Mixed Bathing in Another Dimension

The Ancient Seawater Baths



4

Volume Four

Nagaharu Hibihana

Illust. = Masakage Hagiya


TOUYA HOUJOU
"...LET'S GET YOU TO BED."
"...OKAY."
YUKINA


RAKTI
RIUM
RONI
CLENA
"TOUYA! HOW DO I LOOK? HOW DO I LOOK?
"RAKTI, YOU FORGOT YOUR HAT."


THE SHARP SOUND OF A GLAIVE RANG THROUGH THE AIR SEVERAL TIMES OVER. ON THE OPPOSITE END, PHOENIX'S BODY WAS ENTIRELY COVERED IN BLACK FLAMES AS HE WIELDED A LONG AND SHORT SWORD TO DEFLECT THE ONCOMING ATTACKS.



A HERO SUMMONED FROM ANOTHER WORLD LIKE TOUYA. CURRENTLY TRAVELING SEPARATELY.



A HERO WITH A GIFT CALLED THE UNLIMITED BATH. GETS FIRED UP AT THE THOUGHT OF MIXED BATHING.



A GIRL TOUYA MET DURING HIS JOURNEY. ON A QUEST TO FIND THE DESERT KINGDOM.



A SAND LIZARDMAN WHOSE HOMELAND TOUYA SAVED. A LOYAL COHORT.



HARUNO'S PARTY MEMBER.
A CRYSTAL MAGE.



CLENA'S ATTENDANT.
A LYCAON, A WOLF
DEMI-HUMAN.

WHAT'S HAPPENED SO FAR

TOUYA HOUJOU IS SUMMONED TO A PARALLEL WORLD TO DEFEAT THE DEMON LORD. HE'S GRANTED A SPECIAL POWER, BUT IT'S... *THE POWER TO OPEN A DOOR TO A BATH ANYTIME AND ANYWHERE, THE UNLIMITED BATH!*

AFTER MEETING NEW COMRADES BY THE NAMES OF CLENA AND RONI, TOUYA'S PARTY VENTURES INTO THE LOST CITY OF HADESOPOLIS, WHERE THEY ENCOUNTER THE GODDESS OF DARKNESS, RAKTI.

RAKTI ADVISES THEM TO TRAVEL TO HEPHAESTUSOPOLIS TO OBTAIN THE BLESSING OF THE GODDESS OF FIRE. NOW, TO GAIN THE DIVINE PROTECTION OF YET ANOTHER GODDESS, THE PARTY PROCEEDS TO THEIR NEXT DESTINATION — THE CITY OF WATER.

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Pre-Bath – Prologue

Our horse-drawn wagon rattled as it ran along the tranquil mountain road. It had been about half a month since we'd departed from the kingdom of volcanoes and blacksmiths, Hephaestus, and we were now crossing into a peninsula in the southeastern part of the continent.

Southern-looking trees swayed in the wind under a bright blue sky. It was the height of summer, but the air wasn't moist and humid like it was in Japan. Thanks to the shade of trees along this mountain road, I hardly felt any humidity at all.

As we walked down the tree-lined path, I almost felt like it had been a blessing for me to be summoned to this world. I enjoyed my hot baths, but I couldn't stand humidity.

"Sniff sniff... the scent of the ocean has gotten stronger." Roni, the lycaon girl walking beside me, twitched her nose.

"Now that you mention it, I can smell it too... you have a sharp nose."

I could barely detect the salty air mixed among the scent of greenery. I wouldn't have noticed at all had she not brought it up. Though that was no surprise from a lycaon, a wolf-type demi-human.

"Good job, Roni."

"Eheheh..."

I pet her head, which made her face melt into a smile and her custard cream-colored tail wag back and forth. She looked more like a puppy than a wolf like this.

This continent had two peninsulas to the south on both the east and west ends. The eastern one was a small peninsula called the Talon Peninsula, while the western one drew an arc covering the southern bay, called the Dragon's Tail Peninsula. Its tip almost reached the Talon Peninsula. The southern bay that was surrounded by these two peninsulas had a relatively calm sea and was

dotted with towns rich in resources.

The Talon Peninsula was right past this mountain. Located there was the nation of merchants and the sea, Neptune.

“I can just slightly sense the power of Sister Water,” Rakti said from the driver’s seat. She looked like a petite maid at first glance, but she was actually the youngest of the six goddesses, the Goddess of Darkness. Because of that, she was able to detect the powers of her sisters. She could also tell how powerful the faith was in each of the goddesses in a region.

“It’s only slight because the Goddess of Light has the biggest following here, right?”

“There’s a big temple for the Goddess of Light in Neptunopolis up ahead.”

Clena and Rium offered their explanations from inside the carriage.

The nation was right by the bay, but apparently the Goddess of Water had died down in popularity. Athena had also once boasted the head temple of the Goddess of Wind, but the temple there now was a mere shell of its former self, and the real one had been driven out of the country long ago. I had mainly come to Neptune to receive the blessing of the Goddess of Water in addition to my blessings of Light, Earth, Darkness, and Fire, but it might not be so straightforward.

“Do you sense something, meow?”

“I can’t sense anything, meow!”

The three cat-faced ketolts who had been resting inside the carriage—Pardoe, Shakova, and Crissa—clustered up and peeked their heads out from beside the driver’s seat.

“What are you all doing...? You’re being a nuisance to Rakti!!” Mark, Shakova’s son, called them out as he walked behind the carriage.

“I’m sorry, Marky...”

“Oh no, not you, Crissa...”

However, the only one who apologized to him was Crissa, Pardoe’s daughter. She was apparently considered a beauty among the ketolts, and her remorseful

expression must have done a number on him.

I couldn't see him from here, but Crissa had a clear view of his flustered face. The two fathers also shrunk back inside the carriage, grinning mischievously.

Crissa and Mark were childhood friends and had a sibling-like relationship, so it must have been tough for Mark, being a young man in love.

"Oh, Touya. We can see Neptunopolis from here."

Clena's voice made me look forward, and between the green of the trees and grass and the blue of the ocean, I was struck with another brilliant blue sight. I inadvertently stopped in my tracks, taking in the overwhelming view before me.

The vivid blue drew a sharp contrast to the forest's green. That was my first impression.

The cityscape was all light blue, as if it were an ocean. Pearl white ornaments that looked like seashells decorated the buildings, while a light sand color accented the bottoms of each.

At harmony with the sea; living with the sea. This was Neptunopolis.

The city was built along a coastline that looked almost as if a giant had formed it by playing with the sand, and the blue made it seem like it was inside the ocean. If so, then it'd be a real-life *ryuuguujou*, an underwater palace.

Clena could tell what I was thinking, forming a teasing smile as she inched closer to me. "You thought it was underwater at first, right? I thought so too."

"Yeah... why is it all that color?"

"No special reason... the buildings are made from hydran stones, which can be gathered around here," Rium, who was clinging to Clena's waist, answered my question. Hydran stones were a type of rock colored light blue like the ocean, and were apparently a popular building material in this region.

"The city is booming with trade. You can take a ship up north and easily trade over there, too. There are a lot of wealthy people here, and plenty of auctions too. If we want to sell off the treasures we found in Hadesopolis, this would be the place to do it."

I see. The treasures were doing nothing more than taking up cargo space right

now. We wanted to keep some of them, but we could sell the rest and collect a decent sum of cash.

“So I wanted to head right on over... but will you be okay?” I asked Rulitora, who had been silent until now.

“...I’ll manage. The ocean air is unpleasant for me, but I should get used to it soon...” he replied lethargically from the front of the carriage.

Sand lizardmen had sharp noses as well, but they didn’t like the smell of the sea. That must have been the reason why he had been so silent.

There was nothing we could do about it, though. He just had to get used to it as soon as he could. I gave Rulitora words of encouragement, then set off for the city.

The blue port city that smelled of the sea, Neptunopolis. Merchants from all across the continent gathered here, and it would also be the stage of our next adventure.

First Bath – Neptune Under the Sea

“So there’s one here, too...” I sighed in front of the relief of the five goddess sisters.

It was a staple decoration in every one of the temples, but I knew that the sixth sister, the Goddess of Darkness, was missing from the bottom of every one. Or rather, she was traveling with me right now. I also knew how the reliefs looked nothing like any of the goddesses, having met them in my dreams.

In any case, we were now in the temple of light in Neptunopolis. To no one’s surprise, some clerics from the light temple were waiting for us outside the entrance to the city. The Heroes of the Goddess, Haruno and I, had unveiled the secrets behind Hades and Athena, so they didn’t want to worsen the relationship between us any more than it was already. I had no plans to worship at the light temple, but I didn’t want to make enemies of them either, so I let the clerics lead the way. We gave them a donation for our stay, though they tried to refuse at first. Now we wouldn’t feel guilty for accepting their hospitality, either.

Everything I had seen of Neptunopolis so far was very, well, ocean-like. All the buildings were a light pastel blue. The streets were more narrow compared to Jupiter, and the buildings taller compared to Ceres. Walking between all the blue walls made me feel like I was underwater.

We were currently in a guest room on the second floor of the temple. The scenery outside the window was almost like an optical illusion of being under the sea. I wouldn’t have been surprised if a fish swam past the window right now.

Rium, Rakti, Shakova, and I had stayed back inside the temple while the rest went out to sell meat and materials we had gathered from monsters. We had preserved food prepared inside the Unlimited Bath, as well as pelts processed by the craftsmen in our party—though it wasn’t their main trade. They were higher quality than what people could normally obtain this far south, so they

should fetch a hefty price. The profit might be a drop in the bucket compared to what we could sell our treasures for, but money doesn't last forever. It was still important to conduct honest business like this. And that wasn't just my penny-pinching mentality talking.

The reason we left Shakova behind was to test how the clerics would react to a demi-human. He was the better choice over Pardoe, who might have just made things clumsy and awkward. Rulitora would have worked too, but he was the bodyguard of the group.

"So what are we doing nyow?"

"Let's see... I'd like to explore their library."

There was something nagging me that I wanted to confirm. I asked the clerics, who immediately gave us permission.

We walked down the hall toward the library and passed by several people along the way. As expected, Shakova was attracting the most stares out of the four of us.

"What do their expressions feel like?"

"Purretty normal, I'd say? Some of them look awfully curious, though," Shakova answered.

"It's rare for ketolts to travel outside of Hephaestus," Rium added.

"...You've got a point there." I see, so it was unusual for them.

"Nobody was looking at him disapprovingly, though."

Rakti was right—nobody seemed like they didn't want him to be there. This nation was booming with trade, with merchants visiting from all over. Many of them employed demi-human ravers because it was cheaper, so it'd make sense that they'd be used to seeing demi-humans around.

"So we're probably fine for now."

"I think so, too." Rium agreed with me, then wrapped her arms around my waist. I lightly pet her cocoa-colored hair, and she happily looked up at me.

"Grrr..." Rakti stared at us with an envious expression. It looked like she

wanted some pampering, too. She was quite the spoiled child.

“Uh, let’s wait until after we find the library.” We were in the middle of the hallway right now, after all.

“Mark used to be so spoiled when he was a kid too, mew...” Shakova mumbled, staring up toward the ceiling. Rakti and I recalled the current Mark, who was at the peak of his rebellious age. Rium looked a little confused.

Crissa treated Mark like a little brother, and he was making his situation even worse by trying to act like an adult. One aspect of it was honestly cute, but as someone whose rebellious phase was still fresh in my mind, I could barely stand the second-hand embarrassment. I’d unfortunately never had a neighborhood older sister to crush on, so I was a little jealous of Mark in that sense.

That moment, Rakti tugged on my sleeve a little reluctantly.

“Hm? What’s wrong?”

“Um... Touya, you were looking a little sad just now.”

“W-Was I?”

I wondered what expression I was making. I barely noticed it myself.

But Rakti was giving me a worried look. I decided to prove I was feeling fine by lifting her up by her armpits, then carrying her to the library. And now Rium was looking at Rakti with envy. Honestly, it felt like I’d gained two little sisters.

The library here wasn’t as big as the one in Jupiter. I had the other three assist me in my search, but none of us could find what I was looking for in the end. The only useful book was one describing the types of monsters living in the region.

“This isn’t what I’m looking for, though...”

“There really aren’t any historical books about the time before the first sacred king.”

Yes, I was looking for books that documented history from over 500 years ago.

“The demon lord was summoned first, and then the first sacred king, right?”

“That’s right... the first sacred king was summoned to fight the threat that the demon lord presented.”

“What threat, exactly?”

“...Who knyows?” Shakova cocked his head at my question.

The demon lord’s army attacked, so the first sacred king was summoned in retaliation. That was what I thought had happened when I was first summoned here, but now I doubted that the story was so simple.

The sword and shield with the Hephaestus family crest that we’d found in Hadesopolis tipped me off. The weapons had no vestiges of battle on them, which meant that Hades held diplomatic relations with Hephaestus back when the ketolts ruled the kingdom. But in the end, Hephaestus sided with Jupiter in the battle against Hades. And today, the reason behind that was just written off as the “threat of the demon lord.”

What exactly had happened for things to turn out that way? I wanted to explore this library to find that out, but unfortunately, it had no data on history before the time of the first sacred king.

“Do you remember anything, Rakti?”

“I’m sorry, my memories are hazy from back then.”

“I see...”

There was nothing we could do about that. It was about time for Clena and the others to come back, so we wrapped up our work here.

We reconvened with the rest of the party, then went to update our status cards before returning to our room. Clena and Roni were level 23 now, and Rium went up to level 19.

“We’re the same now, Lady Clena!”

“I used a bunch of magic in Hephaestus, but didn’t fight that much.”

Clena’s MP and MEN had grown a great deal because of that. Though her stats weren’t shooting off of the card yet, like mine were.

Rium had fallen just short. She was only one step away from being a first-class

party member at level 20.

Rulitora unfortunately remained at level 30. He had fought plenty, but that wasn't enough to level up at his rate. Things might have been a little different if he'd defeated the dragon-hippo, but that was in the past. We had no choice but to make it a one-on-one fight between the dragon and I back then.

Pardoe lead the ketolts at level 16, while Shakova was at 15, Mark at 10, and Crissa at 5. They were all lower than I'd expected. But come to think of it, the only times they fought monsters were for self-defense. I shouldn't have been comparing them to us, who battled monsters as part of our daily travels and livelihoods. They had actually risen 2 or 3 levels during our expedition to the Flame Devil's hideout. That made it clear just how differently we fought monsters, or rather the pace at which we fought them.

I had astonishingly risen to level 28. Four levels all at once. The Goddess of Light's blessing made leveling up quicker for me compared to normal people, but the main factor must have been my fight against the dragon.

The only problem was that while I had almost caught up to Rulitora's level, I still felt like I was far from being able to win against him. I might have been able to beat him using special equipment or spells, but he still had an overwhelmingly intimidating air about him. And I had not a speck of that.

But that was a veteran warrior for you. He was the former war chief of the Torano'o tribe, after all. That was an element of battle that simply couldn't be measured with levels and stats.

All of my stats had gone up a bit, but they still paled in comparison to my overloaded MP and MEN. My STR and VIT had gone up a decent amount, but that was about it.

Lastly, Rakti remained at a measly level 1. She only laughed, saying, "Well, I'm the one who grants the blessings."

Since her body was only a temporary one and her actual self granted blessings, her level and stats wouldn't rise by normal means. At this rate, she'd be in big trouble if any monsters were to attack her.

"Then how do you get stronger? I'll be worried if you stay like this."

“I can grow a little stronger if I get some of my power as a goddess back...”

Rakti said no more. Well, I knew what she was getting at.

A goddess’ power was measured by levels of public recognition and piety among her followers. That was the same reason why the sacred family and the light temple had tried to expel the other goddess’ followers 300 years ago.

And here was Rakti, whose country of faith had collapsed, had been sealed for 500 years, and had all records of her existence erased in the meantime. She barely had any of her powers as the Goddess of Darkness anymore. As for me, I felt more like her overly doting guardian rather than one of her followers.

The sacred family and temple of light must have erased all records of Hades because they feared the Goddess of Darkness’ revival and all the demons who would start rallying under her. The first sacred king had sealed Rakti on accident, then failed to finish off the demon lord. They feared the Goddess of Darkness’ influence upon the revival of the demon lord, which must have been why they had stolen her power. Yeah, that made sense.

I wondered how much the current sacred family knew about all this. I had been jealous of the self-proclaimed Cosmos for gaining the princess as one of his party members, but now I was just worried about him. I hoped he wasn’t being brainwashed by her. Well, I didn’t even know where he was right now, so there was no point in worrying about him. I had to focus on all the companions by my side right now, including Rakti.

“Hey, Touya. Why don’t we sleep inside the Unlimited Bath?”

“We wanna use the altar, meow!”

Clena and Pardoe were the first to speak up once we went back to our room.

This was a VIP room, so it was far from shabby, but all the temples of light were about the same, so it wasn’t very novel either. I could understand why she’d want to rest inside the Unlimited Bath, considering that. Not only that, we needed to continue cleaning up our treasures, too.

I opened the door to my Unlimited Bath, as usual. We’d leave a few of us to keep watch in the guest room, too.

The door was large enough to fit a carriage, but also surprisingly light. Once inside, a stone path led the way to a curtain with the word “bath” written on it hanging in front of a sliding door. The curtain made the whole building feel rather oriental.

My level and stats had gone up, but the building hadn’t grown any larger. In exchange, the garden surrounding the outside of the building was now more spacious. It was an ambiguous change so I didn’t notice at first, but the ketolts had noticed that their blacksmithing tools were now farther away from the altar even though the altar stayed in its far left corner.

We used the extra space to better organize our items. The ketolts suggested making a storehouse, but I stopped them. We could definitely use one, but I surmised that a storehouse might get created automatically once my Bath leveled up if I wished for it. Or maybe I could make shelves in my mind, and then a shelf would actually appear inside.

Well, jokes aside, I decided to take a breather after our long journey first.

“Roni, could you make tea for us?”

“Oh, of course!”

“Let me assist you, Roni.”

Roni and Crissa swished their tails back and forth as they headed into the kitchen created from the Goddess of Fire’s blessing.

As Clena saw them off, she whispered, “I wonder what the Goddess of Water’s blessing will grant us?”

I was curious about that, too. The main reason we had come here was to find the Goddess of Water’s temple and have them conduct a blessing ceremony. There was the possibility that they’d been driven out of the country like the temple of wind in Athena was, in which case we’d have to investigate their whereabouts further.

I still needed to send a letter to Haruno, not to mention tidy up our treasures for the auction. We had so much to do—I’d better get as much rest as I could for now.

The next day, we decided to leave the temple of light. We didn't have a falling out or anything. We'd just gotten bored of the tired, same old temple's guest room.

We wanted to stay somewhere more exotic while we had the chance, so we left the temple, saying we had something we wanted to investigate. That wasn't a lie, since we were indeed investigating the water temple.

This country was divided into two levels—the elevated area and the coastal area. The elevated area consisted of the temple of light, rich people's mansions, and layers of protection against sea monsters and pirates. So pirates existed in this world, huh?

An outer wall shielded them from threats coming from the continent, while the elevated terrain guarded them against threats from the sea. There were few places as safe to live as this.

Clena and the others had chosen a marketplace for the land trading route near the outer wall yesterday to sell their things. From what they'd heard at the marketplace, commerce at sea level was more valued than on land, so merchants set up an auction house in the coastal area, taking on the slight risk. The auction house had important customers among both the wealthy residents of the elevated area and the skilled merchants, so they built the house at the border between the two areas.

It was located on the elevated side because some of the wealthy disliked going down to the coastal area. The merchants would have to put up with a bit of a climb if they wanted to make a profit.

"Hm? What's going on?" We were about to exit the temple, but I heard a voice coming from the front gate.

"Like I said, we won't work with you any longer!!"

Somebody was having an argument at the gate. I drew a little closer to see what was going on and found an old man as thin as a twig with a long, unkempt beard bellowing at a few temple knights.

"What? Is that how a cleric should be acting?!"

"I am a temple knight!!"

“So why won’t you bring me a cleric?! I said I’d pay you!!”

The old man was acting rather aggressive for someone who looked like he might bend over and snap in two at any moment. He was wearing a sooty old robe. The aura he gave off was like... yup, a “mad scientist.” His hairstyle was more like an explosion, so he really looked the part.

I asked a nearby cleric, who took one glance at the old man and said, “Ahh, he’s here again...” with a frank and unpleasant expression. I pried a little further and learned that he was a crystal mage in this city by the name of Rondalan. Last month, he had requested for some clerics to help test an experiment of his, so the temple dispatched three clerics for him. However, all of them fell into a comatose state and had to be carried back to the temple. On top of that, apparently one of them had yet to reawaken.

Rondalan complained that the clerics had been too weak, while the temple protested that his inventions were too dangerous. And now the relationship between the two parties was exactly what we were seeing here.

“It’ll take a while once they get like that. Come this way. I’ll guide you to the rear entrance.”

“So today isn’t the first...?” Did they argue like that all the time?

We could still technically go through the main entrance, but Rondalan seemed like the type that would wrap you into something as soon as you got near him. We opted to have the cleric lead us to the back.

And we left the temple just like that, making sure to not pass by the front of the temple, and walked along the river toward the auction house.

I had Rulitora carry whatever we needed for the day and stored the rest in the Unlimited Bath. Since many of the roads in this city were narrow and couldn’t let carriages through, we parked ours at the marketplace along the land trading route.

We’d traveled from Ceres to the desert wasteland of Hades to the volcanic Hephaestus and crossed all sorts of hazards in between, so I wanted to enjoy our leisurely time here.

High-class houses lined the path along the river. We walked by them with the

soft sounds of the current as our backdrop. This city was soothing to both the eyes and the ears.

I was a bit surprised that there were no railings guarding the riverbank, though. There was nothing separating the river, streets, and houses.

Passersby were startled at first when they saw Rulitora's giant body at the front of our group, but lost their interest as quickly as they had gained it.

I was wearing a set of classy urbanite clothing that Clena had picked out for me, along with a tuna knife from the Goddess of Fire's kitchen affixed near my hip. It was appropriate enough to not attract any suspicion as we walked through this high-class neighborhood.

Everyone else besides Rulitora and Pardoe were dressed similarly, and Rakti was in her maid uniform. The other two were armed, which gave the impression that they were our battle raver bodyguards.

Mark had tried to show off to Crissa by becoming her personal bodyguard, but she'd had her way and made him dress like a dandy young man instead.

We kept walking without any particular interruptions until we reached the edge of the elevated land.

"There's a waterfall in the middle of the city...?"

We were quite a distance above sea level right now, and the river turned into a waterfall that fell to the coastal area. The area below was no longer residential, but a public plaza. The two layers of this city were connected by a single white thread. This wasn't a sight you'd find in my old world.

We continued walking along the edge of the elevation until we reached the plaza below. The plaza was surrounded in the other three directions by buildings, and the auction house occupied one whole side.

I could see rows of food carts as well as a few street performers here and there. It was so crowded, it almost felt like they were holding a festival. This was no festival, though—apparently the plaza was like this every day. You could tell how well-off Neptunopolis was from a single glance here.

I suddenly heard a melodic tune from somewhere. I looked around,

wondering if a street performer had started playing something, and traced the sound to a colorfully decorated cart. It was apparently a portable cart-sized orgel used for street performances. Young children started surrounding the orgel, dancing merrily. Rakti started fidgeting as she looked on, her eyes glistening.

“U-Um, can we go join them?”

“Oh? Sure, go right ahead.”

Not a second after I replied, Rakti took Crissa’s and Roni’s hands and skipped over to the orgel, then started dancing with the other kids. Mark was worried about Crissa and followed behind them, but he loitered just outside the crowd.

The kids had probably never seen a ketolt or lycaon before, as they looked surprised at first. But soon enough, they registered the two as a couple of cute animal girls and invited them into the ring to dance.

Crissa was actually pretty skilled. I didn’t know much about dancing, but she really looked the part as she swished her tail and moved her legs to the beat.

Oh, she grabbed Mark and dragged him into the ring too. She slowly but surely made him start dancing with everyone else. He didn’t look too happy about it, but there was a trace of giddiness on his face, all because he was holding hands with Crissa as they danced. I know how you feel, Mark.

Pardoe and Shakova were grinning mischievously as they watched the two of them. I knew how both of them felt as well, but act a little more like doting parents, will you? Just look at Rulitora. He was standing there silently, but you could see a happy tear forming in his eyes.

Rakti and Roni were thoroughly enjoying themselves. They made me feel more alive just by looking at them.

Passersby noticed the group of kids dancing, and the orgel gathered a giant crowd in the blink of an eye. More and more children joined the ring, and a group of street dancers that hadn’t gathered much of an audience before took the opportunity to mingle among them as well.

“Wanna join them, Rium?”



“...I’m okay.”

I tried encouraging Rium to join the fun, but she just refused in a quiet voice and hugged my waist. She was probably too embarrassed to dance in front of such a large crowd.

“It’s fun enough just watching, right?” Clena walked up to Rium and pet her on the head. She seemed like she was having fun watching the rest of the group dance.

The party ended when the orgel’s music stopped. I praised the girls for being such good dancers when they came back, while the crowd threw tips at the streets performers. The orgel player looked especially pleased at his sudden stream of revenue.

We then ate a bit of a late lunch before entering the auction house. I picked a food cart that sold baguettes loaded with an assortment of garnishes... or so I thought, but it was actually a slice of a giant mushroom that was breaded and fried. I couldn’t believe it was actually a mushroom at first, so the vendor brought out a fresh one from under the counter. The whole thing was larger than my head. The vendor laughed as he perched the mushroom on his shoulder, asking if we were tourists.

He told me that this mushroom was a regional specialty of the Talon Peninsula. It was apparently common for travelers from afar to not believe that this was a mushroom at first. This may have been a port city surrounded by water, but now I remembered that there was a mountain right beside the peninsula as well. It made sense for there to be a few mountain delicacies around here too.

The mountain area also raised plenty of livestock, so they produced a variety of savory cured hams and cheeses. I noticed some of that on my fried mushroom as well.

I took a bite and it was surprisingly meaty and juicy, and so filling that I could hardly believe I was eating a mushroom. Rulitora ordered two and gulped each of them down in a flash.

One of the strangest items we found were fried flowers. The flower was

wrapped around cheese and pickled fish, then deep fried. It was crispy and surprisingly delicious as the flower's aroma slowly dissipated in my mouth.

We also tried sautéed sea snails and a sour but refreshing fruit juice. The sea snails apparently sold for higher prices in the elevated area, so merchants often made a trip up there just to sell them.

Unsurprisingly, the seafood dishes were especially delicious. We should find a good seafood restaurant for dinner tonight.

Once we finished up our assortment of delicacies for lunch, we headed for the auction house.

The outside of the auction house resembled an extravagant opera house. I imagined that the tense and heated auctions might feel more like they were conducting a show.

It was even more lavish inside, as the upper walls of the front lobby were decorated with fresco paintings. It portrayed the country's history, but this auction house was apparently built about 250 years ago, so it must have been depicting events after the Goddess of Light's followers came into major power. Participants in today's auctions were gathered in the lobby.

"There are so many people..."

"Auctions can run throughout the entire day as long as they don't run out of items, after all."

"...You mean in general?"

"Yeah, it was the same in Juno. My uncle dragged me to one where we stayed for a whole week once."

"...Stayed where?"

"In the auction house. This one should double as a hotel, too."

"There's a restaurant on the other side, meow."

This wasn't just an auction house, but one of the highest class hotels in the city. Shakova was pointing to a fancy-looking restaurant by the edge of the front

lobby—one that seemed like it would actually care about your etiquette. Yeah, I was glad we ate lunch at the carts outside.

Unsurprisingly, only the elite gathered at this auction house, so when I told a staff member I wanted to become a seller, he gave me a look of clear disdain. Though when I showed him the medals I had been awarded at Hephaestus, his attitude did a one-eighty.

“What was up with him?!” Rakti scowled at the staff member’s behavior after he left. He must have developed that personality after having to deal with upper-class snobs every day.

“He thought you were a rich noble at first, since we’re dressed up, but then his attitude changed after realizing he was wrong. But then he flipped right back over when he found out your actual identity.”

According to Clena, it was common for battle ravers to bring in treasures they had found while scavenging ancient ruins. He must have initially thought we fell into that category of sellers.

“What a flip-flopper.”

“Turning and turning...”

Rulitora and the others had also gotten peeved at him at first, but couldn’t stay angry after his attitude changed.

“Well, there’s nyo use getting angry at a youngster like him.” Shakova had the same reaction as me. He stroked his whiskers, not letting himself get worked up.

In any case, we should put an item on exhibit to test things out. We weren’t planning on selling everything we had found in Hades. We’d save whatever wasn’t taking up space in the Unlimited Bath, such as jewels we could sell anywhere for about the same price. The items we wanted to sell were ornamental weapons and armor, as well as rare pieces of art. I picked out a golden sword that Rulitora had been carrying. Now then, how much would this go for? I was getting a little excited.

Let me explain a little more about how the auctions worked. The auctions in this house were largely split into two categories: the larger-scale auctions

conducted on the main stage at fixed times, and the smaller-scale auctions held every day in other rooms. You could submit your item to the staff in advance, and if they determined it was worth more than a certain amount, you'd be allowed to participate in the larger auction.

There was one stage for the larger auction and five rooms for the smaller auctions. The front lobby had a giant display which showed which auctions were being held in which rooms. The staff was constantly busy updating the display in real time. It looked like there was no larger auction being held right now, but all the smaller auction rooms were full.

"There's some purretty interesting stuff..."

"A lot of battle ravers bring things in. The value of the products is all over the place."

"There's gems and crystals... and sometimes you see a raw ore. My master goes to the auctions in Athena once in a while."

Apparently Rium's hometown, Athena, had an auction house as well. Raw ores didn't sell for much, but they still had the chance to fetch a higher price than selling them directly to a retailer. That was the same reason I came here—to hopefully sell our things at a higher price.

"Purr, I'm curious about any raw ores they'd be selling," Shakova commented.

"Some sort of crystal, meow...? I'd like to buy a nice one," Pardoe followed.

I looked at the display board, but didn't see any gems or crystals on the lineup.

"Where's the sword I entered?"

"Over there. It'll be in the fifth hall."

I looked to where Rulitora was pointing and saw that the golden sword I had registered would be auctioned in the fifth room. There were still three items ahead of it.

"It's not really a good time to go out again... What should we do for the time being?"

"Why don't we learn a bit about the auctions while we're here?"

“Good idea. I’m still not exactly sure how they work, so now is a good opportunity to find out.”

We set off to find the room. Hall five was on the second floor of the auction house. The stage for the larger auction was on the first floor, while the rooms for the smaller auctions were on the second floor, and the third and above floors were used as hotel rooms. I bet the hotel had all sorts of fancy accommodations. The prices must have been astronomical, though.

On that note, weapons weren’t allowed inside the building. We were told as such at the entrance, so we went around to the back alley and secretly placed our weapons away inside the Unlimited Bath.

The moment we opened the door to the fifth hall, an uproar came crashing down on us. Angry voices flew through the air. Some people were in the midst of an intense argument.

We went inside and saw people gathered toward the middle of the room, and a circular fence enclosed a raised platform in the center of that. That was where the auction would be held. There was a walkway extending from the raised stage to a door in the back of the room. I see, so that was where the items for auction would be carried out from.

There were round tables and chairs lined up along the wall. Those were for people to lounge and wait until their target items were on stage. Staff members were bringing them drinks and snacks.

We weren’t planning on buying anything, so we sat down and waited until our sword was up. A staff member immediately came to us after we took our seats, and we ordered some cold drinks and gelato.

Right now, there was a small round table on stage and a necklace with a green gem resting on it. It was probably an emerald.

I spotted four fully armed soldiers surrounding the stage. The platform couldn’t be too high above eye level for the products to be visible, so the soldiers were there to guard them. There was one man next to the table on stage about to start the auction.

“Hey, Clena. Why are those two fighting?”

Two quarreling men near the stage caught my attention. They were both elegantly dressed. The auctioneer was making no effort to stop the dispute, so it didn't seem like they were causing any trouble. I stared at them, wondering what was going on, and Clena answered my question.

"The one on the right is probably a noble, and the one on the left is a merchant."

"How can you tell?"

"Look at the bodyguards on the right. They're all dressed up, right?"

"...Oh, I see."

They both had bodyguards, but the ones on the right looked almost like knights with the elaborate ornaments on their armor. The armor on the bodyguards on the left looked sturdy, but much more plain.

"Merchants tend to keep their bodyguards as simple and inexpensive as possible. Though some of them like to dress them in elaborate armor and show off, so it's not a hard rule."

"And I guess there aren't many nobles with that simple and inexpensive mentality?"

"Yeah, since they need to keep up appearances with everyone else."

I expected no less from a former daughter of nobility and her attendant. They knew this stuff like the back of their hand.

"But that armor on the right... It's not worth a lick in quality, it only looks fancy!"

"The left ones are hardly just 'simple' either... He's just being cheap!"

And then opinions from our blacksmiths, Shakova and Pardoe, followed. The aristocrat on the right was simply putting on airs, while the merchant on the left was a cheapskate. Neither of them were being virtuous.

I asked one more question to Shakova, who had an eye for ornaments and their handiwork. "How about that necklace on stage, then?"

"It's old, but crafted well, I think? Gotta take a closer look to know for sure,

though.”

So it wasn’t bad, but he couldn’t tell exactly how good it was from this distance. If it was valuable, then it might have been some aristocrat’s family heirloom. Perhaps their fortune was dwindling and they needed some quick cash.

In any case, I could hear the two men arguing from all the way where we were sitting. I sipped on my drink while eavesdropping on them, and soon enough could tell what the merchant was arguing about.

“Hey, is that merchant doing what I think he’s doing...?”

“He’s probably making the rest of the buyers feel dubious about the necklace to drive its price down.”

“...So is he a bad guy?” Rakti spooned up her pink gelato and asked. Rium was silently eating her milk-colored gelato next to her.

“Hmm... he’s not necessarily a bad guy,” Clena answered with a thoughtful expression.

It was a legitimate auction technique. Apparently it was a common practice in smaller auction houses. But since this auction also served as entertainment for the rich, that sort of money-grubbing behavior would definitely be met with scorn. Maybe the stingy merchant wasn’t aware of that, or he simply didn’t care about the stares of contempt he received while disparaging the necklace... It was probably the latter. Everyone was looking at him with resentment, but he didn’t pay them any mind. Just how thick was his skin? He was probably used to this.

“...Will he still be there for our auction?”

“...Most likely.”

The merchant seemed to be on the winning side of the debate right now. He had energy in his voice and a way with words. Not many people could stand up against that. Personally, I wanted nothing to do with him. If we didn’t call the staff over, then he’d continue to make a commotion and buy all the items for cheap. But I wasn’t sure if the staff could do anything, either. My stomach started hurting.

“Clena, Shakova, can you guys do something about him?”

“...I can tell him some facts?”

“Can we beat him in his spirit, though?”

The two of them weren’t confident they could be a match against his discourse. Well, this sucked. Maybe I should take the sword out of the lineup and try another day? As I deliberated, two men approached our group.

“Oh, if it isn’t Sir Touya! It’s been a while.”

“Hm? Oh, Kopan!”

Before us were the merchant Kopan and someone who looked like a bearded battle raver. I hadn’t seen him since he bought my water back in Jupiteropolis.

“Long time no see. And this is?”

“Oh, this is my bodyguard.” Kopan gave a large and potbellied laugh, grabbed a chair from a neighboring table, and sat himself at ours. “Have you come here as a buyer, Sir Touya?”

“No, I wanted to sell something... but I was just thinking of taking that back.”

After I said that, Kopan looked over to the two arguing men, then replied with a grumble of agreement.

“What do you think of that necklace, Kopan? Is it actually as bad as that guy is making it out to be?”

“Heavens, no! That’s from the Porrée family. They might be in decline right now, but they have a long history—they’ve been around since this port city was formed. I can only imagine how valuable an heirloom from their family would be.

“But that merchant is a wily one. He has a shop in the coastal area. He drives a bargain and buys cheap, then sells them for high in his shop. That’s how he makes his living. In my opinion, he’s digging his own grave by conducting his business like that. But maybe he’s not thinking that deeply, or he’s only got eyes on the pocket change in front of him. He’s got a way with words, so that necklace will sell for less than it’s worth at this rate. More people might make their bids if it goes for lower, so I think it’ll end up selling for 10 to 30 percent

off its actual price.”

“I-I see...”

Kopan rambled on and on. He was as talkative as ever. He was leaning forward so I shrunk a ways back, but that didn’t seem to register with him as he leaned in even more.

“If you so wish, Sir Touya, I can give him a piece of my mind when your item is up for auction. Oh no, no need to thank me. Just 10 percent of the selling price is fine!”

Was having a thick skin part of the trade for merchants?

But thinking about it, his plan wasn’t so bad. 10 percent of the selling price would go to the auction house as a handling fee. If another 10 percent went to Kopan, that left us with 80 percent. That would be enough for us as long as the price wasn’t bargained down. And above all, I didn’t want to let that merchant have his way.

“Kopan... can you turn the situation around right now?”

“I might, but that’s not part of the agreement.”

“How about we say it’s some preliminary work to let the audience see who’s the better talker between you and him?”

“Hm? Well, that *would* make it easier later...”

“Actually, we have about 30 more we want to sell. So if this goes well, we can let you handle all the rest as well. As thanks, we’ll give you 10 percent of all of them.”

