
"WHO THE HELL'RE YOU?!"
One of the men cried out in panic.
I thought you'd never ask! Time to put on a real show. Come back out of the darkness, cringey Mitsuha from middle school!
"Me? I am... the Archpriestess."
Mitsuha Yamano
A girl who gained the power to jump to another world and back.


“Gentlemen, it’s time for war! There are twenty thousand of them and fifty-eight of us! No doubt, this is going to be a dangerous mission. Your rewards will be gold, honor, recognition, and the people’s eternal gratitude.
“I say that in this fight, we are the true justice!”
“In war, each side claims to be the righteous one, but they’re all the same. There’s no justice. They fight over money and power, and the ones who suffer are always the little people. But not this time! Our mission is to defend the capital’s innocents from an enemy that not only broke a treaty, but invaded the country with a horde of monsters!”
She paused. Her eyes swept across their faces before she continued.


“Mitsuha von Yamano, I bestow upon you the title of viscountess!”
SAY WHAAAAAAT ?!

Saving 80,000 Gold in Another World for my Retirement ✦ VOL. 2

Original Story by FUNA

Illustrations by Touzai



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Chapter 10: Birth of the Lightning Archpriestess!

A few days had passed since Mitsuha's camping experience in the other world, and business was booming. A steady stream of customers had been flowing in to buy a variety of products, such as shampoo, shampoo, and shampoo. With so much foot traffic, Mitsuha figured her store was becoming the talk of the town.

Great job, girls! she thought, attributing the increase in popularity to the Ryners' maids. *You too, Count Bozes.* Mitsuha had an inkling he was the reason she hadn't had any strange or unsavory noble visitors.

Ding-a-ling!

The bell chimed, and a young girl stepped inside. Mitsuha had no doubt that she, too, was after shampoo.

"Umm, is this Mitsuha's General Store?" she asked.

Man, I just realized I don't have a sign out front! Is that why I've barely had any customers until now? Damn it, Kunz, you're supposed to point out stuff like that! I'm gonna have you make one and put it up for me later!

"Yes, you're in the right place. Please take your time," Mitsuha said with a bow.

Her customer looked to be about ten years old. She had feathery blonde curls and a refined aura about her, despite her adorable countenance. Immediately, Mitsuha knew the girl was a noble. It was even believable for her to be a princess right out of a fairytale.

It also dawned on Mitsuha that most girls in this world were beautiful. She imagined it was because noble men married attractive women, and these women eventually gave birth to more of their kind. It certainly wasn't related to some sort of freemason or reptilian conspiracy. At least, that was what she wanted to believe.



“I’ll take a look around, then.” The girl smiled and ventured further into the store.

As Mitsuha watched her customer, her mind drifted to the degenerate dressmaker. *If she could see this girl, her blood pressure would skyrocket till she had blood shooting out of her nose. Not enough to pass out, though, since she would still need to take a mental snapshot. That lady operates on a whole different level, and it’s not exactly inspirational.*

After Adelaide’s debutante ball, the seamstress had given Mitsuha an edited Blu-ray and a set of photos from the event; their quality was exquisite. Mitsuha was planning to sell them to Viscount Ryner, but she still hadn’t decided on the price. She had briefly considered charging one gold per picture, but such a rate would have made her a swindler exploiting his fatherly affections. Simply put, it wasn’t her style.

Mitsuha’s present customer seemed to delight in her shopping trip. The basket she carried was stuffed full of items, and their total value was already impressive. As Mitsuha wondered if she would be able to afford them, the girl approached her.

“I would like to buy this and some shampoo, please!”

“Certainly.” Mitsuha placed her items in a bag decorated with a cute animal mascot—a rare thing around these parts. “You can keep the bag, by the way,” she added, and the girl brightened. As her customer took out some gold coins, Mitsuha wondered if she would be safe walking around without a bodyguard.

“That was fun! I’ll be sure to come again,” the girl said, full of enthusiasm.

“Thank you very much!” Mitsuha replied, seeing her off at the door. There was no retail fakery in her words. The girl had been a great customer, one Mitsuha would always appreciate.

As Mitsuha watched her leave, she noticed something unnerving on the other side of the road. There was a filthy, suspicious-looking man who seemed to fit the classic stalker archetype. If Mitsuha could have called the police, they would likely have arrested him without question. The man was lurking in the alley between buildings, not doing anything of note. Was he after Mitsuha or her

shop? She couldn't tell.

Before Mitsuha could write him off as insignificant, however, he abruptly began walking in the direction of the girl who had just left.

A noble girl goes missing right after visiting my store? Now that rumor would be bad for business!

Mitsuha rushed back into the store and pulled out her "counterattack bag" from behind the counter—a pun that may or may not have been intended. She threw it over her shoulder and left the building, locking the door behind her.

The girl still hadn't gotten far. Mitsuha could see her a short distance away, completely defenseless. The man from the alley approached her from behind while Mitsuha swiftly and silently closed in on them. Just as they passed an entrance to a back alley, the man jumped on the girl, clamped a hand over her mouth, and dragged her into it.

Bingo, Mitsuha thought. She darted into the alley, then chased after them as fast as her feet could manage. They vanished at an intersection, and by the time she caught up, the girl was already gagged and surrounded by four men tying her up.

Aren't you a well-prepared bunch of scumbags?

"What are you doing?!" she shouted.

The thugs panicked for a moment before they noticed their opponent was merely another little girl. They breathed a collective sigh of relief.

"Heheh. Brave, ain't ya? You showin' up just means another payout fer us, though. Thanks fer makin' it easy."

The man who had spoken stepped closer to Mitsuha. She quickly took a sheathed knife from her bag and slipped it into her belt.

"Oh? So, yer gonna put up a fight. Ya got guts, I'll give ya that. But a li'l sweetie like you can't kill nobody. Killin' a man is—"

Before he could finish, Mitsuha reached into her bag again, grabbed one of the things inside, and pointed it at him.

Bang!

A sound cracked through the air. The bandit collapsed to the ground and began to convulse.

“I *can* kill you,” she said. “If there’s a reason to let scum like you live, I’d like to hear it.”

“HUH?!”

The three men still standing were dumbfounded. Despite Mitsuha’s words, however, their partner in crime was still alive; the item she’d used on him was a pistol-shaped stun gun. It fired electrodes that attached to the target and applied high voltage through thin cords. To prevent nefarious use of this weapon, firing it would scatter a burst of paper confetti, with each piece containing the weapon’s unique serial number. Of course, this function had little significance if the stun gun was acquired illegally or used in a different world altogether.

Though the sale and possession of this weapon was banned in Japan soon after its release, it was readily available in a number of foreign countries. Mitsuha had acquired this one through her mercenary connections.

“Who the hell’re you?!” one of the men cried out in panic.

I thought you’d never ask! Time to put on a real show. Come back out of the darkness, cringey Mitsuha from middle school!

“Me? I am... the Archpriestess.”

She spoke in a low tone in an attempt to mimic one of her heroes, Asahi Kurizuka. He had starred in a historical Japanese drama from the 1960’s called *I am a Bodyguard.* To suit her personal tastes, however, she chose to replace the titular “bodyguard” with “archpriestess”.

“Whazzat?” The bandits had no idea what she meant, and frankly, neither did she. Mitsuha was simply itching to cross off yet another entry on the list of things she had always wanted to say.

“I am the Lightning Archpriestess!” she repeated. “Those in my way deserve no mercy!”

This time, she whipped out her Beretta 93R and fired a three-round burst at

some pots nearby.

It won't look cool if I stop to change the setting, so let's just roll with this.

Ba-Ba-Bang!

Gunshots echoed around them as the bullets shattered the pots, sending ceramic fragments flying everywhere.

"EEEEEK!"

The bandits screamed and tried to escape, but just as they did, a group of unnaturally imposing soldiers popped out from the other end of the alley.

"Princess! Are you all right?!" one of them called out.

Oh, so she really is a princess? Mitsuha thought.

While the soldiers were busy capturing the men and retrieving the princess, Mitsuha slowly backed away from the scene. She ducked into the first side-alley in an attempt to flee, but luck wasn't on her side.

"Please wait, Miss Archpriestess." Upon hearing the address from behind her, Mitsuha let out an internal scream of frustration.

There were soldiers at both ends of the alley, but this one in particular seemed somehow more important than the rest. He was an older man, and his face gave Mitsuha the impression that he had been through many an ordeal.

"Umm, how long have you been listening, if I may ask?"

The man's answer crushed her. "Everything from 'What are you doing?!' onward."

Oh, so all of it. Great. Thanks, Mitsuha thought, moments before she collapsed. Her splayed hands quickly stopped her from falling face-first into the cobblestone.

"Archpriestess?"

I'm begging you, stop calling me that. I got carried away, I'm sorry!

"Come with us to the castle," said the soldier.

Mitsuha had somehow known things would come to this the moment she

found out the girl was a princess. She had seen her face, so there was no way out of it now.

Please don't look at me with those sparkling eyes, princess, she thought as she met the girl's gaze.

"Let me at least close up shop."

She still hadn't checked her finances, closed the curtains, or switched the security systems to their "after-hours" settings. There was still a lot for her to do.

The princess and most of the soldiers returned to the castle, while Mitsuha returned to her store, accompanied by the aged soldier and two others.

They don't have to be so on edge; it's not like I'm gonna run.

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She finished closing relatively quickly, and her thoughts moved on to how she would prepare for the castle visit.

A dress, maybe? Nah, too early for that. I already have a good ruse going on with the count, so this time I'll be nothing more than a humble merchant. What about guns? Hmm, they already saw me shoot. Assuming I keep the Walther PPS at my side, would I need the 93R? I can't picture myself using it.

Mitsuha briefly entertained a scenario where she escaped the castle while clearing a path with gunfire, but she figured she could world-jump out of any real danger. In that case, her efforts toward setting up the store and her network with the nobles would go down the drain.

In the end, she tucked her Walther in the holster at her side and put the 93R in her bag. She had fired it off in front of the kidnappers and hadn't had time to reload.

As for knives, she left them behind. While she could claim her guns were something akin to religious tools to explain away their existence, wielding a knife in front of the royal family was completely off-limits.

Opportunist that she was, Mitsuha also stuffed her bag with various items from the store's shelves. They were as full as ever, since she made sure to

continually restock. Additionally, her business model prioritized quality over quantity—one item for ten silver over ten items for a silver apiece. Of course, she was willing to make sacrifices if it meant spreading happiness to girls around the world.