“I’ll be off, then!”

Not a second after I said that, Kopan’s chubby figure made quick steps over to the noble called Lord Porrée and called out to him in a friendly manner.

“Long time no see, Lord Porrée!” he said, then started rattling off stories about the Porrée family’s history as the noble stared at him in confusion. The stingy merchant tried to interject, but Kopan never gave him the opportunity to do so. He then started talking about the necklace, exclaiming “So you’ve finally decided to let this one go! My, this is a big deal!”

Kopan's voice traveled throughout the entire room, and the other buyers started murmuring among themselves. The stingy merchant had already lost.

"The auction will now begin!" The auctioneer announced the start of the auction at just the right timing. He was probably waiting for this. The auction house collected 10 percent as handling fees, so higher bids worked in their favor as well.

All the bidders drove up the price of the necklace as the stingy merchant looked on, vexed. He showed no signs of leaving, though. He'd most likely try again for the next auction.

"Now then, that went well." Kopan returned, leaving the battleground he created behind him. He had shaken hands with Lord Porrée, who probably thanked him. I wanted to believe that he didn't ask for a service fee.

"You were being awfully familiar with Lord Porrée. Do you know him?"

"Nope, never met him before," Kopan replied with a nonchalant expression. Merchants were scarier than I thought.

The stingy merchant tried to bring down the price of the next auction item, but Kopan retaliated again.

The auctioneer introduced my golden sword as a "treasure the Hero of the Goddess discovered inside the demon lord's castle in Hadesopolis," and the buyers made the most commotion yet.

"Th-The demon lord's castle?! Where even is that?! It must be fake!"

"Apparently it's in the void. We have the hero who traveled there in this very room."

"A-And how can you prove he's the real hero...?!"

"Sir Touya here has had the Volcano Warrior medal, the Dragon Slayer medal, and the Golden Cat Ears medal awarded to him by the Hephaestus royal family."

And how do you know that, Kopan? Maybe word had spread more than I thought.

"Even so, there's no proof this jibber-jabber about Hadesopolis is true...!"

“Sir Touya had also given treasures belonging to the Hephaestus royal family back to them. Are you implying that the Hephaestus royal family was deceived?”

“Guh... urgh!”

Kopan handled it like a piece of cake.

Part of the reason I had chosen this auction house was to spread the word about Hadesopolis, which had been concealed for so long now. In that sense, this obstacle was working out all the better for us.

To be honest, I was cringing at the thought of every future auction being as stomach-turning as this one, but I trusted Kopan to handle it. I’d leave the rest of our auctions in his hands.

I let them carry on until the end of the auction, and my golden sword sold for way higher than I was expecting.

“I’d estimate that the price is about three times as much as the market rate would have been. Oh, the market rate is purely an estimate based on what it might have sold for directly at an auction. Prices tend to be lower when dealing with a product yourself, you see. Laying down some groundwork seemed to have an effect here, I must say,” Kopan explained, sounding pleased with himself. I had planned on leaving the rest of our auction items to him, but then something surprising happened.

“Sir Touya—would you consider holding a larger auction for the other 32 items you registered? We won’t ask you for a rental fee.” The auction house’s manager approached us with an offer to hold a large-scale auction.

The larger auctions were divided into two categories: ones that the house itself conducted, and ones that were rented by third parties. The former required an entrance fee, while the latter required a rental fee for the stage. Since the manager wasn’t asking for a rental fee, he must have been implying that the handling fee would be enough to make a profit for them.

“...In that case, what about our deal with you, Kopan?”

“If you’ll be holding the auction under your name, then you’ll need an auctioneer. Oh, no need to be shy, please leave it to me! A larger auction will

fetch even higher prices for these treasures!” Kopan’s eyes were gleaming. His vision must have been filled with dollar signs right now.

“Kopan’s right. A larger auction would attract more attention, not to mention some big-shots that don’t typically go to the smaller auctions might show up.”

“I see... would there be any other issues besides that?”

“...Maybe the time span? We won’t be able to hold it until the auction house has an open reservation.”

“Um, would you mind waiting a week from now...?” The manager cut into our conversation, wiping sweat off his forehead with a handkerchief.

A whole week, huh? That was a bit long, even for a vacation. So what should we do now? I decided to talk about our plans in more detail with the others.

“...So would that be okay?”

“Oh yes, it would be my pleasure!”

The plan we came up with involved me getting into my fully armored get-up in front of everyone, staying around until the end of the auctions, then heading into the city. I was told to keep wearing my Magic Eater as we walked around town to show off my “majestic presence.” Apparently it’d be a problem if I kept presenting myself as a young rich boy rather than a hero.

The manager agreed with the plan. I looked over to the rest of the group, and everyone besides Rium and Rakti averted their eyes from me. It looked like like they failed planning out how we should have been dressing in this city. But I wasn’t looking forward to dressing so stiffly... or rather, so *stiflingly*.

We completed the registration process, confirmed that our entries were removed from today’s auction lineup, and then I shook hands with Kopan under the gaze of everyone in the front lobby.

“I must say, that is quite the set of armor!”

“It’s legendary armor that we found in the armory of the demon lord’s castle.”

There was quite the uproar when I showed up in my Magic Eater. I could sense some fear in the crowd, too. That was understandable, seeing as how this

jet-black plate armor had horns growing out of it.

“I’ll leave the rest to you, then.”

“You got it!”

After that, we went to tour the shipyard in the coastal area. Right now, Haruno’s party was on the western side of the continent journeying toward the Goddess of Wind’s temple. We would need to travel there as well for the blessing ceremony, and going by boat would be fastest.

Of course, the Goddess of Water came first. I’d heard that many of the Goddess of Water’s followers were fishermen, so asking around in the coastal area where many fishermen lived would be the most efficient way to gather information.

Pardoe and Shakova remained behind as our representatives to oversee the planning for the large auction. Shakova knew how to communicate with the upper class well, so he was perfect for the role. They were both interested in the accessories and possible raw ores that might show up in the smaller auctions, so I gave them our profit from selling the golden sword as their spending budget.

Shakova tried to use the opportunity to bring Mark along as a learning experience for him, but he was already dead set on coming with us. Because Crissa had already decided she’d be coming with us, of course. Her reason was that she’d only be bored staying in a luxury hotel with nothing to do. She took after her father a little in that respect.

Many curious eyes turned toward us as we made our way from the auction house to the coastal area. Our carriage was still parked away, so we were traveling on foot. The path down to the coast was a set of zig-zagging stairs formed from the cliff. The stairs were wide, so we didn’t feel particularly unsafe.

“T-Touya, please don’t let go...” ...Besides Rakti. She clung on to me, her legs trembling.

Everyone else was mostly fine, but Rulitora was grimacing against the wind blowing at us from the sea, squinting his eyes and holding a hand up to shield

his face.

The part of the city right under the elevated area was lined with shops as extravagant as the mansions above them. As we walked toward the coast, though, the streets became narrower and the buildings simpler. Fishermen and craftsmen lived in this area. I thought once again that the blue walls surrounding the narrow roads made it feel like I was underwater.

In any case, I was attracting a lot of attention from the passersby and people peeking out from their windows. The Magic Eater was the furthest thing from modest attire I could get.

“Umm, I think it’s this way.” Roni squinted at a map and guided us toward our destination for the day. It was an “interesting and economical hotel” that Kopan recommended to us. The “economical” part must have been his merchant’s mind speaking.

The river we were walking along grew wider and wider until we could spot its mouth up ahead. I was greeted with a much deeper blue than the hydran stone walls.

“Cabins with nets hanging behind them... are those what that old man was talking about?” Mark pointed to ten small cabins lined up along the riverbed. They were all made of wood, but there were also nets near the riverbank behind each of them, hanging higher than each cabin’s roof.

I see, so this was the “hotel” Kopan wanted to introduce us to. We wouldn’t be renting a room, but a whole cabin. They didn’t offer room service, so it was surprisingly cheap. They didn’t have any baths either, but we had that covered with our Unlimited Bath.

We booked our room with the concierge, then picked the cabin closest to the sea to stay for the night. The concierge looked frightened by my appearance. Once we entered the cabin, I had Roni and Rakti help remove my armor.

“Ahh, thank god. It feels like a sauna in this thing.”

“It’s even hotter in there than in Mt. Lemnos in Hephaestus!”

“We were under the water veil back then, so you only felt a fraction of the heat.”

“There’s a breeze from the sea here, so it’s much better. Though it makes my skin feel all clammy.” Clena and Roni retorted Rakti’s comment. I might have been able to appreciate that sea breeze if it weren’t for this armor.

Rium removed her cloak without so much as a peep. She must have been hot in that thing, too.

“Hmm, so this rope controls the net.” Rulitora was fiddling with a rope and pulley by the window, checking something.

I looked out the window and saw a net above the riverbank gradually sink into the water as he drove the rope forward. He peered at the water’s surface for a while, then suddenly pulled the net back up, and it now had a bunch of small fish inside. He altered the pulley’s angle, then slid the entire net toward our window.

Yes, this was a cabin that let you fish indoors with a simple fishing net. The lodging prices were cheap and you could catch your own food. This was the definition of economical. It also worked as something of a recreational facility for families on their days off.

The river was wide enough for the nets to not get in the way of boats passing by. I tried casting the net myself and it was even more fun than I expected. Rium and Rakti scrunched up by the window, their eyes sparkling at the fish flopping inside the net. Yeah, I could see why this would be a good pastime for families.

“Let’s take these two big ones and make a fish soup.”

“We’ll butterfly the small ones and grill ’em, meow!”

“We can fry the smallest ones with just salt.”

Roni and Crissa got right to work planning our dinner with the pile of fish. They looked like they were having fun. Mark was eyeing the two of them, but this time it was unclear whether he was more interested in Crissa or the fish.

“Do we just get them out with our hands?”

“It looks like we can use the net over there. I’ll open the Unlimited Bath, so get a bucket for us.”

“Roger!”

I opened the door to the Bath close to a wall, then used a hand net to scoop the fish out of the bigger net. If we were a family, this might be the father’s job—no, that would be Rulitora, who was keeping the net up. Maybe I just had the big brother’s role.

“Alright, here you go!”

“Thanks, set it over there.”

I scooped the fish over into the bucket that Clena brought over. She had brought out our biggest bucket. We could afford to catch another net’s worth of fish with this. I looked over to Rulitora, who appeared to be thinking the same thing and nodded assertively. He then lowered the net back inside the water.

“Do you want to try too, Mark?”

Mark had been staring at us before I realized, so I offered him my hand net. He accepted the net after a little hesitation, then climbed up onto a child’s stool and waited for the net in the river to come up again. He looked incredibly serious, fidgeting as we waited for the right timing. Rulitora pulled the net back up, and all the youngsters including Rium and Rakti gave a loud cheer. Clena and I watched them from behind, smiling.

Tonight’s dinner was bread we had bought from a neighboring shop, Crissa’s seafood soup, and Roni’s fish *à la meunière*. We already ate the small fried fish as an appetizer.

Shakova and Pardoe were probably feasting on some exquisite full-course menu at the auction house right now. Our meal was nothing to scoff at, though. The seafood soup had just the right kick to it to compliment the white-fleshed fish. The buttery meunière was absolutely savory and delectable.

We had bought soft and fluffy bread, the type we couldn’t eat during our travels since they had to be preserved. They had finished baking right around dinnertime, so the bread still felt warm in my hands.

We made quick work of each and every dish on the table. It was so tasty that I almost ate my chopsticks. Well, there were no chopsticks in this world, but you

know what I mean.

“Let’s do this again tomorrow, meow!”

“I agree!”

Mark and Rakti were still pumped up after dinner, their excitement as high as ever. Rium nodded silently next to them, slightly blushing. Their favorite dish had been the small fried fish. It probably seemed like a tasty snack to them.

Rulitora was permitted to drink alcohol today. He’d hit it off with the father of the family staying next door and they were currently making merry outside the front door. We could hear their boisterous voices from all the way inside.

Yup, this was a nice hotel. We might as well stay here for the time being.

“Hey, why don’t we switch to a longer booking while we’re at it? I think we’ll be allowed to do that before the day ends.”

Clena came up to me with perfect timing and suggested exactly what I was thinking. The rates would go down if we booked a full week at once, too.

After Crissa and Roni finished the laundry, I temporarily closed the door to the Unlimited Bath and headed to the manager’s cabin with Clena. I noticed that the living room was fully visible from the front door, so I noted to myself to open the door in the bedroom after this.

Just in case, I fastened a tuna knife to my hip, then opened the front door. Rulitora’s and the other man’s roaring voices filled my eardrums. I listened in on what they were talking about, and apparently the father from next door had failed to catch any fish today. Rulitora was patting his shoulder while teaching him a few tips and tricks about when to raise the net. If all went well, the father would be the pride of the family tomorrow.

The other cabins along the river all had their lights on and I could hear laughter coming from inside. Clena had brought a lantern with her, but we wouldn’t need it at this rate.

I perked my ears and heard a faint singing voice in the distant darkness. It sounded like it was coming from within the city.

“Mmh... feels nice out!” Clena stretched both her arms up in the air and took

a deep breath of the chilly night air. I imitated her and could taste the saltwater in the breeze, since we were so close to the ocean.

“I want to relax like this for a while...”

“...Yeah, I know what you mean.” I wanted to meet Haruno again as soon as possible, but I wanted to savor my time together with Clena and everyone else, too.

It might take a while to get a boat if we custom ordered one. We’d have plenty of opportunity to relax as long as nothing unexpected came up. That was my current train of thought.

But little did I know, this was just the calm before the storm. Right around the corner, we were about to meet a person who had all the good intentions in the world, but was second to none at stirring up trouble.

A loud bell suddenly rang in the night.

“Huh? What’s happening?” Clena exclaimed and jumped onto me in surprise.

Roni and the rest of my party, along with the guests in the other cabins, all peeked their heads out their doors. The manager noticed what was going on and jumped out his own door, shouting, “Calm down! Calm down, everyone! Don’t worry, everyone! This is just the signal for a ship entering the harbor at night!”

The manager explained why the bell had started ringing. The next moment, a large ship emerged into my field of vision from the mouth of the river. It looked big enough for a hundred people to ride inside.

“...Hey, Touya. Look at that.” Clena raised her lantern toward a pattern on the ship’s sail. My eyes grew wide the moment I realized what that design was.

“Is that... the sacred family’s crest?!” If my memory served me right, the sail depicted the crest of Jupiter’s royal family—the descendants of the first sacred king. In other words, someone related to the sacred family was on that ship right now.

“Hahahahah!” A loud laugh came from somewhere. Rulitora pointed to its origin, someone standing at the bow of the ship. “Thank you, everyone! Thank

you for coming to greet me!”

I couldn’t tell what the person looked like, but he sounded like a man... or rather, I recognized that voice from somewhere.

“That voice... is that Cosmos...?”

There was no doubt in my mind. That annoyingly refreshing voice belonged to one of the four other heroes who had been summoned to this world with me.

Second Bath – Water Vapor Is an Explosion

We had planned on spending some relaxing time off at a cabin filled with family-friendly fun close to the sea, but then the self-proclaimed Cosmos landed his ship at the port right next to us.

“...Hey, is it okay for you to not go say hi to that Cosmos guy?”

I had pondered what I should do for a while, but couldn’t think of any reason why I actually needed to greet him, so I just went back inside to take a bath with everyone and go to bed. Thus, right now I was peacefully washing Roni’s hair. She was normally put-together, but when it came time to wash her hair, she melted into a puddle of smiles and let herself be spoiled silly.

I wasn’t escaping from reality or anything. You could barely count our points of interest on one hand. We neither hated each other enough to say “I’ll murder you!” and get in a fight, nor were close enough to say “Hey, it’s been a while!” and rekindle an old friendship. I was a “Hero of the Goddess” and he was a “Hero of the Sacred King,” but that was only because a tiny group of people labeled us as such. Hardly a reason for either of us to pick a fight with the other. Well, I was sure he’d been notified that I was in this city thanks to our plans with the auction house, but he had no reason to come find me either. Probably.

“There’s no reason why I need to go meet him. Sure, we’re from the same place, but we only met each other after being summoned at the same time.”

“Uh-huh...” Clena mumbled as she rested her chin on her hand at the edge of the bathtub.

“So what’ll you do if he comes to find you?”

“Roni, you’re so cute~”

“S-Sir Touya?!”

“Don’t change the subject on me!”

I dodged Clena's question by hugging Roni from behind, but she immediately gave me a head chop with her hand.

"Well, I don't really want to meet him, but I also don't want to go into hiding or anything..."

"...It's complicated, huh?"

"Yeah, it's complicated."

If he were an enemy, we'd already be readying ourselves for him, but Cosmos was a straight up "good guy" from what I'd heard. If you were to ask which of us had the most diligent and ambitious outlook as a hero, it would undoubtedly be him.

I started washing Rium's hair next, and then Clena asked me a question with a suspicious expression. "...Hey, can I ask you something while we're at it? It's about your old world."

"My old world? What about it?"

"Did you... ever have a girlfriend?"

"...Where did *that* come from?"

I figured she was reminded of something after I mentioned not knowing Cosmos back in my own world, but how did she arrive at the subject of girlfriends? On that note, my number of years without a girlfriend equaled my number of years alive. I didn't want to talk about it.

"Because you seem used to it, Touya. Washing a girl's hair, I mean."

"Oh, that. Well, I *am* used to it."

"So you did have a girlfriend...?"

"Nope."

That wasn't quite right. I was used to washing a girl's hair, but the reason behind that just hadn't come up in conversation before. Well, I wasn't trying to hide it or anything. Now that it'd come up, I might as well talk about it.

"I had a little sister. She wasn't able to do stuff like wash her hair by herself."

Rium looked over at me, asking, "...Had?" She was sharp.

“She died from an illness three years ago. If she was still alive, I’d be frantically looking for a way to return to my old world right now.”

“I had no idea...” Roni said with an emotional expression. She looked like she might start crying any second now.

It was a huge shock to me when it happened, but I’d learned to deal with it. I noticed that Rakti had been staring at me as if she wanted to say something.

“What’s wrong, Rakti?”

“...Um, I was just thinking that you really were summoned using sister Light’s hero summoning ritual.”

“Hm? What do you mean by that?”

“Sister Light doesn’t summon anyone who doesn’t want to be summoned.”

“...Well, we were brought here without even being asked about it.”

“That’s not it. You can only be summoned if you fulfill certain conditions.”

“So there are a few requirements to becoming a hero?” Clena asked, leaning forward as if she had found interest in our conversation. I looked over at her to find a pair of bouncy balloons hanging from the edge of the tub, then quickly turned away.

Girls around Roni’s age still felt like a little sister to me, but that wasn’t the case with Clena. I had gotten more used to her recently, but she still caught me off guard sometimes like this. Clena noticed my behavior and stared straight at my back. She’d normally start making advances at me for some skin to skin contact at this point. I’d deal with that after we put on some clothes, but for now I needed to ignore her and keep talking.

“Uuhh, Rakti. What are those conditions for becoming a hero?”

“Oh, yes. Sister Light’s condition is that you have no lingering attachment to your previous world. Or at most a very small amount of attachment.”

“Lingering attachment...”

That was better than summoning anyone who was still attached to their old world, or should I say kinder. Thinking about it, that was certainly true for me.

So was that also the case for Haruno and Cosmos?

I broke away from the conversation to focus on washing Rium's hair. I rinsed the soap suds off with the showerhead, and then she shook her head like a puppy to splash the water away.

Next up was Rakti. She looked a little glum from our exchange about the summoning just now. I made sure to give her pretty black hair extra care, gently running my fingers through it.

Clena was last up. She was clearly still concerned about our earlier exchange as well. Not the summoning—the fact that I looked away from her just now.

"Come on, let me wash your hair."



Clena leaned her warm body toward me, the flowery scent of her hair wafting through the air. I looked down behind me to see her cleavage heavily emphasized by her tight yuamigi.

“Oh, they’re touching your back.”

“So get away!” Thank god she was at least wearing something right now. I managed to finish washing her hair as she continued teasing me every so often.

However, our roles reversed as soon as we stepped out of the bath. We kept flirting around for a while... until Rakti jumped into the mix and made everything a little more rowdy. Our topic in the bath hadn’t been a very happy one, so everyone was probably trying to cheer me up. Clena and I exchanged glances, then smiled and sighed as we looked on at the girls. Being interrupted was a little unfortunate, but seeing everyone happy was most important.

After breakfast the next day, we set off to collect information. We had two goals: find out where to buy or commission a boat, and find out where the temple of the Goddess of Water was. We’d need to ask sailors for the former and fishermen for the latter, so we split up into two groups. There were apparently many ruffians among sailors, so Rulitora, Rakti, Rium, and I made up the first group. The rest of the party made up the latter team, led by Clena. We split up our two non-combatants, Rakti and Crissa, then put everyone who looked harmless on Clena’s team to deal with the fishermen’s families and the elderly. Rium had simply wanted to be on my team.

I strapped a tuna knife to my hip and had Rulitora dress in full armor so that even the ruffians wouldn’t try to pick a fight with us. Rakti was wearing her maid uniform, so she looked like our servant. No one would be left to watch our cabin, but I had everything stored in the Unlimited Bath anyway. We promised each other to return by sunset, then set out.

Now then, here was problem number one. If we wanted to find sailors this early in the morning, where should we go? This was a harder problem than I had expected. I’d heard voices singing from the city until late last night. Assuming that came from a tavern, the sailors must have been partying all through the night, and would be dead asleep right now. There were also sailors that embarked on ships early in the morning, but those ships departed at the

brink of dawn. It would already be too late to go to the port now. So where should we be going to meet sailors?

“Alright then, let’s go to the raver market.”

Yes, the answer was the raver market. The majority of sailors were, in fact, employed ravers. Apparently many of them were former fishermen who didn’t inherit the family business, so they chose to sell themselves as sailor ravers to save up money to buy their own boat. If we wanted information on boats, it’d be best to ask the captains who owned one themselves. We were most likely to run into them in the raver market, where they’d be looking for crew to hire.

There were two raver markets in Neptunopolis—one in the elevated area and one in the coastal area. The elevated area’s market kept bodyguards and soldiers, while the coastal area’s market mainly kept sailors. Needless to say, we were heading to the coastal area’s market right now. The building sat in a block along the main road lined with merchant shops. The walls of the building were a light blue, speckled with white dots that formed the image of rolling waves. It was pretty small compared to the raver market in Jupiter. The building was no larger than the inns and pubs we had passed by so far.

We passed under a signboard that depicted a large ship, and the gazes of all the customers in the room promptly fell on us. Rakti hid herself behind me, while Rium remained standing beside me with a nonchalant expression. The room looked like the banquet room of a traditional Japanese restaurant. It was split into three sections—the right and left sides were raised, while the center was a lowered corridor. There were tables on each side, and several people that looked like sailors were surrounding them sitting cross-legged on the floor. I could see a few women among them. So sailors weren’t all men here, huh.

They looked like they were evaluating us from head to toe, but then turned their heads down as soon as they noticed Rulitora. Well, of course nobody would try to start something after seeing him.

We walked down the center corridor to the opposite end of the room, where a young woman who looked like a staff member was standing. She was wearing a white sailor uniform. Come to think of it, I’d heard the sailor uniforms back in Japan were originally worn by actual sailors. Looked like they had become raver

market staff uniforms in this world. I bet the great pervert, Ficus, had a hand in this. The staff lady's white cap with a ribbon on it was especially cute.

"Welcome, are you here to request work? Or would you like to employ a raver?"

"No, we actually have business with the people who come here for work. We'd like to buy a boat."

I heard whispers behind me as soon as we said that. If we wanted a boat, then of course we'd need a helmsman. They probably all thought this might be a job opportunity.

There were two captains in the room right now. One was a fisherman and the other was a tradesman, both of whom conducted business in the bay surrounded by Talon Peninsula and Dragon's Tail Peninsula. The tradesman mainly dealt with Ares, the country in Dragon's Tail Peninsula. Rakti tilted her head and tugged at my shirt from behind upon hearing that name. I asked her what was up, and she said she remembered hearing that name often a long time ago.

I decided to sit down at an open table and hear the two captains out. They both said they were here to replenish crew members that had died during monster attacks, laughing about it as if it was a daily occurrence. It looked like the life of a sailor was pretty harsh.

"So you're the rumored hero... you're not wearing that flashy armor today, eh?" The tradesman had already heard about me, most likely from the auction house.

"A ship for the hero's travels, huh? A carrack would be your best bet. It's sturdy and big enough to store plenty of cargo."

"It's a very balanced ship. I recommend it."

They both recommended us a carrack, a medium-sized ship. A small ship was called a caravel, while the largest model was called a galleon. The tradesman chuckled, saying he wanted to buy his own galleon one day.

"Is a caravel no good?"

“Well, it doesn’t have much loading capacity. Though it’s decent for long journeys since it only needs a small crew.”

“But it’s fragile, so it can’t sail deep into the ocean. If one of those big bastards finds you, you’re a goner.”

Since there were monsters in this world, ships needed a minimum level of durability. Caravels were fine ships, but only when they stayed close to shore. However, the two captains’ expression suddenly clouded.

“Well, at least that’s the case for now...”

“What do you mean?”

“More monsters have been appearing in the bay lately.”

According to them, more and more giant sea monsters had been spotted in the bay in the past few years. Several cargo ships had fallen victim to them up to this point. I see, that made for a good reason to get at least a carrack-sized ship. Come to think of it, what about Cosmos’ ship?

“Was the Hero of the Sacred King’s ship that entered the port last night also a carrack?”

“Nah, that’s a galleon. It was most likely made in Vestapolis.”

Vestapolis was a country on the eastern side of the continent, and the second most powerful country in the Olympus Alliance. They were famous for their fine wines. The fisherman had gone to see Cosmos’ ship earlier this morning, and it was apparently beautiful and exquisitely decorated. Since they were bringing the princess along, the ship had to have cost a pretty penny.

However, mine was a slightly different case compared to any other sailors. Loading capacity wasn’t a factor for us since we had the Unlimited Bath. The door would remain open where I left it, so we’d need to figure out a way to anchor it, but I couldn’t ignore the possibility of a small ship with the hardiness of a medium-sized one.

“Do you know of a ship that’s smaller in size, but still durable?”

“Small but durable, huh... nope, don’t think there’s anything like that.”

“Hrmm, one actually comes to mind.”

I knew I might have been asking a little too much. The tradesman cocked his head, unsurprisingly not coming up with anything, but the fisherman actually seemed to know something.

“Where would we find a ship like that?”

“Oh, hold on a second. I know it’s small, but I can’t promise it’s sturdy. Though it’s made from different stuff, so I think it might be.”

“Um, what do you mean by that...?”

“There’s a crystal mage who’s working on making a new type of ship.”

Rium perked her ears at the mention of another crystal mage. They were a type of mage who imbued spells into objects. Essentially, there was someone in this town trying to create a magic ship right now. That definitely caught my interest.

“You’d have to ask the person himself for the details.”

“Well, that part’s obvious... but he’s a raving lunatic of an old man, ya hear?”

“I don’t mind. Could you tell me where we can find him?”

That was hardly a surprise. There was a reason geniuses of engineering tended to be stereotyped as head cases, or at least oddballs.

“If you say so... The old man’s name is Rondalan. And he lives—”

The fisherman gave us Rondalan’s address. Apparently it was pretty close to the ocean. On that note, I felt like I’d heard that name somewhere before...

“Oh yeah, I heard that old geezer caused a ruckus in the temple of light the other day.”

Oh yeah. He was that mad scientist with the explosive hair who’d gotten in a heated argument by the entrance to the temple. Don’t tell me the experiment that caused those clerics to collapse was related to the magic ship? He wasn’t someone I would normally want to involve myself with, but I was curious about this ship. We had no choice but to meet him for now. I thanked the two captains and paid them a fee for the information, then headed to Rondalan’s research lab.

The laboratory was near the harbor. He had apparently been driven out of his former home after causing too much commotion in the name of his experiments, and now both lived and conducted his research in a warehouse in the port.

We arrived to the smell of the sea breeze, the cries of seagulls, and sounds from a crowd of people. Some fishermen's boats had just returned, and they were squatting in front of mountains of fish, sorting them by size or quality. Occasionally, they threw a fish behind them. I wondered if it was okay to throw fish on the roadside, but immediately afterward, seagulls came swooping down to take the fish that had just been thrown away. I see, one man's trash was another bird's feast. Both parties seemed used to the exchange, as the fishermen threw the fish behind them without a glance and the seagulls picked up only the fish that were being thrown away. Oh, one of them grabbed a fish before it even hit the ground. Nice catch.

Rakti was jumping and waving her arms around as the birds swooped down close to her. Rium leaned into me from my front. She wasn't hugging me as usual, but rather pressing her back into me.

"They attack you from behind..."

Looked like she had some bad memories involving these birds. And then I looked toward the shore, only to see a person carrying a wooden crate filled with fish running from a seagull as it flew at him from behind, snatching up a fish. I see, that's what it was.

I looked around more and saw that some fish were already being sold after they'd been laid out and organized. The buyers weren't just merchants, but also a few couples I spotted here and there. They probably all wanted the freshest catch. It was probably cheaper than what fishmongers in the city were asking.

Rondalan's laboratory was a little past this hustle and bustle. Rulitora would have to be careful not to bump into anyone on the way. I soaked in the sights around us as we made our way over. A haggling battle between a fisherman and a housewife, seagulls circling overhead as they waited for spoils, a group of girls carrying the hero Cosmos on a stretcher...

"Wait, what?!" I suddenly shouted and turned around, but I didn't think I was

at fault there.

The one who noticed my yell was a slender and petite young girl in an elegant dress, the princess of the sacred family. I couldn't forget her flaxen ringlet curls even if I wanted to. Then, a tall woman carrying a spear stepped between us. She was probably her bodyguard.

"Oh? You must be... a Hero of the Temple of the Goddess of Light—"

"That's way too long, so just call me a Hero of the Goddess."

Fortunately, she seemed to recognize me and relaxed her guard.

"Um, we need to hurry and take Sir Cosmos away..." Another girl with long ears and honey-colored hair down to her shoulders peeked at us. She must have been the elf that Cosmos rescued.

And she was absolutely right. This didn't look like something I wanted to involve myself with, but I wasn't so heartless as to ignore someone who had collapsed.

"So what happened to him?"

"I... just have to help those in need, you know?☆" The one who answered me was Cosmos, giving a sparkling white-toothed smile from the stretcher. He surprisingly still had life in him, as he gave me a thumbs up despite looking deathly pale.

"We'd heard that someone was in need of assistance after being rejected from the temple..."

"...Are you talking about the guy who lives over there named Rondalan?"

The bodyguard woman nodded, and then the elf continued the story. "Sir Cosmos had all his MP sucked away after helping Sir Rondalan with his experiment. We need to hurry and get him to the temple...!"

"His MP, huh?"

"Touya, that spell might work..." Rakti spoke up from beside me. Yeah, a spell that I had just recently learned might come in handy here.

"Alright, leave it to me. Transfer!" I put my hand on Cosmos' forehead,

recited my spell, and felt a bit of power being whisked away from me. This was a light cleric spell that allowed me to transfer my own MP to someone else. We had forced Clena through a lot of exhaustion to get through the poison gas in Hephaestus, so I learned this spell to make things a little easier if anything similar happened in the future.

"...Okay, he should be good now." His MP filled up much more quickly than I'd expected. Looked like Cosmos' MP stats might have been pretty low. Well, mine were still unusually high after constantly using it for so long.

"Th...thank you!! ...Guh."

"Sir Cosmooos!!"

Cosmos gave me another smile and a thumbs up, but then knocked himself out again. The princess was in tears next to him. What was this, a comedy skit?

"Is he going to be okay...?"

"Y-Yes, don't worry. His MP and complexion look fine now." I asked Rakti just in case, but she also looked a little anxious.

"After you lose all your MP, your physical body starts taking damage... so he probably fainted because of that."

"So should I use my healing light, then...? No, he doesn't have any actual injuries."

Unfortunately, healing light could only heal wounds and did nothing for fatigue. As we conversed, the bodyguard and elf came up to us.

"Excuse me. We must thank you, but right now..."

"Yeah, no worries. Just take him somewhere he can rest for now."

"Um, we're staying in a hotel called Maiden of the Roaring Waves, right over there!"

The bodyguard was dutifully executing her responsibilities. She was the calm and collected type.

On the other hand, the elf looked seriously worried about Cosmos. She remembered to keep us in mind, though. She pointed in the opposite direction

of Rondalan's laboratory. I could see a tall building by the shore. That must have been the "Maiden of the Roaring Waves." I could tell it was four or five stories tall from here—a fancy high-class hotel. It melded with the pale blue of the sea and sky, bringing about a different sort of dignified air compared to the auction house. I expected no less from the hero's party, or should I say the princess' party?

"Got it. We'll come by and check up on you guys later."

"We'll be waiting. ...And I'm sorry for not introducing myself. My name is Ricott, the captain of the bodyguards under Her Highness Franchellis. Please ask for me when you arrive at the hotel."

"Oh, that's right! My name is Foley!"

Oh yeah, I never found out these girls' names. I'd heard the princess' name once after I was summoned, but I had completely forgotten it by now. I remembered my manners and introduced not only myself, but also Rulitora and the rest. We couldn't keep them for long, so I kept the greetings short. And then we watched as the group of girls carried Cosmos' body away.

We'd attracted a lot of attention in the meantime. It'd be wise to remove ourselves sooner than later.

"...That big fish looks like sea bream. Can I get those squid and shrimp-looking things, too?"

...After getting some tasty looking seafood, that is.

We finally found Rondalan's laboratory after freeing ourselves from the open-air market. I opened the door to the Unlimited Bath where no one could see, then put away the fish we bought. We didn't have any ice, but I could regulate the water to stay at 1°C, so it worked as a refrigerator.

"Um, will we be okay? The other hero fainted and all..." After I exited the Unlimited Bath, Rakti voiced her worries to me. She'd probably grown anxious after seeing Cosmos in that state.

"It looks like Cosmos and the clerics collapsed after getting all their MP sucked away, but I barely felt anything after recovering Cosmos' MP."

“Really?”

“Well, Sir Touya’s MP shoots right off of his status card...” Rulitora put his hand to his chin, pondering. He sounded a little sarcastic, but that was probably just my imagination. That was just how much of an outlier I was, though I was hardly one to talk.

I couldn’t prove that I would come out unscathed, but that should have put Rakti’s mind at ease at least a little bit. Or rather, if even I couldn’t handle Rondalan’s experiments, then he might as well quit while he was ahead.

Those thoughts ran through my head until we arrived at the laboratory. It was a warehouse, so the front door was huge, but it had been left ajar after Cosmos’ party had rushed out from it. We could see inside, but the place was a mess since Cosmos had failed the experiment.

I could see a ship... *I think?* Something was propped in the middle of the room, but it barely looked like the fishing boats at the harbor, much less Cosmos’ galleon. It was about caravel size, the same as the fishing boats outside, but it didn’t even have a sail and its unique shape brought anything but a ship to mind. If I had to describe it, it resembled a giant spiral shell. Looking at it from underneath, I felt overwhelmed, almost as if I had become a small fish.

“What are you lot doin’ here?”

While I was still stunned looking at the ship, an old twig-like man with explosive hair called out to us. He was the owner of this laboratory, Rondalan.

“We...”

“As you can see, I’m busy cleaning up right now. Go home if you don’t need anything.”

I tried to introduce ourselves, but he wouldn’t even let us. He was clearly disgruntled. Though I couldn’t blame him, seeing as how he had just recovered from a failed experiment.

“Hey! What are you doing?!”

I looked over to see Rium approaching the ship and Rondalan yelling at her to stop.

“I-I’m sorry! Rium!”

She must have been curious as a fellow crystal mage, but her timing was poor. I rushed over to her and picked her up by the armpits. But she remained unperturbed, and as her feet dangled around in the air while I held her up, she turned to Rondalan and spoke in a soft voice, “You have a weird way of drawing formations... are you from the Erandis school?”

“...What?”

Erandis? It was the first time I’d heard that name. But Rondalan stopped in his tracks the moment he heard it.

“Youngin’, are you one of Erandis’... no, that can’t be. He’d died long before you were born.”

It sounded like Erandis was the name of his master. Since he’d had a “school,” he must have been a pretty distinguished crystal mage. And here was Rium, who was knowledgeable enough about Erandis to shock Rondalan, yet she could never have been his student. Maybe her master Nartha, who I’d heard so much about, was the one who had known Erandis. Could Rondalan and Nartha have been fellow pupils?

“You’ve got a sharp eye for being such a little brat. Who’s your master?”

“...Hn.” Rium didn’t directly answer his question, but instead drew out three small silver spears from inside her cloak. They looked like skewers for kebabs at first, but they were actually weapons that could turn into giant spears after channeling MP into them. I’d seen a giant sandworm get stabbed by those spears once before. I wondered if those spears were enough to answer Rondalan’s question, but when I looked at him, he gave a loud yelp and jumped back toward the wall. His face grew pale and beads of sweat ran down his forehead.

What? What did those spears mean to him?

“N-N-No way...! Are you Nartha’s disciple?!” Rondalan looked positively frantic. On the other hand, Rium simply nodded. He clearly knew Nartha, judging by his reaction. They must have been fellow pupils after all. But why was he so scared, though? I’d never met her before, but according to Haruno’s

letters, she sounded like a graceful and kind old lady. Rulitora and Rakti looked like they were thinking the same thing as they looked at each other. All our questions vanished after Rondalan's next exclamation.