Ah, I should sell stuff for that time of the month, too.

It dawned on her that many of her wares didn't sell not only because of their prices, but because the people of this world simply didn't understand how to use them. In order to increase an item's popularity, she would need walking advertisements; it had worked for shampoo. But she imagined she would become far too busy if she upped her advertising, and so she dismissed the idea.

Once she had put her gun and some souvenirs in her bag, Mitsuha's preparations were complete. She hadn't even changed out of her shopkeeper clothes.

"Uh, Mister Soldier, you should be more careful where you step. The store's closed, which means the security system is on. Don't come crying to me if you're struck by lightning." The young man turned a bit pale.

"Atta boy. Now, walk straight ahead. That's right... Don't even think about touching the shelves."

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I don't recognize this ceiling, Mitsuha thought, fully aware of just how dead the horse she was beating really was.

She had just arrived at the castle and was feeling somewhat let down. Part of her had expected to be transported in a carriage drawn by an excessive amount of white horses—this world's equivalent of a limousine, surely—so you could imagine her disappointment when she had to walk like the commoner she was.

The aged soldier remained at her side even in the waiting room. Mitsuha passed the time by reflecting on her personal fondness for "refined older gentleman" types like him.

There's this guy, Count Bozes, Stefan the butler... In ten years or so, Viscount Ryner will probably make the list, too.

Her thoughts were interrupted as someone called for her.

“You are Mitsuha, I assume?”

Immediately upon seeing the man who had spoken, Mitsuha was compelled to curtsy. *Yep, that’s the king, all right!*

“Please, raise your head. Come here and take a seat,” said the king. “There is no need for my daughter’s savior to trouble herself with formalities. I myself won’t bother with a terribly ‘royal’ attitude. Treat me as you would an equal.”

Oh, so this isn’t his “king” voice, huh? Mitsuha understood that even kings behaved differently depending on the surrounding company. They had families, for example, and it wasn’t as though they all began life as kings. Some were even saddled with the title without expecting it.

The hall in which they met was far from a looming throne room full of ministers, and she wasn’t having an audience with him on some sort of official business. This was simply a casual meeting where a father aimed to thank her for saving his daughter.

Realizing she’d been nervous for nothing, Mitsuha took her first real look around the room. It was a relatively humble space housing a table and some chairs. Everything was luxurious, of course, but such was standard fare for a palace. Mitsuha would’ve been more surprised if the room had been decorated with a cheap folding table and chairs instead.

The king was with a mature, dignified lady—the queen, no doubt—as well as the princess from before and a princely-looking boy. He appeared to be younger than the princess; if Mitsuha had to fathom a guess, she would have put him at eight years old. He seemed particularly interested in her.

Was it something the princess told him? she wondered.

Behind them, there was an elderly man she assumed was the grand chamberlain; behind her stood the refined soldier who had accompanied her here.

I’m not gonna run away, damn it!

“Now, Mitsuha the Lightning Archpriestess...” the king began.

“Mitsuha the general store owner,” she corrected.

“Mitsuha the Lightning Archpriestess.”

“Mitsuha the general store owner.”

“Mitsuha the Lightning Archpriestess.”

“Mitsuha the general store owner.”

“Mitsuha the Lightning Archpriestess.”

“Mitsuha the general store owner.”

“Mitsuha the... general store owner.” He gave in at last.

Mitsuha was aware that this was a golden opportunity to turn her reputation around and insist that she was, in fact, the Lightning Archpriestess, but she ultimately decided against it. Once they had settled on her address, she explained what had happened earlier in the day.

“After the princess bought some items from my shop, I saw her off. It was then that I noticed a suspicious-looking man following her. It worried me, so I ran after them. You wouldn’t believe my surprise when I found a group of men trying to kidnap her! I gathered up my courage and called out to them, but since I’m just a little girl, there was really nothing I could do. That was when the soldiers came and saved us both.”

“Hmm. I’ve been told a different story,” the king said.

“After the princess bought some items from my shop, I saw her off. It was then—”

“I understand! No need for any more of that!”

Heehee. I win again!

Mitsuha continued to treat the “Archpriestess” affair like some sort of fairy tale or a figment of his imagination, so the king surrendered. Whatever had actually transpired was left unclear.

According to some reports that arrived during their conversation, the kidnapping hadn’t been politically motivated—the perpetrators were human traffickers who had merely wanted to abduct and sell a beautiful girl. The

princess had heard of Mitsuha's General Store from one of the maids; thereafter, she had escaped from the castle, shaken off the guards that chased her, and caught the eye of the traffickers, who had no clue that she was royalty.

The local human trafficking industry was secretly backed by some influential nobles, so even the king could do little to stop it. Regardless of the circumstances, however, an attempt had been made to kidnap the princess. No matter how much power they held, any noble who would speak out against an official investigation of this incident would be labeled an ally of the traffickers and a traitor of the kingdom. Therefore, both the traffickers and those who supported them were in serious trouble.

Wow, the princess did something great for the country, Mitsuha thought.

She learned that the princess, Sabine, was ten years old, and the young prince, Leuhen, was eight. They were the youngest of five siblings, and the others—two sisters and a brother—were a fair bit older than them, so Sabine and Leuhen were closer to each other than the rest. The older siblings did love them, of course; they just chose not to join in the young ones' childish games.

"I hope you get along with my children," the king told her with Sabine at his side, both of them beaming.

"S-Same here," Mitsuha replied awkwardly.

Hold on, "children"? Uh, you got plans for me or something? Wait, more importantly...

"Your Majesty, do you feel that you don't see as well as you used to?" Mitsuha asked.

"Yes, actually. For a while now, I've found it difficult to read small letters, so I've started using a lens."

Huh? You have those?! You're more advanced than I expected!

She briefly wondered why she hadn't seen anyone wearing glasses, but remembered that back on Earth, convex lenses used for presbyopia had spread long before the concave lenses used for myopia. The first lenses used to support eyesight were either like magnifying glasses or nose glasses—not of the Groucho variety, but rather pince-nez.

Unlike those with myopia, people with presbyopia didn't need to use lenses all the time. Pince-nez glasses were flawed and could fall off easily, so they were mostly worn while reading—definitely not during walks around town.

I don't know what seeing aid is popular right now, but there's no point in thinking about it! Whatever they've got, it won't hold a candle to Earth's modern marvels!

"Could you give these a try for me, please?" Mitsuha asked, then presented the king with five sets of glasses from her bag. "Try putting them on like this. Each pair is slightly different, so find the one that helps you see best."

"Hmm, like this?" he asked, donning the first pair. "Oh, my! They're so light! And I can see so clearly! They help both of my eyes, and my hands are completely free. They don't move when I look down or shake my head, so I don't have to keep adjusting them!" He then went on to try the other glasses.

Huh, so they do have pince-nez glasses. Doesn't sound like they're the kind with a string, though.

"Saar! Come over here and try these!" the king called out to the old man behind him, who came and picked up a pair for himself.

"Oh? Ohhh!"

"Well? You said you didn't like using a hand lens or your glasses. What do you think of this?"

"Everything is so clear... Why, these glasses are better than anything I've ever known! They're light and sturdy, and I'm free to use both my hands. This would make working long hours much easier!"

The old man was even happier than the king. Mitsuha hadn't anticipated this outcome, but saw no harm in getting on good terms with the grand chamberlain. Surely the king would appreciate it too.

"Now it will be a few more years until this old dog stops being chancellor," the old man said proudly.

Oh, so he's the chancellor, Mitsuha thought as she put the remaining pairs of glasses back into her bag. With these two as her walking advertisements, she

would gain even more customers, especially among the country's elites—a group she was planning to make a great deal of money from.

What? You think this is predatory salesmanship? How d'you mean? I'm just selling something for an outrageous price, that's all!

"Do you have more wares of such quality?" asked the king. "Please, don't hold back. Money is no object!"

"Well, I do this for a living. As long as you pay me, I can sell you anything. Except for girls, of course."

"No girls, you say?"

"Nope."

"I see. Hahaha!"

The chancellor and Mitsuha joined the king in his laughter. Though the joke may have seemed a bit dark considering the princess' failed kidnapping, it was also Mitsuha's way of saying, "You can't control me no matter how much money you have". The king understood this and so did the chancellor. The queen, on the other hand, likely did not.

Despite taking a liking to her, the king did not provide Mitsuha with a carriage home, so she had to go back the way she had come—on foot. She believed it was for the best, however. Being delivered to her back-alley store by a carriage bearing the royal family's crest could have caused her unnecessary trouble.

Chapter 11: Ruin the Wretched Merchant!

Ding-a-ling!

I smell trouble, Mitsuha thought.

A wholly corpulent man walked into her store, flanked by three other people. His appearance sent off Mitsuha's internal "scumbag" detector.

"The shopkeeper, I assume?" he asked.

Called it.

"Give me the rights to this store and its supply routes. Mhm, I'll be taking you under my wing."

Whoa, what the hell?! Don't we have laws in this kingdom? I know I look like a child, but that's too much. I'm kinda impressed, though. He doesn't give a damn about what society thinks. Is he that rich and powerful?

"Sorry, but who are you?" Mitsuha asked, just for the sake of it.

"What? You don't know *me*?" The man seemed genuinely insulted. "I guess I can't expect much from a little girl. Very well, I'll tell you. I'm the president of the Adler Company, Nelson Adler!"

"Ohh, *the* Adler Company?!"

First I've heard of it, Mitsuha thought to herself.

"Yes. Rumor has it that this place deals in fish, the so-called 'shampoo', and other curiosities. You're young, but you have potential. I'll look after you, so you'd better appreciate it."

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. I guess Count Bozes' pressure didn't squash nosy merchants too.

"Umm, I'll need to run this by my trade partner, so could you come here around the same time tomorrow? I'll make sure he's here."

"Mhm. Very well."

Pleased that his demands had gotten through to her so easily, Nelson turned around and left. He had likely intended to strong-arm Mitsuha if she refused, and her obedience led him believe that she either knew going against the Adler Company was a bad idea, or she was simply an idiot.

Hah! As if I'd make it that easy for him. Also, I said I'd call my "trade partner", but I didn't say anything about a supplier.

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Ding-a-ling!

"Mitsuha! I'm heeere!" came a girl's voice.

"So you are!" Mitsuha replied, thinking about what a regular Sabine had become.