"How dare you, Silver Executor?! You sent one of your students all the way out here?!"

"Whaaat?"

...Only to bring up another host of questions. The "Silver Executor" seemed to be referring to Nartha. Rulitora, Rakti, and I looked at Rium in shock, but she just kept fiddling with her spears as her feet dangled in the air.

"...Have you calmed down?"

"...Sorry about that, folks."

It took about ten minutes for Rondalan to calm down after that. He kept glancing fearfully at Rium as she toyed with her spears, but at least we were able to talk to him now thanks to her. What in the world was Nartha like when she was young, anyway?

"Rium, come over here."

"Mmh..."

I beckoned Rium over and had her sit in my lap. She looked happy about it, and it would help Rondalan keep calm—two birds with one stone.

Don't look at me like that, Rakti. You'll get your turn after we go back.

"We saw the hero Cosmos being carried away just earlier. What in the world happened?"

"What, are you lot his friends?"

"...Well, we're acquaintances."

We weren't enemies, but I didn't want to call us friends either. He was just the self-proclaimed Cosmos.

"I asked him to activate this magic crystal... but between him and the clerics, none of them are worth a damn!" Rondalan grumbled in annoyance as he smacked his fist against the spiral-shelled ship in the center of the room.

Magic crystals were conductors that crystal mages embedded in their contraptions. Rium's flying disc had about a fist-sized magic crystal affixed to it. I couldn't imagine the size of the crystal needed to operate an entire ship.

"So you don't have enough MP to activate it?"

"It's not even filled a third of the way yet!"

"Oh, so it doesn't have to be all at once?"

It worked a bit differently from how I'd imagined. I thought it would keep sucking the user's MP until they collapsed. Maybe I could allow myself to be a little optimistic here. I showed my status card to Rondalan, told him I was a Hero of the Goddess, and explained why we were here.

"We came here to find a ship to travel out to sea with. If your ship needs *that* much MP to function... it must be pretty powerful, I assume?"

"Oh? Y-Yes! Of course!" Rondalan replied absentmindedly. It didn't sound like he was unsure of the ship's abilities. He was probably just looking at my status card—specifically, the MP stat flying off of it.

"Is this really a ship? It looks like a seashell to me."

"You don't know anything, lizardman. Can't even see the merits behind this design, huh?"

"Will this shape keep it stable in the ocean?"

"Y...yeah, probably." He had responded to Rulitora in an arrogant tone, but started cowering as soon as Rium spoke up. Maybe the ship really did have stability issues, or maybe he was wary of the spears in Rium's hands, but most of all, he was probably scared of the "Silver Executor" he was imagining behind her.

I climbed on top of the ship and saw that the mouth of the "shell" was facing upward, but there were no barriers to prevent waves from splashing inside and eventually flooding the ship. Rulitora and Rium had plenty of reason to be dubious. The whorl inside the shell formed a cabin. This was an interesting ship, but its likeliness to flood was a deal breaker. A ship that couldn't sail out to sea could hardly be called a ship in the first place. We concluded it wasn't worth

trying to activate the crystal if we couldn't even use it.

"This was a letdown..."

"So that's a no go? Let's find another ship, then."

"W-Wait!"

Rium mumbled her harsh opinion and Rakti responded by leading them out of the building, but then Rondalan ran over and stopped in front of them. He was quicker than I would expect for his age. He wasn't going to let someone with as much MP as me leave just yet.

I looked at the ship one more time, pondering something else. Rondalan noticed me staring at the ship and called out to me as a last cry of hope. "Say something, lad! All I ask is that you help me activate the crystal!"

"Nah, I have nothing to gain from doing that," I said, which made Rondalan think of something. He had originally requested help from the temple, so he was probably thinking of how much he should pay me right now. But I didn't need money at the moment. All I wanted was a functional ship.

"Let me ask you one thing."

"What?"

"Only that mouth portion of the ship is prone to flooding, even though the rest is this weird shape, right?"

"Of course. This beauty's made from nautilus shells I collected. That makes it both light and sturdy, so those old wooden ships won't stand a chance against it. It's a shipbuilding revolution!"

Apparently nautiluses were a type of monster that essentially looked like a smaller version of this ship. They lived in the water surrounding Neptunopolis and were often spotted around the beach.

"Can it handle high water pressure?"

"Not a problem!"

"But wouldn't it just sink because it would flood from the top?" "Uh..." Rondalan had answered with his chest puffed out in pride, but then Rakti called

him out.

I wondered why he hadn't just created a normal-looking ship from these shells, but I bet that thought had never crossed this guy's mind in the first place. Anyway, an idea came to mind as I was thinking what we could do with these shells.

"Couldn't we just make this whole thing a submarine...?"

"....."

Rondalan stopped in his tracks at my words. Even Rium, Rakti, and Rulitora were staring at me with stunned expressions. Did I say something that strange? The nautiluses that this ship was based on lived underwater anyway, and we might as well block off the ship's hull if all it did was allow water in.

"Young lad..."

"What do you think?"

"...What in the world is a *submareen*?"

Oh, the word submarine wasn't even in this world's vocabulary. I see. I'd never seen a submarine here before, now that I thought about it. The idea of venturing underwater probably wasn't even considered in this world, aside from free diving. I figured we would get nowhere, but I explained what I knew about submarines, and then both Rondalan's and Rium's eyes started glistening in curiosity.

"A hatch that can open and close, huh... Mhmm, that can work."

"What about the air inside...?"

"Hmm... we'll need another magic crystal for that."

The two of them were deeply conversing about the ship's new mechanics, any hint of tension between them now gone. Seemed like curiosity got the best of fear. I let the two of them be for now.

In the meantime, I called Rulitora and Rakti over to look at the ship again. I was mainly curious about its propulsion mechanisms. This ship didn't have anything that looked like a sail. I circled around to the back of the ship and sure enough, found a hole that looked like a rocket's nozzle. Something would spurt

out from here to propel the ship forward.

Rulitora squinted his eyes and looked inside the nozzle. “Is that a magic crystal inside?”

It was dim inside, but I could faintly spot what looked like a crystal embedded deep inside.

“I think so. I can feel some power coming from it, though it’s weak.”

“Weak?”

“Compared to the size of the crystal, at least.”

“Because it’s only about a third filled right now?”

Maybe I could feel something from it if I got closer. I braced my feet on the edges of the nozzle and peered inside.

“Whoa?!”

The next moment, my entire body was sucked inside. I wasn’t being physically dragged by anything, but sucked in by some force.

“Touya?!” Rakti stretched her arm out to grab me, but couldn’t reach. My body was suspended in the air as it was forcefully pressed against the magic crystal.

“Th-This thing is absorbing my MP on its own...!” I could tell my MP was being sucked out of me. At an extremely fast rate, no less. I had already transferred about 20 percent of my MP to Cosmos, leaving me at 80 percent. But now my MP was quickly dwindling down to 50, 40, then 30 percent.

“Rulitora!”

“Hold on!”

Rulitora leaned himself inside, grabbed onto me, then used his thick arms to pry my body off the crystal, and finally brought the both of us back outside. Right after that, Rondalan and Rium came rushing over, having noticed the commotion.

“What are you doing?!”

“That’s my line!”

I had just barely 10 percent MP left. My head was spinning. I had only been stuck to that crystal for half a minute or so, but over half my MP had been sucked away in that time. Had Rulitora rescued me a moment later, I'd have ended up another Cosmos. I explained what had happened, but Rondalan cocked his head in confusion.

"True, the magic crystal draws you in as it absorbs MP, but it's not supposed to move your entire body. At most it tugs at your hand."

"Really? I figured you had set a trap because you didn't have enough MP..."

"Touya, Rondalan is telling the truth. Magic crystals aren't supposed to do that... especially before they're activated." I still had a doubtful look on my face, but Rium backed up his claim.

"Um... maybe it's because Touya has too much MP?" Rakti interjected. Now that I thought about it, Rulitora hadn't been pulled in either.

"I bet that's the reason. Look here, I can get inside and nothing happens," Rondalan said, then pushed himself inside the nozzle. Rium followed behind him, but neither of them were triggering a response in the crystal. It looked like my massive amount of MP really was the issue. I wasn't expecting this pitfall.

"Impressive work, lad. You actually filled this thing up to 90 percent."

"...Well, I'm a hero who mains in magic, I guess." I normally wore a full suit of armor and swung an axe around, yet magic was my forte.

Anyway, apparently I had twice the amount of MP as Cosmos and the three clerics combined... no, I had transferred a portion to Cosmos, so it was even more than that.

"Now if you would hear me out—could you come back after your MP recovers? I may need to install more magic crystals, so I'll be asking you to activate those as well. In exchange, the ship is yours the moment it's done."

"Do you think you can make it a submarine?"

"Who do you think I am?"

I think you're a mad scientist who started a fight with the temple knights right in front of the temple. Well, he wouldn't cause a scene as long as Rium was with

us.

On that note, I could channel my MP into the magic crystal without getting too close by firing light spirits at it. Or rather, the light spirits would be immediately drawn in either way. The problem with activating the crystals was settled now. I didn't know whether Rondalan could successfully transform the ship into a submarine yet, but that was a safe enough bet to make.

"Do you have enough nautilus shells to make the hatch?"

"Not quite, since I'll also need more to reinforce the hull."

"Tell me where we can find them. Fighting monsters will be a good workout for us."

"Let me make you a map, then."

We figured we'd better help him in every way we could to make the best submarine possible.

"Got it. We'll stop by again tomorrow... no, the day after tomorrow."

But for now, I was dead tired. I decided to take the day off tomorrow.

"Are you alright, Sir Touya?" Rulitora asked me in a worried tone. I was a bit unsteady on my feet.

I had pampered Rakti after we got back to the cabin, gave Roni the fish we bought to make dinner with, then let Rium sit in my lap to read a book together. Later, I took a nap on Clena's soft and squishy thighs. Yep, I was exhausted.

"I won't be able to get any sleep if you're using me as your pillow."

"You have a point."

We agreed to let me use her as a lap pillow only while Roni and the others were making dinner. I pinched her plump thigh, to which Clena promptly slapped my hand away. She told me while I was lying down that their investigation into the Goddess of Water's temple hadn't turned out so well. There were indeed some followers of the Goddess of Water among the fishermen and sailors, but there were no temples or clerics in this city. At best, there was a small chapel.

“Oh yeah, they said that the gillmen might know something.”

“Gillmen... as in mermaids?”

I remembered hearing about them back in Jupiter as an example of demi-humans who didn’t take baths. So they lived around here, huh?

“But they live on an island out in the sea, so first we’ll need to wait on the... submareen?”

“So we’ll have to postpone getting the blessing from the Goddess of Water for now.”

“Can’t we just sail that ship out as-is?”

“No, it’ll get flooded by waves in its current state. Not to mention we’ll be able to do a lot more with it after it’s done.”

We’d be going back to activate the magic crystal and get information on the nautiluses after my MP recovered. But for now, I needed to rest so that my MP would come back even a second faster.

Roni and the others were using the kitchen in the cabin to cook tonight, while Mark refrained from using the fire altar. Instead, he was helping Crissa with dinner as if his life depended on it. They were having all sorts of trouble using the hearth since they had gotten used to the kitchen in my Unlimited Bath. It went without saying, but the user-friendliness of a modern kitchen couldn’t compare to the ones in this world.

I slowly closed my eyes as Clena stroked my hair. This wasn’t so bad. I rested like that for a while until I felt a weight on my arm.

I opened one eye to see what happened and was met with the cocoa-colored back of Rium’s head as she read a book. She was using my arm as a pillow to lie down on as she read. I wrapped my free arm around her waist and pulled her in, and she scooched herself closer to me as well. I could use her as a body pillow while we were here.

Later that evening, Rakti and Roni sandwiched us between them to sleep, after having found us and gotten jealous. I took the opportunity to ask Rakti about the gillmen.

“Oh, it’s not just the gillmen. Many followers of sister Water live in the sea!”

“Not just the gillmen...?”

“Yes! Like dolphins and whales!”

Apparently the Goddess of Water had a wider variety of followers than I had imagined, considering how even dolphins and whales, to say nothing of the gillmen, were her followers. The gillman clerics that served under the Goddess of Water were called “sacred dolphins.” They looked like dolphins at first glance, but they were actually gillmen who could speak like any other human.

“...Wait a second, are gillmen actually dolphins?”

“No, they’re not. Gillmen can walk on land, unlike dolphins!”

So the mermen of this world were actually dolphins that had learned to walk upright on land. There were a few among them who had pure white bodies and were known as “sacred dolphins” who served as clerics. Those white-bodied gillmen were honored as the guardian deities of the sea by fishermen and sailors. Apparently there were stories of a sacred dolphin coming to the aid of capsized fishing boats, carrying fishermen back the harbor. Now that made me curious—I wanted to see it in action. But that would also have to wait until the submarine was complete. I should be focusing on that for now.

I napped until noon the next day to let my MP recover, and then headed to Rondalan’s laboratory again the day after that. This time, we went with the whole party because they all wanted to see the ship.

I infused my MP into the magic crystal by firing light spirits at it from a distance so that I wouldn’t get sucked in. It really did attract magic—even when I shot the spirits in the wrong direction, they would draw a sharp curve and get sucked right into the crystal. It absorbed anything magical.

“Could this be used as a defense against magic attacks?”

“You could try, but it’ll end up being one-time use each... and that’d be pricey.”

I thought we could use the crystal’s behavior as a way to defend against incoming spells, but it wasn’t so simple. Between the hardened earth created

from earth magic and balls of fire created from fire magic, there were too many spells that would physically damage the magic crystal and render it useless. The crystals were both expensive and rare, so we couldn't expend them so freely.

I minimized the number of times I had to cast my spirit summoning spell by pouring as much MP as I could fit inside a sphere the same size as the magic crystal. After the crystal inside the nozzle flashed brightly for the umpteenth time, Rondalan gave the stop signal. The magic crystal had finally activated.

"It's stabilized now that it's activated, so it won't pull you in anymore. You can get closer to it now."

"Alright then..." I stepped inside the nozzle, with Rondalan, Mark, and Rulitora, who had been keeping an eye out for me, following close behind.

Clena and the other girls weren't here right now. They had gotten bored of watching me chuck MP at a crystal ball over and over, so they had gone shopping. It was a good opportunity to split the workload in our party. I wasn't lonely or anything, I swear.

Anyway, Rulitora was bracing himself to rescue me in case anything was about to go awry, but I felt nothing from the crystal this time as I stepped inside the nozzle. As a test, I fired a small ball of light at it, which immediately went inside the crystal. It hadn't lost its magic absorption powers.

I looked closer and noticed that the ball looked brighter than it did just earlier. Or rather, a bunch of faint lights were floating inside the sphere. I put my face right up to it and saw the lights flickering inside. It actually looked quite pretty like this. I appreciated the dancing lights for a while longer, then stepped outside the nozzle to find Rondalan facing me with a dubious expression.

"Are you still doing alright, lad? You've been throwing your magic at that thing for a few hours now."

"Don't worry, I'm still fine. I can keep going as long as I don't get stuck to the crystal like last time."

I still had about half my MP left. Chanting the same spell dozens of times in a row had done a bigger number on me so far.

"Looks like most of your MP had gone rogue the day before yesterday... it was

only an accident, but still, what a waste."

I had no response to that. Well, Rondalan couldn't have predicted that my body would get sucked toward the magic crystal either, so it couldn't be helped.

"Well then, if you still have some energy left in you, help me activate those other magic crystals."

"Are you going to be using more?"

"Yeah, I'll need to install them to prepare the ship for going underwater."

"Weren't magic crystals rare and expensive...?"

"Hmph! I won't be paying you to activate these crystals, but I'm not asking you to pay me back for buying them either. The deal's costing you a lot less overall... but in exchange, I'm having you help me with every last drop of juice ya got!" Rondalan cackled as he picked up two soccer ball-sized magic crystals under each arm. I supposed we lit up his fiery inventor spirit.

Mark followed behind Rondalan, carrying a huge basket filled with magic crystals. *Since when did you become his assistant?* I looked over at Rulitora, but he seemed as exasperated as I was.

In any case, I'd gladly help him if it meant getting us our very own submarine. I'd even help be a crash dummy if it meant reinforcing the ship's safety features.

The crystals would require a lot of MP to activate, but it wouldn't do me much harm. We only had a lot to gain if it all worked out.

The only issue was whether or not he could actually make us a submarine, but we had plenty to look forward to if he was serious about it. Low-risk, high-return. There wasn't much to say no to.

"Okay, let's do this!" I put on an audacious smile and grabbed one of the magic crystals from Rondalan... but then I stopped in my tracks.

"Sir Touya, what's wrong?"

"Er, it's not doing anything." Wasn't this thing supposed to start absorbing my MP as soon as I touched it? I cocked my head in confusion, but then Rondalan explained it to me.

“Oh, the crystal’s absorption powers are proportionate to its size. A crystal of that size can’t absorb anything on its own.”

“So then how am I supposed to do this?”

“You could just inject your MP into it directly...”

“I’m not that skilled.”

“Then you’ll just have to fire your light spirits at it like you did just now.”

There were at least a dozen magic crystals in the basket Mark was carrying. How many spells would I have to chant to activate all these crystals? I was getting exhausted just thinking about it.

“...Oh.” And then I remembered something.

“Hey, professor! I have a question!”

“What is it?” Rondalan looked back at me, clearly annoyed.

“Would gifts that use MP count as magic?”

But as soon as he heard my question, he stopped what he was doing and started looking around. “...A gift... you mean like what the first sacred king had?”

“These things went back 500 years?!”

“If anybody other than the first sacred king could use them, then why would we have summoned you guys?” I was shocked, but then Mark retorted me.

Yeah, he had a point. If people from this world could use gifts, then they didn’t need to go out of their way to summon us. Before us, there were no other people who had gifts other than the first sacred king.

“We won’t know till we try. As long as it’s something made from MP and won’t damage the crystal, then go right ahead.”

“Won’t damage it...” *I think this might work.*

I opened the door to the Unlimited Bath right in front of me. This would be related to the submarine’s loading capacity, so I might as well let Rondalan see it. However, the door didn’t appear in front of me after I opened it, and not a moment later I heard a sound coming from behind me.

“Huh...?”

“What was that?”

“It came from behind us!”

We all looked at each other wondering what was going on, then turned around to see a door stuck to the front of the magic crystal deep inside the nozzle. The door was round, as if it was matching the shape of the magic crystal.

I knew what that was. It was a different shape, but that was the door to the Unlimited Bath for sure.

“...Wh-What in the world is that?” Rondalan looked stunned. Well, of course he would be.

“Did the magic crystal suck it in?” Rulitora asked doubtfully, which made me sprint towards the door.

“Is everything okay inside?!” I opened the door and ran inside, but fortunately everything looked the same as always. The sword made from the grave marker that we had put next to the entrance looked untouched as well.

When I went outside and closed the door, it disappeared like normal, and when I tried opening it again, it got stuck to the crystal again. When I got far enough away from the magic crystal, the door remained in place like it usually did.

“Looks like it really is sucking in the Unlimited Bath.”

“Let me try closing it from the inside.”

This time I tried closing the door while I was still inside, and everything still seemed normal. However, the outside was a different story.

Usually if I close the door from the inside, no one could interfere with the Unlimited Bath from the outside anymore. But now the door remained visible and stuck to the magic crystal even when it was shut.

“Um, the door remained even after you closed it.” Rulitora opened the door from the outside and ducked in.

“So this is your gift, lad?” Rondalan and Mark came inside next, looking

around. He couldn't hide the surprise on his face. That made me feel a little haughty, I admit.

"So it's the magic crystal that's making the door stick to it?"

"That seems to be the case. Though there doesn't seem to be any problem with the door just being stuck to it."

"Can we access this magic crystal from inside the ship?"

"Of course. You'll need to replenish it with MP while sailing."

In fact, we could only see a small part of the crystal from the nozzle, and most of it was sitting inside the ship's engine room.

"One more question... normally, that door can't move from where it was originally summoned."

"...Mhmm?"

"If the magic crystal moves while the door is stuck to it, what do you think will happen?"

After hearing my question, Rondalan smirked and then replied, "It probably won't move from the surface of the crystal. That's just how it works."

I replied by nodding in satisfaction.

There was actually one big problem with using the Unlimited Bath while traveling by ship. The door to the Unlimited Bath stayed in the same spot as long as it was active. If I closed it from inside and then opened it again, the door would open in the same spot it was closed before. So yes, the door would not move along with the ship. We had to find a way to anchor the door to the ship if we wanted to use the Unlimited Bath. Even if we weren't sailing, we couldn't help the ship from moving as it rode with the waves. I had been thinking of using the ship's hold along with the Unlimited Bath during our trip at sea.

But it looked like Lady Luck was smiling on us today. If we utilized the magic crystal's tendency to suck in magic, then we could use the Unlimited Bath while out at sea. I wouldn't be able to move far from the Bath while it was open, but that was hardly a trade-off worth mentioning for being able to use it in this spiral-shaped ship. Finding this ship may have been a big stroke of luck for us.

“Sir Touya, how are the magic crystals?”

“They look unaffected. Well I wasn’t expecting them to absorb MP just by stepping inside the Bath.”

Actions would speak louder than words here. I entered the bathing room, then sunk a magic crystal inside the cedar wood tub.

“Wow, amazing!”

“Meow... what’s going on?!” Mark had stopped at the entrance to the bathing room since he was a ketolt who hated water, but he was overcome by curiosity and ran over to me. He looked inside the bathtub and let out a shocked yelp.

His reaction wasn’t surprising. The magic crystal inside the tub was absorbing the hot water, which made the water level gradually dip. Rondalan’s eyes were wide as he looked on from behind us.

“What’s going on...? Oh! I see! This is your gift!” Rondalan used his crystal mage instincts to immediately figure out what was going on.

Yep, this was the main attraction. Piping hot bath water made from my MP. The magic crystals absorbed magic, so it was sucking in all of the water. But I wasn’t expecting it to suck up all the water along with it. I was expecting the MP to just vanish from the water like that time we had trapped a certain evil goldfish inside it.

The water was about to vanish, so I quickly turned on the faucet to fill the tub with more hot water. If I kept this up, I wouldn’t have to chant any more spells and still be able to activate these crystals. I put the rest of the magic crystals inside the bathtub.

A bunch of soccer ball-sized spheres sunk inside the water. They’d get in the way when we wanted to take a bath, but we could just remove them temporarily.

“I’ll take the magic crystals for now. They’ll start shining like the bigger crystal once they’re activated, right?”

“Y-Yeah, you’ll be able to tell by looking. I never thought a method like this existed...”

“No, you wouldn’t be able to do it. Only Touya’s gift would be able to do this,” Mark said as he stared into the tub. He was right, this was unique to me.

I recalled that this was how people in the countryside cooled their watermelons. And come to think of it, the hot water generated so much steam. There was no reason why the water had to be hot. I turn the faucet down to cool and led everyone out of the Unlimited Bath. I’d be borrowing the magic crystals for now and returning them once they were all activated.

After that, I spoke with Rondalan about what kind of features a submarine would need and whether or not they were practical. For now, the most important things were measures against water pressure and deep sea monsters. Rondalan proclaimed, with his chest held high, that he could make it happen as long as he had the magic crystals.

Clena and the other girls returned after a while of us talking.

“Sorry for the wait!”

Each of the girls was carrying a bunch of bags. It looked like they had gone on a shopping spree.

“Another bunch of stuff? Want us to toss everything inside for now?” “Yes, thank you.”

Rulitora, Mark, and I took up all the bags and carried them inside the Unlimited Bath. Roni and Crissa took some of the fish immediately into the kitchen. They were fish bought from the harbor, just like yesterday.

Clena was hugging a package to her chest.

“What have you got there?”

“We’ll be hunting nautiluses, right? I bought something to prepare for that.”

“Prepare? What for?”

“For this. While you were infusing that magic crystal with your MP, I asked around for where the nautiluses lived,” Clena said, then took something out of the package. “We’ll need this at the beach. I bought a cute one, so look forward to it!” She was holding a cute swimsuit, just like she said.

I spent all of the next day activating the magic crystals, then rested for

another day. And then we went to the southern beach of Neptunopolis. It wasn't far enough to need a carriage, so we went by foot. It was about two hours away. I would have winced at a two-hour walk before being summoned to this world. But now I was appreciating the sea breeze, fatigue hardly crossing my mind, which made me feel like I had really gotten used to being in this world.

"Are you okay, Rulitora?"

"I'm fine enough for now. The wind is keeping it from feeling too humid, so I'll be alright." The sea breeze was also helping Rulitora from feeling too bad.

On that note, his stance on the submarine was that he had no idea what it was, but he was fine with it. He seemed to like the idea of traveling in a ship with a cover on it. Clena and the others didn't fully understand either, but they were very interested. They got to enjoy bathing with modern technology inside the Unlimited Bath, so they had little reason to object.

As we chatted, we defeated our second sweep dog and finally arrived at the beach. I took a quick look around and saw that the beach was covered in rocks —not the best-looking place to swim. But this seems like the ideal habitat for nautiluses.

"Alright, let's start changing then."

"Oh, you didn't buy a swimsuit for me... right?"

"This one's for you, Touya."

We were about to get right to it and change, but I realized that I had never bought my own swimsuit. And then Mark called out to me.

"What's this supposed to be?"

"It's a breastplate made from the same nautilus shells as the ship. You can't wear the Magic Eater at the beach, right? So I had that old geezer make this for you."

"I see, meow."

"Don't say meow, meow!"

Apparently during the two days I was resting after activating the magic

crystals, Mark had expedited an order for a set of beach armor for me. He had realized that my full plate armor, the Magic Eater, would be too dangerous to use near the sea after listening to Rondalan and I talk. He was right, I would drown in that thing.

So Mark had made a pure white breastplate for me that was shaped like a couple of seashells with a wavy design. Each part was reinforced with metal to give it stronger defensive capabilities, and each shoulder pad was attached by chains. It was a beautiful piece that also functioned as a work of art. It was more than enough as temporary armor. I chose to wear it since they had spent all their time making it for me.

"...You really are Shakova's son, huh."

"No no no! Rondalan was the one who made the mold! I was just using magic!"

He claimed that he had only connected the parts together and reinforced them with metal, which was how they had managed to finish it in two days. But in my opinion, he had really inherited his sense of aesthetics from his father. I mean, why was he so worried about the compliment? Maybe it was because Crissa had inherited a plain and simple aesthetic from her father? I didn't think she'd be concerned about that.

In any case, Rondalan really did have an obsession with shell designs. That would explain why he had chosen to settle down in Neptune for his research.

After I finished changing, I sat down on a nearby boulder to wait for the girls. Rulitora and Mark were waiting next to me in their usual outfits. Mark was wearing his small breastplate and Rulitora had his dragon bone armor, so both of them should be fine near water.

Of course, the most important thing right now was the girls' swimsuits. And their amazing figures. I had already seen all I could see of them in the bath, so maybe it felt like I was backtracking right now... but this was a different matter. I had a separate mind for appreciating girls in cute outfits.

I bet the southern sea would be warm. After our submarine was finished, we would probably head to Dragon's Tail Peninsula first. It would be even hotter there.

That's right. We should buy summer clothes for everybody one of these days. I would take up all of their requests for what kind of clothes they wanted to wear.

"Sir Touya, the girls have finished changing." I was in the middle of daydreaming when Rulitora patted me on the shoulder. As soon as I returned to my senses and looked at the door, I saw Rakti leaping toward me with a joyful expression.

"Touya! How do I look? How do I look? Does it fit me?" She jumped into my chest and looked up at me with a grin. It was a satisfied, proud, innocent, and adorable smile. Obviously it was the first time she had worn a swimsuit, and she seemed incredibly happy about it.

Her swimsuit was a one-piece. It was shaped like an A-line dress, and had a light blue color. I could trace a transparent skirt from around her modest chest down to her thighs.

She wanted to show off her swimsuit more, so she backed up a bit and did a quick twirl. I could see her slender body line underneath her fluttering dress as it shimmered in the sun.

"You look really good in it, Rakti."

"Thank goodness..." She smiled, relieved and embarrassed at my compliment. I felt happier just looking at her.

"You forgot your hat." Roni approached her from behind and plopped a straw hat onto Rakti's head.

She was wearing a white and pink striped bikini. The bottom was styled like boy shorts. There was even a hole in the back for her tail.

It was a sporty design that suited her tanned skin well. She had slender limbs and a slim waist, a small yet very present chest, and a butt that was just meaty enough to fill out those boy shorts. Her usual frizzy hair was tied back into a ponytail right now, which also suited the sporty look.

"You look cute too, Roni."

"Th-Thank you very much!" Her smile was like a flower in full bloom. Roni

started playing with Rakti, her ponytail swishing back and forth in tune with her tail.

“.....”

And then before we realized it, Rium had wordlessly squeezed herself into the mix. Her expression was as nonchalant as ever, but she seemed like she was having fun.

She was wearing a light blue tankini with a row of buttons going down the front and a denim sarong wrapped around her waist. It almost looked like a fancy formal dress, but it was actually a swimsuit. The bright colors complemented her cocoa-colored hair and her tanned skin well. Though in Rium’s case, she was happier being able to play with everyone rather than wearing a cute swimsuit. She surprisingly got lonely quite easily.

She tottered over and stared up at me with her golden eyes. I could easily guess what she wanted me to say and do for her.

“You look good, Rium,” I said and patted her head. After that, she turned around and skipped back to the other girls. She didn’t let it show on her face, but she must have been embarrassed. She started playing with Roni and Rakti again, but seemed just a little bit happier than she was before.

“What are they doing...?” Mark sighed, looking at them in exasperation. Could he not appreciate what an amazing sight this was?

Rulitora also stared at them with his arms folded, nodding. He looked at them like a father watching over his daughters.

And now it was time to tease Mark a little.

“Oh, that looks good on you too, Crissa.”

“Thank you very much!”

“Hey, wait!”

All the girls had gone on a shopping trip to buy swimsuits. Of course, that included Crissa as well. Her pure white fur was covered by a pastel green one-piece swimsuit. It was a simple and clean design, but also sported a cute ribbon above her chest. So even the ketolts wore swimsuits, even though they were

basically two-legged cats.

“Does it look weird on me?”

“N-No, that’s not it...”

Oh boy, he was getting nervous. He was looking at his crush in a swimsuit, so of course he would be.

“And what are you doing...?”

Clena had finished changing while I was still staring at the two of them, and I replied without looking back at her.

“Cheering them on?”

“...Well, you’re not wrong.”

If I hadn’t brought up the subject, Mark would have stood there doing nothing but blushing. Now then, what kind of swimsuit was Clena wearing? I slowly turned around in anticipation, and then stopped in my tracks.

“C-Clena...”

“What is it...? Don’t stare at me like that.”

She was actually wearing a halter top bikini. I couldn’t believe she actually picked that out herself. She had always complained about her figure, but I kept on telling her that I didn’t care and that the extra flesh made her more sexy. It looked like my efforts were finally coming to fruition.

The bikini was a charcoal gray, almost black. It contrasted against her porcelain white skin well. I looked down wordlessly and saw her thighs that I had slept on the other day peeking out from under a flower patterned sarong.

“...Aren’t you going to say anything to me?”

“Oh, um... You look cute! Super cute! That looks amazing on you!” I was brought back to my senses by Clena’s voice, which sounded a little peevish, and immediately blurted out the first words that came into my head. She responded by squirming around in embarrassment, then tried to hide her chest with her arms, but that only pushed up her cleavage even more. I bet she had no idea how destructive that was on my senses.

Rulitora, stop looking at me the same way you're looking at Rakti and the other kids. Crissa, stop saying your signature "Oh my, oh my." And Mark, stop grinning at me. Was this payback from before?

"L-Let's hurry up and hunt those nautiluses!"

"Yeah, yeah. Let's get started already."

I tried my best to change the subject to the task at hand, and Clena responded with a kind smile in agreement. Why did I feel like I was the loser here?

Anyway, we started preparing for the hunt. Apparently we could lure the nautiluses with bait. Rondalan had helped prepare a special mix of highly effective bait for us.

"All right, Rulitora and Mark will be with me in front."

"Understood."

"I'm ready to go!"

"Clena and Rium will stay in the back, casting spells."

"I can go with that. My sword won't be too effective anyway."

"....." Rium nodded wordlessly.



It was the obvious formation, since we couldn't have our scantily clad girls get hurt. The nautiluses had hard shells that would easily repel any half-baked attacks. Even though her sword once belonged to the Dark Prince, one of the five Great Demon Generals, it wouldn't do much damage with Clena's physical strength.

Actually, that sword was thin and single-bladed, like a Japanese sword. Maybe it was wrong of me to think of it as an otherworldly sword in the first place.

The nautiluses were hardy but not very dangerous, so our armor was mainly a backup measure. Now was the chance for us three men to go out in front and impress the girls.

"Alright then, do your best, Mark."

"With what?!"

Don't make me say it, it's embarrassing... Or maybe not. Do your best, Mark. I'd be giving it my all as well.

Their shells were formed using magic just like the armor Mark had made for me, so it didn't matter if we smashed them into pieces. I could lay waste to them using my Crescent Moon magic axe as much as I wanted.

"Roni, you're in charge of collecting the nautiluses that we defeat. Rakti and Crissa, you two will be in charge of cleaning the parts." "Understood!" "Leave it to us!" "So we'll be cleaning them on the inside."

The biggest nautiluses apparently went up to my waist. If Roni couldn't carry all of them by herself, then we would have Mark or Clena help her. I had expected the monsters inside the spiral shells to be soft-bodied creatures like squids or octopuses, but in reality they were more like hermit crabs. Apparently their meat was a popular food in Neptunopolis. I was curious what they tasted like, but we'd be hunting them for a few days, so I bet I would find that out as soon as tonight.

I had Rulitora scatter the powdered bait into the ocean. It would spread out as time went by. We also set out a case filled with bait in the water. We could trust Rondalan when it came to craftsmanship like this, so now all we had to do was wait for the nautiluses to show up.

“I-It really is effective...” Roni was the first to notice them coming. Her lycaon eyes noticed the sea spray drawing near.

“They’re here already? That was fast.”

If we waited any longer, that topic of conversation would be brought up again, so it worked out. Rulitora, Mark, and I readied our weapons. Clena stuck the tip of her sword in the sand, preparing herself to fire a spell at any moment.

“Oh, I can see them now.” After a little more waiting, I spotted the water spray with my own eyes. Rondalan’s homemade bait was more effective than I had expected.

“I can see them too, but...” But this was weird.

“Wh-What are those...? They look...”

Why was the wave so spread out? It only took a few seconds before we got our answer.

“Your bait is way too effective, Rondalan...!” I blurted out, looking at the swarm of nautiluses coming toward us. There were at least 100 of them.

“Prepare for attack! Retrieve the bait! Rakti, you and the others hide inside the Unlimited Bath!” I gave my orders in rapid succession while the giant swarm of nautiluses approached us. They would surround us in no time, so I opened the door to the Unlimited Bath and braced myself, acting as a shield for the others. Mark brought back the case of bait we had set in the water, and I handed it over to Rakti and Crissa to clean up.

Clena was firing off spells to keep them at bay, and I was protecting us from near the door. I let Rulitora and Mark fight to their hearts’ content, as they were fully armored. Rium had gotten on her flying disc and was floating in the air before I realized it. She was covering for us from the air. I let her do whatever she judged best for now.

Roni was supposed to be in charge of collecting materials, but I didn’t think I should let her go in this situation. I was about to ask Clena to protect Roni and turned around to see them hastily putting on their armor inside the Unlimited Bath. Clena was wearing the jade scale armor we had ordered for her, and Roni was wearing her red lizard armor top. They were both wearing armor on top

and bikini bottoms below. Even though Roni was wearing boy shorts and Clena was wearing a sarong, they both made my heart skip a beat.

“Stop looking at us and focus!”

“O-Oh yeah!”

Lastly, they put on pairs of sturdy boots that covered their legs up to their shins. Considering the size of the nautiluses, leg armor would be important.

Roni wasn’t carrying her usual daggers, but a pair of weapons that looked like ice picks, and was raring to go. I felt comfortable letting her go wild along with Rulitora and the others. I later learned that those ice picks weren’t actually weapons, but tools made for picking the meat out of the shells.

During the time we had taken to prepare, the swarm of nautiluses landed on the shore. There really were a lot. The first group of monsters that arrived on land came rushing toward us. Rondalan’s bait must have had some lingering effects even after we took them out of the ocean.

There were at least 200 here, with far more still coming in. This was way too much no matter how I looked at it.

“Um, Touya! Do your best!” Encouraged by Rakti’s words, I faced the incoming swarm.

This would be a much tougher battle than we had expected. I gripped the hilt of my Crescent Moon and braced myself.

“Uwoooooh!!” Rulitora was the first to leap into the fray. He let out a roar and swung his glaive, sending several of the nautiluses flying at once. The nautiluses went flying through the air with every glint of the blade. The monsters fought back by trying to surround Rulitora, but between the waves of his tail and his kicks, the enemies couldn’t get close to him.

“Get lost, you bastards!” Mark was following close behind. He was smashing several of the nautiluses with a swing of his dragon tooth hammer, which happened to be taller than his entire body.

It was a fitting way for ketolts to fight, with their tiny frames but strong muscles. Naturally he couldn’t take out as many of them at once like Rulitora,

but he was a more than adequate backup.

Meanwhile, Rium was whittling down the number of nautiluses using crystal mage techniques from up in the air.

“O rain of light, shower down...” She grabbed several marbles from out her cloak and scattered them in the air. They promptly turned into balls of light that rained down on the swarm of nautiluses. On their own, the shots weren’t strong enough to take down their sturdy shells, but those that managed to hit their soft bodies were highly effective. The attack wasn’t very precise, but in exchange it covered a large area.

Rulitora could take on the swarm with his giant body head on, Mark could easily dodge around the crowd with his petite body, and Rium weakened the swarm with her wide ranged attack. I could leave the battle up front to the three of them.

“Whoa!” One of the nautiluses aimed a pincer at my leg. I quickly dodged it and struck my hammer down, not just at its pincer but at its whole body. The nautiluses that had escaped from Rulitora’s group were starting to approach us.

They looked like hermit crabs in spiral shells about 1 stuto in diameter. And of course, the hermit crabs inside were as big as their shells could fit. No matter how sharp those pincers were, they would do more than just hurt if one managed to grab me. The sight of their many legs scurrying around sent a shiver down my spine. They were abnormally aggressive, keeping us intimidated while waiting for a chance to strike. But their tough shells also gave us a chance to fight back.

“Take that!” Roni skillfully brushed off their attacks using the ice picks and an occasional kick. The nautiluses rolled over, wriggling around on their backs and unable to get back up. I used the chance to swing down on them with my Crescent Moon. Occasionally, I pulverized a nautilus along with its shell. I wasn’t as nimble as Roni, but as long as I had my Crescent Moon, I could pull this off.

“Touya! Roni! There’s more on the right! Chain of Sand!” Clena’s support was just as valuable. She pierced her sword into the sand, summoned the spirits of earth, and twined the sand around the nautiluses, rendering them immobile.

It wasn’t just one or two of them—she caught every nautilus within her range.

Roni and I didn’t waste a second to clean all the trapped ones up. Thanks to Clena’s ability to paralyze the monsters, we could take care of the ones on land just fine.

However, there was no end to them. I had prepared myself, but this was more than I could have imagined. We kept fighting for a while, but the swarm of nautiluses didn’t seem to die down at all. Rulitora managed to sweep away several monsters at once with a swing of his glaive. Both of our groups combined had probably fought off 100, no, 200 of them by now.

None of us could hide our exhaustion, including me. Even Rulitora was starting to pant. Rium had run out of marbles to conduct her area-of-effect spell, so she had switched over to her silver spears to throw at the monsters. They were strong enough to pierce the shells, but they were singular, one-use attacks with essentially no area of effect and could hardly be called efficient.

“Maybe Rondalan’s bait still had an effect even after we took it out of the water?”

“If it’s the smell that’s luring the monsters, then that’s a possibility...”

Should we close the door to the Unlimited Bath? No, I had no idea when the effect would wear off. I didn’t want to deal with another swarm of nautiluses once we open the door again. Maybe we should put the bait in the bathing room and turn the fan on? No, it might stink up the bathroom and then the smell would linger on us.

“Um, Touya. How about we burn all of the bait up?” Rakti timidly called out to me from inside the Unlimited Bath.

We looked over to see her crouched down beside the door. Since only the door was visible from the outside, her body looked like it was disappearing in the air.

Anyway, burning it sounded like a good idea. The effects of the bait should disappear if we eliminated the source.

“Rakti! Crissa!”

“Y-Yes!” Crissa’s tail shot up in surprise after she was suddenly called out to.

“Take that bait to the kitchen and burn it up! Use the godly setting!”

“Using sister Fire’s powers?!” Rakti’s voice was practically hysterical. What was she so surprised about? If we were going to do this, we’d need to be thorough about it. And besides, if the smell really was the reason behind this, clearing out the scent might not make much of a difference. There was even the chance of making the smell stronger. So it would be safest to burn it to ash. That was the only sensible option.

“Hurry up! We can’t last much longer!”

“G-Got it!”

I rushed them on in a loud voice, and the two of them picked up the case with the bait and carried it inside the room. The godly flame shouldn’t burn the whole building down. I hoped. I was a little worried as I recalled the Goddess of Fire in my dreams with her wild smile, but right now I had to trust her common sense, or rather her good will. I was sure that she wouldn’t hurt her little sister.

I kept cutting down the nautiluses with my Crescent Moon, and after a sudden burst of lethargy, Rakti came running back out from inside.

“Touya! We did it! It all burned up right away without a trace!”

“Already?! That godly flame sure is something!” Roni turned around in surprise. Clena also looked dumbfounded. Yeah, let’s ignore the fact that that was supposed to be a kitchen burner for now.

Back to the point, everyone was just about at their limits. We should end this now without taking up any more time.

“Rulitora! All of you come back here for now!” I called for the three in front to come back.

As soon as he heard me, Rulitora kicked away the nautiluses at his feet and ran back. Mark followed behind him, his breathing ragged. He couldn’t have gone on much longer either. The swarm of nautiluses tried to chase after them, but Rium shot a silver spear at them to stop the pursuit.

Alright, we were all back. Now it was my turn.

“I’m going to fire off one of the goddesses’ favorite gaudy spells! Buy me

some time for the chant!” Everyone had guessed what I was about to do and formed a protective circle around me.

The goddesses had been giving me magic lessons in my dreams. I couldn’t hear them so my senses were limited, but I had picked up a few things along the way. One of them was that the Goddess of Fire really liked gaudy things. I wasn’t talking about fashion, but about incredibly flashy magic spells. However, that meant that the spells she taught me were all complicated, so I had only learned one up until now. That one spell was enough for now, though.

“O flames! O flowers! Dance! I offer this crimson banquet to the Goddess! Blazing Dance!” Flame sprouted all around me, and everything around us besides ourselves burst into fire.



The blazing flames did look like a crimson banquet. They were flaring up even taller than I was, and all of them together looked like a bright red flower garden. I see, so this was the flower in the chant.

The heat was pricking our skin, so we put our arms up to shield our faces.

After the fire died out, there wasn't a single nautilus left moving.

"Is it over...?" Rulitora murmured, looking around him.

The nautiluses' shells were strong against heat, but the same didn't go for their insides. Even if they hid inside their shells, they would essentially be baked. I didn't think it was just my imagination that the air was smelling a little tastier right now.

"Looks like it's over... Are you okay, Touya?"

"That shaved off a good chunk of my MP, but I'm fine."

"Then please rest. We'll take care of collecting the shells."

I wasn't anywhere near collapsing, but I still felt incredibly fatigued. That was a really powerful spell, but it sure did consume a bunch of MP. The others wouldn't let me work in that state, so they offered to collect the nautilus shells themselves. I should take them up on their kindness for now.

"Be careful, the sand might still be hot..."

"Alright! Now then... huh?!" She had replied with a smile, but it was quickly wiped off her face when she looked toward the ocean.

I looked in the same direction, wondering what was going on, and saw another wave of sea spray approaching just like earlier. It was another swarm of nautiluses. Looked like they couldn't get enough of us.

"The effect of the bait should have worn off by now..." Crissa murmured.

"...Maybe it's left over from before?" Mark grumbled in reply.

"...That's probably the last one. There won't be another wave." Rium descended from the sky. She had scouted out the sea for us using the small telescope in her hand. So that swarm really would be the last one.

"One more battle, huh."

“...No, stay back. I’ll use another big spell.”

Blazing Banquet wasn’t the only spell I had learned. This time, I would cast a powerful one using light magic.

“Will you be okay?”

“I still have enough MP.”

Rulitora looked like he still had some fighting energy in him, but the others, not so much. I would get even more fatigued from this spell, but that was it. There was no need to hesitate on this decision.

Everybody readied their weapons and kept their eyes on the approaching swarm. It was about time for me to start chanting the spell. I pierced my Crescent Moon into the ground, and then...

“Stop right there, if you would please! It’s the end of the line for you monsters!”

...a familiar voice rang in the air. Several gunshots sounded not a moment later, piercing holes into the nautiluses.

Yes, the owner of that voice was the hero Cosmos. He was wielding dual pistols to channel his gift, the Unlimited Bullet, as he stood beside the bank.

“...What are you wearing?” The only thing he had on was a speedo.

“Hahaha! There’s nothing more to worry about now that I have arrived!”

“Why are you here?”

“What more reason do I need than to help a person in distress?”

I could almost see his teeth sparkling as he said that. He was pretty amazing, if only because he said those lines completely unironically.

Behind Cosmos were all his party members, including Princess Franchellis and her elite guards. The whole party numbered close to 20, all of them carrying weapons and donned in swimsuits. I had no idea why they were here, but it looked like they wanted to help us.

“Now then, let us embark! Hup!”

“H-Hey! Hold on a—”

“Uwhoaaaoo?!”

I tried to stop him, but it was already too late. Cosmos eagerly sprang down to the sand, but then let out a strange yelp and jumped up immediately after. Of course the sand would be hot if you stepped on it with your bare feet right after I set off the Blazing Dance. Oh, now the princess and her guards were gleefully putting on boots. Foley the elf healed Cosmos’ feet with magic, and then they put on boots as well. But now I couldn’t unleash an AOE spell with all of them here. I might as well let Cosmos and his gang help us out.

“Cosmos! Their bodies are more fragile than their shells! Watch out for their pincers, since they’ll aim for your feet!”

“Thanks for the advice! It’s showtime!!”

I gave Cosmos a few words of warning just in case, to which he offered his gratitude like any normal person. He then dashed off toward the crowd of monsters with a pistol in each hand... while wearing nothing but his speedos and a pair of boots.

The princess’ entourage of bodyguards followed quickly behind. I’d say they looked more like a bunch of students from a girls’ school carrying weapons. It was a sight. So much so that it almost brought a tear to my eyes.

The captain of the bodyguards, Ricott, stood out among them. Her tall and slender figure was clad in a wine-red racing swimsuit, and she swung around her spear as if she was performing a dance. She looked about the age of a college student. And then there was Cosmos, who occasionally struck a pose as he fought with his twin pistols.

“What... is that...?” Clena asked in wonder as she watched him.

Oh, she hasn’t seen a gun before... I almost thought, but that’s not what she was wondering about. Cosmos mixed some hand-to-hand combat into his gunfights, then struck a cool pose in the middle of battle. Why did he keep stopping to pose with a sparkling smile? Was it part of some spell that had an enchantment effect? I’m sure Clena had no idea, either. Or rather, or brains were actively rejecting trying to figure it out.

“Calm down, Clena. Let’s focus on the monsters in front of us.”

“Uh, yeah... You’d better protect me, Touya.” She was acting unusually meek. This was new. It made me want to protect her with everything I had.

“Leave it to me. Just don’t leave my side.” I reminded myself to tease and spoil her about it later, but for now I pat her on the shoulder to cheer her up. “Alright! Let’s wipe the lot of them!”

“Roger!”

“Meow!”

Rulitora and Mark followed my battle cry. Rium had replenished her supply of marbles from the Unlimited Bath and whittled down the swarm of monsters with each shot of her Rain of Light. Roni and I covered the rear as we protected Clena and Crissa, fighting off the nautiluses that managed to make their way all the way here. With the heroic and boisterous cries of the elite guards as my BGM, I slammed my Crescent Moon down on a nearby nautilus, making sure not to look in Cosmos’ direction all the while.

The sun was high in the sky when we finally finished cleaning up all the nautiluses. It had been over an hour since we initially scattered the bait. We managed to get out of that last battle unscathed thanks to Cosmos and his party. I’d have to thank him later.

The problem right now was whether or not I should reveal my Unlimited Bath to him. The original reason I had kept my gift a secret was because I didn’t want word to get out that I was a “weak hero with a gift that was useless in battle.” I took extra caution to hide it because I predicted it would make me a bigger target. However, I knew plenty of cleric spells now and could fight confidently without the need for a gift. Right now, I could laugh it off by saying my gift was a convenient little extra. I didn’t mind if other people knew. I left the door to the Bath open and started speaking to Cosmos’ party.

“Thank you, you saved us.”

“Hahahah, it was a matter of course!” I reached out to shake his hand, and he responded in kind with a cheery laugh.

Princess Franchellis approached us with a graceful smile. I hadn’t noticed

from afar, but she was actually wearing a white microbikini. *Are you sure you should be wearing that, princess?*

She had a petite frame that I'd hardly call curvy, so the outfit honestly didn't suit her very much. Sitting opposite of the princess was Foley the elf. She was wearing a cute frilly tube top bikini with a flower pattern. I bet the princess would look better in something like that as well. *Ahem.* It'd be rude to stare, so I paid attention to the conversation instead.

"By the way, why are you all here?" Cosmos asked, staring at the mountain of nautiluses surrounding us.

"We tried using the bait Rondalan made for us, and well, stuff happened..."

"Ohhh..." Cosmos immediately knew what I was getting at, as he had already collapsed once at Rondalan's hand. He turned to the sky, overreacting as usual. "Well, I'm happy we arrived in time. We shall be going for a dip in the ocean now."

Oh, so that was what their swimsuits were for. He was like a grade schooler who was so excited for pool day he came to school with a swimsuit under his clothing. Well, he wasn't wearing any clothing on top, so it was even worse than that. But in that case, I might as well give him some of these nautiluses. We needed to keep the shells, but we could afford to part with some of the meat. It was perfect for a seaside barbecue.

"Let me give you some of these nautiluses as a token of our gratitude. We need the shells, but go ahead and take one or two hundred pieces of meat." On that note, I had no way of counting exactly how many we had defeated in total, but I estimated it at just over 300.

Cosmos returned my offer with a look of doubt. "Oh no, I didn't help you in search of a reward. Just consider it payback for you helping me the other day."

"....."

He sounded serious. I opened my eyes wide and turned to Ricott, but she simply shook her head. She must have been used to this. Did Cosmos do this kind of stuff all the time? It sounded like he was just saying it to be nice, but that wasn't actually the case. The leader of a party always needed to be on the

lookout for sources of income for the sake of the group. Of course, neither of us would do anything as low as demand money from the needy, but this was far from the case right now. How had they survived up until now? Could it be? Was the princess basically funding their whole trip?

Said princess was resting under a parasol one of her attendants set up because she didn't want to get a tan. I wondered what she thought of Cosmos' personality. I couldn't begin to guess from the way she was grinning so lightheartedly.

"...Well, we have no use for all of them. We're going to grill them soon, so join us for a meal."

"A lunch invitation, is it? In that case... what do you say, princess?"

"Aye, do as you please."

Before Cosmos could respond, Ricott interjected and posed the question to Princess Franchellis. She kept herself cool with a regal-looking fan and gave a composed reply. If the princess agreed, then Cosmos had nothing else to object to. The nautiluses we had fought a fierce battle against just minutes prior were now about to become ingredients for our barbecue.

We started preparing by picking the nautiluses out of their shells. Since we had over 300 to go through, we split the work between Rium, Roni, Crissa, Mark, Foley, a few of the bodyguards, and me. Rakti and Clena then took the nautilus bodies and peeled off their outer skin, then sliced them. We could fry them easily on an iron griddle if we cut them lengthwise. A few of the bodyguards helped out here as well. I really appreciated their sheer force in numbers right now. Each nautilus was big, so I had no idea how many our parties combined would be able to consume.

Rulitora wasn't as adept at handiwork, so I had him carry all the iron griddles outside. These griddles were crafted using iron from armor and weapons we had scavenged from the demon lord's castle. I watched him from the corner of my eye as I picked a nautilus from its shell using a dagger. This was harder than expected.

Foley and her comrades looked at me in surprise. I asked them what was up, and apparently Cosmos couldn't cook at all, so they had assumed I couldn't

either.

Cosmos peered at us from behind, curious about our work. “Hahahah, they look like crayfish!”

“At least compare them to lobsters.”

A conversation that could only be had by two people from the same world.

The nautiluses’ bodies had surprisingly long tails hidden in their shells, which made them akin to shrimp. Since they lived in the sea, I would say they were most similar to lobsters. Though I’d never actually eaten lobster before.

Roni and Crissa were the fastest workers among us by far. Mark was third due to his built up dexterity. He picked up the pace as time went on, quickly grasping the methods and tricks. Thanks to those three, we quickly finished prepping and piled all the shells inside the Unlimited Bath. Clena and the rest were already taking care of the next steps, so after we cleaned up the shells, it’d be time to start barbecuing.

Foley’s group continued to help us cook even though they were our guests. She must have acted as the caretaker in her party. We couldn’t ask Cosmos or the princess to help cook, and it seemed reckless to ask Ricott as well. She was cool and collected as the captain of the elite guards, but apparently she was useless when it came to housework.

We obviously didn’t have enough plates, so we borrowed some of theirs. Well, we’d planned to camp here for a few days, gradually hunting the nautiluses, but we got everything we needed in under half a day. We had brought a ton of food with us, so we might as well take them out and have a big party as a way of saying thanks. And thus I changed from my armor into an apron and started cooking. Barbecues were fun since everyone got to participate.

“Here, Touya. Say ‘Ahh!’” Rakti wanted me to sample her cooking, so she offered me a slice of nautilus.

The meat, which was lightly covered in fish sauce, had a bite to it. Rich flavors filled my mouth with each chew, the taste more reminiscent of crab than shrimp. This might go well in a stew, too.

The grilled nautilus seemed to be a hit among the swimsuit-clad girls in Cosmos' party. I looked around me again to appreciate what a sight it was. But my party was nothing to scoff at, either. Clena, Roni, Rakti, and Rium were here. I could barely see their swimsuits under their shirts and aprons, but I was still confident enough to say that our girls were just as good. Well, it's not like I was trying to compete with Cosmos about this anyway.

Speaking of, Cosmos was currently trying his hand at rock fishing. He was just about bouncing in excitement right now. He shouted something cheerfully, then cast his rod into the water like he was putting on a show. He sure knew how to live it up.

The princess couldn't quite keep up with him right now, so she was gobbling down a helping of the barbecue under a beach parasol. She was having no less fun than anyone else.

"Want to take a break, Touya? Here's a freshly grilled batch."

"Oh, thank you."

Once everyone was starting to settle down, Clena brought me a heaping plate of nautiluses. I sat myself down next to Rakti, who was also eating. Come to think of it, she had busied herself helping everyone out here and there, but did anyone even begin to suspect that she was the Goddess of Darkness? Even I almost forgot that fact sometimes, especially since her long black hair was tied in a loose braid right now.

Most of the swimsuit-clad bodyguards had finished eating. There were two left near the barbecue, plus Foley, who had started cleaning up. Five of the guards, including Ricott, were keeping watch around us, and the rest joined the princess as she played in the water.

Oh, a monster that Cosmos fished up was biting down on him. I stood up, about to go help him, but Ricott darted over before I took a single step. She pierced the monster with her lance. I kept eating while soaking in such sights around me. Just as I was thinking about how Cosmos was blessed with some great companions, Rakti spoke out to me.

"Touya, this is yummy! Here, say 'Ahh!'" She picked up a chunk of a potato with her fork and pointed it toward me with a charming smile. It looked like she

had taken a liking to having me sample her food.

I glanced around me to find Clena looking at us with a mischievous grin. Mark too, huh? Rium was staring with her usual expression. Roni kept sneaking glances as she cleaned the dishes, but her cheeks were red. Rulitora and Crissa were looking over here with fond smiles. The group playing at the beach hadn't noticed us, but Foley and everyone else who was still eating had stopped what they were doing to look at us.

Why is this happening? I had no choice but to say "Ahh" here. This was embarrassing.

Rakti kept her fork held out. Her smile was that of an angel's, even though she was a goddess. What kind of face would she make if I rejected her here? I just couldn't. It was physically impossible for me to say no. I braced myself and ate up what she offered me.

"Isn't it yummy?"

"Y-Yeah." It really was... and even more embarrassing.

But this level of embarrassment was nothing if it meant protecting Rakti's smile. I really wished everyone around us would stop staring and grinning, though. Well, in for a penny, in for a pound. Though her smile was worth a million. Alright then, I might as well turn the tables here.

"Okay, now it's my turn."

"Huh?"

"Rakti, say 'Ahh.'"

"Oh, yes! Ahh!"

I picked up a bite-sized piece of sausage and offered it to Rakti, which she happily gobbled up. Yup, I could do this all day. I suddenly noticed that the princess was staring at us. Sorry, Cosmos. I might have put some strange ideas in the princess' head. Though he seemed like the type who could handle it, so maybe this should count as a gift from me.

"Clena."

"Wh-What?"

“Later.”

She covered her beet-red face in response to my curt reply. Of course, the same went for Roni and Rium. If we continued to feed each other, then Crissa would start getting some ideas, too. *Consider this a gift from me, Mark. Don’t think you can escape this by just sneering in the background.*

And in the end, even though our parties combined had feasted on the nautiluses, we were unable to finish all of them. In fact, we still had way too much left. What should we do about this?

Bath Break – Newly Installed Pipes

After we finished our barbecue party with Cosmos, we ended up not camping out and returned to Neptunopolis. Their group stayed at the beach and camped for the night. We wanted to deliver the shells to Rondalan as soon as possible, but the bigger reason was that we were simply tired. Rium would normally be soaring above us on her flying disc right now, but she had no more juice in her, so I was currently giving her a piggyback ride.

I was disappointed that we ended up not playing at the beach, but there would still be some time until the ship was complete. We could go back another day—*just* to play this time.

In any case, we still had too much of this lobster-ish meat remaining. I was at a loss as to what to do, but then Roni made a salt water brine and pickled them. This was apparently the first step to smoking them. When the girls were gathering information from the fishermen the other day, they also found a shop that would smoke meats for us. Honestly, I couldn't have more reliable comrades.

We fortunately didn't run into any monsters and returned to Neptunopolis safe and sound. After delivering the shells to Rondalan, we took a wagon full of nautilus meat out from the Unlimited Bath and brought it to a shop, whose staff were absolutely stunned by the sheer volume of meat. They were professionals, though. They quickly contacted their fellow tradesmen, distributed the volume between a few shops, and helped us smoke the meat. According to a shopkeeper who had been in the business for over thirty years, nautiluses were a luxury food here and he had never seen anyone bring in such a large haul before. After we told him it was due to bait Rondalan made for us, he immediately understood and even sympathized with us. *You sure do have an established negative reputation in this city, Rondalan.* Anyway, now that the nautilus issue was resolved, we had one more issue to take care of.

"So where should we stay for tonight?" Rulitora asked.

Yes, we had yet to decide on our lodgings for the night. We had been staying in the inn by the riverbank until now, but because we had expected to take several days to hunt the nautiluses, we'd already checked out. We could stay inside the Unlimited Bath as a last resort, but then we'd have to cook our own dinner. I wanted to find an inn that served food.

"How about the auction house, then?"

"Ugh, why do we have to climb all the way up there?" Mark objected to Clena's suggestion.

To Clena's dismay, I agreed. The auction house that Pardoe and Shakova were staying at right now was halfway across the city. If we started walking right now, we wouldn't arrive until after sunset.

"Um, Touya. How about that inn over there?" Rakti was pointing toward a tall building with lights scattered all around it, looming in the evening sky. That was the "Maiden of the Roaring Waves" that Cosmos' party was staying in.

"That sure is close... but it looks expensive," Roni commented. She was expressing the sentiments of a middle-class citizen, and I agreed. I got nervous just looking at it, since it was clearly both high-class and pricey.

But after fighting such a hard battle today, it wouldn't hurt to splurge a little. I wanted to rest up for a few days.

"Alright, let's stay there. The princess is staying there too, so they must have some pretty good room service."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, don't worry about it. Just let me take responsibility at times like these."

And thus we picked the Maiden of the Roaring Waves for our stay. Roni, Rakti, and Crissa would normally start preparing our dinner around now, but I wanted to give them a break tonight.

The closer we got to the building, the more extravagant it seemed. The Maiden of the Roaring Waves was an elaborate building five stories tall, sporting a design reminiscent of the inns back in my old world. No, I should call

them hotels.

The sun had already set, so the lights spilling from the windows made the building look like a giant tree bearing fruits of light. The architecture inside wasn't as grand as the auction house, but still plenty refined. Several guests were inside the lobby when we entered. There was an elite and his bodyguards. He might have been a tradesman visiting this country.

I was worried that they wouldn't have any more rooms left, but we managed to book a suite. It wasn't exactly a VIP suite, but it was still a classy one with several amenities. The room was actually for 10 people, but better roomy than cramped. There was a sofa and table in the center of the spacious room. The whole place was very ornate, as flower-themed decorations were installed all around. There was a scenic window at the far side of the room, which looked out to both the ocean and the city. The room was worth the price for this view alone.

"Wow, what a wonderful room! This reminds me of a noble family's mansion!" Clena exclaimed.

"Oh yeah, you were the daughter of a noble. Though you entered a haggling war with the old man at the smoked meat shop earlier..."

"S-So what?"

"Nothing. You're reliable, and you scored some points with me for that."

"...I see." She grew silent, then looked away from me with her cheeks red. How cute.

I wasn't teasing her, of course. That really was what I thought of her.

In situations like these, Rakti would jump on to me and have me baby her. Roni would start grinning and act a little more boldly around me than usual. Rium's expression would remain unchanged, but she would cling on to me and not let go. However, Clena was never honest with herself and put on a tough act. She was oddly demanding in that sense. She found it too embarrassing to be pampered, so her actions would start leaning in the opposite direction.

"Hurry up and change, Touya! Restaurants around here are strict with their dress code! This country isn't so bad about it, but you can't go around looking

all slovenly like that, either! Come on, I'm picking your outfit!"

Yeah, she would start acting like this. She was trying to hide it, but her cheeks were still red. According to Roni, she had always been like this. In any case, I hadn't learned about formal dress etiquette yet, so for now I should just follow her orders. I opened the door to the Unlimited Bath and stepped inside, then immediately felt that something was off.

"Um, Sir Touya? Has it gotten bigger in here?" Roni murmured as she peered inside from behind me.

Yes, the Unlimited Bath had gotten even larger. The sensation just now was due to the longer distance between the door beside me and the door that lead into the actual building inside. I looked to my left and right and noticed that the space inside had grown larger overall.

"Well, we *did* kill 300 monsters..." Rulitora said thoughtfully as he looked over my head.

Oh yeah, the Bath must have leveled up again after fighting off the swarm of nautiluses. That was only natural after defeating over 300 of them. I wasn't the only one who had fought them, but my Blazing Dance alone must have killed about 100 of them.

"...Hey everyone, I know you're tired, but let's check up on everything inside."

"I'll check out the fire altar."

"I'll go with you, Marky."

"I'll inspect the building's surroundings."

Mark and Crissa went left, then Rulitora went right. I'd leave the garden area to them.

The rest of us opened the sliding door with a rattle to check inside. The building itself appeared to have grown larger. I could tell since the items inside never moved even though the walls would. For example, there was now some space between the magic bookshelf and the wall it had been set against. Rium ran to the sink on the right, turned the faucet, and made sure water was flowing from it.

“...We have hot water.”

“I’ll go check the *washa masheen*.”

“Nothing seems to be wrong in the kitchen.”

Roni went to look at the washing machine, and then Rakti trotted back to report on the Goddess of Fire’s kitchen. Alright, I should check inside the tatami-floored room and the cedar wood bath.

“Wait, what’s that?” Then I noticed something strange right before my eyes.

“Hey, Touya. What’s that door...?”

In between the two doors I was able to check was a brand new door. A plain-looking doorknob was attached to it. On its right was a sliding door that led to the tatami-floored room, and on its left was a frosted glass door that led to the changing room. So where did this door in the center lead to?

“I can detect sister Light’s powers from beyond there.”

“The Goddess of Light, huh...” I opened the door and found something nostalgic, in a sense.

“...What’s this?”

“It’s a toilet...”

“Wait, really?”

Yes, behind this new door was a toilet. It was even one of the modern-style ones with a Western design. The toilet sat inside a room that was neither too narrow nor too spacious.

This world did have a plumbing system, but the toilets themselves were very different. The standard ones were stone benches with a hole in the middle. They came in ceramic too, but the designs were largely the same. Clena and the others must have been astonished at this comparatively simple yet efficient design.

“Er, so even if this is a toilet, why are the Goddess of Light’s powers emanating from it?” Clena asked, unable to reason her way through it.

“Huh? Is that weird?” However, Rakti cocked her head with a blank stare in

reply. Well, I had to take Clena's side here...

But then Rakti swept our suspicions away with her next words.

"But aren't the essences of sister Light purity and cleanliness? All her powers up until now have helped keep you clean and tidy."

"Clean and tidy..." I looked around us.

Clean and tidy. A bath, a sink, a washing machine, and now, a toilet. Oh, she was right.

"So does sending stuff down the drain count as purification, then...?"

Why was the Goddess of Light's gift a bath? That was indeed a question I had harbored in the past. But now I understood—her true intent wasn't to grant me hot water, but to wash impurities away. Thinking about it that way, all the new features of my gift complied with the Goddess of Light's true essence. In other words, all the features of her gift had to do with hygiene.

"I-Is the Goddess of Light fine with just that?" It looked like Clena was still dubious. She might have been thinking about this in the context of this world's toilets.

I looked inside and found a control panel lined with buttons beside the toilet, as I expected. They were buttons to control the bidet, as well as a few other neat features.

"Clena, Rakti, look at this."

"Look at what?"

"Huh? The buttons?"

Neither of them knew what the buttons were for, but they were familiar with the control panel inside the bathing room, so they could at least tell that this was something similar.

"This is from my world, so let me teach you how to use it."

"...In that case, let's get the others over here."

And so I explained to Clena, Rakti, Roni, and Rium how to use a bidet toilet. Of course I only explained orally—they would have to figure out the rest

themselves.

“...And that’s about it. Do you all understand?”

“Uhhh...”

“I don’t really get it, but... maybe?”

The girls only gave me confused stares after my brief lesson. Rium was the sole girl with her eyes glistening. This might have been one of the few things that I couldn’t explain in words.

“...I guess we have no choice but to try it out for real. This bidet toilet, I mean.”

“W-Will you be okay, Lady Clena?”

“Don’t worry, Roni. I trust Touya about this.”

“I trust him too, but...”

“Er, it’s not going to kill you or anything.” They ignored my remark, wallowing in a somehow tragic aura.

“In that case, I’ll...”

“No, Rium. We don’t know what’s going to happen. Let me handle it.”

It was nothing to be so afraid of, but I guess that was another culture gap between our two worlds. I glanced over at Rakti, who returned me a troubled smile. As the Goddess of Darkness, she could tell that it was nothing dangerous, but she also had yet to understand it enough to declare that everything would be fine. I had no choice, then. I might as well shut my mouth and let the girls figure this one out. Clena ended up being the one to test it first. She entered the room by herself.

“Hyaan?!” She closed the door, and not a minute later, let out a bewildered yelp that we could hear from outside.

A moment later, she slammed the door open and jumped out with her panties still halfway down her legs. Or rather, she’d failed to pull them back up in her frenzied state.

“T-T-T-T-T-T-Touya! What in the world?! What the heck is that?! It surprised

me!!”

“I wouldn’t know how to describe it... a purifier, I suppose?”

“Don’t get smart with me!!”

“P-Please calm down, Lady Clena! You haven’t pulled them back up yet! You’re exposing yourself!”

“Yeah, just calm down and pull your panties back up.”

After Roni and I finally pointed it out, Clena went back inside the room red-faced, rearranged herself, and came back out.

“W-Well, I at least know that this thing has some powerful *purification* effects!” She said in a shrill voice, her face red to her ears.

“...Can I try it or not?” Rium stared at her and asked.

“...Go ahead, I guess.” Clena turned her head away in embarrassment and replied.

It looked like the girls finally accepted the Unlimited Bath’s latest feature. Maybe there were still a few things left to point out, but I decided not to think too hard about it. The Bath became more convenient—that was all.

According to Rulitora’s report later, a building resembling a public restroom had popped up at the back side of the outer garden. The toilets in there ranged in size from big enough for a sand lizardman to use, and small enough for the ketolts. The Goddess of Light had even taken my companions into consideration. I’d better offer her my gratitude when I meet her in my dreams tonight.



Third Bath – Maiden of the Roaring Waves

“Wow...!” I exclaimed in astonishment at the view before me.

We were at the restaurant inside the Maiden of the Roaring Waves. It was an open-air restaurant that utilized the hotel’s private beach. Several tables were lined up along the coast around a bonfire. We’d heard that this restaurant only opened at night, and now I knew why. This area operated as a recreational beach during the day.

I looked out to the sea and saw a sky full of stars. It wasn’t just the sky that was shining, though. The nighttime ocean presented itself as a black canvas that the starry sky reflected itself on, lights glistening with each passing wave. It gave the illusion that we had just entered the realm of the stars.

“It’s so pretty...” Rakti sighed from beside me, entranced by the sight.

We figured she shouldn’t come to dinner in her usual maid uniform, so she changed into a cute and frilly dress that made her look like the daughter of a well-to-do family. But in either case, she was in fact the Goddess of Darkness. She might have been especially captivated by the nightscape due to her nature. Though anyone would be impressed by this sight, goddess or not. Our entire group continued to stare at the starlit sky without any sign of the novelty wearing off.

Clena had advised all of us to change into something fancy, but not too formal like a tuxedo. This nation’s culture wasn’t particularly uptight, so a tuxedo would have stood out more than anything else. Indeed, I could hear lighthearted conversations and laughter all around us. The atmosphere was more akin to a party than a fine dining restaurant.

A waiter brought us to our table and took our orders. After waiting a while, he returned with several dishes mainly comprising of seafood. I had assumed they would have nothing but seafood here, but they also used a bunch of ingredients from the mountains, making their dishes rich and colorful. Neptune felt like an oceanic country, but it took up most of the land on Talon Peninsula, so the

nation actually covered both the sea and the mountains.

Everyone put their hands together and said “itadakimasu”/their thanks while appetizing scents wafted through the air. It looked like Clena and the others had picked up my habit.

In this world, it was customary to pray to the goddesses before eating, but I felt like I didn’t need to do that since I had direct approval from them, Rakti included. The prayer had about the same meaning behind it as the one we did after defeating a monster, so it felt more accurate to say that the prayer signified gratitude for the food itself. I mentioned this to Haruno before, and she said her party had also started saying “itadakimasu” after they parted with the pilgrims. The one issue was that I didn’t know whether or not I should mention this to the temple. In my case, I was saying it more out of habit and less because I had any real thoughts about praying for my food. There wasn’t any use in troubling the clerics about it now, so I decided to leave it be. Yeah, it was nothing for me to worry about. The goddesses didn’t seem to mind, either. Anyway, it was time to eat dinner.

“Ohh! This is delicious!” Rulitora exclaimed after he bit down on a whole fried fish.

I was about to chide him for picking the fish up with his bare hands, but looking around, I noticed that many other people were doing the same thing. Nobody seemed particularly disturbed by Rulitora’s etiquette. In fact, the main thing I noticed was the amount of people who had ordered this same dish.

“Clena, are his manners okay?”

“Oh, eating with your hands? Nothing to worry about. Though it depends on the dish too, of course,” Clena said, then picked up a smaller fried fish with her own bare fingers.

“Are you sure...?”

“...Have you ever eaten with the Jupiter royal family before?”

“No, I stayed at the temple as soon as I got here.”

“Oh, I see...”

“What do you mean?”

Clena was initially confused about my reaction, but then showed me a wry smile. “Jupiter dictates how all the other royal families should act. In the past, it was apparently customary for people to eat with their bare hands while lying down.”

“...Really? But their hands would get dirty.”

“They had mealtime clothing specifically for wiping their hands while eating. I bet they still do that in Jupiter now.”

Now that gave me a different impression of the Jupiter royal family. Maybe I was fortunate for staying with the temple instead of with them.

“Well, eating with your hands isn’t such a crazy thought in this situation.”

“I’d never experienced it myself until now, but royal etiquette is more... savage than I expected.”

“Apparently it was even worse in the past—they had a lot of customs that you wouldn’t believe.”

Sorry, but I’d rather not hear about those.

I wondered if Princess Franchellis and her cohort also chowed down on this fried fish with their bare hands. Looking around us again, I saw that everyone was dressed in classy outfits, but the way they ate their food made them appear far from elegant. They looked like they were having fun, though. I might as well join in.

I picked up my own fried fish and took a bite. A satisfying crispy sound filled my ears and a savory scent tickled my nose. Soon after, flavorful oils filled my mouth. The salt and spices brought out the fish’s natural umami. Now I could see why everyone was ordering this.

I looked beside me to see Rium giving her undivided attention to munching on the fish. She almost looked like a kitten, or a squirrel nibbling at fruit from a tree. I could tell that she liked it, too.

“Come on, Marky. Don’t eat so fast, the food isn’t going anywhere,” Crissa scolded Mark as he gulped down his fish. This dish was going to go quick if I

didn’t pay attention. I didn’t want to miss out.

“Touya, Rium! You should eat the other dishes, too!” Now it was Rakti’s turn to scold us for only focusing on the fried fish. Though I bet she wasn’t saying that just because we needed to eat a balanced diet.

She still had a point—we shouldn’t be stuffing ourselves with just fish. I might as well eat some meat, too.

“You need to eat everything we ordered!” ...But before I could, Roni transferred some salad to our plates.

Rium looked at her with sorrowful eyes, but Roni didn’t flinch. There was nothing stopping her now that a fire had been lit under her caretaker soul.