The girl had initially called her "Mistress Mitsuha" out of respect, but Mitsuha didn't want the princess' reverence toward a commoner to seem enforced, which would certainly buy her a one-way ticket straight to the gallows. She had therefore insisted Sabine just call her "Mitsuha" instead, which eventually worked.

Sabine joined Mitsuha behind the counter. There was a small TV and a DVD player hidden there. Customers couldn't see them, and Mitsuha made sure to stop whatever was playing if she needed to greet someone. For this reason, any customers who arrived during an engaging part of a show earned an intense, largely unmerited glare from Sabine.

Since the princess had become a daily visitor, Mitsuha, unable to tell her much about Japan, had run out of discussion topics. Then one day, she had accidentally pressed the wrong button on the remote, revealing to Sabine the existence of the TV and DVD player. The princess had gone wild over it, and Mitsuha had found herself unable to play off her mistake. Soon enough, the two of them began watching things together.

However, Mitsuha had made sure to tell the princess that the TV was a magic mirror of clairvoyance that would break if she told others about it. She even selected appropriate shows to increase the potency of the lie, including a story about a little witch who would lose her magic if her identity was discovered,

and another about a character who lost everything because of a broken promise. It worked spectacularly.

Additionally, as Sabine did not know Japanese, Mitsuha had to translate and dub the shows on the fly. Doing this was so tiresome that intense transformations or special attack scenes, which involved little to no dialogue, relaxed her.

“Ah, Sabine, please give this letter to the chancellor when you’re back. It’s very important, so don’t forget it.”

Though she had a devilish side, Sabine was a bright girl with a good head on her shoulders, and Mitsuha was fully confident in her abilities. The princess nodded with a serious expression, took the letter, and tucked it into her pocket.

Ding-a-ling!

The entrance bell chimed to signal another arrival.

“I brought a contract,” the guest said bluntly. “Sign it.”

Well, then. You sure don’t waste time, do you, Nelson?

“Mitsuha, who is this?” Sabine asked, peeking out from behind Mitsuha.

Since the princess was just ten years old, few citizens knew what she looked like at a glance. She was also wearing plain clothing so as not to stand out. As pretty as she was, in her current state, no one would assume she was royalty.

“He’s from a big company and says that he wants to take me in,” said Mitsuha.

“Whaaat? You’re going away? Nooo! Please don’t!”

What an actress. This girl actually scares me sometimes.

Upon seeing a girl who was exceedingly charming even by noble standards, Nelson cracked a fleshy grin.

“Oh? If you want to stay with her so much, why not come along? I’ll allow it.”

“Really?!” Sabine jumped for joy, and just as Nelson’s smile stretched even wider...

Ding-a-ling!

The bell chimed yet again.

“Sorry for keeping you waiting.” The newest visitor showed himself in.

“Wha—Chancellor?!” Nelson couldn’t withhold his surprise.

Yep. Everyone’s here, Mitsuha thought.

“Sorry for calling you like this, Saar.”

“Oh, don’t be. Your calls come before all other matters!”

She refers to him by his first name?! Nelson panicked. *And why is the chancellor so humble with her?!*

He had a bad feeling about this.

“This man told me to hand my store over to him for free!” said Mitsuha. “He also wants to take me away, and the princess as well. I just wanted to tell you that... well, I might have to refuse the king’s requests from now on.”

“Oh? What’s this I’m hearing, Mr. Adler?” The chancellor gave the large man an icy glare.

“Huh?! Wait, I, uh...” Nelson was sweating bullets.

“Do you truly intend to interfere with the business of a merchant working directly for His Majesty the King, lawlessly possess her place of business without compensation, and coerce young girls into becoming your property?”

“What? No, uh, not at all!” By now, the president of *the* Adler Company was as clammy and desperate as a fish out of water.

Is he even breathing? Mitsuha wondered.

“‘Not at all’, you say?”

“No! I mean, er, yes! Exactly!”

“Then I trust you will not meddle with this store or anyone associated with it, directly or indirectly?”

“I won’t! I swear by the goddess!”

“Then I would like you to keep watch for any obstruction of this business. You will be held responsible if something happens, so you best inform any pertinent

parties right away.”

“Certainly!”

With that, the Adler Company was now obligated to make sure that not only its own members, but all businessmen in the capital, avoided meddling with Mitsuha’s General Store. Mitsuha couldn’t even imagine what kind of punishment the chancellor would bring down upon Nelson, were he to fail. It had come at a cost, but Nelson had made it through the most dangerous moment in his life... or so he thought.

“One more thing, Mr. Adler,” the chancellor continued. “I hereby revoke your permission to set foot on the castle grounds. Starting tomorrow, employees of the Adler Company are barred from entering the royal palace.”

“What?!” Nelson turned white as a sheet.

For the Adler Company, a purveyor to both the palace and the government, a ban from the palace was far more than merely a loss of sales. It also meant losing the people’s trust and becoming a laughingstock among fellow merchants. Even the top businessmen in the capital—no, the country—wouldn’t have been able to pick up the pieces from this degree of damage.

“Why would you do such a thing?” Nelson had believed he was safe when he agreed to keep the other merchants in check, but...

“Simply put, His Majesty the King is a gentle man, but even he would not tolerate the presence of his young daughter’s would-be abductors.”

“Huh?”

“Now, let us return, Your Highness.”

“What? But I wanna play with Mitsuha some mooore!” the princess whined as the chancellor dragged her out of the store.

All that remained was a fat man collapsed on the floor.

Rest in peace, Nelson.

Soon after that, the president of the Adler Company retired, leaving everything to his son.

“Do not lay a hand on Mitsuha’s General Store.”

His last order as acting president may have been uttered through gritted teeth, but it was heard by all the merchants in the capital—no, the country.

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“Hey, Sabine! Wanna inherit the title of ‘Plumber of the Opera’ from me?”

“No! That sounds weird! You just want to push it on me to get rid of it, don’t you?!”

Such keen senses! She really is scary!

Chapter 12: Yamano Cuisine

Mitsuha was selling more and more glasses by the day, and she knew the chancellor was the one responsible. Between this increase in business and his help with the Nelson affair, she was developing a real appreciation for the man. Sales of her other stock were picking up, too, despite the outrageous prices.

She had also managed to sell Sven's party a bike trailer. The mercenaries had thought long and hard before making a decision. They knew the purchase would blow a hole in their wallets, but since it had seemed like a worthy investment, they'd ended up biting the bullet. Mitsuha had explained the alternative options of renting or leasing, but Sven had ardently refused.

How manly.

She had sold it to them for about the same price as she herself had paid, which was a great kindness by her standards. However, she *did* make them swear to secrecy regarding what they'd paid for it, claiming she would go out of business if others expected such a generous rate. They had all nodded in unison, taking her words to heart.

They probably think I'm deep in the red or something, Mitsuha had thought. *And honestly, I don't see a downside. Now, go on and advertise me! Bring demand to my supply!*

Sven and his crew were immensely satisfied with their purchase. Previously, they'd had to increase their meager earnings by gathering cheap herbs light enough to carry, which was a time-consuming and laborious task. Now that they had the trailer, carrying capacity was no longer an obstacle, so they could focus solely on hunting. They could return to the capital more quickly, and they wouldn't have to toil under the burden of their game on the way back.

Yeah, I imagine that hauling all that weight with a branch on your shoulder the whole way back would hurt like hell. I bet it's so bad they have to take a day or two off afterward.

The mercenaries had already used the trailer on a couple of hunting trips, and the results were outstanding. They could spend twice as much time hunting as before, and Mitsuha found herself thinking that they would fare better now as hunters than mercenaries.

Ilse, the archer of the group, was really interested in a crossbow. She seemed to want to say something about it whenever she and Mitsuha met.

Earth had crossbows for a long time, right? Mitsuha thought, feeling conflicted. *Should I just sell her one?*

That was just one of the many things she had to worry about, however. There was also the matter of how to handle bike trailer sales going forward. She would only supply one if a customer ordered it, but she wasn't sure how to price them. After all, the target audience was poor mercenaries and hunters.

Mitsuha had also finally used one of her deep pockets for the first time. Throwing in the first coin had been an exhilarating moment for her. She had placed her ear against the pipe as it fell, waiting in anticipation. But to her disappointment, she hadn't been able to hear anything at all.

Yeah, I'm gonna need more gold if I wanna hear that sweet, sweet sound. Damn it!

As for Princess Sabine, she was in a foul mood these days. More customers meant more interruptions of her precious films and dramas. She had even asked Mitsuha to stop bringing in so many people, but her proposal was swiftly rejected.

Should I just let her go up to the third floor? Nah, she'd probably insist on living here. Please don't ask to bring Prince Leuhen along either. I'm begging you!

On one occasion, Beatrice Bozes had visited the store and subsequently run into the princess. Both of them were surprised to see one another; they were apparently already acquainted, which was something Mitsuha hadn't expected. She had assumed that members of high society weren't aware of one another prior to their debuts.

The noble girls had explained things to her: as the eldest daughter of an

influential count, Beatrice had been assigned to socialize with the youngest princess. Their relationship was something akin to school friends.

Good call not picking someone Sabine's age, Mitsuha had reflected. *I can just imagine the kind of fights they'd have. Beatrice is older and more mature, so she probably lets things slide here and there.*

Hey, Sabine, don't try to talk to her about the DVDs! Don't even think about showing them off, either! I said the TV would break if you talked about it, didn't I?!

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Ding-a-ling!

A girl no older than eighteen entered the store. Instead of heading into the aisles, she walked directly over to Mitsuha.

Huh? What?

"Excuse me, is this where I go for consultations?"

Would you look at that. The sign I hung up at the entrance is already working! This'll be my first consultation request in a while. Oh, and just so you know, I also put up a sign with the store's name.

The girl's dilemma was as follows:

Her family's home also functioned as a diner, and it employed by five people: her parents, herself, and two prep cooks. Her father was the owner and head of operations. A twenty-eight-year-old man was second-in-command, and the nineteen-year-old was part apprentice, part assistant. The girl and her mother worked as waitresses, though she was training to become a cook herself.

All was well until she caught the eye of one young man: the second-oldest son in a family who owned a larger restaurant in town. She was a cheerful character beloved by many, and this man began to pursue her aggressively. She refused his advances, as she herself was attracted to the young apprentice working for her family, but he showed no intention of backing down.

Eventually, his father got involved. Since his own business would be passed down to his eldest son, he wanted his second son to marry the girl and take

over her family's diner. He couldn't do anything to outwardly destroy its reputation, of course, so he started to meddle in their business by way of underhanded tactics. His first move was buying out the older one of their two cooks.