“Well said. Sir Touya, you’ll never grow to become as big as me if you’re picky about your food.”

“Er, I don’t think I’ll ever become as big as you either way...”

Rulitora was currently sitting on a sturdy barrel because the restaurant didn’t have chairs big enough to support his weight. I was pretty sure it was impossible for me to ever grow to his size.

“Touya, the meat here is tasty, too.”

Oh, thanks to Rakti I could try some meat before touching that salad. Though this dish called for a fork instead of my bare hands.

The meat was covered in a tangy and refreshing sauce. It was apparently made using fruit. The meat was tender, juicy, and easy to chew.

The salad was made with fresh vegetables and seaweed covered in cream cheese. This wasn’t just any salad, though. Let me mention that I did *not* condone this name, but the dish was called “Everlasting Neptune.” There were several dairy farms on the plateau at the outskirts of the city. You could say this salad was a culmination of all the bounty you could find in this country, from land to sea.

“But the fried fish is better.”

“Mhmm...”

Rium and I looked at each other and said... while munching on more fish. Even the bones were crunchy and delicious. The salad wasn't so bad, but the fish was irresistible. No question about it.

And so we ordered another giant plate of the fried fish. When the waiter brought our food, he mentioned one thing. "Sir, you have yet to make a reservation for the bath..."

"A reservation?"

I hadn't realized we needed one. Though we could always use the Unlimited Bath.

"Yes, it's our famous ocean water bath."

"Ocean water bath?"

"We have open air baths that combined hot water and ocean water to just the right temperature. It's good for your health, too." The waiter was selling us on the bath with a smile. I guess this was what they called a salesman's smile?

The bath here was naturally sourced, huh... I grew curious about it. I looked around and saw that everyone also seemed interested, besides Rulitora, Mark, and Crissa, who didn't like baths in the first place. Alright, this was worth a try.

"Can we make that reservation now?"

"Of course."

"Okay, thank you. We'll be there once we've taken a short break after our dinner."

"Understood." The waiter bowed and left.

This was my first time hearing of an ocean water bath, though. I was getting excited.

"Touya, are you going to eat more?"

"Oh yeah, I am." But right now I needed to gobble down another plate.

This fried fish was absolutely delectable. Was there a secret ingredient?

"Hey, Roni. Would you mind going shopping with all of us when we have time?"

“I was thinking the same thing. I’d like to see the spices they sell here.” Roni was already one step ahead of me.

We had already delivered our shells to Rondalan, so our role in building the submarine was already complete. All we had to do now was wait for him to finish construction.

“I’d like to buy some more clothes, too. Especially for Rakti.”

“Huh, for me?”

“The maid uniform is convenient when we’re traveling, but you need some other things to wear, too.”

She didn’t have anything else to wear when we first met her, so of course she didn’t have much of a wardrobe. Alright, a shopping trip for Rakti was now on the list.

“Oh yeah, what should we do about the carriage after we set sail?”

“The carriage, huh... I think we could sell it off easily.”

“We could bring it with us inside the Unlimited Bath, too.”

I hadn’t thought about what we should do about the carriage yet. That was something we needed to discuss.

We continued conversing about our future plans throughout dinner. After that, we went back to our suite to rest. I had reserved our bath for a little while after dinner, so I had Rulitora and the ketolts clean themselves first.

In the meantime, I started looking over the books we had retrieved from the demon lord’s castle. I had anticipated discovering some amazing spell within them, but unfortunately they were all just plain old books. There was one textbook on dark cleric spells, but they were all common ones that I essentially knew already.

The Goddess of Darkness’ faith had died out 500 years ago, and who knew how many of these textbooks were left right now, so maybe I should call this one a “forbidden spellbook.” This book and all the others had been preserved in the magic bookshelf, so I bet each one held considerable value. They would probably have sold for a high price at the auction for their historical value alone.

However, the books might contain information on Hades from before the first sacred king had been summoned. So we had kept the books and used our free time to go through them like I was doing now.

“Hey Touya, where’s your swimsuit?”

“My swimsuit? I didn’t need it today, so it’s still packed away.”

I actually had a swimsuit too. Or rather, Clena and the others had bought one for me without asking me first. I could have used it to play at the beach if we were camping out like we had planned, but unfortunately we didn’t have that opportunity now.

“What do I need my swimsuit for?”

“To wear, of course.”

“...In the bath?”

“Yeah, I guess you weren’t aware. You need to wear a swimsuit in public baths like the ones in hotels.”

“Oh, I didn’t know that...”

Spa resorts in Japan required you to wear swimsuits too, so I guess it was the same concept. Come to think of it, we had only used temple baths or the Unlimited Bath until now. I’d never used a hotel bath or a public one before.

“We did make the reservation, right?”

“I asked a staff member earlier. He said there are a few different stone baths with walls between each one. There’s a walkway between the hotel and the baths, so we should consider it public property,” Roni explained as I nodded along.

Well, it was basically the same as wearing yuamigi. When in Rome, do as the Romans do. Might as well take a bath in a swimsuit for tonight.

The ocean water baths were on the opposite side of the hotel from the open-air restaurant. We asked a staff member for directions and went on our way. I had a short sword affixed at my hip. You couldn’t survive in this world without having a means of defense at any time.

There was no rule against wearing swimsuits inside the hotel, so we could spot a few guests walking around in their swimsuits now that it was this time of night. They were a minority, though. Almost everyone had a bathrobe on over their swimsuits. I wasn't eager to parade around half-naked either, so I wore a yuamigi over my swim trunks. Cosmos had probably walked all over the place in just his swimsuit. The question was whether or not Princess Franchellis did the same. Honestly, it was fifty-fifty.

The fabric of our yuamigi was much higher quality than the bathrobes the hotel provided. You couldn't tell just from looking though, so it just appeared like we were wearing bathrobes with a slightly unique design. We had seen a guest wearing an incredibly extravagant bathrobe as soon as we stepped out of the building. The embroidery on it looked like it was made of gold.

"...Does everyone else think we look plain?"

"No, we look normal enough. That guy was just a nouveau riche."

According to Clena, it was classic behavior from newly successful merchants. I was similar to them in the sense that I had acquired loads of money for the first time, so I needed to be careful not to become like them.

We arrived at the ocean water baths soon after that. Five cabins lined the coast. Each one was a bathhouse with an ocean water bath within. As the story went, this beach originally had five different hot springs geysers, but the area was so rocky that no one ever came to visit, and the hot spring water drifted into the ocean instead. A certain merchant found the hot springs and built a road to them, figuring that he could open up a business here. That merchant was the founder of the Maiden of the Roaring Waves.

We went inside a cabin and were greeted by the wide ocean. The water's surface glistened with the reflection of the stars in the night sky. The perpetual rumbling of the waves sounded like a lullaby, almost lulling me to sleep.

"Wow! It's the ocean! The sea!" Roni wagged her tail in excitement.

I was stunned, too. The cabin only had three walls. The steam wouldn't build up inside the cabin this way, but most of all, it offered us this great view.

"Oh yeah, did we bring soap?" Clena asked.

“I brought it!” Rakti cheerfully held out a pouch filled with soap.

We bought the pouch specifically for carrying around things like this. The soap from my Unlimited Bath had the quirk that it would disappear without a trace right after it was used, likely because it was all made from MP. We wouldn’t risk dirtying the water with it, so this was the perfect opportunity to use it.

I poured a bucket of water over myself, and it felt more dense than regular bath water. Since this was an ocean water bath, it must have been filled with minerals that would leave your skin silky smooth.

“I’ll have to check with you girls on that...”

“Check what?”

“You’ll find out later.”

Anyway, after we finished showering ourselves, we entered the bath. The water was slightly lukewarm, but it was the perfect temperature for a long soak.

“It’s my first time bathing in a swimsuit, so it feels weird.”

“Isn’t this no different from wearing a yuamigi?”

“Aren’t they pretty different...?” Maybe they felt similar for the people of this world? They carried two different implications in my mind, but I might as well not think too hard about it and enjoy myself.

“Oh? The bottom of the bath isn’t rock...”

“...It’s sand. The hot water is gushing out from underneath.”

The bottom of the bath was covered in sand, and also was the source of the hot water. I looked more closely and noticed that the water was spurting from several small holes, making the sand dance around each opening. The sides of the bath were made of slightly jagged rock. I moved toward the center of the bath so that I wouldn’t have to lean on it.

“Hm? What’s wrong, Rium?”

“...It tickles.”

Rium climbed onto my lap. It seemed like she couldn’t take the water tickling

her legs.

“That’s okay. Come on, get a little closer to me.”

I didn’t want her to miss out on this bath just because of that. I set her petite bottom on my lap and supported her body weight. Her expression barely changed, but she seemed a little happier. I enjoyed her presence for a while, then felt a stare on me. I looked over to see Rakti, who clearly had something she wanted to say.

“Grrr...”

“...I can free up a half for you, if you’d like?”

She was jealous of Rium. I couldn’t call myself a man if I just ignored her. I called her over and let her sit on my other leg.

It was a little cramped now, making it more difficult for me to keep balance. I wrapped my arms around each of their waists, which made them happily snuggle their cheeks against mine.

“Let me sit next to you.”

“I’ll be on this side, then.”

And then Clena and Roni came over. They sat to my left and right, resting their heads against my shoulders.

“Doesn’t this feel a little too stuffy even though the bath is so big?”

“What’s wrong with being friendly?”

“Y-Yeah, I just feel like it today.”

Roni looked especially relaxed, her flushed face forming a slack smile. Clena’s cheeks were red too, but the hot bath wasn’t the cause. She must have gotten embarrassed from admitting that herself. How cute. I wanted to pat her on the head, but unfortunately both of my hands were occupied at the moment. I guess I had to save that for when we returned to our room. We continued cuddling and enjoying the view for a while, until Roni’s ears suddenly perked up and started tickling my neck.

“What’s wrong, Roni?”

“I hear a voice...”

“Oh no, a peeping tom?”

“No... it’s coming from the sea,” Roni said, peering into the horizon.

I followed her gaze, but couldn’t see anything in the darkness. I doubted there was anyone with the guts to spy on us from the ocean at night, but Roni’s hearing was undeniable. The other girls seemed to have sensed something as well and quickly stood up. The view was best when we were sitting down inside the bath, but this wasn’t the time for that. I also stood up and squinted, and saw a momentary flash of light from beyond the darkness.

“Spirit summon!!”

I didn’t know what was happening yet, but I could tell it was bad. I immediately summoned earth spirits to form a black wall made of packed sand a short distance in front of the bath. An explosion sounded not a moment later. Apparently a spell had come flying into the wall. I knew it, that light was an attack. Trusting my gut paid off.

“Fall back, everyone!” I shouted to the girls.

“O-Okay. I’ll bring our weapons!”

We had left our weapons and yuamigi outside the bath. By the time the girls exited the room, another explosion sounded. That was the limit for my wall, as it started crumbling to the ground with a loud rumble. A silhouette appeared opposite the wall.

“She’s floating...?”

A girl with long, thin pigtails was floating in the air. Her hair was silver. Something that looked like a spearhead was attached to the end of each pigtail. Were those her weapons?

I thought she was wearing a black bikini at first, but it had an oddly sharp and jagged design, so I wasn’t sure if it was a swimsuit at all. She had bat wings on her back. The first word that entered my head upon seeing that was “demon.” Was this girl really a demon? If so, she must have attacked me because I was a Hero of the Goddess.

I formed black gauntlets around both my hands while trying to take in everything I could about the current situation. The girl showed no regard for my predicament, though. Her fiery red eyes exhibited an unrelenting anger as she screamed at me.

“Tonight is the night I’ll take you down, Cosmos!!”

“Don’t you dare confuse me with him!!” Yeah, I was half-naked right now, but I sure as hell wasn’t wearing spats. Shouldn’t she be able to tell by my face, anyway?

“Ugh, the steam’s in the way...”

Don’t tell me she couldn’t see my face clearly because of the steam? Though judging by how she apparently didn’t take in a word of what I just said, she must have been the type to put actions before thoughts. That caused all the more trouble for me, who she was mindlessly attacking.

In any case, it looked like this demon girl had some sort of beef with Cosmos. Oh yeah, he had been staying here until just yesterday. And we were about the same age. That must have been were the confusion was coming from.

“Get ready, Cosmos!”

“Spirit summon!”

She fired a lightning bolt, which I repelled with a blast of fire. The resulting explosion created a wall of smoke that made it even harder for us to see each other. It looked like I had no way of correcting her misunderstanding right now.

Don’t underestimate me just because I have no weapon. Sure, I didn’t have my Crescent Moon and wasn’t wearing my Magic Eater right now, but I specialized in cleric spells I could cast using my enormous pool of MP and MEN.

“You’re not getting away!”

A blade sliced through the smoke. It was the spearhead attached to one of her pigtails. She must have been controlling it somehow, because it was aimed directly at me. But I was prepared—I swung my earthen gauntlet against the blade, which seemed to shake her up a bit and create some distance between us.

“Not bad... but how about this?!”

“Oh no you don’t!”

The demon girl sprang toward me, but I intercepted her attack by conjuring a pillar of sand from within the bath. It wasn’t a dense enough pillar to turn black, but it was enough to throw her off.

“Guh...! Since when did you learn magic...?!”

Just as I’d planned, she fell back after I rendered her unable to fly straight.

“Touya, are you okay?!” Clena and the others ran back with their weapons. I shouldn’t have been surprised, but I hadn’t prepared my mind for these swimsuit-clad warriors.

We could win this. I still didn’t know who she was, but so far she didn’t hold a candle against Goldfish, the Masked Cleric.

“Huh? Who...?” The demon girl finally started to realize that she had gotten the wrong person.

It was too late, though. Now that the girls were here, victory was essentially in our grasp. Well then, should we defeat her right here or capture her alive since she had some connection to Cosmos? That moment, a whoosh rang through the air as something else approached us.

“Are you okay, Balsamina?”

Another demon came flying down. It was another girl sporting black bikini-like armor and bat wings. She looked a little younger than the girl she called Balsamina.

“Backup?!”

“Wait, Clena!”

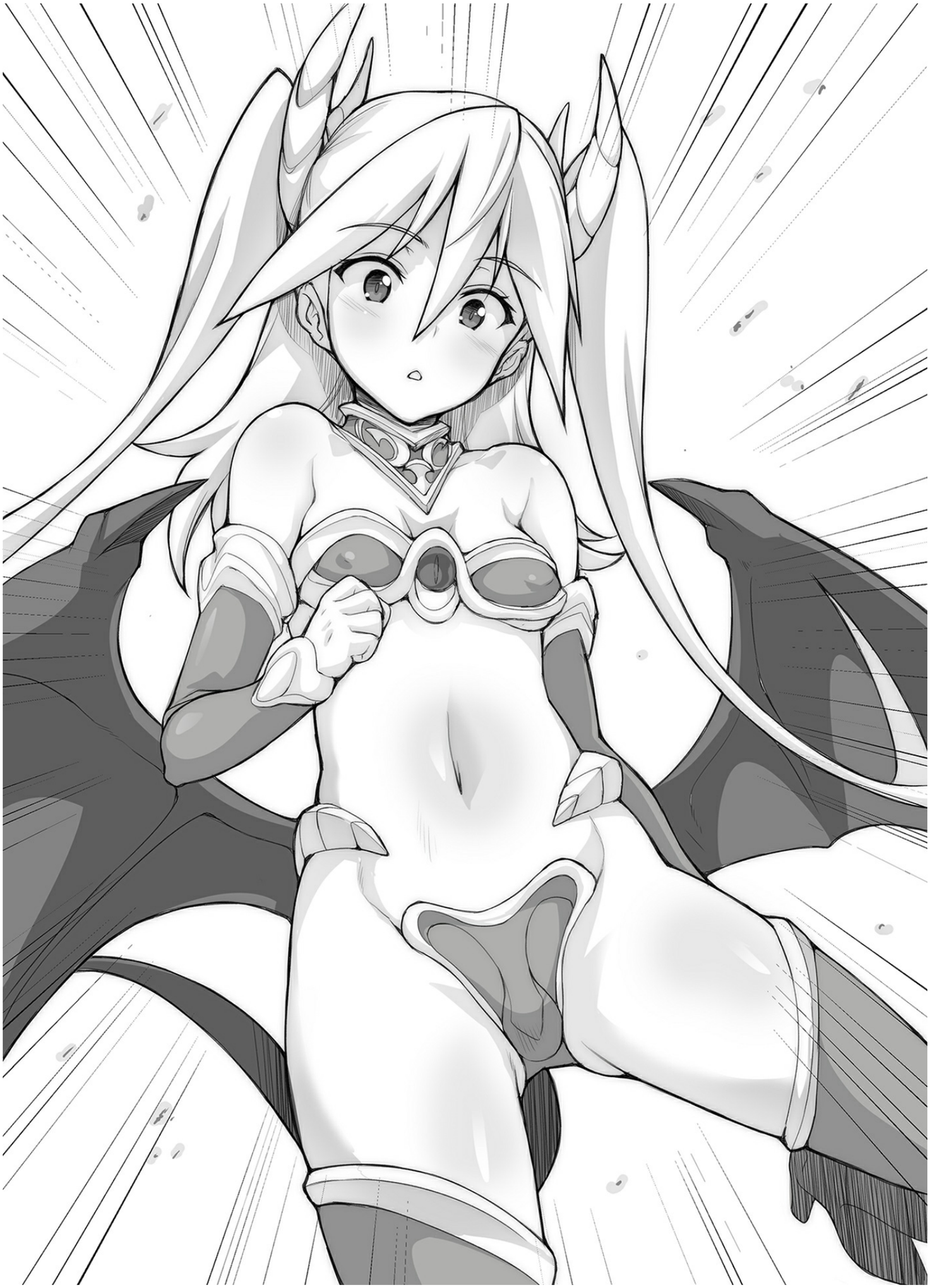
Clena wasted no time in pointing her sword toward the new girl, about to fire off a spell, but I stopped her. She looked toward me, confused. Roni was surprised, too. But I had a good reason to stop us from attacking that girl.

I looked at the new girl one more time. She looked back at me, her eyes wide. She had a petite frame, her long silver hair held up by ribbons in twin tails. Her

youthful facial features reminded me of a kitten. But most importantly, I was very familiar with her face.

“Yukina...” Yes, the demon girl’s face was exactly that of Yukina Houjou’s, my younger sister who had passed away.

“No way... Touya...?” The silver-haired girl said in a trembling voice.



I knew it. That was Yukina. She continued to stare at me, showing no signs of aggression against us. Clena and the others noticed the unusual situation and also stood still, bewildered.

A pair of wings sprouted from her back. I noticed that she also had a tail, which was entwined around one of her legs. She obviously wasn't human, but her face and hairstyle were definitely that of my little sister's.

"Wait... the temple of darkness...?!"

I see. The Goddess of Light summoned living beings, but the Goddess of Darkness reincarnated deceased souls into demons. Yukina's body must have been that of a demon's now. I tread through the water toward her. She continued to look back at me as if she wanted to say something.

Ahh, it's Yukina. That was the face she made when she wanted me to do something for her, but couldn't bring herself to ask.

"What are you doing, Yukina?! Attack them!!"

"Sir Touya!"

I was mere steps away from her when some idiot who couldn't read the atmosphere launched an attack toward me. The demon named Balsamina fired a ball of light at me, but Roni threw a dagger at it, intercepting it dead on. I shielded my face from the resulting explosion, but the blast hit my stomach and legs.

"Are you okay?!"

I didn't care one bit, though. What about Yukina, who had been the same distance from the explosion as me?

Yukina had curled herself into a ball in the air, using her wings to protect herself. Fortunately, the blast didn't seem to have reached her, as her wings looked unharmed. I put a hand to my chest and breathed a sigh of relief, then saw her peeking at me from behind her wings, as if she was pleading something of me.

Now I was mad. I wouldn't forgive this girl named Balsamina for endangering Yukina like that.

“Urgh...! We’re retreating, Yukina!” Balsamina’s shoulders trembled for a second, then she turned around and starting flying away into the horizon. For some reason, Yukina followed her.

“Yukina!” I shouted at her, which made her turn around and look at me as if she wanted to say something. But she remained silent and quickly turned back to chase after Balsamina.

I was certain that she wanted to say something to me. And that there was a reason why she couldn’t. From the looks of it, that reason had something to do with Balsamina.

“Wait, are you okay, Touya?!”

“Touya, your stomach is completely red!”

The other girls rushed toward me as I was lost in thought. Rakti looked like she was about to cry as she stared at my bright red abdomen.

Hey, no need to touch it. I was glad she was worried about me, but kneading her hands into it would only make it worse. I was finally starting to feel the pain in my stomach and legs. I’d better heal myself before Rakti started to bawl.

We couldn’t bring ourselves to continue soaking in the bath after that ordeal, so we returned to our room.

“Can you explain what that was all about?” That was the first line out of Clena’s mouth. I was the one who stopped her from attacking, so of course she wanted an explanation.

Thinking back, I should have left Balsamina for the girls to handle. The look in Yukina’s eyes was a cry for help. I would need the other girls’ assistance if I wanted to save her. I needed to explain the situation to everyone first, though.

Everyone sat themselves around the table, ready to hear me out. I hydrated myself with a cool drink Crissa prepared for us, then started talking in a serious tone.

“Those two demons... the one who arrived later looked exactly like my little sister, Yukina.”

“She passed away, didn’t she?”

I nodded in response to Roni's question. It had happened three years ago, just before she entered middle school.

"It was an illness, wasn't it...?"

"Yeah. She'd always had a weak constitution and needed me to look after her. Both my parents worked to pay for her medical bills, so it was up to me to take care of her. She called me Touya when she saw me, so there's no mistake about it."

She couldn't walk during her last years, so I was happy to see her so healthy like that. Even if she was a demon now.

"I'd suspect it was a coincidence if she was any other race..."

"But she's a demon..."

Rium and Rulitora glanced at Rakti. Mark and Crissa looked at each other, confused.

Oh yeah, I hadn't properly explained to them about the Goddess of Darkness's hero summoning yet. I brought them up to speed about how the Goddess of Darkness summoned souls of the departed and reincarnated them as demons, and that the demon lord and Five Great Demon Generals had come from the same world as I did. And lastly, that "Yukina" was very likely my little sister who had been brought to this world as a demon thanks to the Goddess of Darkness' hero summoning ritual.

"Hey, Rakti. Did you detect anything?" Clena whispered.

Our current cover story for Rakti was that she was a mysterious girl we'd found sleeping inside a glass casket in the ruins of Hadesopolis, and that she was actually a cleric from the temple of the Goddess of Darkness. The ketolts didn't know more than this cover story, either. I might have spun a few too many tropes from my old world's video games into the tale, but with a story this crazy, no one would suspect the even crazier possibility that she was the Goddess of Darkness herself. Even if someone were to detect a goddess' powers from her, we could wave it off by saying it was due to the Goddess of Darkness' blessing.

"I could tell that she had a blessing, but I didn't know whether she was a hero

or a cleric...”

“So that’s as much as we know, huh...”

We could ask Rakti details relating to the Goddess of Darkness and demons without raising too much suspicion. But this wasn’t something we could talk about too loudly, so we still kept it to a whisper.

“Did you recognize the other girl, Touya?”

“Not one bit.”

I knew that she had some connection to Cosmos, but I had no knowledge about the details. I was more concerned about what Yukina had to do with him.

“Uh, can I ask a question?” Mark raised a paw. “You guys defeated a demon general in the demon lord’s castle, right? Some cleric of darkness called the Masked Cleric?”

“Yeah, there’s no doubt we killed him.”

“Wasn’t he the last cleric of darkness? Then when was your little sister summoned?”

“Huh... I wonder?”

That was a good question. Yukina had been alive until three years ago, so it must have been after that. Since the first sacred king accidentally sealed Rakti away 500 years ago, no new clerics of darkness should have been born because she could no longer grant anyone her blessing.

“Maybe Goldfish summoned her before we met him?”

“If that were the case, then he would have made her bring him back to Hadesopolis.”

“Right... then maybe Goldfish created a cleric of darkness and that cleric summoned her?”

“If that cleric was strong enough to conduct a summoning ritual, then he still would have brainwashed the cleric to do his bidding.”

“That’s true...”

Our theories didn’t add up.

“...There must be a cleric who’s been alive since 500 years ago.”

“That lifespan might be possible for demons, but the Masked Cleric should have been the only cleric strong enough to summon a hero.”

Rium confidently put her own theory on the table, but hung her head in dejection after it was immediately dismissed. Now we had to consider the possibility that a new cleric of darkness had been born.

“Can someone become a cleric of darkness from birth?”

“Sometimes the child of a demon is born with the blessing of darkness. If they study dark cleric spells on their own, they might be able to become a cleric without ever coming in contact with the temple. But still...”

“It’s unlikely that they could grow strong enough to summon a hero?” I finished Rakti’s thought and she nodded back.

“But sometimes a naturally gifted cleric comes along.”

“Oh?”

“San Pilaca, one of the first sacred king’s party members, was like that.”

So he was the precedent. Now that I thought about it, I could use cleric spells, but I’d hardly call myself affiliated with any temple. Maybe a descendant of a surviving demon from 500 years ago was born with a strong enough blessing to learn their own cleric spells. The possibility was there. Everyone looked grave as we considered this theory. That wasn’t the only problem, though. If this theory was true, then it led to one more possibility we had to worry about.

“Sir Touya... so does that mean... there might be a group out there that’s just as powerful as the Five Great Demon Generals?”

“Yeah, that’s the natural conclusion.”

The most startling thing about our theory was that there might be some demon who developed an organization to seek out capable beings and train them. Someone who could lead the demon army in place of the demon lord, who remained sealed. We had no concrete evidence yet, but the natural conclusion would be someone among the Five Great Demon Generals.

“...Should we suspect the Dark Prince?” I felt bad for Clena, who wore a

complex expression as she asked her question, but her potential father was the most obvious suspect among all of them. He was apparently the son of the demon lord Amann Naga, after all.

“No, I think the Flame Devil is more likely.”

However, my bets were on someone else. I wouldn’t be surprised if he had betrayed the demon lord while he was still sealed. We had already been duped by him once in Hephaestus, and I couldn’t help but assume that he had an unpleasant personality. That was mostly my own bias, though.

“In any case, should we assume that the ones who attacked us in the bath were part of the demon army?”

“I think so, too.”

“Yeah, I doubt anyone would try to take on a hero of their own accord. And that doesn’t just go for demons.”

Not to mention Cosmos was the target here. This demon named Balsamina was trying to track him down, even though he had the princess and her royal guards with him. And I had no idea why, but Yukina was her partner in crime.

“The next question is... why are they targeting Cosmos?”

“Purr... I can’t think of why they’d take the risk.”

“It must have been an order from the demon army.”

We rattled off our thoughts in response to Rium’s question. It was hard to narrow down an answer with someone as unpredictable as Cosmos.

“We’d be better off asking him directly when he comes back.”

“...You’re right. We should let him know about the attack, too.”

“Let’s go to the coast tomorrow if he doesn’t come back.”

“I agree.”

I personally wanted to find him and tell him right now, but we’d arrive in the middle of the night if we departed now. I had to be patient for the time being. I was worried about Yukina, but I couldn’t put any of my comrades in harm’s way, either. We should prepare ourselves for another potential attack and sleep

inside the Unlimited Bath for tonight.

Rakti whispered to me right before we slept, “I think my sisters could give you some more information.”

The Goddess of Light held the most power among the six goddess sisters right now. That didn’t mean she was omnipresent, but I could at least ask her if she could find out a few things.

“I know she’s always watching over us, though.”

“That’s actually pretty embarrassing.”

She must have been worried about her youngest sister. I just wanted to believe that she at least wasn’t watching over us when we used her newly gifted toilet. Either way, I should ask her about Yukina in my dreams tonight.

“Oh yeah, I didn’t get to use my new light cleric spell this afternoon after Cosmos’ party showed up. Do you think the Goddess of Light would be mad about that?”

“I-I wonder? I don’t think she’d be *that* mad.”

I presumed that even if the Goddess of Light wasn’t outright angry, she’d at least be in a sour mood. The Goddess of Fire, on the other hand, would likely be in high spirits, but I couldn’t rely on her to make the Goddess of Light feel any better.

“I’m counting on you in case things go south, Rakti.”

“I-I can try, but please don’t expect much...”

I tried to plan it out with Rakti, who I’d be seeing in my dreams as well, but she didn’t sound so confident. Maybe I should trust the Goddess of Earth with this one.

That night, I fell asleep with Rakti as my body pillow. In my dreams, the Goddess of Fire jumped onto me with delight. The Goddess of Light wasn’t nearly as happy, but the Goddess of Earth had already started placating her. I knew I could trust her.

The Goddess of Light was still pouting though, so the others started poking her cheek. The sisters would always start messing with her whenever she got

stubborn like this. That wasn't the issue right now, though.

I opened my mouth and tried to ask "...Why are you all dressed like that?" but as usual, my voice didn't come through. The goddesses around me were showing much more skin than usual. Yes, they were all wearing swimsuits for some reason.

"Why swimsuits...?" I thought, and then the Goddess of Fire puffed out her chest and wrote "Because we're at the beach" on her usual flipbook. Did that matter even though we were inside a dream right now? At any rate, her sporty swimsuit was a sight for sore eyes when paired with her healthy tan and curvy figure.

The Goddess of Light was wearing a bold V-string bikini, unabashedly showing off her spotless porcelain skin. She was also quite the sight, but I was a little too embarrassed to stare.

Rakti, the Goddess of Darkness, was actually wearing a school swimsuit. So that's how it was. *Yup, you look good in that, Rakti.* I'd pet her head if I could move my hands right now.

The Goddess of Earth was the most shocking, though. Her swimsuit was modest, but the size of her chest was overwhelming... downright extreme, really. Especially on the eyes. She was also tall, so she'd often bend down to look me in the eyes. Whenever that happened, my gaze would be sucked into the depths of her cleavage. I wanted to appreciate the sight more, but now wasn't the time. I could communicate with them through my thoughts, so I first chased the imagery of great mountains and valleys out of my mind and then asked them about Yukina.

The Goddess of Light immediately responded with a "No doubt she's your sister" in her flipbook. My suspicions were confirmed. She was my reincarnated sister.

My next question was why Yukina had flown off without a word. The Goddess of Light wrote on a new page that she'd had a spell cast on her called the Inept Scout. She then explained the details of the spell to me.

The Inept Scout was a spell that conveyed whatever the designated "scout" observed to the spell's caster. The spell got its peculiar name from how it was

cast on inept communicators who couldn't properly explain what they had scouted. I didn't know whether the backstory was true, but it was an awful name either way. Well, the name wasn't the only awful thing about it, considering how the spell's main purpose was to convey information back to the caster with no regard for the scout's life. The goddesses didn't know where that caster was right now, but they were sure that Yukina had that spell cast on her. That was enough information for now. The Goddess of Light detected my gratitude and gave me a gentle smile.

Next, Rakti came up to me with her head hidden behind her flipbook. She had written on it with shaky handwriting, "It's a dark cleric spell. I'm sorry."

It's not your fault, Rakti. Don't worry about it. I was frustrated that I couldn't voice my thoughts. I'd be sure to cheer her up later.

In any case, if that was a cleric spell, then the caster must have been the one who summoned Yukina. They must have placed the Inept Scout spell on her to monitor her every movement. Now I knew I had to rescue Yukina at any cost. I didn't care about the details of her summoning or reincarnation anymore. She was my little sister, demon or not. I couldn't bear not being able to save her a second time.

I came up with a plan, which was to get Yukina safe inside the Unlimited Bath. Nothing from the outside could interfere with the Bath as long as the door was shut, so the Inept Scout should lose its effect, too. When I arrived at that thought, the Goddess of Fire placed a hand on my head and showed me a somber smile while shaking her head. What was wrong with my plan?

Now it was the Goddess of Earth's turn to write in her flipbook. Wow, she could balance it on her chest. I resisted the urge to look down as I read the page, which explained that a spell didn't vanish just because you cut it from its source temporarily. We'd be right back where we started as soon as she stepped out of the Bath.

Then the Goddess of Light put on a pair of glasses and held out her flipbook, where she'd written that I could use a spell called Purifying Light. She may have been the oldest of the sisters and came off as the most capable at times, but she had a surprisingly childish side to her as well.

Back on topic, Purifying Light was a light cleric spell that could neutralize a spell under any other cleric denomination. I see, so this was one way we could break the Inept Scout spell.

Whenever the Goddess of Light put on her glasses, she entered instructor mode. She'd be drilling the spell into me until she knew for sure I could save Yukina. She was still wearing a V-string bikini, though. I had to admit that it was a little distracting right now.

But she could still read my mind. *Are you all doing this on purpose? Are you testing me? Sure, I'll take the challenge. I'll study this spell as seriously as I can.*

The next morning, I told everyone what I had learned from the goddesses in my dream. Of course, I kept Rakti in my lap and pet her head all the while. She looked like she was about to cry as soon as she woke up. I needed to comfort her as much as I could right now.

"...Can I ask you one thing?"

"What is it?"

"Do all the dark cleric spells have names as evil-sounding as that one?"

"......Most of them."

Clena asked her question in bewilderment, and Rakti replied with her eyes averted. In her defense, the majority of cleric spells were invented long ago by the cleric organizations at the time. Rakti was absolutely innocent when it came to their terrible naming sense.

"A-Anyway, the next time the demons try to attack us, we just need to hide her in the Unlimited Bath and break the spell."

"Oh, so that's the spell you need to practice."

"So that's the plan for Yukina, but what about Balsamina?"

"Can't we just leave her to Cosmos?"

Yukina was the important one here, not her. Honestly, I couldn't care less whether or not we defeated her. So my conclusion was to just leave her to Cosmos. She had found us only because she had some beef with Cosmos in the first place. It was one thing if we had no idea where he was, but he was close.

Instead of thinking of a way to handle it on our end, I might as well tell him about the incident and let him take care of it. In fact, I wasn't even obligated to do that much. Anyway, we set off to find him after we finished breakfast.

We headed for the rocky beach from yesterday, but then bumped into Cosmos' party along the way.

"Hello there! A refreshing morning, isn't it?" Cosmos gave us a needlessly cheerful greeting as usual. Princess Franchellis stood next to him as if she was snuggling up to him.

I didn't know if this was something we could talk about within hearing range of the princess of the sacred family, so I dragged Cosmos a distance away to let him know about the Balsamina incident.

"What? Balsamina made a mistake and approached you instead of me? Hahahah, I do apologize for that!"

But then he replied with a loud yell, rendering all my forethought null. I looked over to the princess, who just sighed deeply. This wasn't new for her.

Anyway, they were already on their way back to the Maiden of the Roaring Waves, so we joined them and returned to their suite. To none of my surprise, they had rented out every VIP room on the top floor of the hotel. Even though they had over ten elite bodyguards traveling with them, this was still a little extravagant. I'd thought I had been acting like some big-shot since we came to Neptune, but I was just being naive—or well, there was always someone a level higher. Though I had no intentions of catching up to him.

In any case, we needed to discuss the incident involving Balsamina and Yukina. I figured it'd be a bad idea to bring Rakti along, so only Rulitora and I went, and I left the rest of our group in Clena's hands.

We were led to the princess' room, the most expensive room in the entire hotel, and sat ourselves around a table on an unbelievably fluffy sofa. I wouldn't call this household furniture. Maybe a work of art?

The captain of the bodyguards, Ricott, stood behind Cosmos and the princess. Rulitora stood his guard behind me.

"The second demon? I've never met her before... maybe a new hire?"

According to Cosmos, the only demon who had attacked Cosmos back in Jupiteropolis was Balsamina. Ever since then, Balsamina had repeatedly tried picking fights with Cosmos, but she always acted independently. He had no idea who Yukina was. Apparently Balsamina had attacked him again by herself just a few days ago, so we could assume Yukina had been summoned very recently.

“But I don’t think she’s a bad girl. She must have a reason for doing what she does. Don’t worry, I’m sure you will reconcile with your sister soon!” Cosmos gave me a thumbs up and a needlessly sparkly smile.

Well, it’s not like Yukina and I needed to reconcile. We were already on good terms—that was why I was trying to save her now. I looked at the princess once more, who sighed yet again. She must put up with a lot. I had to make sure we were on the same page right now, though.

“Okay then, the next time those two come for us, you handle Balsamina and I’ll handle Yukina... is that alright with you?” I asked, which made Cosmos’ expression suddenly tense up.

He stayed silent for a short time, thinking deeply about something... or so I assumed, but then he suddenly crossed his forearms and yelled, “Absolutely no cuckolding!!”

“I agree, but that’s not what we’re talking about.” I had no idea what my words were being translated to in his head.

I looked over to the princess one more time, and this time she gave me a smile back. She must have been his favorite. I knew for sure after looking at her eyes now, though. Her behavior wasn’t “natural,” but “cultivated.”

I had been wondering if the princess had the same type of personality as Cosmos, but that actually was far from the case. If she was naturally similar to him, then she wouldn’t be sighing at his antics. Yes, she was simply matching him to keep up with him day to day.

“I’m going to save my little sister. She might have been reincarnated and summoned here, but that doesn’t matter.”

“...Even if she’s a demon now?”

“Of course.”

“.....”

“.....”

The air froze around us. Everyone must have noticed by now. I was gauging the princess of the sacred family’s reaction on my intent to rescue a demon.