Not long after that, the girl's father was suddenly assaulted by a group of thugs. They deliberately broke his right arm, leaving the rest of him unharmed. It would heal completely if given enough time, but he couldn't cook until then, so they were forced to close up shop temporarily. This last event had occurred just a few days ago. The family learned of the restaurant owner's plot from an employee of his who happened to owe a debt to the girl's father.

Her request was simple:

"Please, help us!"

"Hold on a second," Mitsuha said. She went and hung her "Closed Due to a Special Contract" sign on the door, then closed the curtains.

Time to get my rusty consultation gears a-rollin'! Why'd she say something so heavy to a girl who only looks twelve or so, anyway? Oh, she's friends with the Ryners' maids? Makes sense.

"Let me get this straight. You want me to reopen the diner, prevent any further damage to business—as well as any future interference from the restaurant—and, if possible, help you tie the knot with the apprentice. Is that everything?"

"Um, yes," the girl replied meekly. She was surprised to hear such words from someone who looked so much younger than herself. The mention of her love interest had also caused a flush to spread across her cheeks.

"First of all, getting new cooks would be tough. Inexperienced hires probably wouldn't be of much help, and unemployed veterans are pretty rare. You might even pick up someone hired by the restaurant to sabotage you."

"Huh?" The girl's reaction made it obvious that she hadn't even considered the possibilities.

"Basically, to solve this problem, we need to reopen the diner, run it without hiring anyone untrustworthy, and gain enough profit to make up for the losses

from the temporary shutdown. Then we've got to keep it running at a profit, crush the restaurant owner's plans, and lead him to destroy himself. Then he'll never bother you again. It's that simple!"

"No, it isn't! How are we supposed to do that?!"

"That's a job for Mitsuha's General Store's Consultancy Division! Leave it all to me!" Mitsuha's words were brimming with confidence.

"But, uh, you didn't mention anything about tying the knot..."

This girl's a lover and a fighter, Mitsuha thought.

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At nine o'clock that evening, a group of five people were holding a meeting inside the girl's family's diner, "Paradise". A single light shone over their table, and seated there were Bernd and Stella, the couple who owned the establishment; Aleena, their daughter; Anel, the apprentice; and, of course, Mitsuha. She had just finished explaining to them everything she said to Aleena earlier in the day.

"That's impossible!" Bernd declared. "First of all, look at my arm! Anel can do the prep work just fine, but he can't run the kitchen by himself. All Aleena can do at this point is help out with the simple stuff, and if we've got three people in the kitchen, Stella's gonna have to do hosting and serving all on her own. She can't work the dining room *and* the register!" He seemed adamant.

"Bernd, do you understand why apprentices need years and years to become proper chefs?" Mitsuha asked him.

"Wha? Well, that's 'cause they start from the basics, watch the other chefs work, practice in their spare time..."

"Exactly! No one sits down to teach them. They have to use what little spare time they have to train through trial and error, making lots of culinary disasters. Am I right?"

"Yeah, that's how you become a chef."

"Then imagine spending the whole day teaching Anel how to make a single dish. He already mastered prep, didn't he? If you hammered it into his head,

eventually he'd know it well enough to make it at least ninety percent right, don't you think? It wouldn't have to be perfect."

"You're not wrong about training, but in cooking, that remaining ten percent is hard to get right. If ninety's enough, Anel can probably do a few dishes already."

"I want you to spend a week coaching Anel and Aleena. Don't worry, you can keep an eye on them and help them get it right even while they're working. A broken arm won't get in the way of that, right?"

"Uhh, I guess..."

Anel could barely believe what he was hearing. In the realm of cooking, the only ones who could learn directly from their master were either their direct successors or employees trusted enough to inherit the establishment, and even then, it only tended to happen at the end of the chef's career. An apprentice chef getting a whole week of training was simply unheard of.

"But the taste would still be lacking, and it's not like our diner has some kind of specialty. I don't think the customers who went elsewhere during our short-term closing would come back fast enough, and the regulars would notice the drop in quality... and like I said before, Stella can't handle the customers alone."

Mitsuha grinned. "Don't worry! I have a plan! I'll make it a real walk in the dark!"

"That's not reassuring at all!"

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One week later, Paradise was back in business.

"One order of omelet rice for you, and an udon for you! Enjoy!"

"Hamburg steak special, comin' right up!"

The diner was bustling with activity. Four waitresses were taking orders and running food out to customers. Besides Stella, there were the two female mercenaries, Gritt and Ilse, as well as one more hired part-timer.

Mitsuha had offered this job to the two of them. Drawn to the idea of good pay, free food, and a chance to take a break from hunting, they didn't hesitate

to accept. The wages and meals from Paradise, as well as the commission and reputation they would earn after completing the job, made for an offer they couldn't refuse. Mitsuha had chosen only to hire the women, however, feeling the male mercenaries were unnecessary in this situation.

Back in the kitchen, Anel and Aleena were hard at work following the instructions of Bernd and Mitsuha. Bernd taught them how to make the items on Paradise's standard menu, while Mitsuha guided them in the arts of Yamano Cuisine.

Yes, Yamano Cuisine. That was the name of the mysterious culinary style that had recently become a hot topic among nobles. It was said to be unbelievably delicious, and thought to be made using unimaginable methods and impossible ingredients.

Many cooks tried to emulate this food based on what little information they had, but none of them succeeded. The only exceptions were those who had begged for help from the head chef of a certain noble house.

While learning under him, they had asked him what to call it, to which he had replied, "Yamano Cuisine". Each dish had its own name, of course, but that was the name he'd provided for the style as a whole. Yamano Cuisine was not the name of a single dish, but of all dishes that used the Yamano techniques. It was akin to a secret martial art.

The other chefs praised him for the food, but he always shook his head in response, saying that he had created none of it—he had simply learned it from his master, then honored her by putting her name on the food. That was the story of Yamano Cuisine.

As the name spread among the wealthy, it naturally reached their servants, and through them, the commoners. Similarly, Mitsuha had gone out of her way to use hearsay to her advantage. She had asked the Ryners' maids, as well as Sven and Szep, to spread the rumor that Paradise was serving up Yamano Cuisine. She hadn't even bothered to use flyers this time because, as it turned out, most commoners were illiterate.

So that's why the flyers did nothing when I opened my store! Damn it!

Mitsuha had learned from this blunder, and she now stuck solely to word of

mouth in order to advertise. She had been careful not to overdo it as she didn't want the diner to receive more patrons than it could handle.

Business isn't about getting as many bodies as you can on day one—you need long-term stability!

At Paradise, Yamano Cuisine followed Mitsuha's business model of "Big Profits, Slow Returns". After all, there was a limit to how many customers the diner could hold. She chose to target wealthy individuals, commoners who desired a taste of luxury, men looking to show off to women, old couples who had money saved and wanted to celebrate a special occasion, and so on.

Of course, Yamano Cuisine that was cheap and easy to make had lower prices than the rest. A bowl of udon noodles, for example, cost just five to six small silver. They were also the kind that didn't look terribly fancy, so giving them a high price wouldn't have been a good idea. They were quite popular, though, so Mitsuha was satisfied.

Even the more expensive dishes weren't on the same level as the rip-offs in her general store. Nothing was priced higher than two silver, which was about 1,800 Japanese yen. And, as you might expect, the diner's original menu maintained its usual prices.

On the first day after Paradise's reopening, most of the tables were occupied for nearly the whole day. It wasn't a full house, but it was still a great success and an example of the power of gossip. Sometime in the afternoon, Stella had briefly caught a man peeking in through the window, wearing a bitter expression. From what she told Mitsuha, this visitor had been the crooked restaurant owner trying to bring them down.

Y'know, I feel like I should add that Marcel considered using "Mitsuha Cuisine" instead of "Yamano Cuisine", but I begged him not to do that. It was tough trying to figure out what to use instead. "Japanese Cuisine" wasn't completely right, and it would confuse me, too. "Earth Cuisine" didn't work well, either. In the end, we talked about it and agreed to call it "Yamano Cuisine". I was fine with it 'cause there aren't too many people around here who know my last name.

Anyhow, Paradise's part-timers had been hired on a seven-day contract.

During this time, Anel and Aleena aimed to become skilled enough to run the kitchen by themselves, which would allow Bernd to stick to front-of-house work. He didn't need both hands to run food or handle payments.

On the second day, Mitsuha began to notice wealthier-looking individuals and possible nobles among their customers. As these people likely had a reputation to maintain, they didn't want other members of high society to know they had visited such a commoner-oriented diner. It was for this reason they all wore plain, modest clothing.

That plan would've been smart if it wasn't so obvious, thought Mitsuha. *Not that I care if they come to this place—it was actually part of my plan! If Paradise's one-of-a-kind menu brings in nobles and influential people, anyone who wants to mess with this place—like that restaurant owner—will be in for a hell of a time. Powerful customers make powerful allies!*

Uh, it looks like there's way too many of them, though. We even have a line outside. Didn't really see this coming. Will it even out in a week, I wonder?

Wait, Aleena, that's not how you make katsudon!

By day three, business was booming. The training in the kitchen was also going swimmingly; Anel and Aleena had begun to excel at their jobs.

Mitsuha had thought long and hard about what kind of Yamano Cuisine to put on the menu. It was essential that the dishes were cheap for the diner to make and didn't rely on her world-jumping power, especially since she wasn't entirely convinced it was permanent. There would be no cheating with spices or anything like that, and the food had to be simple enough that even beginners could put it together quickly and with minimal instruction. Under those conditions, she had chosen things like omurice—fried rice encased in a fluffy omelet, Hamburg steak, and udon noodles.

I also taught them how to make mayonnaise. I mean, it's just a mix of eggs, oil, vinegar, and some other stuff. There's no harm in advancing their cuisine, right? It's not like I'm popularizing microwaves or something. I do have one for myself, though; I need it for frozen food.

Soon after opening up for the fifth day, Paradise was visited by a group of five men. They cut discourteously into the line outside.

“Ah, sir, please don’t—” Stella’s words were cut short when she realized who she was dealing with.

“Business is booming, I see,” said the man who stood out most in the group—the owner of the large restaurant. His entourage included the ex-Paradise employee he’d bought out, two guards, and a portly man Stella didn’t recognize. She quickly called for her husband.

“Can I help you?” Bernd asked as he walked out of the kitchen, clearly in ill humor.