Ricott realized that a fight might break out right here and now, so her normally fair complexion turned an even paler white as her entire face tensed up. Me aside, she must have been frightened at the thought of having to battle Rulitora.

“Oh? What’s wrong everyone? Why the long faces? Come on, remember to smile!”

...And then there was Cosmos, who couldn’t take a smidgen of a hint. The princess glanced at him, then sighed a little and produced a soft smile. All the tension in the air dissipated at the same time.

“...I think that’s fine. We may have to carry out the appropriate punishments if she has committed any wrongdoings, but that does not seem to be the case.”

“...Even though she’s a demon?”

“And are you not a Hero of the Temple of the Goddess of Light?” The princess returned my question with a confident chuckle.

She must have known about the fact that the sacred family and the temple of light had once ostracized the demi-humans and other goddess denominations. And she must have realized that I knew, too.

“Do I look like the type of person who would torment Foley?”

“...No, you two looked like good friends yesterday,” I smiled, which made Ricott look a million times more relieved. Was she that afraid of fighting Rulitora?

The princess glanced over at her, then opened her fan to cover half her face and raised an eyebrow as if to say “learn from your counterpart and behave yourself.” She was probably thinking that Rulitora was maintaining a poker face this entire time, but I believe she simply didn’t know how to discern the facial expressions of a sand lizardman yet.

“Well, I am not completely fine with all this, but if I were to object on account of the subject being a demon, then I would have stopped Sir Cosmos first. Though I am not completely fine with all this.”

I get it, you said it twice because it was important.

Cosmos was clearly trying to make friends with Balsamina. He was looking at me with sparkling eyes right now, most likely because he assumed I was a comrade who also had demons in my strike zone just because I was trying to save Yukina. Not that I would deny it. But make sure you don’t neglect the princess, Cosmos. After this, I planned on giving the other girls as much attention as I did Rakti this morning.

In any case, it seemed like Princess Franchellis wasn’t intent on killing anyone just because they were a demon. That was one less thing to worry about. Now all that was left was to learn the Purifying Light as soon as possible and save Yukina.

“Ahh, yes. Mister Touya, there is one... no, two things I would like to warn you about. You may find this needlessly vigilant, but take caution when returning to Jupiter after retrieving your sister.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“My elder brother is often called the personification of the sacred family’s traditions, you see.”

“...You mean the same guy Ritsu Nakahana tried to recruit to her party by flirting with him?”

“My, that was one terrifying day...” The princess said, then fanned herself as she averted her gaze.

I see, so the prince of the sacred family was anti-demi-humans. I didn’t know if I’d be returning to Jupiter yet, but I’d better keep that in mind.

“And what’s the other thing?”

“The girl has attacked us once every few days so far, so if you need to prepare, then I advise you do so immediately.”

“...Thank you for the advice.”

Apparently Cosmos had yet to fight back every time Balsamina assaulted him, opting to persuade her with words instead. Even after Balsamina launched spell after spell at him, he would approach her unfazed with a smile on his face, which made her frightened enough to back off every time.

I'd better start preparing as soon as possible. I'd start pulling all-nighters in order to learn the spell even a day earlier—though in that case, I'd better take an afternoon nap first.

Rulitora and I said our brief goodbyes, then left for our suite with Cosmos' gleaming smile behind us. I let Rulitora handle reporting our meeting to Clena and the others while I immediately got started on practice. Maybe having the goddesses train me in my dreams would make things go faster, but I was wide awake and alert today after getting some sound sleep last night. And thus, I was lying down on my side reading a textbook on light cleric spells right now. Most people got sleepy after reading a difficult book, but unfortunately I wasn't one of those types. At times like these, I viewed it as a minus. Though times like these didn't come often.

"This textbook covers some pretty advanced spells..."

In any case, this textbook that the temple elder gave me back in Jupiteropolis was my first magic book, but lately I'd started to realize just how impressive it really was. I should visit him again one day to thank him. However, I was worried about what the princess said about how the prince of the sacred family was anti-demi-human, so I'd better plan ahead. I knew that the family had been against demi-humans in the past, but I guess a few of them remained. Fortunately, the princess wasn't one of them. I might have ended up in a fight against Cosmos otherwise. We'd have to work together in order to rescue Yukina. I didn't believe I'd come to understand even a cell of his brain, but the princess probably didn't either, so there was nothing to worry about. Probably.

"We're up to speed now."

I looked up to the voice and saw Clena standing beside my bed. Rulitora had finished explaining everything to them.

"...You've got a lot of impact from this angle."

"Leave that for later."

I voiced my honest thoughts, which made Clena press a hand against her face.

I sat myself up and Clena sat beside me, positioning herself to look me in the eyes as she inquired, “So do you think the princess is trustworthy...?” She brought up the princess instead of Cosmos, indicating that she knew exactly who we needed to worry about.

“For now, at least.”

I knew how Clena was feeling, but I wasn’t too worried right now. As long as Cosmos and I shared the same goal, we shouldn’t have any problems. That princess was actually pretty weak-willed against Cosmos. Though part of that might just have been because she couldn’t continue her journey if it weren’t for him.

“But do you think your little sister will actually come again? There’s a chance that she won’t...”

“Apparently Balsamina has been staging her attacks once every few days so far.”

“So basically, as long as we keep an eye on Cosmos...”

“Then there’s a high chance Balsamina will show up again and bring Yukina along.”

And if she came alone, Cosmos and I would capture her and make her tell us where Yukina was hiding. It wasn’t a fail-safe plan, but it was at least much better than searching for her blindly.

“So the only problem left is...”

“Whether or not I can learn Purifying Light.”

This was the key to saving Yukina. Nothing would come to fruition if I couldn’t learn this spell.

“Should I help you with practice? You’ll need to know the spell by the time Balsamina arrives again.”

“That’s not necessarily true.”

“Huh?” Clena stared at me blankly,

But I wasn't saying anything wrong. This plan would require Clena's help, though.

"I have a favor to ask of you, Clena."

"O-Okay, that's fine, but what do you need?"

"Buy us food."

".....Huh?"

"Like I said, food."

"But don't we still have plenty?"

"No, this will be to store on the ship. We might need to hide in the Bath for a while, so this supply will be yours just in case that happens."

Basically, our plan was to hide Yukina inside the Unlimited Bath to cut off the source of her Inept Scout, then break the spell. I needed to use Purifying Light for that to happen, but to be blunt, the spell only needed to be broken between her entering the Unlimited Bath and exiting out of it. Worst case scenario, I didn't have to break the spell the moment we came in contact with her.

"After all, we can cut the spell off as long as we keep her shut away!"

"...If you have time to think about that, then hurry up and learn your spell."

"Of course I will. But don't I need insurance if my little sister is on the line? And when we shut her inside, there's no guarantee all of us will be able to come along."

"Well, that's true..."

That was the deciding factor regarding whether or not we'd be able to save Yukina. I wasn't so rash as to put her life on an all-or-nothing bet.

"But that's only assuming your little sister will stay put inside, right?"

"She remembers me, so there won't be an issue." I wasn't worried about that part. As long as she hadn't lost her memories or become a different person, she wouldn't make me an enemy of her own volition.

"...I understand. We have the insurance, but make sure you practice, alright?"

“Are you implying that I would slack when it comes to rescuing my little sister?”

“Yeah yeah, just don’t get too full of yourself.” Clena didn’t look completely convinced, but she agreed with my plan and took the others out shopping.

“Okay Touya, let’s do this!” And thus Rakti was the only one left in the room.

Her maid outfit didn’t make her look the part, but she was still the Goddess of Darkness. Light cleric magic wasn’t her specialty, but she could at least give me some tips and tricks along the way.

“Cleric spells were originally made by us sisters.”

“Oh, is that so?”

“But they were too hard for humans to learn, so now hardly any of it has been passed down. The cleric spells of today are ones that the humans simplified or created themselves.”

“There’s no mention of any of that in this textbook.”

“That’s a newer textbook, so I don’t think it would mention it. Right now it’s considered a secret.”

The spells that the goddesses had created were apparently called “ancient spells.”

Ancient, huh? That was true. Rakti may have looked younger than me, but in terms of age she was less of a young girl and more of an old lady... though that probably didn’t apply when it came to goddesses. Either way, I shouldn’t tell her that.

“Hnyaa?”

I started patting her head, which brought a silly expression to her face. Well, it didn’t matter because she was adorable.

“O-Oh yeah, we were talking about the difference between ancient spells and modern ones. The hero summoning spell, for example, is a modern one.”

“It is...?”

She said that long before the first sacred king was ever summoned, the

followers of each goddess waged war against each other. When certain factions were cornered, they invented the hero summoning ritual to turn the tides, and the other side developed their own hero summoning spell as a countermeasure. The goddess sisters hadn't been keeping watch over the world at that time for certain reasons, so they had no idea who had conducted the summoning first. Either way, it was a pain for the ones being summoned.

"The Inept Scout is a modern one, too. That spell utilizes the blessing of darkness."

"It uses the blessing to create a spell that evil?"

"...That's why my blessing is called a curse."

"...Sorry."

That was something Rakti was self-conscious about, as she covered her face and drooped her shoulders. Come to think of it, Goldfish had called it a curse as well when he forced the blessing of darkness on me. It was a slip of the tongue. I'd better change the subject somehow.

"Um, are there any examples of ancient spells?"

"Oh? Hmm, spirit summoning is a bit of an exception, but that's an ancient spell."

"Oh, those are the fundamentals."

The spells seemed like they would be difficult even after simplifying them, but maybe the reason they could be simplified in the first place was due to the foundation spell, spirit summoning.

"And... oh yeah, Blazing Dance is an ancient spell."

"What, really?" My eyes widened as I questioned her, and she nodded in response. Now that I thought about it, the Goddess of Fire had taught it to me herself, and it was incredibly hard to learn.

According to Rakti, the spells humans created were simpler, but also had more specific uses. Taking Inept Scout and the hero summoning for example, they were indeed pretty specific. Maybe it was just me, but I felt like the creators' awful personalities were showing through those spells.

“Purifying Light is a modern spell, so it’s easy! I’ll make sure you get it down perfectly!”

“You think so? It’s a light spell.”

“Our magic is where all magic originates! Of course I can help teach my older sister’s spell!” Rakti proclaimed as she made a fist and puffed air from her nose.

In other words, the spells from this world were all sourced from the goddess sisters’ ancient spells. Rakti further taught me that Rium’s crystal magic and Pardoe’s craftsman magic had all been derived from the ancient spells. Come to think of it, our communication device was made through crystal magic, but was activated using cleric magic. That probably only worked because they came from the same source.

“Hmm? So since the goddesses are teaching me magic, does that mean I can learn other denominations like crystal magic?”

“...I wonder?”

I blurted out my thoughts, but Rakti only cocked her head in return.

“The spells we’ve been teaching you are like the theoretical foundations of cleric magic. Crystal magic has a different name because it’s based on a different theory than cleric magic, so I think it’d be easier to just learn that from scratch.”

So it wouldn’t be so simple. Well, it was just a thought. I wasn’t dying to learn it or anything. Anyway, I had to focus on Purifying Light for now.

At that point, Rakti took a pair of glasses out from her apron and put them on. She must have been imitating the Goddess of Light whenever she did that in my dreams. The followers of light and darkness had always been at odds with each other since long ago, but the goddess sisters actually got along very well with each other. Though Rakti was still scared of her sister whenever she got angry with her.

“Do they look good on me?”

She looked adorable as she put on airs while showing off her appearance, but she looked far from the womanly instructor persona that the Goddess of Light

liked to assume.

“Yeah, you look cute, Rakti.”

“Hmph...”

I patted her head again, which made her puff out her cheeks like a squirrel with food stuffed in its mouth. *And that’s why I keep saying you’re cute.* If she put on a school uniform as well, she would have looked like an underclassman helping me study for school. I made a note to myself to order one the next time we shopped at Ficus Brand.

Clena would be the class president. Haruno would be the beautiful and popular president of the student council. Roni would be the energetic underclassman that followed you around, and Sera would be the kind upperclassman of the after school club. Yup, they all fit their part. Roni’s ears and tail might stand out, but that just contributed to her character.

“...Rium might look better with a red backpack.” Though she was 13, so age-wise she should have been in middle school.

“What do you mean by red backpack?”

I looked beside me to see a goddess who would also look good in a red backpack peering back at me. Her eyes made me recall Yukina from back when she was alive. She slowly faded from my vision as I came back down to reality. Oh yeah, she never got to wear her middle school uniform. Even though she was looking so forward to it... Yeah, I’d order some school uniforms at Ficus Brand next time we went there. I remembered the design. It was a charming sailor uniform.

“Let’s start practicing, Rakti. I don’t mind if you push me a little. Just teach me the fastest way to learn the spell.”

“Oh, yes. Though I won’t be pushing you. I’ll place a sort of blessing on you, so try your best to remove it.”

“Got it. Bring it on.”

Just practical training, huh? That made things simple.

The Yukina from my previous life and the Yukina that had become a demon.

Their two faces drifted to view in my mind.

Hold on a little longer, Yukina. I'll make sure you get to wear that school uniform this time.

Bath Break – Where Memories Reside

This was a story from a few years ago, before Touya was summoned to another world.

The moon bathed the apartment building in a blue light. It looked like a decently upper class apartment at first glance, but the faded walls couldn't hide the building's age. Touya had been living in this apartment building in a quiet residential neighborhood at the time. His parents had yet to return from work, so it was just him and his younger sister at the moment.

"...What are you doing, Yukina?"

Touya came out from the bath to find Yukina, who had finished bathing before him, standing naked in front of the television. She was holding a bath towel against herself, but was only covering her front with it, so her pale back and butt were in full view. Touya instinctively checked to make sure the curtains were closed, which they were, so he breathed a sigh of relief.

"Hey, Touya, look at this!"

"I can see, so dry your hair and put on some clothes first."

Her hair, which was still black at the time, was moist. Touya patted her hair dry with a towel as he watched TV, which was airing local news coverage on a school's peculiar sports match. He finished drying her hair, then sat down on the sofa. Yukina kept her eyes glued to the TV as she put on a pair of panties.

"It's so cute~♥"

"Mhmm... it is."

A schoolgirl was currently being interviewed on the screen. Yes, Yukina's eyes were glued to the sailor uniform that the girl was wearing.

"I wish I could wear that already~"

"Next year. I'm sure it'll look great on you."

She would be entering middle school next spring and could hardly hold back

her excitement about being able to wear the sailor uniform. She finished putting on her favorite pink pajamas and then jumped onto her older brother's lap.

"You know, I'm going to make lots of friends in middle school!"

"That's right, make sure to get along with your classmates and club members."

"And then, and then, I'm going to go shopping with my friends on the way home from school!"

"You're going to get yelled at if you're seen goofing off in your uniform."

"Oh yeah."

Yukina lay down on the sofa using Touya's lap as her pillow, listing out all her future dreams with a wide smile. She hadn't been able to attend elementary school that much due to her weak constitution that often landed her in the hospital. That was why she was moving all her goals to middle school. For her, the sailor uniform wasn't just a uniform—it symbolized middle school itself.

Yukina continued to talk about all the things she wanted to do, Touya smiling and nodding along all the while, and eventually she started to grow silent. She was doing her best to put up an energetic front, but she was sickly and had little stamina.

"...Let's get you to bed."

"...Okay."

Touya stroked her hair and picked her up in a princess carry that he seemed all too used to. Yukina wrapped her arms around Touya's neck to keep her balance.

"Hey, Touya..."

"What is it?"

"When my school uniform comes, I'm gonna make sure you're the first one to see me in it."

"I'm looking forward to it. I'm sure you'll look cute."

“Yeah, I’m gonna get better, so let’s play together when that happens.”

“Are you planning to go in your school uniform?”

“It’s fine as long as we don’t go far, right?”

“...Well, that shouldn’t be an issue.”

They walked to bed as they exchanged casual banter.

“...After that, Yukina went in and out of the hospital several times. She tried her best, but right before the start of middle school...”

“So that’s what happened...”

“Sniff...”

“That poor girl...”

Now back in the present, where Touya was continuing to practice his magic.

Clena and the others had asked Touya what kind of girl his little sister was during their break, so he recalled their memories together, and then Roni and Rakti broke down in tears. The ever-silent Rium and Clena, who stared at them stunned, also looked like they had tears in their eyes. They had differing reactions, but they all shared the same desire to rescue Yukina.

“I want to bring Yukina back and grant her dream of wearing that sailor uniform.”

“I don’t really know what a sailor uniform is, but if it’s something like a dress, then I know how your little sister felt.” Clena folded her arms and nodded. She must have shared a similar experience in the past.

“So you understand now?”

“Yes, I’ll help you out. Let’s make your little sister’s dream come true!”

“Thank you, Clena!”

Clena reached out her hand, which Touya firmly grasped. And then he followed, “And if she wants to go shopping with her friends, then everyone will need their own sailor uniforms... so I ask of you all, please wear sailor uniforms!!”

“Yes, of course we will!”

Roni was the first to jump on board, then Rakti and Rium took Touya’s hand as well. Lastly, needless to say, all eyes rested on Clena. She turned red as all the expectant gazes pointed in her direction, then averted her eyes for a while until she finally softly murmured, “...I’ll think about it.”

In response, Touya and Roni exchanged a wordless thumbs up. After that, Clena grew angry and intensified Touya’s training regimen, but that was a story for another time.

Fourth Bath – Wash Your Little Sister at Twilight's Horizon!

During the day, Clena helped me practice. During the night, the goddesses gave me specialized lessons in my dreams. The goddesses of Light and Fire were especially enthusiastic and trained me to the bone. Since the key to all this was a light cleric spell, it made sense for the Goddess of Light to be pumped up. It was weird how fired up the Goddess of Fire was, but it also made sense after taking a few looks at her.

There was just one explanation—she was hot-blooded and loved the opportunity to to put me through the wringer like this. She even showed up in a red jersey and a bamboo sword tonight. She was definitely playing the part. Her jersey jacket was unzipped and revealed a white gym top underneath. Her curvy figure was still obvious under that gruff outfit, so I honestly didn't know where to look. On top of that, the Goddess of Fire had the habit of getting closer to me whenever she got worked up. She often refused to let go, too. Normally I'd be raising my arms up in joy, but now wasn't the time. Had the Goddess of Light not put a stop to her behavior, I wouldn't have been able to absorb a word of what they were trying to teach me. Her figure as she made the Goddess of Fire sit down for a stern lecture was satisfying. Though if her tight skirt was just an inch shorter, my psyche would have been in danger.

How did the goddesses learn about clothing from my world, anyway? They normally read my mind because I couldn't talk normally with them. Did they pull the information from my memories? In that case, was the Goddess of Earth exhibiting her tanned cleavage that was practically bursting out of her white nurse's blouse because I was imagining it that way? No, I was thinking too hard about this. I shouldn't be focusing on it too much.

The Goddess of Earth wasn't giving me any intense training this time around—she took up more of a support role. But in a way, she was actually the biggest obstacle to my training. She had the most gentle personality among all the

goddesses, but still possessed an overwhelming onslaught of *material I needed to grasp*. I couldn't mention it since they were being so serious, though. My mind was simply rotten. I should just be proud that I managed to learn Purifying Light in a mere five days while also withstanding those repeated bouncy bombardments.

Then there was the fact that Balsamina had yet to approach us again like we were expecting her to. I thought I just barely managed to learn the spell in time with just enough spare room to catch my breath.

"She *is* going to show up again, right...?"

"Considering everything she's done so far, I doubt she'd give up after that last attempt..."

Things were looking worrisome, so we gathered at Cosmos' room to make a plan. Even the princess seemed troubled at the fact that Balsamina hadn't shown up after a week. This time, everyone in my party who remained at the hotel joined Rulitora and I in Cosmos' room.

Only Mark and Crissa had left the Maiden of the Roaring Waves. Our auctions had finished, so they joined Shakova and Pardoe to stay at Rondalan's place to help him work on the ship. They were apparently on the last spurt and keeping themselves busy. Mark must have been bored because he had nothing to do while I was practicing magic, and the submarine would be completed faster if the ketolts lent their assistance Shakova might start trying to meddle with the design, but Pardoe and Mark should be enough to stop him. I was worried whether a bunch of zealous craftsmen would be able to take care of themselves, but that was what Crissa was there for.

"I wonder if anything happened to Balsamina..." Cosmos lackadaisically wondered. I couldn't fault him for asking, though. I was also worried to death about where Yukina was.

We couldn't save her by standing around and waiting, though. We needed to think this through. There must have been a reason why Balsamina had yet to show up. I thought about what might have been different between her past attacks and now, and one theory came to mind.

"Maybe it's because we're here?"

We had much more fighting power against her now. It was very possible that she ceased her attacks because she was scared of us. The princess didn't react favorably to my idea, though.

"She was reckless enough attacking us by herself until now, so I doubt a few more people would deter her..."

She had a point. Balsamina was much more of an idiot than I had assumed. Maybe I should thank her, though. If she hadn't mistaken us and actually attacked Cosmos' party, what would have become of Yukina?

"In that case, then why? I doubt Yukina would be stopping her."

"It'd make more sense if someone else was preventing her from coming."

"Someone else? Like Yukina?"

"No, Yukina would normally take the initiative to find me."

"Then why hasn't she shown up yet?"

"The issue is how much freedom she has over her own actions right now."

She had followed Balsamina's orders and retreated last time. I had just one more idea.

"Whoever summoned Yukina must still be out there. The summoning spell is pretty advanced, isn't it?"

Yes, I was referring to the mysterious being who could use the dark hero summoning spell. A person who could use magic wasn't necessarily smart, but they at least tended to be due to the amount of studying it took to learn spells. If there was some other power stopping Balsamina right now, the most likely suspect was this practitioner. That put us in a bad spot, though. We would have to find out where Yukina was hiding on our own.

"Do you have any ideas where Balsamina's hideout might be?"

"If I had a guess, I'd go there myself to win her over. Hahahah!" Cosmos laughed. In other words, they had no leads.

Well, that was expected enough. Even if Balsamina's group had a base of operations, they would have to keep changing it to follow Cosmos around. We

couldn’t think of anything else we could do right now, so we simply reminded each other to not let our guards down and dismissed the meeting.

However, something completely unexpected happened that evening. Balsamina came alone to Cosmos’ room.

We grabbed our weapons and ran to him as soon as we could, but unfortunately she had already left by the time we got there. The room was still filled with commotion though, as several armed bodyguards were keeping watch through the window. The room itself looked unscathed and barely touched. It didn’t look like a fight had broken out.

Cosmos and the princess were sitting on the sofa. Ricott was standing guard near them, while Foley was making everyone tea. The princess was reading something, so I went up to Ricott and asked what had happened.

“What did Balsamina do?”

“Asked me out on a date... I suppose?” Cosmos replied from the sofa as he combed his hair upward with his fingers. *I didn’t ask you.*

“Um, she had come to deliver a written letter of challenge.”

“A letter of challenge?” Rulitora asked with an inquisitive expression.

The letter was for Cosmos, but the princess was reading it right now. I looked over at her, and she ordered a bodyguard to hand over a map and the letter they had received.

“So what’s this letter about?”

“...Balsamina asked Sir Cosmos to come to an island off the coast. We were in the process of checking its location on a map right now.”

“A duel on a remote island, huh...”

This was like *Ganryujima*. Yes, the duel between Musashi Miyamoto and Kojirou Sasaki. As I mulled over that thought, Clena frantically butted into the conversation.

“Wait a second. Does that mean you were the only ones who were invited...?”

“...Yes, only us. She said to come without telling you about anything.”

“What?”

So that’s how it was. It was the will of Balsamina, or maybe whoever was pulling the strings behind her. If the enemy forces had increased in number, then you simply needed to separate them. That was only logical.

“But in that case, can’t we just hide inside your ship?” Roni asked as she tilted her head. She had a point. It was one thing if we had to go by foot, but it was easy enough to fudge how large the group was if we went by ship.

“Balsamina must have been the one to think of this...” Foley murmured, a look of pity in her eyes.

“In that case, should we assume Balsamina acted outside of orders?” Rulitora asked.

“That’s a possibility.” Ricott earnestly nodded.

“Assuming there’s some mastermind behind all this, they must have stopped her from coming back because we have strength in numbers now. But then Balsamina came up with the idea to split us up, so she acted on her own accord?”

“That would explain why she hadn’t launched an attack this past week.” Clena agreed with my idea. Rulitora, the princess, and Ricott all nodded in turn.

“So Balsamina wants to see me that badly~?” Cosmos suddenly stood up and started dancing, but we ignored him.

Oh, but Foley was having trouble keeping her eyes off him. She kept glancing his way. Her cheeks were flushed, almost as if she was taken by his demeanor. Well, everyone had their own preferences. I decided to ignore her, too.

“I-I suppose we can have Touya’s party secretly board our ship, then sail to the island...” The princess was having a hard time ignoring Cosmos, too. She had a different reaction than Foley, though. Her lips were pursed and her expression rigid. I might as well ignore her, too.

Anyway, that was the princess’ plan, but I had a different idea. “I’d like to suggest something, too. When will the duel be?”

“Three days from now. Our analysis says that we’ll have plenty of time to get

there if we depart the morning of," the princess replied as she showed me a sea map. The island she was referring to was within the bay of Neptunopolis. So that was where their hideout was?

"Since we have some time to prepare, my party can ready our own ship."

"But the letter told us to come alone...?"

"Our ship is actually called a submarine. It can sail underwater."

If we stayed underwater, we could approach the island without getting caught. Fortunately, we had already bought the preserved food we needed in case I couldn't learn Purifying Light in time. We could set sail as soon as we finished storing the food away inside the submarine.

"U-Underwater...?" The princess' eyes opened wide. Not only her, but Ricott and the other elite bodyguards also looked as if they couldn't believe what I had just said.

"It's the thing Rondalan was working on."

"...Oh, now I understand." It was clear how everyone viewed Rondalan from that one line.

We walked to Rondalan's workshop as soon as our meeting with the princess' party ended. Yes, the princess' party. Cosmos played little part.

I had a lot of questions back when Cosmos suddenly managed to recruit the princess to his party. Now I only had one thought about it, though. I was grateful that the princess was acting as Cosmos' guardian. Honestly. Who knew what would happen to that happy-go-lucky guy if he was left to his own devices? I'd also feel uneasy if a fellow human from my world ended up not being able to survive their journey. I was seriously thankful that the princess had been there for him.

When we arrived at the workshop and told Rondalan that we wanted to set sail in three days, he promptly replied that we could get it working as soon as tomorrow morning. Pardoe and Shakova had been surprisingly fired up and managed to help finish the ship's construction way ahead of schedule. I was curious about how much they had earned from the auction house, but I held off asking until later, knowing that their hard work must have paid off.

“I wanted to put anyother relief right around here...”

“Stop while you’re ahead, purr.”

“No no, if I could just embellish the exterior a little more...”

“That would degrade the ship’s staminya.”

Behind the scenes, Rondalan and Shakova had kept trying to decorate the ship more, while Pardoe and Mark had kept trying to fend them off. The end result was an exterior decorated with waves that were neither too flashy nor too dull, and that added character to the ship without sacrificing utility.

The opening of the spiral-shelled ship faced upward and served as the deck. A transparent cover surrounded it. The cover looked like thick glass, but it was made from a special mineral molded using craftsman magic and could withstand water pressure. It sounded similar to acrylic glass. The pure-white shell brought the image of a white castle to mind, but this ship was on the smaller side, so calling it a “castle” didn’t seem appropriate to me.

“Rondalan made something this pretty?! You’ve got to be kidding me!” said a fisherman who happened to walk by the workshop. The people of this world thought the ship had a strange shape, but still a beautiful design.

From what the others told me, this wouldn’t have been the case if Rondalan worked on the ship by himself. Shakova’s sense of style played a key role in it.

“Don’t purraise him. He’ll just get full of himself.”

“And you need to study up more, Mark. Our livelihoods are in the customers’ hands, so we can’t let ourselves be satisfied by our own work that easily.”
“Grrr...”

“Don’t *grrr* me, meow.”

So began the discourse between father and son. Shakova was winning the argument since he had a large part in making a fine ship this time around.

“We can’t just make decorations for the sake of decoration. They need to have a purpose too, meow!” Pardoe interjected.

His philosophy was utility first, while Shakova emphasized a refined appearance. They both had the skill to back up their claims, so it was a tough

battle.

We couldn't just wait for them to finish bickering, though. I clapped my hands to make them stop and then asked Rondalan, "So now all we need to do is prepare the food? Though we've almost finished taking care of that."

"Of course!"

"Well, we also need to take it for a test drive. That's our first purriority."

Pardoe was right. We tested the ship out over the next two days, and the only thing that needed fixing was some fine tuning to make navigation easier. Rondalan really was a technical wiz.

And then the day had finally come to set sail.

Cosmos' party would be staging a grand departure from the main port as the people of the city saw them off, so we would be taking off more quietly from the fisherman's port. The only people seeing us off would be the nearby fishermen. They had come to marvel at the fact that one of Rondalan's inventions had actually been completed. Everyone believed it only after learning that ketolt blacksmiths had been assisting him. These people really had no faith in Rondalan.

The fishermen had offered us preserved goods when we were packing the ship with food. They had treated us while we were doing test drives, too. I had to remember to thank them for all the fish.

We didn't have as extravagant a sendoff as Cosmos' party did, but we were friends with everyone here. I was more comfortable with an atmosphere like this.

The pure white submarine had been transported to a dry dock overnight. I had test driven it several times up until now, but I was getting butterflies in my stomach at the thought of setting sail for real this time. I had been admiring the boat, my eyes sparkling, when a fisherman called out to me.

"By the way, young sir!"



He was calling me “young sir.” He knew I was more than an ordinary citizen since I had spent so much on this ship, but I also didn’t seem like someone who would throw his money at exorbitant pleasures like this. Thus, they had assumed I was the son of a distinguished family. Come to think of it, I had never gone around announcing I was a hero to them. On the other hand, I had still managed to present myself as someone prominent even without having to fall back on my title as a hero. That wasn’t such a bad outcome.

“Hm? What is it?” I tried assuming a composed attitude. Was this how sons of nobility were supposed to act?

“Have you decided on a name for your ship?”

“Yeah, I thought of one yesterday. Grande Nautilus.”

“Ohh, that’s a good one!”

The ship itself was shaped like a giant nautilus, so I picked this name for her. It was straight to the point, but not a bad name at all. I then conversed with the fisherman about how the weather at sea would be today, until Clena called out to me from the other side of the ship.

“Touya!”

“Oh, your wife is calling for you.”

And he thought Clena was my wife. So I was the young sir and she was my lady. The fishermen also assumed Roni and Rakti were our servants and Rulitora was our bodyguard. Lately, the fishermen’s wives had been gossiping about Rium’s role in our group. The prevailing theory was that she was my little sister, but some insisted that she was our daughter. How young did they think we had her? They ended up asking me directly about it, so I told them that she was just our traveling partner.

In any case, they had assumed Clena was a noble’s daughter from the way she presented herself, so they also thought I was a rich family’s son in turn. In response, Clena told me, “I’m not bothered by it, so they can think what they want to think.” Her cheeks flushed red in a cute manner as she said that, so I patted her head.

Anyway, I didn't want to waste much more time here, so I headed over to the ship. As I approached, I saw Clena and Roni surrounded by fishermen's wives and a box by Clena's feet. It looked like they had bought even more food for us. I walked closer and noticed that the box's contents were fresh fish, not the usual preserved goods. The fish were round and plump, their scales glistening smoothly. They were probably just caught this morning. I tried making my way to Clena and Roni, but the wives blocked me off.

"We heard! So you're going to rescue your kidnapped younger sister?"

"We thought you were a deadbeat husband who was just showing off his cute wife, but you really were working on something this whole time..."

Who's a deadbeat husband? I looked at Clena, who hurriedly waved her hand left and right to deny it. I then looked over to Roni, who shook her head in a fluster. It seemed like the wives had created their own misunderstanding. And even now, they were running their mouths without giving me a chance to speak. Housewives sure were something. No wonder Clena was unable to get them off her back. I didn't want to be called a deadbeat husband, though. Let me settle a few things while we were here.

"Don't worry. My wife and I have had a proper discussion about this. I feel incredibly blessed to have a wife as understanding as she is." I slid over to Clena, wrapped a hand around her shoulder, and pulled her close.

Clena quickly glanced my way every time I said "wife," but I was showing the housewives my best smile, so unfortunately I didn't have the opportunity to look at her. I bet her face was bright red right now, a mix of surprise and embarrassment. The housewives started squealing at us. Clena gave me a subtle punch to my side, but I didn't flinch. I took her hand as she tried to punch me again, then pulled her even closer to show off how intimate we were. We might have to put up with a little teasing from the housewives, but it was better than the alternative.

"...And what are you looking at, Roni?"

"Oh? Nothing important~" Roni was also looking at us warmly.

After putting up with all the banter, we finally broke away from the crowd, then carried the box of fish inside the Unlimited Bath and placed it inside a tub

of cold water. I could control the water's temperature inside the Bath, but I couldn't create ice. The Goddess of Fire's kitchen was furnished with all sorts of equipment, but it didn't have a refrigerator. I really wanted one at times like these, but I shouldn't be too greedy. It was no use whining about it, anyway. I'd just ask Roni to cook the fish for us as soon as possible. We'd be having a seafood feast tonight.

I had been holding on to Clena's shoulder the whole time, so after we finally entered the ship and got out of the housewives' view, Clena pinched my hand as hard as she could. But then she flitted her head to the side with her cheeks red and puffy, so I just thought she looked cute. I looked at Roni, who seemed to be thinking the same thing as she watched Clena with a warm smile.

"You're not safe either!"

"Kyaah?!"

Roni had assumed she was the third wheel, so I launched a surprise hug at her and rubbed both my hands into her hair. Never let your guard down, Roni. I continued petting her until she started wagging her tail in joy, and then Clena started staring at me. She had started getting jealous. Clena hardly ever took the initiative to do things like this. Sometimes she let herself loose, but she was usually too shy to do so. Therefore, the rest of us needed to be proactive. I whispered something in Roni's ear, then the two of us hugged Clena from both sides. This was the same sandwich Roni had put me in in the past.

"Whoa?! What are you doing?!" she exclaimed, but she looked happy about it. In either case, her skin was as supple as ever. The sensation of my cheek rubbing against hers was the best. I could get used to this.

In the end, she was both timid yet needy. After all, she had grown up in an aristocratic environment where she didn't know who her father was and was treated like an outcast. I could tell how it had affected her until now, so I couldn't help but want to take care of her. I wished Clena would be more proactive about cuddling with us, but well, that would come in time.

"Sir Touya! Cosmos' ship has set sail!"

Roni and I stepped out of the Unlimited Bath at the sound of Rulitora's voice. Clena cleared her throat, straightened herself up, then followed us out. I looked

outside to see a giant body at least two or three heads taller than everyone around him. I'd had Rulitora keep watch for us since I had no more hard labor for him to do, but he was grimacing at the salty ocean air. He looked pretty scary like that. Everyone on the beach must have been wary of him.

"How are they looking?"

"I was worried, but there weren't any attacks after they set sail. They'll be moving past us in another few minutes."

"Thanks for the work. Go ahead and rest inside the ship."

Now then, I didn't want to let Cosmos get too far ahead of us. Let's set sail and start our expedition underwater.

"Alright, it's time to depart!"

I called for everyone to board, then set off with Rondalan and all the others as our audience. I stood on the deck and saw the crowd below waving at us from the other side of the transparent cover. Misunderstandings aside, they were all cheering for us and worrying for our safety. I wanted to let them all meet Yukina after we successfully rescued her, even if it meant having to hide her demonic features.

"Initiate the dive!"

Pardoe was in charge of steering. The mechanics slightly differed from a normal ship, but the ketolt blacksmiths already had a firm grasp on how this submarine worked, so I trusted them with the job. We were finally on our way to save Yukina. I instinctively clenched my fist as thoughts raced through my head.

"...Touya."

Something grazed my hand. I looked to find Clena resting her hand over my fist. I met my gaze to hers, and her silver eyes stared back at me. I silently conveyed my thanks by grasping her hand, and she looked straight ahead, gripping my hand in turn. I looked at her profile as her cheeks were tinted red, which brought a smile to my face. I didn't want to ruin the atmosphere by teasing her right now. Instead, I also looked straight ahead, staring into the depths of the water from under our transparent shield.

“...Don’t hog him to yourself, Clena.”

“So greedy~”

...But then Rium and Rakti latched onto me, rendering all my tact for naught.

We had a clear view underwater from the piloting deck as the Grande Nautilus set sail. A vibrant blue filled my vision all around us. I looked up and saw the ocean waves undulating along with the rays of the sun. Rakti and Rium were still clinging to my waist as they looked around them, stunned. I glanced over to find Clena, Roni, Crissa, and Rulitora all wearing similar expressions. No wonder, it was their first time being under the ocean depths like this. Pardoe, Shakova, and Mark had already taken the ship out for a spin, so they were more calm about the experience. Though they had been just as stunned the first time they set sail, too. I was one of the more composed ones. I had seen this sight countless times on TV before, so it was a little disappointing how I couldn’t feel the same way they were feeling right now. That was only natural, though. I left the excited bunch on the deck and returned to the Unlimited Bath with Shakova to find out what they had gained from the auctions.

Most of the items Shakova had won in the auction were compact in size, but had high market value. Many were small ornaments that could be considered works of art, precious metals, or antiques. He had won a few that were damaged or broken, but he could mend them all himself. Pardoe had won a few crystals he wanted to use, so both of them had stuck true to their craft in terms of what they’d purchased.

“Were there no weapons or armor?”

“Nyothing stronger than what we have now, at least.”

Oh, no wonder he hadn’t bought any. Instead, they had managed to acquire some amulets with spells cast on them.

“Though a few of these might be cursed.”

“Hey.”

“Can’t you just dispel them with your gift?”

It was true, my gift could literally wash away any “bad” magic. Shakova must

have kept that in mind when he was buying these. For now, we should just leave the items to soak in a bowl instead of washing them. Like we were marinating sushi.

They had bought the items at bargain prices thanks to the curses, but they'd turn back to normal ornaments after a thorough cleanse. Now this would turn us a tidy profit.

"These cursed items are often left without bidders, so the manager purractically pleaded us to buy them."

"Nice one, Shakova."

We exchanged a thumbs up. Shakova might have seemed like a big spender thanks to his love of gaudiness, but he was actually even more responsible with his money than Pardoe was. They were anything but stingy, though. Strength was required for travelers to survive in this world, but knowing how to handle money and travel expenses was just as important. It was my responsibility as the party leader to take care of everyone. That would apply all the more after we saved Yukina, since she'd be another addition to the family. We'd eventually meet back up with Haruno's party, too. I had to keep up with my duties until then. Shakova's support was priceless in that sense.

On another note, Kopan was still helping us conduct our auctions to get his fair share of compensation. We had absolutely no time for that until after we got Yukina back, so we left it all to him.

We maintained a moderate distance from Cosmos' ship above the water and continued sailing for about half a day, then finally neared the island Balsamina had summoned them to. I inspected our surroundings through a periscope above the ocean surface and saw a piece of land much larger than I thought it would be. The infamous Ganryujima was the first thing that came to mind when I imagined duels on islands, but this one was a normal lush green island with mountains towering in the distance.

"This doesn't look like a demon hideout..." Rulitora said after he looked through the periscope after me.

He was right. Not only was the island completely devoid of eeriness, we couldn't spot a single building that might constitute a hideout. Princess

Franchellis had suspected that the letter was a trap meant to lure us to a large onslaught of enemies. I had thought the same. Balsamina might have called Cosmos' party out to split us up, but Cosmos still had an entire group of elite guards backing him up. In order for Balsamina to stand a chance, there had to have been a swarm of monsters lurking somewhere on this island. Taking that into consideration, she had two likely strategies: Either unleash their full army on us from the beginning, or keep part of their troops hidden for a later ambush. We originally thought she might bring enough troops to match Cosmos' strength or keep under it, while hiding their remaining forces for a surprise attack. The island was teeming with trees, so there was no better environment to keep their troops hidden. The question was whether or not Balsamina would be able to think up such a plan. The princess, who had experienced her attacks a number of times, had said "if she is able to come up with such a strategy, that would confirm there is indeed a mastermind pulling the strings behind her."

"Hmm... I see a female demon."

"Let me take a look."

Rulitora handed the periscope to me, and I spotted Balsamina standing atop the sprawling sand. I couldn't find Yukina anywhere around her, but I did see a group of monsters numbering about the same as the elite guards, and one more person wearing a black hooded cloak. That wasn't Yukina. I couldn't see their face, but the person was much too tall. The two of them appeared to be quarreling about something.

"...This is bad."

"What is?"

"We need to pick up speed and get to the island. Find a place to dock, hurry!"

"Look! Cosmos' ship has started to speed up!"

I started giving out orders and in the same instant, Roni pointed above us. I looked up to find that Cosmos' ship had suddenly gone far ahead of us.

"I knew it! Hurry!"

"What's going on?!"

If we could see it through our periscope, that meant Cosmos could also see it through their telescope on the ship. To be more specific, Cosmos could see Balsamina arguing with the mysterious cloaked individual.

“Balsamina is arguing with another demon. Cosmos is the type of guy who would rush over as soon as he saw something like that.”

“...I see.”

Clena, who was looking through the periscope now, agreed with me in an exasperated tone of voice. Though if it had been Yukina fighting instead of Balsamina, I’d be doing the same. That was why I knew exactly what Cosmos was doing now.

I was curious about the cloaked individual, but most importantly, Yukina was nowhere to be seen. Right now we needed to catch up with Cosmos and find a place to dock.

“Do you think that hooded person is a demon...?” Clena looked away from the periscope and asked me, confused.

Whoever they were, they certainly didn’t seem like one of the monsters Balsamina was commanding. I had thought Yukina might be leading some of the monsters if no other demons were present, but now I wasn’t so sure.

“Rulitora, switch with Clena. Keep up the surveillance.”

In any case, I needed to find Yukina as soon as possible right now. I left the periscope to our best eyes and prepared ourselves to disembark. We circled the island until we found a spot that was concealed from the beach. The submarine couldn’t enter shallow waters, so we got on a boat and rode it to shore. Of our group, the six who disembarked with me were Rulitora, Clena, Roni, Rium, Rakti, and Mark. Rakti couldn’t fight, but she could support me while I broke the spell that had been cast on Yukina. I made her promise to not leave my side.

Mark was supposed to remain inside the submarine at first, but he wanted to disembark with us. He probably wanted to show off his cooler side to Crissa. If we paired him with Rulitora, they’d be able to cover each other’s blind spots, so we let him come with us. We couldn’t just leave the submarine by itself, so we had Shakova, Pardoe, and Crissa look after it in our stead. Of course, they

couldn’t use the Unlimited Bath while I was gone, so we left them a supply of food and water.

In the meantime, Cosmos’ party had also landed on the island in a smaller boat and began battling with Balsamina. Balsamina had launched attacks on them before they landed, but Cosmos deflected the air attacks with his Unlimited Bullet, while Ricott fought off the sea attacks with her spear. Interestingly, the hooded person disappeared before Cosmos’ party arrived. Rulitora tried to track their movements through the periscope, but the wharf obstructed his view and he lost sight of them. I was worried about what that person was up to. We needed to hurry and locate any possible ambush attacks.

We were currently located behind the shadows of the wharf on the island’s eastern side. Everything but the beach on the northern edge of the island was covered in forest. The wharf was a little elevated compared to the beach, so we could keep track of what was going on right now. Cosmos’ party appeared to be winning the fight. They wouldn’t have an issue as long as they weren’t ambushed.

Roni led our party. Her red lizard armor was a little gaudy, but she was the most adept at stealth among us. She was on all fours sniffing the ground like a dog, which just further confirmed that she was indeed a lycaon. Her butt was sticking out as she wagged her tail, but we couldn’t interrupt her investigations, so us three men just averted our eyes.

“...A lot of monsters have been moving about here.”

“So they were hiding here just recently?”

“No, they only passed by.”

It looked like the monsters hadn’t been headed toward the beach or even staying on a path where they could see Cosmos, but convening somewhere else.

“These might be the ambushers. Can you track their movements?”

“Of course!” Rulitora stood up with confidence and led the way.

The rest of us were wearing armor that wasn’t exactly covert, but we tried our best to not make a sound as we followed Roni. Rium was on her flying disc,

so she didn't have to worry about being light on her feet. All she had to do was not hit any trees.

"...I guess we didn't have to worry too much about sound."

We had circled the beach until we reached the south side of the forest and found the monsters.

"Th-They're noisy." Rakti mumbled as she timidly took a peek from behind me.

There was no chance the monsters heard her— they were as loud as could be, and on top of that, the hooded man was standing at the center of the crowd, shouting something. So he had come here after disappearing from the beach. We hid ourselves in the bushes and looked on to see the hooded man hastily pacing back and forth within the ring of monsters. He was clearly angry.

"Why?! How did it come to this?! I told her to stop! I told her we didn't have enough power to fight them yet!!" His tone of voice carried a sense of distress and a hint of haplessness.

Since the hooded man had been trying to stop Balsamina, I guessed that he was above her in rank. There were more monsters here than on the beach, so there was a decent chance this was their main army.

"Okay, it's a decent idea to gather our forces and ambush them! But why call them to our secret base?!"

I let out a chortle, then put a hand to my mouth. I looked next to me and saw that everyone besides Rakti and Rium also had their hands over their mouths The comment had especially hit the mark for Clena, whose white cheeks had turned red as she was holding back tears and stifling her laughter.

So this was the demons' hideout, huh? And it had somehow been kept secret until now. I didn't know what they were scheming here, but this was where they were observing Neptune from. Balsamina had revealed their location to Cosmos and summoned him here. She had most likely been told she wasn't strong enough to fight him, so she decided to use the troops on the island against him instead. As a result, both our parties were now here and their little secret had spilled to all of us. Yeah, she was an idiot. She could have at least

moved the monsters somewhere else and summoned him there.

As I mulled over those thoughts, Clena moved closer to me. She nudged her cheek next to mine, then spoke to me in a hushed voice, “This is weird. If Balsamina was acting alone, then didn’t we decide that she wouldn’t have prepared an ambush?”

“Yeah, she shouldn’t have thought that far ahead considering she tried to only call Cosmos here.”

“It *is* strange. There might be a mastermind behind this, but that hooded man doesn’t seem like he wanted Balsamina to do anything...” Rulitora was just as confused as the rest of us.

Right, a theoretical mastermind wouldn’t have suggested such a half-assed idea for Balsamina, even under the pretense of her acting alone. Or maybe he did suggest the idea to her, but not all of it entered her head?

“Maybe there’s some other higher-up involved?”

“I agree... especially considering that this is their hideout.”

Mark and Rium had valid suggestions as well. We had thought Balsamina and Yukina were the only “staff” here, but that hooded man was here too. We needed to cast aside our assumptions and consider all the possibilities. The question was where Yukina was located right now—but this hideout was the biggest possibility.

“Aargh, no way around it! No more holding back if it’s come to this! All of you, go wipe them out and shut their mouths!!”

The hooded man suddenly waved his hand in the air and issued a command. He was planning to unleash a surprise attack on Cosmos now. The timing was a little off, but Cosmos’ party might be in danger if they were caught off guard. I left the thinking for later and decided to take care of the bunch for now.

“Let’s ambush them as soon as they make their move,” I whispered from the bushes. Everyone nodded silently in response. “Clena, I’ll leave Rakti to you.”

“Got it.”

It was hard to tell since she often paired up with Roni, who was a front

fighter, but Clena's specialty was protecting the rear guard as she fired spells from a distance. She was a spellcaster capable of defending herself. Rakti would be safe if I left her to Clena.

Not a minute later, the hooded man raised his hand and commanded the monsters he had riled up, "Charge!!"

At the same moment, the monsters roared and dashed forward. They were all concentrated in the same direction. We couldn't let this chance slip by. I prepared to use earth spirits to summon black spears from the ground like I had done against the sandworms, but then—several lances suddenly rained down on the front of the pack of monsters.

"...Huh?"

Needless to say, that wasn't us. The lances had come from the opposite direction. Someone had set up an attack at exactly the same time we did. The monsters were rattled from the surprise attack.

"What's going on?!" The hooded man shouted, and then someone appeared from within the bushes in the distance.

"I've been waiting for this moment... for when you mess up this island so much that you forget to keep an eye on me..."

"Y-You...!"

A young girl floated before us, her large wings flapping and her silver hair fluttering in the breeze. That was my little sister, Yukina.

Yukina pointed at the hooded person, then loudly proclaimed, "You can keep track of me all you want... but that doesn't matter if I can just beat you down!"

Plunk. My jaw dropped. Everyone around me had more or less the same reaction. My little sister had become so strong and resilient since she had been reincarnated here.

"Ohh, you're so energetic now, Yukina. Your brother is so happy for you..."

"Get it together, Touya! I know how you feel, but now isn't the time!"

"O-Oh yeah."

I returned to reality after Clena's remark and immediately thought about our next move.

"I'm going to cast a spell out of Yukina's reach—we'll move out right after that!"

"...I'll help too."

First, Rium and I would unleash earthen spears and balls of light at them, then Rulitora, Roni, Mark, and I would charge out. The hooded man was shouting something, but I had no obligation to reply.

The monsters ranged in variety from beasts to birds to lizards. Some bigger monsters in the pack looked unharmed by the rain of attacks, but Rulitora could deal with them directly. He swung his glaive as if he was summoning a storm, then immediately afterward, several monsters fell to the ground with a thunderous cry. Rulitora roared just as loudly as the monsters he just felled, making the rest of them cower. Mark used the opportunity to strike down on them with his hammer.

I couldn't let myself lose to them. I ran into a swarm of medium-sized monsters and swung my Crescent Moon, scattering them about. Smaller monsters that looked like sweep dogs started crowding around my legs, but Roni cleaned them up for me.

"Huh? What?"

Yukina was stunned as she looked at us. I was wearing my Magic Eater, so that was no surprise. I raised my visor so that she could see my face. She recognized me immediately, then turned toward the bushes behind her.

"T-Touya...?! Everyone, they're our allies!"

I looked in the same direction to find a peculiar group of creatures all wielding lances. They were a troop of odd-looking dolphins. Their pectoral fins were longer than normal for dolphins, and they were standing upright on their similarly long caudal fins. There were little protrusions on the ends of their pectoral fins, which acted as thumbs to hold their lances. Each of them was carrying a basket filled with more lances on their backs.

I see, so they were the gillmen Rakti had mentioned before. The torrent of

spears from earlier had been their doing. They were Yukina's comrades, but they didn't exactly look built for walking on land. My party should bear the full brunt of the monsters' attacks in their place.

Not a moment after I thought that, a white dolphin near Yukina suddenly raised his staff and shouted, "March of the Water God!!"

The dolphins spouted water from their caudal fins even though there was no water around them, then quickly glided forth. So that spell gave them the ability to move around quickly on land. I see, so that was a sacred dolphin, one of the clerics who served the Goddess of Water.

"Charge! We gillmen will reclaim our island!!" A larger gillman shouted in an awfully gruff voice from within the troops.

His powerful charisma swayed the rest of the troops, so now the monsters who were still in disarray didn't stand a chance. The rest of us were just as stunned as they were. I stood dumbfounded at the sudden development until a beast-type monster leaped toward me.

"Sir Touya, watch out!"

"Whoa?!"

Thanks to Roni's warning, I blocked the attack with my gauntlet. The Magic Eater consumed a small portion of my MP, but I took no damage at all. The monster had bitten down on my gauntlet and wouldn't budge, so I swung it to the ground like a hammer. This was no time for me to be absentminded. I didn't know why, but Yukina had made the gillmen her allies. We just had to cooperate to take out these monsters and that hooded guy.

Taking what Yukina just said into account, he must have been the one who cast the Inept Scout on her. Rulitora and the others could take care of the others, but I wanted to take that guy out myself. I looked around to find where he was and saw him just about to point his staff toward Yukina.

"Curse you, Yukina! O Darkness!"

The hooded man's voice resounded, and at the same time a black mist sprouted from the center of Yukina's chest and wrapped itself around her body. No longer able to flap her wings, Yukina fell to the ground. I immediately

sprinted over to her. Change of plans.

I had thought we could wait to break the spell on Yukina since she was already rebelling against the hooded man on her own and defeat all our enemies first, but since that mist was coming from her own body, she must have had other spells cast on her as well. Now we had no way of knowing exactly how many spells she was under. I couldn't ignore the possibility that a life-threatening spell had been cast on her, either. We had to put breaking the spells on maximum priority.

"Touya, hurry!" Clena urged me from behind.

She must have made the same judgment I had, which I was thankful for. I trusted that she would cover for me and ran heedlessly toward the hooded man. An avian monster made a nose dive for my head, but Roni pierced it with a throwing dagger. Without slowing down, I brandished my Crescent Moon above me, but then another avian monster swooped toward me. These guys were crafty. I quickly swung my Crescent Moon down on it, but now I had already reached the hooded man and didn't have the time to swing my axe at him again. He noticed my arrival and pointed his staff at me.

"Summon spirit!"

Without hesitation, I pounded my fist into his face. The magic crystal imbued into my palm emitted fire spirit flames that surrounded my fist. The hooded man took the brunt of the blow and was propelled backward. The Crescent Moon wasn't my only weapon— my Magic Eater armor was also a weapon in itself.

"Yukina!"

I ignored the person I just struck down, instead focusing my attention to Yukina, who was still entangled in the black mist. Since the mist was coming from her own body, taking down the caster must not have altered its effect.

"Tou...ya..."

Yukina sounded like she was in pain. The mist was constricting her to the point that she was having trouble breathing. I needed to take care of her as soon as possible.

“Hurry, Touya!”

“Sorry for the wait!”

Clena suddenly rushed toward us with Rakti in tow. I knew she would bring Rakti over to us. Good timing. I believed in you, Clena. I picked Yukina up and summoned the door to the Unlimited Bath, which Roni opened without delay.

“Clena, I’m leaving you in charge!”

“I know, just go inside already!” Clena said, pushing Rakti toward the Bath.

I looked up to see Rium on her flying disc, raining her balls of light down below. I knew I should just listen to what they said right now and focus on Yukina.

“You gillmen over there! I’m Yukina’s older brother! Leave her to me!”

The white dolphin and gruff dolphin, who had started approaching us, exchanged looks. I couldn’t discern their expressions, but they were most likely confused and dubious. But I had no time to confirm, so I darted inside the Unlimited Bath without waiting for a reply. Rakti quickly followed and closed the door after us. Now the door would have disappeared to the outside world and the hooded man’s spells wouldn’t reach us, either. But the black mist was still wrapped around Yukina, strangling her. Maybe it hadn’t disappeared because it was coming from Yukina herself, so severing contact with the hooded man made no difference.

“Rakti, I’m going to start erasing it.”

“Got it!”

The path from the outer door to the inner building was nothing but stone and gravel, but we had laid out a blanket beforehand. I had wanted to lay Yukina on her stomach because of her wings, but the mist was coming from her chest. Rakti sat down and supported Yukina’s weight so that the source of the mist was facing me.

“I’ll save you, Yukina...”

“This mist is made of spirits of darkness. I’m going to hold it in place, so please dispel it in the meantime,” Rakti said, then squeezed her eyes shut. The mist

thinned out slightly and Yukina looked a little more relaxed. I placed my hand above the source of the mist on her chest, then chanted the spell.

“It’s going to be bright, so close your eyes, Yukina... Purifying Light!!”

The light emitting from my hand slowly forced the darkness to dissipate. However, as soon as I unfocused the spell, the mist would start spurting out again. What in the world had that hooded man cast on her?

“Please continue to restrain it like that... this isn’t a spell.”

“It’s not...?”

“This is the energy that constitutes her body, which is being turned into dark spirits and bleeding out from her.”

“Her body... dark spirits...?!”

I repeated Rakti’s words, then suddenly reached an epiphany. We had cut Rakti’s hair—a party of her own body—and she assembled it into a black orb. That mass of dark spirit energy was sitting inside the tatami-floored room right now. So demons’ bodies were made in the same way? And now Yukina’s body was hemorrhaging that energy.

“This isn’t a spell cast on her body, but a ‘wound’ made using magic. The dark spirit energy that makes up her body is bleeding from the wound, so we need to heal it first.”

In other words, we didn’t need a purification spell here, but a healing spell. Not only that, it needed to be a specific spell akin to Healing Light.

“Will she be okay?”

“D-Don’t worry! I can heal her!”

“I’m begging you, Rakti...”

Rakti’s brows furrowed as she squeezed her eyes tighter, a single bead of sweat streaking down her cheek. I poured more of my MP into Purifying Light, keeping the dark spirit energy at bay, and the mist slowly grew weaker while Yukina gradually looked more at ease. Rakti was doing something I couldn’t wrap my head around right now. This was the power of a goddess. The black mist spurting from Yukina’s chest gradually subsided until it completely

stopped.

“Phew... I did it. She’s okay now.”

I stopped maintaining my Purifying Light after I saw that Rakti had relaxed herself. Yukina then opened her eyes, noticing that the bright lights had gone away.

“Yukina...” I gently said her name, and tears formed in her eyes. *Ahh, it’s Yukina. It’s the same Yukina from years ago.*

After realizing she could move her body now, Yukina leaped toward me. “Touya! Touya...!” She shouted my name over and over again in a tearful tone. She must have felt so hopeless until now.



Everything is going to be okay. I'll protect you from now on. I vowed in my heart, then carefully hugged her back, her body so small and frail that it felt like it might break from the slightest pressure.

"Touya... I'm so happy for you." Rakti was tearing up too and blew her nose as she congratulated us.

"Yukina, are you okay? Does it hurt anywhere?"

"No... it doesn't... I'm alright, Touya."

Red marks remained on her arms from being constricted, but the immediate danger had passed. We weren't done yet, though. At the very least, the Inept Scout spell remained on her.

"Yukina, I'm going to break the other spells on you. Hold on just a little longer."

"The same light from just now? Okay, I understand." Yukina nodded obediently. She finally smiled. I'd make sure to break those spells so that her smile would never turn to tears again.

"Rakti, I'm counting on you.'

"Ah, yes. Besides the Inept Scout, there are seven other spells placed on her. Do your best to break all of them!"

"...She has *that* many?"

"Don't worry! All of them can be broken by Purifying Light!"

"O-Okay..."

Just how far had that hooded man gone? *I'll make sure to punch him again after we get out of here.* I noted to myself, then embarked on the task of breaking all the spells.

A control spell, an HP draining spell, an MP draining spell, a magic-sealing spell, a sight-blocking spell, a movement-sealing spell, and a tickling spell were the other spells that had been cast on her. I couldn't believe how much that guy had done. And what was the idea behind that tickling spell? That sounded terrifying, in a way.

Not to mention between all these spells he had cast on her, he had gone straight for a life-threatening one. Was he especially strict about traitors or did he just have a short fuse? Either way, he was incredibly quick on the offense. We'd be in trouble if these spells activated after we stepped outside, so I made sure to dispel them, one by one. I eventually managed to take care of all them without much resistance or difficulty.

After we confirmed all the spells were gone, I asked Yukina about the hooded man. I wanted to give her time to rest, but the battle was still raging on outside, so I had no choice but to push her a little more right now. We needed more information before returning outside.

"Yukina, who is that hooded man?" I asked, and then Yukina shifted herself to sit on my lap. Ahh, I remembered her doing this all the time in the past. It felt so nostalgic.

"He was the one who summoned me... everyone calls him Phoenix."

"Phoenix?" His cloak and hood didn't make him look bird-like at all, so I wondered where the nickname came from.

"Apparently he's immortal. I never checked to make sure, though."

Yukina said something crazy so nonchalantly. So his immortality granted him that nickname. I couldn't blame her for not being able to make sure, though. All the spells he had cast on her until now made it difficult for her to rise up against him. I bet he had made backup plans for today, too.

"I don't remember hearing the name Phoenix among the demon generals, though..."

Goldfish had never mentioned anyone by the name Phoenix in his ramblings. He was nowhere to be found in the history textbooks, either. I glanced at Rakti, who spoke up in a hesitant voice.

"I think, maybe... he might be a retired demon general."

"...What do you mean?" I asked dubiously, which made Rakti suddenly grow anxious. *I'm not scolding you, so calm down and talk to me.*

"Um, those nicknames are given when a general is inaugurated."

So it was a sort of mark of prestige for the generals. That was believable.

“So if he had a nickname, but isn’t known as a demon general, that might mean he became a general at some point but then quit for some reason...”

“What reason would a general have to quit...?” I couldn’t think of a single one. Or rather, I didn’t even know you *could* quit being a general.

He could cast all sorts of passive spells, but maybe he didn’t have much raw fighting strength. I suggested my theory, to which Yukina responded from my lap, “Touya... I might actually know the real reason.”

“Oh?”

“One of his subordinates mentioned it once. He said Phoenix was known for always being defeated in battle. But since he’s immortal, he would always be revived...”

“...Oh, so he didn’t quit, he was fired.”

He was a demon general who had fought 100 battles and lost all 100. On top of that, he would always eventually come back to life after the loss. This Phoenix must have been quite the nuisance. There was a limit to how much you could bother other people.

“Does that mean we have an easy victory in our hands...?”

“But he said he’s a strong Hero of Darkness, so no one can disobey him.”

“Hero of Darkness?”

“Apparently he was summoned at the same time the demon lord was. He always boasts about that.”

I glanced at Rakti, who simply whimpered in distress. Goldfish was the one who had summoned them, so it made sense that she wouldn’t know.

“...So basically, he’s the same rank as the Flame Devil and the Five Great Demon Generals?”

I didn’t know if he was also as strong as them, but he wasn’t someone we should go easy against. Just how much of a pain was he to deal with? Our opponent was immortal, not a great leader, and most likely strong. That was all

the information we had right now. We had better return to battle sooner than later.

I opened the door to the Unlimited Bath and surveyed our surroundings. It looked like everyone had finished taking care of the monsters already, but there were injured soldiers among the dolphins, so the white dolphin was going around healing them with magic. I wondered if the rest of my party was okay, so I looked around to find Clena, Roni, and Mark huddled together. Rium was circling above them on her flying disc.

Then I spotted Rulitora and the one-eyed dolphin—er, gillman—fighting repeatedly against Phoenix. The sharp sound of a glaive rang through the air several times over. On the opposite end, Phoenix's body was entirely covered in black flames as he wielded a long and short sword to deflect the oncoming attacks. Were those his *daisho*?

The one-eyed gillman was gliding along the ground, sometimes swinging his lance and other times throwing it. He no longer had a basket strapped to his back, but was instead taking the spears the other gillmen were handing to him along the way.

So Phoenix wasn't all magic, huh. Rulitora and the others were right in line with him, though. Or rather, it felt like they were steadily backing Phoenix into a corner.

I see, it was hard for everyone else to interrupt a battle of this level. Even Clena and the others could do nothing but watch. One thing in particular bothered me, though. As we witnessed the blades dancing through the air, I spoke to Rakti and Yukina, stunned.

"He's not wearing his hood anymore."

"Sister Fire's heat burned it away."

"He's enveloped by black fire right now, though."

"I think that's the same dark spirit energy we saw with Yukina just earlier."

"But now I can see his face."

"He's a skeleton."

“It’s my first time seeing his face, too. I had no idea...”

“What kind of demon is he?”

“He’s a type of monster called a necroarc. They’re kings of the undead. I’d heard they were monsters that had mastered magic, but...”

Rakti trailed off hesitantly. I couldn’t blame her since we were watching this supposed spell master brandishing two swords in the midst of battle. So he was supposed to be an equal to the Five Great Demon Generals? In any case, he was a king of the undead, a necroarc?

“What part of you is a ‘phoenix,’ then?! Why don’t you just call yourself the Undead King or something?!”

“Of course they wouldn’t let me call myself a king! We already had a demon lord!”

I had shouted at him without thinking, but Phoenix kicked Rulitora aside from their sword fight and rebutted me. I wasn’t actually expecting a comeback.

Rulitora had shielded himself against the kick with his greaves, but it had propelled him a distance away, so he gripped his glaive and calculated the timing for his next attack. The one-eyed gillman also paused to survey the situation.

Now we were in a bind. From what I could tell, I had no chance of winning against him in a direct battle. That was a matter of course, though. He was a purebred samurai who had lived through the Sengoku era, while I was some random high schooler who had grown up during a time of peace. It would be tricky to back up Rulitora and the gillman with spells since they were engaged in dizzyingly fast close-range combat. I had to think of another way to create an opening. Come to think of it, his comeback to my jab was pretty energetic. Almost as if he couldn’t avoid it, even. Maybe I could try something like that again. I mulled over my next step until Yukina started clinging to my arm.

“Touya...”

“What’s wrong?” Tears welled up in her eyes. Rakti started getting worried about the sudden change in mood. I looked at her, then softly stroked her silver hair.

“I’m so relieved, Yukina...”

“Yeah...”

“...That I never turned out like *that*.”

“I agree...!”

We gave each other a hug full of sibling love. The gillmen around us collapsed to the ground like they were in a comedy skit.

“I’d be fine with becoming a demon, as long as I don’t look like *that*.”

“I know what you mean!”

“Shut the hell up!!”

The two of us smiled at each other, then Phoenix turned his scream our way.

“Now then, summon spirit!”

We had been waiting for that reaction, though. Yukina remained within my embrace as I stretched an arm out to fire off light spirits. I made them explode right before Phoenix’s eyes to blind him. As he flinched, I used the earth spirits at my feet to restrain his feet to the ground. I condensed the earth to the point it became black, so he wouldn’t be getting out of there so easily.

“What?! Urgh... Oh, Yukina! Perfect timing. Take them down...!”

Phoenix finally noticed Yukina after he scowled at us with his vacant eye sockets. He was probably trying to make Yukina turn against us. He pointed his short sword at her... but nothing happened. Well, of course. He just didn’t know yet.

“What?! Are you joking?!”

“Yeah, that’s right. But you’re the joke here.”

“What did you say?! You’re not getting away with that!!”

I taunted him even further and this time he brandished his long sword at me.

“Yaaargh!”

But not a moment later, Rulitora jumped up from behind and launched Phoenix’s head into the air. Only a few seconds had passed, but that was more

than enough time for Rulitora. I could see him leaping toward us from behind Phoenix this whole time. That was his own fault for getting distracted by us, though. I started understanding why he'd become known as the man who lost 100 battles. His body collapsed to the ground lifelessly.

"You bastard, who did that?! Who sent my head flying?! Get over here, lizard!!"

...His head was still yapping, though. No wonder he was immortal.

"He might still be able to use magic. Rulitora, take care of him."

"Understood."

The skull was still spouting black flames, so Rulitora took the blunt end of his glaive and smashed him to pieces. Maybe his comebacks were witty, but he couldn't take a joke and had a microscopic fuse. I bet that had something to do with why he had lost so many times. Just now, Yukina had thought up the idea to rile Phoenix and bring his attention to us, which I had guessed and thus played along with her.

"You two sure were merciless... did you come up with that beforehand?"

Clena and Roni approached us and asked. They had all fallen down earlier after realizing what our plan was. Now she was just looking at us in exasperation, though.

"No way. I was worried about you guys, so we hurried out here as soon as we could."

"So then..."

"I can at least tell when Yukina is thinking up stuff like that."

Yukina jumped on me again after she heard my reply. She wore a big smile on her face. Now this was sibling love. *Come on, Clena. There's no reason for you to make that exasperated face again.*

"H-Hey! Look at that!" Mark suddenly interrupted our conversation with a yell. He was pointing at Phoenix's fallen body. The black flames that had covered the body until now had disappeared and it started crumbling apart.

"Wh-What's going on...?" We stared dumbfounded at the sight until Rakti

told us what was happening.

“That probably means he reached his limit.”

“Limit?”

“Those black flames... that was a spell to increase his strength at the expense of draining his life away. Of course, it’s not a spell you can maintain forever, so when you reach its limit...” Rakti trailed off and looked at Phoenix, so I did the same and witnessed both his body and head crumbling to ashes and fading away.

“So he literally burned himself to ashes...”

“Wait, you mean he’s not immortal?!” Mark exclaimed. He had a point, though. He was supposed to be immortal, yet he burned himself to ash.

Yukina then helped to clarify. “He’ll come back after a while. I’ve seen it many times before.”

“Since he’ll be resurrected, he had no qualms about using a spell that would burn himself away, huh...” Rulitora murmured, baffled. I knew exactly how he was feeling.

I was wondering if we should have stuffed his body in a bag and threw him in the ocean before it happened, but then I saw the two swords he had been using. They both had awfully wicked designs with a skull ornament decorated pommel. I didn’t know the history behind those swords, but if we seized them, he would at least be a grade more helpless after he revived. And so I took a step toward the swords, but then someone unexpected came swooping down on us.

“I won’t let you!” Balsamina, who should have been fighting against Cosmos, appeared before us. She flapped her large wings and flew past our heads, then snatched up the two swords and flew away.

“You damn idiots! Just you wait! The prince is looking for a way to revive the demon lord right now!!”

“What...?”

She left us with a surprising tidbit of information. The prince was looking for a way to revive the demon lord? By prince, did she mean the Dark Prince? None

of us managed to land an attack on her as we were caught off guard, so all we could do was watch her figure fade into the distance.

“Hey there!”

We stood shocked for a while, and then Cosmos, Ricott, and Foley came running toward us. The princess was nowhere to be seen. She had probably stayed at the beach along with her bodyguards.

“Hello, Touya, my friend! Did Balsamina come by here?”

“Y-Yeah, you just missed her. She took the weapons that the boss of this place was using and flew away.”

“Thank you! Oh, your plan with the young lady went well, I see? Congratulations! Now then, I’ll be off!” Cosmos rattled off his comments and then hurried off with his comrades.

Yukina called out to them from behind. “There’s a cave over there! That’s the entrance to the hideout!”

“Thank you! I won’t give up! I’ll make sure Balsamina... oomph?!” Cosmos had turned backwards, waving at us. But he hadn’t stopped running, so he stumbled and fell in the middle of his sentence. He jumped back up as if nothing had happened, though, and then waved at us again and ran off.

I see, so they hadn’t managed to persuade Balsamina. Unlike Yukina, I had no idea if she even entertained the thought of joined our side, so it came as no surprise.

“Their hideout, huh... will they be okay by themselves?”

“It’ll be okay as long as Phoenix isn’t there. Though Balsamina might run away from them.” According to Yukina, the hideout itself wasn’t that big and most of the monsters had come out to fight us, so it should be essentially empty now.

“Hey, Yukina? I want to ask you something.”

“What is it?”

“Would *you* be able to persuade Balsamina?”

The question had been on my mind as well, but Clena was the first to ask. If

we stood a chance, then we could help Cosmos.

“Huh? No way. She was like, my superior? I had to be with her because I couldn’t disobey orders, but we weren’t exactly friends.” Yukina immediately denied the possibility, though.

Come to think of it, she definitely seemed like she had just been following Balsamina’s orders ever since we met at the bath. She must have been a pain for Yukina to deal with as she schemed her escape plan. In that case, we would be of no help to Cosmos even if we chased after him.

“I suppose there’s no need for us to go after Cosmos, then.”

“...I guess.” Clena agreed with Rulitora. She must have been worried, but came to the same conclusion I did.

“Balsamina might be there and all, so we would just be bothering them.”

I was curious, but we’d just be a nuisance to Cosmos if he were to continue trying to persuade her. I just had to hope he’d successfully convinced her to come to our side and bring her back. I started wondering what we should do next, but then the white dolphin called out to us.

“Um, how about it? If you all don’t mind, I’d like to invite you to our village...”

He had an amicable tone of voice. He didn’t look like a bad person, but then again I had no idea how to judge a dolphin’s facial expressions. Yukina had been the one to bring them here, so I turned to her to check.

“Yukina, who in the world are they?”

“They’re the, um... gillmen? living on this island. They viewed Phoenix as an enemy too, so I started working with them in secret.”

“I see, so...”

Yukina had never intended to wallow under Phoenix’s watch forever. She had already started scheming before we even reunited with each other. Her original plan had been to leave Balsamina distracted with Cosmos, render Phoenix powerless with the aid of the gillmen, then have the white dolphin break the spells on her. So Yukina had already thought up her own strategy to break free.

However, that plan would have likely ended in them unable to seal the wound

that made the black mist spurt from her chest. Thank goodness we found each other before she went through with it. If she had been cooperating with the gillmen until now, though, then we could trust them. I looked at Clena, who had come to the same conclusion and nodded back at me.

“I understand. Please guide us there.”

“Alright, this way then.”

The white dolphin lead the group. The other gillmen, including the one-eyed one, surrounded us as we walked. They might have been escorting us, but they also must have been wary since we were still armed. I figured it was a reasonable reaction, so I didn’t comment on it. We eventually reached the coast, where the gillmen’s village was located. All the meanwhile, I had been thinking about how scary my Magic Eater armor must have looked to them.

We eventually reached an inlet along the shore where several small cabins were floating above the water. The coast was surrounded by trees, so this watery village would be hard to spot from outside the island.

As we approached the village, several unarmed gillmen came to greet us. I figured the armed ones were men and the unarmed ones were women, but I couldn’t tell the difference just based on appearance. I had assumed the one-eyed gillman with a gruff voice was a man, but what if it was actually a woman? After checking with Yukina, I breathed a sigh of relief after she confirmed he was male. Apparently you could tell a gillman’s gender by voice after they became adults. Though of course, some of them were less obvious than others.

“Everyone! We defeated Phoenix and the monsters! A hero has invaded their base, so we have nothing more to worry about!”

The gillmen from the village cheered at Yukina’s announcement. They had also wanted Phoenix’s hideout gone, which was obvious from their reaction. That was the reason they had conspired with Yukina, after all.

“Do you think we also should have gone to the hideout in case they leave it to chase Balsamina?”

“No, I think it’ll be fine. Ricott was with them, after all.”

I would have been more worried if Cosmos was alone, but the ever-

responsible Ricott had gone with them, so I trusted that she wouldn't leave the hideout unattended.

I looked around us and saw cabins lined up all along the coast. Gillmen primarily spent their life in the ocean, but they slept in these little roofed houses at night. This must have been the safest option, considering monsters also inhabited the waters.

Parasols made from giant leaves stood on top of the sand, giving the beach a very southern flair. Below each of them were benches and straw mats. I wondered if Yukina slept on those when she came here.

"Have you stayed here overnight before?" Roni asked.

"I haven't. I couldn't be away from the hideout for that long," Yukina answered as she fluttered her black wings. She must have gone through so much hardship.

The gillmen would be throwing a celebration in their village tonight. We wouldn't be able to join them underwater, but we could at least enjoy a seafood feast with them.