“Now, now. There’s no need for such a sour expression. I am merely here to do my duty as a virtuous citizen,” said the restaurant owner.

“What are you talking about?”

“I reported your criminal acts and came to see to it that you’re properly penalized!” He pointed at Bernd with a wide smile on his face. The recent change in the diner’s operations had led him to switch to a direct assault.

“Criminal acts? What do you mean?”

“Don’t play dumb! I have guards with me!”

“Listen, I really don’t know what you’re talking about. You’re going to have to explain.”

In response to Bernd’s words, the restaurant owner pointed at the menu on the wall.

“That! That right there is proof of your misdeed!”

“Huh?”

“You falsely claim to sell the famous ‘Yamano Cuisine’, fooling your customers and robbing them blind! Guards, arrest this man at once!”

Bernd and Stella were flabbergasted. The three part-timers looked on with worried expressions, and the customers braced themselves for the outcome.

Finally, Bernd snapped out of his stupor. “Uhh, what proof do you have that our Yamano Cuisine is fake?”

“I thought you’d never ask.” The restaurant owner cracked a devilish grin and

presented one of the men that came with him. “This man is the founder of Yamano Cuisine! Viscount Ryner’s one and only head chef—Marcel!”

Gasps broke out among the crowd, though the more noble-looking sorts simply gawked.

“Marcel, please testify!”

“Hey, I can’t do that without trying the food. Let’s start there.” He wasn’t wrong, and the guards needed proof to make an arrest, so the restaurant owner reluctantly complied.

It won’t take long, anyway, he thought.

“All right, then. I’ll have that soup, the... ‘omurice’, and the, um, ‘Hamburg steak’, please.”

The restaurant owner was grinning from ear to ear. Marcel didn’t seem familiar with the dishes’ names, further evidence that the diner’s Yamano Cuisine was fake. Bernd shouted the order to the kitchen, and everyone else waited. The guests resumed eating and watched the unfolding drama in silence.

A short while later, the food was on the table in front of Marcel.

He was upset by the udon, huffy with his Hamburg steak, and outraged by the omurice.

“Bring me the one who made this!” he shouted, his chubby fists flushed and quaking.

Naturally, Bernd complied.



“Man, what’s with all the noise?”

It was Mitsuha who walked out of the kitchen.

“What’s the meaning of this?!” Upon hearing Marcel’s shout, the restaurant owner’s sneer grew to Cheshire proportions.

Marcel directed his frustration toward Mitsuha. “Master!” he cried. “Why did you teach these people dishes you didn’t teach me?!”

“What was that?!”

“Hey, that was party food,” Mitsuha replied. “These dishes are for the general public. I couldn’t really teach them to you back then, could I?”

“B-But I would like to serve this to the Ryners too...”

“Uh, then how about you learn by helping out in this kitchen? Maybe you can even teach the staff here a thing or two. They’re your fellow students, after all.”

“Certainly!” Marcel ran off to the kitchen, leaving the restaurant owner slack-jawed and the guards unsure of what to do next.

“So, what do you want?” Mitsuha’s voice could be heard from all corners of the diner.

“Is this where you get to eat Mitsuha’s cooking?!” Suddenly, the tense atmosphere was broken by a girl violently dashing through the door. “Ah, it’s Mitsuha!” she exclaimed.

“Beatrice...”

The girl was soon joined by her family: Count Bozes, Lady Iris, Alexis, and Theodore.

Hey, you guys need to get in line! Oh, who am I kidding, Mitsuha thought as the family simply waltzed in. While the other nobles had tried to masquerade as commoners, the Bozes were as unabashed and gaudy as always. No one had the gall to complain about them cutting the line. The high society customers turned their faces in the other direction, hoping not to be recognized.

“Uhhh. Bernd, I know them and they know me. You won’t mind if I let them cut the line, right?”

Bernd nodded vigorously, unable to speak.

“Is this where my daughter works?”

The door had opened up once more, and the man who had spoken was none other than...

“Ah, Your Majesty.”

Upon hearing Mitsuha’s words, Bernd collapsed.

Careful with that broken arm, she thought.

Again, the diner had four waitresses: Stella, Gritt, Ilse... and Sabine.

The girl hadn’t been able to bear Mitsuha’s absence for an entire week, so she had come to the diner every day. Mitsuha had asked her to help with running food and other assorted tasks, and the girl seemed to enjoy it. She would even sit beside customers she liked, talk to them, and share their food. Essentially, Sabine did whatever she wanted, but the customers didn’t mind, and so neither did Mitsuha. However...

Of course they don’t mind; what kind of man would say no to this cutie fawning all over them? It’s the pretty face, isn’t it? Women are worthless without one, huh?!

And man, whenever she talks to those noble types, she always takes notes. I don’t know what that’s about, but it scares me!

Mitsuha was also feeling mildly impressed by the guards brought in by the restaurant owner. She had heard that the town guards were all commoners with little training or social standing, but they ran to the king’s side with fierce loyalty. The king was accompanied by the chancellor and the older palace guard; the two of them looked very pleased with the town guards’ performance.

I really hope this ups their reputation. Oh, and another thing...

“Hey, guys,” she said, addressing them directly. “Bernd was attacked by thugs recently, and I think there might be more to that... Think you can look into it?” Mitsuha shifted her gaze from the guards to the restaurant’s owner. The king looked at him, then the guards, and nodded in encouragement.

“Right away, Your Majesty!” the town guards replied rigidly.

Not like they could’ve said no, but it’s a chance to move forward in life! G’luck, guys!

The guards grabbed hold of both the restaurant owner and the ex-Paradise employee and took them away.

They aren’t going home, that’s for sure, Mitsuha thought. The king’s own guards were, by the aged man’s order, stationed outside the diner.

Also, as it turned out, the ex-Paradise employee had committed a grave sin. The culinary sphere in this world valued relationships, including seniors’ affection for junior workers, bonds between fellow chefs and cooks, and gratitude toward one’s instructors, with the third being the most important. Betraying this principle was so heinous that no reputable restaurant or noble kitchen in the capital would hire him now.

The local chef network is something else, Mitsuha mused.

After everything that had happened, Mitsuha was sure no one would ever interfere with Paradise again. Part of her was a little worried that the diner itself was now beyond belief.

Imagine telling somebody, “Hey, there’s a commoner diner that nobles love, the king pops into now and again, and has a princess among its waitresses!” Of course they’re gonna say you’re full of it. But I didn’t plan on any of this, I swear! Seriously, talk about overkill. And speaking of “kill”, I sure hope that restaurant owner doesn’t get snuffed out.

As service resumed, the three Bozes children insisted Mitsuha herself make them something to eat. Sabine dropped all pretense of working and joined her father to order something as a customer.

This is going on your tab, Your Majesty. Oh, well. Guess I’ll treat the princess to an improvised kids’ meal using a Hamburg steak and some omurice.

This turned out to be a mistake, however, since everyone else then wanted the same.

It barely makes a profit, it’s a pain to make, and it’s not even on the menu,

damn it!

"I guess you failed the request, huh?" Aneel huffed, back in the kitchen.

"Uh, what makes you say that?" asked Mitsuha, puzzled.

"You haven't helped me... t-tie the knot with Anel!"

"Ah." It had completely slipped her mind.

"Hey, Your Majesty, can you help me with some matchmaking?"

"NOOO!" Bernd cried out in desperation.

You're a papa bear when it counts, huh, Bernd? Wait, what? You wouldn't mind 'cause he'd marry into the family? You stopped me 'cause of "something way more important"? What the hell?

And so, Paradise continued to run as a relatively normal diner. Besides the fact that it sold Yamano Cuisine, had hidden nobles among its customers, was often visited by the king, and employed a princess as one of its waitresses. Each new day saw another full house, another line out front.

You guys should hurry up and hire more people before one of you keels over.

The whole Paradise ordeal had not been a profitable venture for Mitsuha. She had merely helped out a diner that wasn't doing so well. Between the mercenaries' wages and various other expenses, she was left with just over one gold in profit.

Well, at least I had fun, she thought. *I'll chuck this gold coin into one of my deep pockets. It's got more significance than the gold I made selling glasses, after all.*

Sabine had taken a liking to serving customers, so she sometimes went to Paradise to help out. She waitressed for free—unless you included her staff meals—but received enough tips from customers to put away a healthy amount of savings. The princess was extremely good at asking for things.

Additionally, she was always under the watchful eye of her guards during shifts. Some disguised themselves as customers, while others pretended to be random citizens walking or loitering outside the building.

Once their contract ended, the two female mercenaries returned to their party, having made a pretty penny from their tips and the job itself. They could have chosen a comfortable career as waitresses, but what would the poor men of their party do then?

It really is all about the face, huh?! Oh, what? I just didn't get any tips 'cause I was in the kitchen the whole time? Okay, that's a relief.

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"I see we still know next to nothing about her," said the king.

"It appears so," replied the chancellor.

The two of them were in the king's office at the royal palace. Saar stood and listened attentively as the sovereign read a report.

"She appeared out of nowhere in the Bozes' county. Soon after, she killed a pack of wolves unaided in order to save a village girl; this encounter left her with severe wounds from which she quickly recovered. She then became acquainted with the Bozes family and went on to open a curious shop in the capital.

"Furthermore, the wares she sells have unknown origins, her knowledge is outstanding, and she displayed exceptional talent as host of the Ryner girl's debutante ball. I find it hard to believe she is merely a noble young lady from a small, faraway country.

"The Lightning Archpriestess, eh? Truly a character. She seems to mean the kingdom no harm, at least. We met through the dissolution of a human trafficking ring, and she helps people a great deal, from what I hear. She even saved Sabine, who has grown quite fond of her. You also have her to thank for those glasses."

"True..."

"Anyway, I see no problem with her. We should even work to bring her closer to us. After all, she's..."

"Very interesting, Your Majesty."

"Indeed she is!"

Their laughter echoed throughout the office.

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“Huh? An invitation from the king?” Mitsuha asked.

“Yes.” Sabine nodded. “My older brother is returning from training for campaigns with the royal guard, and my sister’s coming back from her diplomatic mission in another country. He wants to introduce you to them over dinner.”

Man, talk about a royal pain in the neck.

Mitsuha had no idea why she had to be introduced to the other prince and princess. While she and Sabine were on good terms, the others were basically strangers to her; she didn’t understand why that had to change. Even the king himself was simply “a friend’s father” to her.