This island had been kept secret from the people of Neptune since the majority of them were followers of the Goddess of Light, but apparently it was common knowledge among the fishermen. The gillmen had informed us as such on the way here. Clena and the others hadn't managed to learn about this island when they were asking around, but maybe that was because I was known as a hero who was affiliated with the light temple. I had wanted to ask the white dolphin about the temple of the Goddess of Water, but now I was worried that they were vigilant of me. I was mulling over how to bring the subject up when the white dolphin suddenly called my name.

"Sir Touya, I would like to show you something. Would you mind coming with me?"

"Oh? What do you want to show me?"

"...The temple of the Goddess of Water."

Surprisingly, he was the one to bring it up. It was convenient, but a little *too* convenient, so I put on a doubtful expression. I glanced at Yukina, but she just

shook her head and waved her hands without an answer. So she didn't know about this either.

"...Is it okay to take Touya there? He's a Hero of the Temple of the Goddess of Light, you know?"

"There is no issue. It has been decreed by the oracle of the Goddess of Water."

Clena also questioned him to make sure, but he dismissed our doubts with a smile.

The oracle, huh? It would be safe to assume the Goddess of Water herself approved of this, then.

"My goal is to receive the blessing of the Goddess of Water... can I assume you'll do that for me?" I asked, and the white dolphin nodded back. "...I understand. Lead the way. Is the temple somewhere within the village?"

"It is not, but it is somewhere humans can get to without having to swim," the white dolphin said, then turned around and started heading toward the ocean.

"Wait, didn't you just say we didn't need to swim?"

"Oh? Yes, that is correct. Your feet should touch the ground the whole time."

"...Uh-huh." I should probably change into something lighter, like a swimsuit. "Sorry, I need to get ready, so please wait a bit."

I stopped the white dolphin and opened the door to the Unlimited Bath. The path to the temple was apparently safe, so I chose to wear no armor over my swimsuit and brought one weapon with me just in case.

"Ooh, it's bikini armor..."

"This isn't armor."

It was the only thing I could think of since Clena and Roni were wearing nothing but swimsuits with a single belt strapped around their hips and a sheathed sword hanging from them. Though I was also in swimming trunks and carrying a spear from Hadesopolis so that I could easily deal with underwater monsters. This getup made me want to try spearfishing.

“I’m jealous, your swimsuits are so cute...”

“We’ll buy one for you when we get back to the city.” I patted Yukina’s head as she stared at the other girls in envy. She then badgered me to carry her through the water so that she wouldn’t get wet. She could just fly, but it was our unwritten rule to not mention that. This was just a cute little request, anyway. Needless to say, I complied without delay. The blessing of the Goddess of Water was important, but I also wanted to hurry and make time for us to sit down together for a chat.

We waded through water that came up to my waist until we reached a cave that opened up into the wharf. The room inside was spacious and natural light illuminated the cave from above. I couldn’t spot anything that resembled an altar, though. Maybe I couldn’t expect much more from a temple that wasn’t the head temple. Clena and the others were also looking around with slightly disappointed faces. It looked like I’d need to find the head water temple to redo this ritual as with the Goddess of Earth’s blessing.

“Could you tell us where the head temple for the Goddess of Water is later?”

“Hmm? What is a head temple?” The white dolphin cocked his head as he asked an unexpected question.

I explained what a head temple was, and then he chuckled and said, “In that case, this is the head temple too.”

Was he really saying that this empty cave was the head temple? Or rather, what did he mean by “too”? I looked to my right, left, up, and finally down, then realized what he meant.

“Don’t tell me... it’s the ocean itself?!”

“Yes, all the seas are connected to the Goddess of Water.”

I see, so the temple didn’t have a specific location, but was the sea itself. So all the world’s oceans were the head temple of the Goddess of Water. Going by that logic, all the land in the world should have fallen under the Goddess of Earth, but maybe the existence of the other goddesses prevented that. Considering her magnanimous personality, I could see her splitting her territory with the other goddesses without a word.

Yukina, who had been listening to our conversation, inquired to the white dolphin, “So why did you make this cave a temple? Couldn’t you build one on the coast?”

“That would take time, and isn’t the best option the one that causes the least inconvenience to others?” The white dolphin gave a blunt reply. They probably didn’t mind inconveniencing themselves a little if it meant leaving minimal marks around their habitat.

“...Do you mind if we watch?” Rium asked.

“I find no issue with it.”

Since having others around wouldn’t get in the way of the ritual, the rest decided to stick around until the ceremony was complete. As everyone looked on, the white dolphin raised his staff and began chanting the ritual prayers in a solemn voice. Come to think of it, this was my third time witnessing this ceremony, but I still had no idea what those prayers meant. Apparently these words were part of some language even the blessing from the Goddess of Light couldn’t decipher.

My role in the ceremony simply consisted of sitting down and listening to the cleric chant, so it was pretty tedious. This time I was sitting on some rocks surrounded by water, so I couldn’t help but be distracted by the waves undulating against me. In fact, my lower half was getting chilly. Light was streaming from above, but we were still inside a cave, so the water’s temperature was much lower compared to the water near the beach. I wanted to get in a piping hot bath as soon as this was over with.

I took a peek at Clena and the others, who had all sat themselves down on flat rocks jutting out of the water. They’d be much colder if they stayed in the water, so they made a good decision. In any case, I withstood the cold water until the blessing ceremony was complete.

After that, I asked the white dolphin if they had any textbooks on water cleric spells, but unfortunately gillmen didn’t even have the technology to create books in the first place. I should be able to feel my way around starting with summoning water spirits, so the only thing left was to wait for the Goddess of Water to appear in my dreams.

“More importantly, my legs are freezing! Let’s hurry and get back to land!”

“Hahahah! That might have been a little difficult for humans.”

“Is this one of the reasons why the Goddess of Water fell out of favor in Neptune?”

“If you wish to just offer your prayers here, it is fine to do so by boat.”

“Oh, so that’s why the fishermen knew...”

I see, so even if they were followers, they didn’t have their own cleric. And now I understood why Phoenix’s hideout had never been found even though this island was so close to Neptunopolis. They didn’t want to stir up any conflict against the gillmen, so they opted to stay out of the situation rather than possibly mess anything up. I finally started to put the pieces together by the time we returned to the village.

There was still some time before the party started, so I decided to warm myself up with a bath first. I opened the door to the Unlimited Bath to find that the insides had changed yet again.

“Huh? Touya... it looks different in here.”

The path to the building inside was longer, and the building itself obviously bigger to the point that Yukina had noticed the difference even though it was only her second time here. The space inside the Unlimited Bath had grown again.

“...There’s another room, too.” Rium had surmised that there was space for a new room on the right side of the building, so she went ahead to confirm that there was indeed a new room there.

There was also now a large pond on the right side of the garden, diagonal from the fire altar. I approached it and while there was no new altar present, there was a flat rock at the edge with a magic circle engraved on it. Since this was my gift, I could learn exactly what its purpose was just by touching it.

“This is a summoning device.”

“Summoning? What can it summon?”

“You see, this little device... can take the fish from nearby waters and

transport them here!”

“.....”

Say something, Clena. I was trying my best to make that sound exciting.

The water in this pond had just the right levels of salt for fish from the sea and fish from rivers to thrive in. On top of that, it had the convenient feature of automatically transporting the fish back if we closed the door to the Bath while there were still fish inside.

“...That’s it?”

I averted my eyes at Clena’s sarcastic comment. Sorry, we still had to catch them ourselves after the fish were summoned here.

“Well, this summoning spell is a sure sign that a goddess’ powers are at play.”

Thank you for the support, Rakti.

Rium nodded earnestly next to her. As a crystal mage, she probably knew better than I did how amazing this summoning stone was. We could wait to test it out though, since the gillmen would be providing us with plenty of seafood tonight.

I turned around and gazed toward the location of the new room. The room looked smaller than the pond, but it was still part of the gift from the Goddess of Water’s blessing. The room had a back door we could open from here, but I couldn’t have predicted what we found inside.

“Huh? Is this another kitchen?”

There was a sink with two faucets. I couldn’t spot a stove though, so this wasn’t a kitchen. A shelf on the wall was lined with hand nets, fishing rods, and other tools to use for the pond outside.

Roni approached the sink first, wagging her tail as she started poking around. “It looks like a normal faucet. Oh, but there’s no control panel.”

Apparently these faucets had no control panel attached to alter the water’s temperature. Basically, the water would only come out here at a constant temperature. Roni turned the tap, but something alarming started gushing out of it.

“Whoa, what’s going on with that water?! Get away from there, Roni!”

The water from the faucet was dyed a different color. Clena raised her voice in surprise at the bright orange water, and then Roni nimbly leapt back to safety. However, Yukina and I approached the faucet with dumbfound expressions. I put my face near it and could smell something sweet. I then put my hand under it and learned what it was.

“It’s okay, Yukina.”

“Y-You sure? Then let me try...” Yukina stuck a finger under the liquid, then took a single lick of it. “Touya, this is... orange juice!”

Yes, the liquid pouring out of the faucet was 100% pure orange juice.

“S-So it’s safe...?”

“Don’t worry, it’s perfectly drinkable. It’s refreshing.”

Clena and Roni scuffled toward us with timid steps, so I ensured them that it would do them no harm. Of course, it was completely drinkable, and even though it was created from my MP, it had the same nutritional value as the real thing. Well, anyone would be surprised if a regular old tap would start pouring orange juice instead of normal water.

“Then what’s this one...?”

Rium turned the tap on the other faucet. This time, an amber-colored liquid streamed out. The smell of it was a little familiar. I put my hand under this faucet as well and determined what it was.

“...This one’s udon broth.”

The taste was simple and nostalgic.

“Um, the udon broth thingy that tastes of the sea is connected to sister Water, and sister Earth’s aura is strongly emitting from the orange juice.”

No, you didn’t have to explain it, Rakti. Anyway, a bath, a kitchen, and now orange juice and udon broth? What in the world was my gift?

But I couldn’t let myself feel dejected after coming this far. I had used my Unlimited Bath to save the Torano’o clan and defeat a demon general. The

value of a gift depended entirely on how you utilized it. I straightened myself back up and cleared my mind.

“Come on, the orange juice can be drunk directly. Let’s get some cups.”

“Okay...” Rium scrambled away, immensely curious about the new toy.

“This udon broth can be used for cooking.”

“Really? I can bring over a pot, then.”

“Sure. I’ll teach you everything I know about it.”

We could use the broth in a variety of dishes. We couldn’t get udon noodles right now, but the broth could be a base for stews. Only certain ingredients would pair well with it, but we could make something like oden.

“This takes me back~ I’m excited, Touya!” Yukina smiled happily. Haruno would appreciate this taste, too.

All abilities had their purpose. Since this gift was the card I was given, I might as well use it to enrich our lives as much as we could. I regained my composure and then headed to the bathing room. This was the centerpiece of my gift, after all. I wanted to wash away all my doubts about this being my main gift, along with the fatigue of battle.

“...Well, that’s no surprise.”

“What’s wrong, Touya?”

The girls and I had stripped down and prepared to enter the bath, but we stood stock still as soon as we saw the new bath. Yukina was the only nonchalant one, since this was her first time seeing the bathing room anyway.

“It sure has gotten... a *lot* bigger...”

Yeah, it was bigger. I ran out of the building even though I was in my yuamigi and made sure that the section of the building had expanded, along with the rest of the Unlimited Bath. I had been distracted by the pond before, so I failed to notice that the Bath itself had expanded in size. I returned and checked the walls, ceiling, and the floor of the showering area to find that everything in the room was now made of Japanese hinoki. The bathtub itself had grown a size or two, and the longer side of the rectangle faced the showering area. Of course,

that meant that the showering area had grown wider as well, so more faucets and showerheads filled the space.

There was a handrail going down the center of the bathtub, splitting it in two. It looked like the bath went deeper past the railing. We could actually swim in this thing.

“Um, is it okay to go in? These girls look like they can’t contain themselves for much longer.”

I turned around at Clena’s voice and saw Rium, Rakti, and Roni with their eyes sparkling. Roni was usually in charge of keeping the younger girls in check, but now even she couldn’t resist the allure of the bigger bath. I’d better let them go sooner than later.

“Yeah, it’s fine. The bath gets deeper past the railing though, so be careful.”

I said, and then the three girls scrambled to pour water over themselves before jumping into the bath. They were pouring the buckets of water over each other like they were playing at the beach. Though it was more like we were at an indoor pool.

I kept an eye on the girls as I approached Yukina, but then Clena also drew near her. Maybe Clena wanted to play too, but held herself back because she was worried about Yukina.

“Thank you, Clena.”

“Don’t worry about it. Touya’s little sister is my little sister as well,” Clena said as she blushed a little.

She was being so open-minded, but Yukina only responded by puffing her cheeks in a pout. I shouldn’t be the one saying it, but she held her older brother dear. Just as I predicted she would, she clung onto me and faced Clena. I imagined she was sticking her tongue out at her right now. I couldn’t tell from my angle, but I was pretty sure I was right. Clena was taken aback by the reaction at first, but then she played along and pouted back.



You shouldn't be giving someone who's worried about you that attitude, Yukina. I lightly poked her head. She looked up at me to object, but I just stared back at her until she started sulking a little, then eventually gave up and bowed her head in Clena's direction.

"Alright, good girl. I'm sorry as well, Clena."

"Oh, no, don't worry about it. She must have thought I was stealing you away from her," Clena said, which made Yukina flick her head away in defiance.

Her quirks were the exact same even though she had been reborn as a demon. *Your older brother is so happy, Yukina.*

First things first, I wanted to warm myself up in a hot bath. Of course, I poured a bucket of water over myself first like the other girls had done. I had told the other girls to do so since it was proper etiquette in Japanese baths, so I needed to set an example here. I poured a bucket of water over Yukina, which made her wet hair glisten. These two silver-haired girls really did look like they could be sisters. Next, the two of us sat down in the bath. Not wanting to be a third wheel, Clena opted to join Roni and the other girls.

This new bath really did feel wide open. It was a world of difference from the time this tub could barely fit two people without us overlapping each other. Though those were good times as well, in a way.

"This is an amazing bath. Did you create this, Touya?" Yukina waded next to me and rested her head on my shoulder. It made me recall our days from back when she was alive. Come to think of it, our bathroom from the apartment we were living in was about the same size as my initial Unlimited Bath.

Yeah, now everything was coming back to me. The days we had spent together and my little sister's death. Yukina had been sickly since she was born. Both of my parents had time-consuming jobs, so I had started taking care of her when I was in fourth grade. That was the reason why I was so good at washing the girls' hair, too. I wasn't a natural at it, but I experimented little by little to make the experience at least a little more pleasant for Yukina. My life had centered around Yukina back then, but that had never been a bad thing in my mind. In fact, I found it fun to spend my days with her. Now that I thought about it, my past experience might have lead to the Unlimited Bath taking form

as my gift.

Of course, I knew that my parents weren't leading the easiest lives. I couldn't count the number of times I had witnessed them fighting. Back then, I did everything I could to keep Yukina from knowing about it.

"Touya...?"

Oh no, it was showing on my face. I didn't want Yukina to ever find out about that.

She had been reincarnated and her body was perfectly healthy now. The fact that she had become a demon was nothing more than a trivial detail. Not to mention I was on the verge of becoming a demon myself. The only things preventing that from happening were the blessings of light, fire, and earth, as well as Rakti's orb of darkness. My lively sister was right next to me right now, and that was most important. I wanted to talk with her more.

"Hey, Yukina. Could you tell me about what happened since you were summoned here?"

"Oh, okay. Though it's been less than a year since I came here..."

Yukina looked about the same as I remembered her. Since she had become a demon, I had been curious whether her actual age still matched her physical appearance or not, but thankfully she hadn't become my "older" little sister. What should I call her now, though? My "non-blood-related yet blood-related little sister"? No, I wasn't sure how factual that still was. It looked like I wouldn't find an answer to that, but she was still my little sister no matter what, so the rest wasn't important.

On another note, what was up with the two year time gap? Was the dark hero summoning spell that lenient in its time frame? Or maybe this world and my old world weren't on the same timeline. I asked Rakti, our resident goddess, but she said she wasn't sure either. I guess I just had to accept that that was the way it worked.

"Phoenix was the one who summoned me. He said that a country called Jupiter was trying to summon a hero of light, so they summoned me as a countermeasure."

“So you were picked...”

In that case, I was grateful for both the sacred family in Jupiter and Phoenix. If it hadn’t been for them, I would never have been able to see Yukina again.

“And then they put me through a lot of training.”

“Was it painful?”

“Not at all! I mean, I can move around so much now.” Yukina sprang up and spread her arms apart energetically. The sight almost brought me to tears, thinking about her physical state in the past.

“I see, that’s great...” I said and spread my arms out as well, and then she leapt into them. *I won’t let go of you again,* I thought, and embraced her slender body tightly within my arms.

Anyway, Yukina had lived almost a full year as a demon now, huh? Now I wondered why she had been with Balsamina when she attacked us at the Maiden of the Roaring Waves.

“What relationship do you have with that other demon, Balsamina?”

“I became her subordinate recently.”

So they hadn’t known each other for that long. Oh yeah, had Cosmos managed to persuade her to come to us yet?

“Apparently her old subordinate had been defeated in the void just a while ago. So they transferred me over to her.”

Was she talking about that demon we had fought, Maius? The world was a small place.

“But all I did was listen to her complain every time she went out and came back defeated...” So all those times she had tried to attack Cosmos but came back unsuccessful, she had complained to Yukina afterward. “And actually, the first time we went out together was that time we saw each other.”

I see, so then they mistook me for Cosmos and attacked us. If they had identified Cosmos correctly, then he would have dealt with Balsamina personally, leaving Yukina with the elite guards. Essentially, our battle against Maius created a butterfly effect that eventually let Yukina and I reunite. It was

practically a miracle. I looked over to Clena, who had overheard and returned a shocked expression.

“...Hey, Touya.”

“Hm? What is it?”

“I became a demon, but... will you stay with me?”

“Of course I will,” I replied without hesitation.

Yukina might have been self-conscious about it, but I couldn’t care less. Since less than a year had passed for her, she was still the same Yukina I always knew. She was my adorable little sister. Even if she had been reincarnated and even if we were no longer blood-related, that fact would never change.

“I see...♪” After hearing my reply, she happily rested her cheek against my chest.

A small hand started patting Yukina’s head. The other four girls had come over without me noticing.

“All of us... together.” Rium continued patting Yukina’s head while giving me a thumbs up with her other hand. She looked a little proud of herself.

Yukina stared blankly at the other girls. “Um, but...”

“Are you worried about the fact that you’re a demon? I hadn’t introduced myself yet, but I’m Clena. I’m a half-demon, born from a human mother and a demon father.” Clena smiled and offered a hand, which Yukina took while still looking perplexed.

“I’m Roni, a lycaon!”

“...Rium. Human.”

“Um, I’m Yukina... a demon.”

I nodded to myself, satisfied at their introductions. It looked like Yukina would be welcome in the party, not just with me. I knew the girls would be fine with her, but it still brought me relief seeing them shake hands with each other like this. We’d need to introduce her to Rulitora and the others as well, but I wasn’t worried about that either.

Roni then urged Rakti, who had been hiding behind Clena, to step forward. “U-Um, I’m Rakti. I’m the Goddess of Darkness. Sorry.”

And then she apologized right off the bat. Maybe she was referring to the whole hero summoning situation, even though she had nothing to do with it.

“...Goddess?”

“Oh, you can call me Rakti. That’s what Touya and everyone else calls me.”

Yukina was dumbstruck by the friendly goddess. After taking some time to process it, she peered at Rakti and exclaimed, “Rakti! I want a gift, too!”

“...What?”

“It’s no fair that only Touya gets one! Give me one, too! Like an Unlimited Convenience Store, or maybe an Unlimited Shopping Mall!”

Er, an Unlimited Shopping Mall would be *way* too convenient. I wanted one too, if that was possible.

“Um, sister Light is the one who grants gifts, I only...”

“You’re lacking in customer service, Rakti!”

“Customer service?!”

That wasn’t the issue here.

Yukina’s quirky energy was rubbing off on Rakti.

“Since sister Light summons people who are still alive, she grants them new powers. My power revives the dead, so I grant them new bodies! If I granted you a gift, then you wouldn’t have the body to use it!”

“...I get it now!” Yukina clapped her hands together in understanding. Actually, this was my first time hearing about this, too. So that was why I received a gift at the same time I had gotten blessed.

“Okay then, give me one now!”

“That’s impossible! Gifts are granted to people who were summoned from another world, but you were reincarnated, so you’re considered someone from this world!”

Don't be so greedy, Yukina. Though I could understand why she was so tempted, since the Unlimited Bath was so useful. If I could, I would split this gift with her, but it didn't work that way. In any case, I should calm her down. I waded over to Yukina.

"Hey, you're all warmed up now, right? It's been a while, so let me wash your hair."

"Okay!♥" Her face quickly lit up as she jumped onto me. Her tail, which was lifting up her yuamigi, wagged around energetically. She reminded me of a dog. She had always enjoyed having me wash her hair ever since we were little.

I picked her up like a princess, which made her eyes open wide. And then I suddenly realized—I had picked her up out of habit, but she wasn't the same Yukina anymore.

"Sorry, you can walk by yourself now..."

"No, it's okay. Let's go like this for today..." Yukina smiled and nuzzled her cheek against me.

I had her seal of approval now. This made me happier as well, so I carried her to the showers and sat her down at a stool. I was pumping myself up to wash her hair for the first time in a long time, but then someone poked my shoulder. I turned around to find Rium, looking like she wanted to say something. I bet she wanted her hair washed, too. But then she turned back and returned to the bathtub. She then stared at me as if she was waiting for me to do something.

Oh, was that it? She wanted me to carry her, too. I noticed that Rakti was also gazing my way slightly embarrassed, and Roni was doing the same but with an apologetic look. All their stares were colored with expectation. Clena was the only one who had her arms folded, looking the other way.

"...Yukina, wait here for a second."

"Okay, got it."

Yukina let me go, but her smile looked a little impatient. I couldn't keep any of them waiting.

Rium's expression didn't change as I carried her over, but her body felt the

slightest bit tense. I bet those flushed cheeks weren't just from the heat of the bath, either. Yukina didn't seem to fully understand and assumed she was just being nervous.

When I tried picking Rakti up, she wrapped her arms and legs around me and clung to me with her entire body. She reminded me of Yukina when she was younger. I recalled the time she hugged me like this and wouldn't let go when we had entered a haunted house. Yukina was also looking at her with an air of nostalgia.

Roni was getting flustered as I approached her, trying to back down from the offer, but she became more obedient after I picked her up and she turned bright red to her ears. She wasn't too used to this sort of treatment, after all. Yukina thought the scene was cute as well as she stared at Roni with a grin.

"You're the last one, Clena."

"Wh-Why am I included?!"

"Well, you kept looking back at us even while you were pretending not to care."

"Ugh... well, I'm... heavy..."

I involuntarily looked at a certain part of her body, but I wouldn't say which.

To show her how strong I had become, I half-forcefully tried to pick her up, but she flailed her arms and legs to resist. The moment her feet left the ground, though, she immediately became docile. I had gained plenty of muscle since being summoned here, so she was light as a feather for me. Yukina had been grinning at us all the while. After these past couple of incidents, she must have thought she was discovering Clena's weak points.

"Clena, Roni, we don't have much more time until the banquet. Can you two help?"

I would wash all of their hair myself if we had the time, but since the gillmen invited us to their feast, we had to make things quick. For tonight, we'd better wash ourselves in pairs.

"Yeah, we don't want to be late to the party."

“Understood. We’ll leave Yukina to you, Touya.”

Everyone else understood what I had meant as well. I faced Yukina again, then paused as I stared at what was growing from her back and butt.

“...How should I wash your wings and tail?”

“Be gentle!♪” Yukina flapped her wings mischievously. I obviously couldn’t hurt her. For now, I would just make sure to be gentle and thorough with her.

“.....”

Halfway into washing her hair, she suddenly became quiet. I looked at her reflection in the mirror—she was squeezing her eyes shut, holding back tears. Yeah, this really did take us back. So many things had transpired, but I finally felt like we were truly back together now. I looked around and noticed everyone else gazing at Yukina, too. Their eyes were kind.

Yukina, you didn’t just come back to me. You gained new friends, too. I wanted her to understand that. I brushed my fingers through her shiny silver hair as I wished so.



A short time after that, we exited the bath, changed, and went back outside. The sky was now painted red and the evening sun was slowly sinking into the horizon. They had just finished setting up for the banquet.

Yukina had no clothes other than that bikini she had been wearing, so I gave her a cloak so that she wouldn't catch a cold. She happily accepted it and draped it over herself. I spotted Cosmos' party in the crowd, but Balsamina was nowhere to be seen.

"Oh, Balsamina's such a shy girl!"

Apparently he had failed in his quest to persuade her again. So we wouldn't get more information on the demon lord's revival now, either. Judging by Cosmos' behavior, he wasn't about to back down just yet. I was sure he'd pick himself right back up and start again where he last left off. I decided to leave Balsamina to him and look for another approach.

Since I probably wouldn't get a proper conversation out of Cosmos, I called out to Princess Franchellis and Ricott. Clena and Yukina were with me. They must have wanted some information from Yukina as well, since she had been staying at that hideout.

"There wasn't much left in that hideout, right? There were never many monsters there in the first place, and most of them had gone out to the coast today."

"Yes, we only came across a few of them. We destroyed the hideout so that it couldn't be used again just in case, but could the monsters be hiding anywhere else?"

"I guess Balsamina would be the only one left? Oh, and Phoenix, too. He'll come back after a while. Though I bet he'll go straight back to headquarters instead of sticking around here."

"So he really was immortal... Do you know where the headquarters are located?"

"Ahh, sorry, I don't know. I was only told that this place *wasn't* the headquarters."

After hearing Yukina's reply, the princess covered her mouth with her fan and sighed. I knew how she felt. I had already accomplished my goal of saving my little sister, so now Cosmos' party just needed to deal with Balsamina.

"Actually, Balsamina said something when she crossed us..." I informed them about what she had told us, and they listened on with serious expressions. Now they knew what sort of information they could get from Balsamina if they managed to persuade her.

In any case, Phoenix's hideout was now completely annihilated. Peace would return to the gillmen's village. On that note, Yukina had thought the hideout would be completely empty, but the princess' party had recovered a small treasure box hidden in what they suspected to be Phoenix's room.

"Um, so this is...?"

"Phoenix had a hidden stash?!"

"...You think that's what this is, too?"

The box contained precious jewels and other treasures. The princess offered to split the treasures in half with us, but my priority had been with Yukina today and I left the hideout and all the monsters for them to take care of, so I politely rejected.

"Look, it's the Grande Nautilus." Meanwhile, the Grande Nautilus had pulled up to the inlet. Rulitora and Mark had returned from retrieving the rest of the group. The party was about to start now that everyone was here, so I saved the heavy topics for later.

The banquet consisted of a wide assortment of seafood barbecue. The gillmen apparently loved grilled fish. They normally ate raw fish, so grilled fish was considered a luxury for special occasions. Since they had lost control of the majority of their island, they hadn't been able to retrieve wood for grilling. Maybe that was actually the worst of the damage Phoenix had caused.

I took the opportunity to open up the Goddess of Fire's kitchen and cook some fish in there. Grilled fish, fried fish, and meunière were just a few of the dishes on our menu. However, the most popular dish of all was the fish broiled in udon broth. The white dolphin cleric even had tears streaking down his face

as he exclaimed, “This is the blessing of a goddess...!” Udon broth sure was amazing.

Pardoe and Shakova started drinking with the gillmen, then Cosmos’ party joined in on the fun. Crissa would normally stop them, but she let them do whatever they wanted today. The girls in the elite guard squealed “So cute!” as they picked up and hugged Pardoe and Shakova. It was their first time seeing ketolts. *Those two are middle-aged men on the inside, you know? Not to mention one of them is the hard-headed gruff type.*

“Cosmos sure is something, though.”

“What are you talking about?”

“That thing he’s drinking doesn’t contain alcohol.”

“...Huh?”

I hadn’t been watching him this whole time, but I don’t think he had ever drunk anything alcoholic. But he was still huddling shoulder to shoulder with the gillmen and singing with them in a loud voice.

“He’s naturally talented, I guess...” Rium murmured. That wasn’t something I wanted to be talented at.

“Oh yeah, where’s Mark?”

“Oh, Marky is right over there.” Crissa pointed away from the hustle and bustle of the party to where Rulitora and the one-eyed gillman were drinking quietly and creating a subdued atmosphere. For some reason, Mark and Ricott were with them.

“...Why are those two there?”

“Apparently they were interested in speaking with the other two.”

The most obvious point in common between Rulitora and the one-eyed gillman was that they were both excellent soldiers. Ricott aside, was Mark really trying to follow them? He was supposed to be a blacksmith.

We continued people-watching as we chowed down on the seafood dishes, surrounded by gillmen. This fish was honestly delicious.

The gillmen who were acting rowdy with Cosmos were soldiers, while the ones near us were wives and children. They'd gotten curious about our dishes, so they were showering Roni, Crissa, and even Rakti, who had been helping out, with a barrage of questions.

"This fish is so tasty."

"The meat here is even tastier!"

The dishes were well regarded by everyone, but the fish wasn't so novel for Yukina since she had been eating it ever since being reincarnated here. I was right to request a meat dish from Roni.

Her favorite, though, was the orange juice. She had loved it in her previous life as well. *I can make as much as I want with my MP, so drink up. Just make sure you don't get a stomachache. And don't call it "fresh-squeezed older brother," because that sounds weird.*

Cosmos had started roughhousing with the younger gillmen soldiers, but the party ended with deepened friendships and without any hitches otherwise. Cosmos' party would be returning to their ship tonight and setting sail to Neptune first thing tomorrow morning. They wanted to be ready for Balsamina again as soon as possible. Cosmos really was a good guy, though. As I watched him wave goodbye at us, I prayed that he'd be able to persuade Balsamina soon.

We'd be staying in the village tonight, so the white dolphin asked to see the faucets that the Goddess of Water had created. He stared at the amber-colored udon broth pouring from the tap, fascinated.

"...You're so cool, Touya," Yukina said.

"I'm not sure how to feel about that compliment..."

It was a convenient feature, but I wondered why all my new gifts were turning out like this. Cosmos, eccentric as he was, still contributed to the fight on the coast. I didn't want to be too greedy, but I wished at least one of these gifts could directly help me in battle.

"Maybe it's just because my first gift was the Unlimited Bath...?"

“I wouldn’t say it’s impossible to get another kind of gift, but at this point, I wouldn’t get my hopes up...” The white dolphin replied as I was sighing and mumbling to myself. He was a water cleric, so he might know a thing or two about gifts. I took the opportunity to ask him something that had been on my mind.

“So I guess I can’t expect a battle-oriented gift, since it’s all growing from my Unlimited Bath?”

“Huh?” The white dolphin only cocked his head in response. I couldn’t discern the facial expressions of a dolphin, but I bet he was looking perplexed right now.

I hadn’t explained myself well enough, so I repeated myself with more details this time. “In the beginning, I only had a single bathtub in here. After that, I got a sink, a washing machine, a tatami-floored room, a kitchen, a toilet, and now these faucets.”

“...Ahh, I see. So that’s what you meant by ‘grow.’”

Now it seemed like he understood me. The white dolphin nodded his head several times assertively. He was acting strange, though. Did I say something wrong?

“Let’s see, it appears that you believe your Unlimited Bath has been growing, but that is actually not the case.”

“What do you mean?”

“You must be thinking that this entire space is the Unlimited Bath, but that is incorrect. This faucet, for example, is a separate gift.”

“A separate gift...? But they’re all in the same space...!”

“Yes, I was surprised as well, but gifts are awakened based on the nature of the receiver.”

I see, so the Goddess of Fire’s kitchen and the Goddess of Water’s faucets were separate gifts. The sink, washing machine, and toilet all had to do with “purification” like the bath itself, so they could be considered part of the Unlimited Bath. Having the sink and washing machine in a room right next to

the bath was a common design, and many hotels had the toilet in the same room as well, so it wasn't too outlandish.

"...Hm? So does that mean..."

"Your nature appears to be leaning heavily in this direction... At this rate, I suspect that even if you awaken new gifts from the goddesses after receiving their blessing, they'll all fall under this general category..."

I fell prostrate to the ground after hearing that. The white dolphin then left the room, looking a little apologetic. I thought for sure that the bath was gradually growing more convenient for me, but that wasn't necessarily the case. I just happened to keep awakening these types of gifts. It had come as a shock, but now everything was cleared up.

Come to think of it, I had originally wanted to leave fighting the demon lord to other people and just figure out how to survive in this world. I had even considered becoming a water merchant at some point. In fact, I was well on my way to accomplishing self-sufficiency with just the Unlimited Bath. I guess you could say these gifts had been awakening true to my nature, indeed.

"...Touya." Just as I had come to terms in my mind, Rium pulled at my sleeve. I looked down at her, and she pointed toward the door to the tatami-floored room.

"Is that a gift, too?"

"Oh yeah, it is."

That room didn't seem to have anything to do with purification. It must have been something that awakened with the blessing of darkness.

"Sniff, I'm sorry for giving you a useless gift..." Rakti started sulking. Her powers as a goddess must have weakened after the incredibly long time she had been sealed. She couldn't help the quality of her gift. I slowly approached Rakti and patted her on the head.

"...Huh?"

I then bent forward to match her at eye level. "Don't worry about it, Rakti. It's all thanks to you that Yukina was reincarnated here. Thank you for the best gift I

could have ever received," I said as I pulled Yukina into my arms.

"Oh... th-thank you!" Rakti finally showed me a smile.

Yes, Yukina couldn't have been reincarnated here without Rakti's powers. And even though the kitchen and faucets were separate gifts, the Unlimited Bath itself was still growing. The tatami-floored room still had a high chance that it would upgrade itself, too. Once I saw the goddesses in my dreams tonight, I'd better ask them for more details. I bet everyone would amicably join the conversation.

However, the goddesses in my dreams that night were acting much differently from usual. A women stood in the center of the circle formed by the other goddesses and I. Her hair was so long that it touched the ground. It was a pale blue color so light that it was almost white.

Her beautiful mermaid dress, which seemed to be made of a thin fabric, also reached the floor, and her sleeves were on the longer side as well. The dress sported a risqué design in that it was open enough in front for her bellybutton to show, and her shoulders were exposed as the sleeves dangled off her arms. She must have been the Goddess of Water. Her face was slender and her eyes were long and narrow.

The other goddesses around her didn't look so amused, though. The goddesses of Light and Fire were both baffled, while the Goddess of Earth looked a little worried. Rakti clung onto me and kept looking as if she wanted to say something. The Goddess of Water was trying to tell me something, but unfortunately I couldn't hear her voice. Apparently she wasn't aware of this yet. The Goddess of Earth couldn't help but interject as she approached the Goddess of Water, said something to her, and handed her a flipbook. The Goddess of Water looked a little annoyed as she ran the pen across the page and then thrust the flipbook toward my face. The words on the page were scrawled in craggy letters, as if she wasn't used to writing in Japanese.

"HARUNO IS WITH ME IF YOU WISH TO SAVE HER COME TO THE WATER CAPITAL" Huh? Was she captured? Had the Goddess of Water abducted Haruno? Rakti, who was still holding on to me, quickly shook her head. So there was some story behind this.

Whatever happened to Haruno and her party, I needed to help them. Even if the temple of the Goddess of Water was at the bottom of the ocean, it wouldn’t pose a problem with our Grande Nautilus. And if Haruno was trapped there, I had no choice but to get her out.

Post-Bath – The Author's Booth

Long time no see to everyone coming from volume three, and nice to meet you to everyone who picked this title up starting from volume four! My name is Nagaharu Hibihana. How did you like this volume? All sorts of new and odd characters showed up.

First off is the Hero of Darkness, the demon girl Yukina, who appears on this volume's cover. She turned out to be Touya's little sister. However, she's not just any little sister. Touya is a "summoned" hero from another world, but Yukina is a "reincarnated" hero. Yes, and that gives us the "non-blood-related yet blood-related little sister." Her soul still has strong ties to her family, but her body is brand new. How will Touya interact with her after their miraculous reunion in another world? This kind of development is something you can only find in these parallel world novels. I think.

He's not a new character, but our heroes also reunited with one of the other five summoned heroes, Cosmos AKA Akio Nishizawa. He's supposed to be a rival character of some sort, but he doesn't have a normal enough personality to assume the role of your average rival.

And of course, another new character is the demon general who had gotten fired, Phoenix. I can't reveal which Sengoku era commander he was, but I'll at least say that he didn't die in the same period of time as the demon lord Amann Naga did. Actually, his character design in his reincarnated form was based off of a character in a manga I had drawn back in elementary school. And now he got an awesome color page all to himself, which blasted me with nostalgia and made me think "you sure have come a long way..." to myself.

I'd like to thank Masakage Hagiya, who drew such a cool depiction of Phoenix and alluring illustrations of the girls in their swimsuits, my old editor K, my new editor S, K, and everyone who was involved in the publishing and selling of this book.

Now then, I hope to see you all again in volume five. Please pick it up when

you have the chance.

Nagaharu Hibihana, March 2016.



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Mixed Bathing in Another Dimension: The Ancient Seawater Baths by Nagaharu Hibihana

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