Dads who care too much about their daughter’s friends are weirdos. But he is *the king... It’ll probably be way worse for me if I say no. Guess I’ve gotta go, then.*

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“I’m heeere!”

“She’s heeere!”

Mitsuha arrived at the palace to find Sabine waiting for her right at the gate.

I guess she’s really excited to have a friend come and visit her place. Well, it’s better than being welcomed by some grim-looking soldiers. I like refined old men, not dirty old farts.

The princess led Mitsuha into a relatively simple room, and it took her a moment to realize that it was the same one as last time.

Maybe the palace has less rooms than I thought.

The king and his wife were already inside. The queen was beautiful, but her silence minimized her presence in the room.

Oh, I get it, thought Mitsuha. *She’s just letting her husband have the spotlight. Well played, lady.*

In addition to the two of them, there was a prince who was perhaps a little over twenty, and a princess who looked to be in her mid-twenties.

Wait, mid-twenties and still living with her parents? In this kind of world? Y'know, that pretty much makes her a spinst—uhh, nevermind. I didn't mean it, all right, so don't look at me like that! And did you just read my mind? Is Professor X your dad or something?!

Lastly, there was a princess in her late teens—seventeen or eighteen, Mitsuha guessed—and the two little royals she already knew, Sabine and Leuhen.

The entire family was present, and their combined gazes made Mitsuha feel as though she was being evaluated all throughout dinner. The stares from the eldest brother and sister were particularly stern. They didn't seem malicious or hostile, however, and so Mitsuha assumed they were merely sizing up the stranger their youngest sister had suddenly become so fond of.

Hey, now, it's not like I meant for this to happen. Ahh, Sabine, don't you dare mention the DVDs!

When the dinner finally came to an end, Mitsuha was glad to leave. Though she had initially been apprehensive about joining them, their discussions about specialties and economic states of the country's separate territories had made the affair worthwhile. However, the king had also spoken with her about the surrounding countries. The eldest princess had even pried for her opinion.

Why?! I'm just a merchant! I don't care if the neighbors are acting suspicious. And why does the prince talk about blades so much? Is he cut from the same cloth as Theodore?

◇ ◇ ◇

On one particular occasion, Mitsuha took the day off. She actually did so whenever she felt like it, but preferred to reserve such days for when she had business in Japan. This time, however, she had other arrangements.

She made her way to the forest she had camped in with Sven's group not too long ago. Her goal, you ask? Well, the mercenary captain from Earth had invited her to a barbecue, and she wanted to hunt down a present for him and the rest of his crew.

Yeah, I actually became good friends with everyone in Wolfgang—not just the captain. There was a new drill instructor every time, and we'd always get to talking. Plus, they're all from different countries, and I could speak everyone's native language, so that helped me score some points with them.

Now that I think about it, Sven and his party are all mercenaries too. Crazy how I know mercs from two completely different worlds, and all of them are good people.

She shifted her focus to potential targets for her hunt. Firstly, a boar would be too much for her. Not because she couldn't shoot one down, but simply because she couldn't carry it. She opted to go after rabbits instead. Birds were also a viable option, but plucking off all the feathers would have been a tedious process.

If I had more time, I'd make a bird stuffed with veggies or herbs... Oh well.

In the end, she managed to get four rabbits. Wanting to get in some practice, she had chosen to use her slingshot instead of a crossbow.

I'll just take two in each hand and—oh, man, they're heavy. Ahh, ow ow ow! One of the horns just jabbed into my leg! Huh? Did I forget to mention that the rabbits here have horns? My brain just processes them as "rabbits", not "horned rabbits" or whatever, so there's that.

Having completed her goal, Mitsuha world-jumped to an empty part of the mercenary base. Flames were raging in the bodies of many makeshift barbecue grills, which the mercs had assembled using cut-up metal barrels.

She should be here soon, thought the captain. Seconds later, he saw her, as well as the strange objects in her hands.

"I'm heeere!" she said in a singsong voice.

"Uh, I see that," the captain replied awkwardly. He was taken aback by her appearance.

The clothes she had on reminded him immediately of hobbits. In her belt, she had equipped a 93R, a revolver, a knife, a dagger, and a slingshot. A crossbow was slung across her back. Her entire ensemble, combined with her silky black hair and youthful face, made her look like some kind of elf or fairy.

That reminds me... She paid in yen the first time. Hotel workers and businessmen sometimes call Japanese people "fairies", right? Makes sense, I guess. They're small, polite creatures who're always busy, wearin' a smile, and makin' places prosper. And if something bad happens to 'em, they don't complain, they just disappear and never come back. Once one goes, the rest follow, and when all of 'em are gone, the place goes to shit. Or so I hear, anyway.

One of my boys said they were like some kinda critter called a... what was it, a "zashiki warashi"? That guy was always creamin' himself over Japan, though. Who knows what the hell he was talking about.

Despite finding Mitsuha strange in many ways, the captain appreciated her as a business partner. She paid well, never caused trouble, and was generally just a fun and interesting—albeit tiny—girl.

He was, however, at a loss for what to make of the things she had brought along with her this time. *You can keep sayin' these're rabbits all ya want, but rabbits don't have horns, y'know? Yeah, I still ate 'em! And yeah, they were tasty as hell, damn it!*

One of the younger men in the group uploaded some photos of Mitsuha and the strange animals on the internet, along with the following caption: "A princess came to our BBQ. Brought horned rabbits with her. #justmercthings"

C'mon, man, you ever hear of privacy? thought the captain.

Some days after their barbecue, they were visited by a number of eccentrics. One claimed to be a scholar and wanted to see the horned rabbits. The mercenaries informed him that they had already eaten them and buried the remains. In response, he promptly dug them out, handed them his business card, and left.

What the hell? And no, you numbskulls aren't gonna see or take photos of the fairy! Get the fuck out and get yer own!

And so, the peaceful days continue for me, even if they don't for anybody else, thought Mitsuha. *Huh? That's not real peace, then? Oops.*

Chapter 13: This Means War!

“We’re at war,” the king said.

His words were directed toward Mitsuha, who had been invited to the palace once again via the Sabine Express.

Well, that came out of left field.

“I would like you to take Sabine and evacuate to another country.”

So that’s *why I’m here, huh.*

“ABSOLUTELY NOT!” she cried.

The king and chancellor were taken aback by her rapid rejection.

“I poured blood, sweat, and tears into building my store. Leaving it behind is nothing but a last resort!”

“Oh, this is but a temporary evacuation; a cautionary measure, if you will. You would be cleared to return as soon as the coast was clear.”

“That’s not a guarantee, though, is it? I’ll be protecting my own store, and if worse comes to worst, I’ll just take myself out along with it!”

“Take yourself out? Why would you go to such an extreme?!”

“My store is my home and my castle. If you want to break in, you’re going down with me!”

The king looked uneasy.

Naturally, Mitsuha wasn’t *really* planning to die with her store. When she referred to taking herself out along with it, she meant this quite literally—in an emergency, she would jump to an uninhabited area on Earth, taking the store with her, then find a secure return location in one of this world’s other countries. Jumping alongside an entire building was child’s play for Mitsuha.

To continue her business elsewhere, she would simply have to make it appear as though she had died when the store vanished. Therefore, she could stand

her ground there until the very last moment. The information network in this world was relatively weak, and there was no photography, so she would have no trouble creating a new life for herself somewhere far away.

Besides, people think I'm a little kid, so they'll picture me looking different in a few years' time. That means I'd be safe, because by then, I'd still look the same. Too bad for you, would-be sleuths, I'm already fully grown! Agh... Even though it's a good plan, it still hurts, damn it!

Above all, Mitsuha had no desire to get involved in a war, so she simply refused the king's request and left the palace. However, she did intend to come for Sabine if the country's situation turned dire. The young princess had the adaptability to make it anywhere, be it another country in this world or even on Earth.

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Back in her store, Mitsuha spent a long time thinking. No customers came, surely because everyone had heard of the war. It wasn't something that could be done in secret, and there was no point in doing so. War involved mobilizing a great number of soldiers, calling for volunteers and mercenaries, gathering food and other war supplies... These activities simply couldn't be hidden.

Now that ballroom season was over, the nobles had all returned to their homelands. Beatrice had wanted to stay in the capital, but in the end, she too had gone back with her family. The only nobles who remained were those who had sons or subordinates to run their lands, and the landless nobles who had power only through their posts.

According to the king, the country they were now at war with had been acting suspiciously for some time, but he hadn't expected them to take action so soon. They shouldn't have had enough military and finances to fight a war for several years, and neither country was terribly impoverished or lacking in options, so the king had wondered what they were planning.

Then, he had received earth-shattering news: the enemy empire had somehow added monsters—orcs, ogres, and the like—to their army.

On top of these grievous conditions, a few nobles with territory at the nations' borders had chosen to defect to the other side. Normally, these nobles

would have kept enemies at bay while buying time for the kingdom to gather its forces. With their betrayal, however, the enemy army had quickly crossed the border territories and gone on to crush all others in their path as they advanced toward the capital.

Express messengers had been dispatched throughout the kingdom with requests for reinforcements. They were constantly switching out horses and riders to save time, but it didn't seem as though they would make it before the enemy arrived at the capital. Even forces closest to the enemy's path of conquest had a difficult time getting in their way.

Additionally, no one in the kingdom knew *why* monsters had joined the enemy army—the creatures couldn't be communicated with, after all.

Things aren't looking too good, to put it lightly, Mitsuha reflected. *The kingdom's pretty much in checkmate.*

Her benefactor, Count Bozes, resided near the sea on the other side of the country, far away from the invasion. On one hand, his territory would be safe, but on the other, his troops clearly wouldn't arrive in time. Armies were far slower than stagecoaches, but from what Mitsuha had been told, the enemy would soon reach the capital's doorstep.

It takes a while for info to get from the observation posts to the city, after all. Hmmm.

All right, I've got it. I'm gonna go to the palace. If something happens, I can just jump to Earth, then to the store. My priorities right now are info-gathering and supporting little Sabine. And of course I'm gonna go in fully strapped!

Mitsuha equipped a knife-proof vest, three guns, a knife, a dagger, and some spare magazines. She set the store's security system to maximum defense mode. If someone were to enter, it would release a smoke signal and fireworks, alerting her immediately.

Here I go!

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The guards let Mitsuha into the palace without issue, which initially caught her off guard.

Oh, so you know my face? And the king told you to let me pass? Okay, then.

Grateful for their reception, she walked into the building. This time, she hadn't come to see the king. The two of them had already met quite recently, and he was likely too busy for her now. She searched for Sabine instead, but had no luck finding her.

I'll have to ask someone. But then again, I feel like a person walking around a palace searching for a princess would come off kinda sketchy. It'll be hard to play it off.

While walking around, Mitsuha bumped into the chancellor, who let her know that the king was otherwise occupied. Before she could inquire where to find Sabine, he asked her to come sit in on a meeting, practically dragging her along with him.

Hey, that's not asking! You're totally forcing me to come! What kind of meeting is it, anyway? And what's it got to do with me? We talkin' business? Do you want some supplies? Oh, so it's a war council. Gotcha.

The council room they entered was already occupied by about thirty people, each of whom looked to be of either a noble or military sort. They were seated on simple chairs, and at the far end of the space, there was a long table with a few distinguished figures behind it.

Uh, you're gonna drag me this far in? I'm fine with sitting in the back! Look, now they're all staring at me!

"And who is this, chancellor?" someone asked.

See?

*"*Everyone, this is Mitsuha, in the flesh," said the chancellor.

"Ahh, the infamous Mitsuha, eh?"

What do you mean, "infamous"? What'd you hear about me?!

"Mitsuha!" one of the men in the room stood up, running over to her with arms spread wide.

Is this guy comin' in for a hug? Hell no!

THWACK!

Mitsuha sunk her fist into his stomach. The mercenary captain had taught her how to punch, and the way the man collapsed made it clear she was a star student.

Wait... That's Alexis!

"How could you?" he squeaked. His eyes brimmed with tears as the others laughed at him.

What made you think you could hug me in front of people? Or at all, for that matter?

Mitsuha soon discovered that Alexis had been sent to the capital to gather information and open lines of communication as his father's representative. In the meantime, Count Bozes prepared his army to support the capital.

Alexis' responsibility carried real weight, and Mitsuha fully understood why he was participating in the war council. He even had a seat near the front of the room, which showed how important a count's son really was. Additionally, while it was his duty, his presence here was likely also a way to help him gain some prestige.

He had come here by a fast carriage, which meant the journey had only taken him three days. The count's forces were expected to arrive in seven.

Well, the troops are heavily armored, thought Mitsuha, *so a week is actually pretty good for such a tight schedule.*

In the end, Mitsuha was provided a seat in one of the front rows—closer to the edge, at the very least. Thereafter, the council discussed the current state of affairs, examined the enemy's routes, and so on. In all likelihood, the hostile forces would arrive at the capital by tomorrow evening, make camp, then lay siege to the city the next morning.

They figured the enemy army was composed of about 20,000 individuals, 3,000 of which were goblins, orcs, and ogres, among other monsters. The kingdom's allied forces amounted to just 2,000. Any troops that had been deployed to buy time had probably been killed in action, so it was best not to count them. The current plan was to defend the city with the capital army,

guards, royal guards, and mercenaries until reinforcements from the other territories arrived.

At the front of the room, in the center of the bigwig group at the table, was the supreme commander—Marquis Eiblinger. His hair barely had sprinkles of salt within its pepper, but he was a decorated war hero. He had braved the front lines with a great Zweihänder in hand until he inherited his father's title. His peers' respect and admiration had made him the best man for the job.

While the roundtable was considering how to position their forces, the guards let a tired-looking soldier into the room. He was clad in iron armor and had a short sword at his side.

"I come with a message about the state of the enemy army!" he declared, sliding a large leather bag off his shoulder and opening it.

Before she knew it, Mitsuha leapt up from her chair and dashed toward Marquis Eiblinger, her thoughts lagging behind.

Weird—that's not right—a long-distance messenger would wear light leather armor and keep the message somewhere more discreet and not have any other stuff getting in the way—I know he could be tense about talking to these people, but those eyes are just too bloodshot—the hard leather bag looks like a pain to carry—he's like a hunter ready to strike—if I shoot him, I'll hit people behind him—am I an idiot—I'll die—but I have to prevent the marquis' death—the chaos would be too bad—crap, I needed bulletproof not knife-proof kevlar—aaahhhh!

Mitsuha defended the marquis like a goalkeeper in handball. She didn't regret her reflexive reaction; even if afforded the time to think, she would have done the same.

I'm Mitsuha, goddamn it! Mitsuha Yamano!

The faux messenger whipped out a small, multishot bow. It had the shape of a crossbow and a special design that allowed it to release five bolts at once. Right before he fired, someone jumped in front of Mitsuha.

THUD.

Mitsuha's left shoulder seared with pain as she fell backward. A moment later, a man collapsed on top of her. Both his shoulder and abdomen were

riddled with bolts.



Upon realizing he had missed his target, the intruder unsheathed his short sword and rushed toward the marquis. Since this was the royal palace, and everyone was seated together in close quarters, most people had removed their sword belts and couldn't maneuver in time to act.

Mitsuha pulled out the 93R with one quivering hand, attempted to stabilize it with the other, and took aim at her opponent. Heat throbbed in her left shoulder, but the pain had been suppressed by adrenaline or dopamine or whatever else had begun coursing through her. It didn't stop her arms from shaking, however.

She was lying on the floor, watching the assassin running behind her. From this angle, any bullets that missed would hit the ceiling—no bystanders were at risk.

I can shoot him!

B-B-BANG, B-B-BANG, B-B-BANG!

Three-bullet bursts, fired three times. The would-be assassin dropped to the ground and the room fell silent, hardly daring to breathe.

"Mitsuha... Do I pass... as your knight?" her protector asked in a weak voice.

"Alexis!" Mitsuha looked down at him. "No, actually. You totally failed!"

"FAILED?!" their audience blurted in disbelief. "How?!"

Easy peasy, she thought.

"Look, there's one in my shoulder! So yeah, you failed."

"Haha..." Alexis laughed dryly, his head drooping.

"But," she continued, "I respect your effort. You may have messed up, but I'm not disqualifying you yet. Make sure not to disappoint me next time."

"'Next time', huh?"

"Yes. Next time."

Oh, so that's what she meant, thought the men in the room. But the veterans present knew full well that there would be no "next time". A shoulder injury was hardly fatal, but his stomach wound would quickly decay. The courageous

soul would die a painful death in just a few days... truly a shame.

Alexis closed his eyes as the pain sapped away his consciousness.

“Ahaha.”

Mitsuha’s sudden laugh startled everyone.

“Haha... Ahaha... AHAHAHAHAHA!”

Have fear and grief driven her mad?! they wondered, feeling a change in the air.

“I was holding back,” she said to no one in particular. “All this time, I was holding back.”

What is she saying?

“I tried not to mess up this world’s progression, to make sure the hardworking people here didn’t suffer. I mean, I know I overdid it here and there, but I was still holding back a lot. And *this* is what I get? I almost died, and I couldn’t even protect someone close to me.”

The council members weren’t sure what she was talking about, but understood she was expressing some measure of regret.

“That’s it. ENOUGH! NO MORE HOLDING BACK! I’LL SHOW THEM WHAT I’VE GOT!” Mitsuha turned to the marquis. “Lord Eiblinger, I’ll return the day after tomorrow, at dawn. If you would, please forbid passage into the palace’s inner courtyard starting tomorrow night.”

“Well, I have nothing against doing that, but what are you planning?”

“I’m going to prepare an unstoppable army. And come dawn, two days from now, the enemy...”

She cracked a sinister grin.

“...Will know the true meaning of fear and despair. They will see that hell exists in this world.”

The next moment, Mitsuha and the unconscious young man vanished from the room.

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Wolfgang, the mercenary group Mitsuha had allied herself with, had enormous headquarters. The land in the area had been quite inexpensive, allowing them to really spread out. They even had enough space to construct a recreation room, which was located in a two-story building at one corner of the base. Currently, the mercenary captain was enjoying a game of billiards and a fresh cigarette in this very room.

However, his leisure time was about to come to a very abrupt end.

WHUMP!

Out of nowhere, a client he was all too familiar with materialized a few feet above the table and immediately fell onto the table. She was bloodied, writhing in pain, and in her arms was a young man in even worse condition. The captain gaped at the two of them, cue still in hand.

“Ow, ow, ow!” Mitsuha cried. “These balls are so hard!”

No way those hurt more than that bolt stickin’ outta yer shoulder, the captain thought.

“Get the medic,” she said, rolling off the table with a serious expression. “He protected me! Don’t let him die!”

The captain gestured with his jaw, spurring the young mercenaries around him into action. One called for the medic while the other began administering first aid to the unconscious man. He didn’t remove the bolt, however; it would have worsened the bleeding, and the state of its head was yet unclear.

That guy put his life on the line to protect the li’l lady, so ’course we’re gonna fix him up. Can’t let a guy like that kick the bucket. Not likin’ that bolt in her shoulder, though. If yer gonna protect her, don’t fuck it up, man. Yer eatin’ my fist when ya get back from death’s door. He put down the cue and took a glass off a nearby table.

“Captain, you said you don’t have any big jobs lined up, right?” Mitsuha asked.

“Yeah.”

The girl smiled from ear to ear. “Well, I want to hire *all* of you. We’d move out

in the morning, day after tomorrow. There are about twenty thousand enemies, including monsters. I'll pay you forty thousand gold coins, guaranteed... if not more. You up for it?"

CRASH!

Huh, some guy dropped his glass. What a pussy, the captain thought. *Jeez, my throat's super dry. Lemme just drink this and... Aw, shit. I'm the one who dropped it.*

"Before that, li'l lady..."

"Hmm? What's up?"

"Let's go to the hospital and get that bolt outta ya, all right?"

Chapter 14: The Archpriestess' March

When Alexis awoke, Mitsuha told him that they were in her homeland. Their medical technology was highly advanced, and he would be on his way to recovery so long as he obeyed the doctor's gestures. She added that she would be back in a few days, and they would return to the kingdom once he had healed. Relieved, he went back to sleep.

Mitsuha herself had already gotten the bolt in her shoulder removed and the wound stitched up. According to medical personnel, it would recover completely without leaving a scar. She had been delighted to hear it.

All mercenaries had been given urgent summons, even those who were on vacation. Mitsuha had assured them they were welcome to opt out of the job, but still wondered how many of the 59 members would participate.

By now, everyone was preparing for battle. Some checked the condition of weapons and vehicles, others worked on securing more ammo. There was a decent quantity in reserve, but considering the amount this job would require, they decided to buy more just to be safe.

Mitsuha found some time to explain the kind of forces they were going up against. She mentioned that orcs were most likely too tough to go down with just one handgun bullet, and that ogres and beyond would probably survive barrages from handguns, SMGs, and perhaps even 5.56mm assault rifles.

I haven't fought any myself, so this is just a guess based on what Sven's crew told me.

The mercenaries knew they were traveling to another world. Mitsuha's visits and behavior up until now were strange enough, but the way she had showed up this time left no room for doubt. Most of them had readily accepted the fact, and no one really questioned her about it.

Just like Sven and his people, they respect their employer's privacy. Must be a merc thing.

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At five o'clock in the morning, about a day and a half after Mitsuha had appeared in the rec room, 57 mercenaries stood in formation outside the vehicle garages.

At the front of them all stood Mitsuha, wearing a white dress and a gun belt. There was a 93R on her right side, and since her left arm was still incapacitated, she didn't have her usual dagger and revolver. Instead, she carried several spare magazines. Though her left arm was tied up in a sling, she could still move her hand and use it to reload.

She raised her right hand. Everyone fell silent and waited.

"Gentlemen, it's time for war! There are twenty thousand of them and fifty-eight of us! No doubt, this is going to be a dangerous mission. However, your rewards will be gold, honor, recognition, and the people's eternal gratitude.

"In war, each side claims to be the righteous one, but they're all the same. There's no justice. They fight over money and power, and the ones who suffer are always the little people. But not this time! Our mission is to defend the capital's innocents from an enemy that not only broke a treaty, but invaded the country with a horde of monsters!"

She paused. Her eyes swept across their faces before she continued.

"I say that in this fight, we ARE the true justice!"

"**YEEEAAAAAHHH!"**

The mercenaries' roar was deafening.

"I'm going to step away for ten minutes. Anyone who doesn't want to fight, leave now. Those who stay are going with me to the battlefield. I have faith in your courage." Mitsuha then walked off the platform and into a nearby building.

Ten minutes later, all 57 mercenaries were still lined up and ready to go. Two people remained absent from the group, but only because they were on vacation far, far away.

"To the vehicles!" Mitsuha shouted.

“You sure are somethin’, li’l lady,” the captain remarked breathlessly.

The start of her speech had merely been a rewording of the ad for Ernest Shackleton’s Trans-Antarctic Expedition, but the captain, unaware of this fact, was moved by her knack for leadership.

Wolfgang was in possession of a great number of vehicles: lightweight armored vehicles, jeeps with mounted machine guns, tarp-covered trucks... and “God”.

“God” was the one thing Wolfgang had unwavering faith in.

Once, when their group was still small and nameless, they had been hired to fight in battle. Their employer—a government’s military—had used them as the rear guard. They hadn’t had the power or position to protest, but they knew no one would sacrifice their own to cover a couple of mercenaries. Military soldiers had always looked down on them. After all, while they may have chosen to fight and sacrifice themselves for their country, mercenaries’ one true allegiance was to their paychecks... or so the soldiers believed.

From the soldiers’ perspective, it was entirely possible that these dishonorable dogs would quickly turn and become their enemies if the opposition offered them better wages. As long as they remained allies, however, the mercenaries wouldn’t fight the soldiers, and they needn’t bat an eye at mercenary deaths. In fact, the mercs should have been honored to die as the soldiers’ shields—they were on a grand mission, after all. This was the kind of mentality that had led the military to use mercs as bait and fodder while they themselves retreated.

With no transport trucks or even lightweight armored vehicles, the mercenaries had quickly been chased down by the rebel soldiers. But just when they had accepted their impending demise, “God” had descended upon them.

It was a half-track that had been abandoned after becoming lodged atop a large boulder. Mounted on the vehicle was an out-of-date, 20mm autocannon. The desperate mercenaries had examined it and soon discovered they could turn on the engine by tinkering with the electrical systems. As it turned out, the artillery had still been fully functional.

They had taken down the half-track, stashed it behind the rock, and

ambushed the rebel soldiers pursuing them. The 20mm autocannon had roared something fierce as it delivered its divine punishment. Not even trucks or LAVs had been able to withstand the wrath of the exploding 20mm shells.

In the end, the mercenaries had survived. They had then poured great funds and effort in order to resurrect the beast. This beast had crushed and devoured its foes, a metallic incarnate of the once-great dire wolf. It had served as their wolfish fangs, and became the namesake of their crew, “Wolfgang”. These events had occurred so long ago that the current captain hadn’t yet been known as “Captain”, but rather as “Young’un”.

Been a while since we got to use God, the captain thought. His gaze wandered over to Mitsuha. *And this time, we’ve even got one of his angels.* He felt certain of their victory.

A few seconds later, the people in the yard disappeared, and a gentle breeze was all that filled the void.

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As he had been ordered, a soldier was keeping watch over the royal palace’s inner courtyard. By now, he had lost track of time.

What’s the point of watching this place? he thought, his eyelids drooping. *The enemies are outside the capital, right? It’s gonna be morning... soon...*

Just before sleep overtook him, there was a rapid shift in the air. He opened his eyes, and standing before him was a great pack of strange, angular beasts. A girl in a white dress was riding one of them.

“Wolfgang’s here!” Her voice echoed across the palace grounds.

Upon hearing the news, Marquis Eiblinger and the other noble officers hurried to the inner courtyard. They gawked at Mitsuha, who had gone from poking out of the hatch of an LAV to kneeling on top of it.

Mitsuha winced. *This is hard on my knees.*

“Everyone, assume your positions! We’re going to move through the capital’s main gate at dawn and destroy the enemy. Lord Eiblinger, you stay in the city and protect the gates. I’ll be sending you some support.”

“Huh?!”

Leaving the dumbfounded nobles behind, the wolves went to their posts. As part of the plan, a group of six mercenaries was dispatched to three of the four city gates, the exception being the main gate to the south. They drove around to supply each gate’s forces with equipment, machine guns, and grenade launchers.

Once everyone was sufficiently armed, the vehicles converged at the palace gates, passed through, and halted at the main gate. Their sounds roused the townsfolk, who trickled out to see what was happening.

“Cut the engines!” Mitsuha shouted once they had arrived, wireless microphone in hand. Her booming voice was soon the only sound in the capital.

“Everyone! I love this country!”

No one in Wolfgang knew the local language, so they had no clue as to she was saying. She was grateful for that.

“I’m telling you, I *love* this country. I love this city! I love the people living in it! To protect you all, I’ll stain my hands with the blood of our enemies.

“*Wolfgang, move out!*”

The last part had been in English, so the mercs turned on the engines again and began their advance.

“Open the gate!” she ordered.

The guards could hardly refuse, so they quickly did as she told them. The army of vehicles slowly passed through the gate and left the city. Mitsuha’s white dress danced in the wind.

“Ohh, goodness! It’s the march of the Lightnin’ Archpriestess!” someone marveled.

“You know her, old man Leiden?!” a young man asked him.

“Yes... When the third princess was bein’ attacked by scoundrels in an alley, that girl brought her lightnin’ down upon ’em! Said her name’s the ‘Lightnin’ Archpriestess’! I saws it all from behind a wall!”

“An archpriestesss?”

“Lightning Archpriestess...”

“The Lightning Archpriestess is going to battle for us!”

The murmurs grew louder, and word spread. Soon, they grew into joyous cries.

“Praise the Archpriestess!”

“All hail the Lightning Archpriestess!”

“We can’t see nothin’ from here! Let’s climb up on the wall!”

I think I hear something disturbing behind me, Mitsuha thought, feeling an uncomfortable tingle in her spine. *I’m just imagining it, right? Yup, I’ve gotta be. I can’t hear you! Lalala!*

She tried to cover her ears, but unfortunately, she couldn’t lift her left arm. At the very least, no one in Wolfgang understood nor cared about the gossip.

Whew, even this cloud’s got a silver lining!

◇ ◇ ◇

The enemy—the Imperial Army—had set up makeshift front-line headquarters within view of the capital. As dawn broke, the supreme commander of the invasion stood to order the start of the attack. However, he immediately lost his composure upon seeing what was happening down below.

“They’re opening the main gate?”

Their operation was supposed to be a siege. The Imperial Army had already gone over the plans again and again; the capital’s forces should have had no other option than to try and hold their ground until reinforcements arrived a few days later. The kingdom had no knowledge of the Empire’s secret weapon, so they likely believed they would survive the assault.

Surely they aren’t stupid enough to try and fight us out in the open, are they? the commander wondered.

Such a strategy might have been feasible if some agent of the kingdom had assassinated the commander, but it was otherwise impossible. As he

contemplated their intentions, a series of shapes came through the gates, advancing a short distance before stopping at once. Then, the gates closed once more.

“What in the world are those?”

What had emerged from the gates appeared vaguely like carriages without horses.

Are they being pushed by people? Or are they just throwaways to buy time? Is the enemy here to negotiate? I don’t intend to let them waste our time, but it’s common etiquette to make an attempt.

“It’s a negotiation. Go. And make it quick,” he ordered.

“As you wish!” The noble responsible for such matters quickly prepared himself, mounted his horse, and galloped off.

“Welp, someone’s coming,” said Mitsuha. “Snipers, prepare to fire. Your target is the mounted enemy soldier.” She had sent the order through a microphone at her throat, which was wirelessly delivered to the snipers waiting on the walls.

The rider stopped about a hundred yards before the vehicles and raised his voice.

“I am a noble of the venerable Aldar Empire, Count Tristan von Lotz! Currently, we—”

“Shoot him.”

BAAANG!

The rider toppled off his horse.

“How dare you... You harmed a messenger?! Do you know anything about honor and pride, you barbarians?!” The enemy commander flushed with rage.

Suddenly, Mitsuha’s voice came through a set of speakers, reaching all 20,000 Imperial soldiers, and perhaps even every corner of the capital.

“You! Honorless, prideless dogs of the empire!”

“Wh-What?!” Upon hearing his own words redirected toward him, the

commander began to shake.

Mitsuha continued her verbal assault. “You broke the treaty, snuck into this country with the help of some traitors, joined hands with monsters, and killed civilians on your way here. Glorified bandits like you have no right to talk about honor or pride!

“God is angry. No matter how courageously you fight or what kind of deeds you do here, you Imperial dogs will not go to His side! Hell is where you all belong!”

The commander wanted to bark back, but no matter how hard he shouted, he couldn’t speak over the girl. While her voice reached all of his soldiers, his could only be heard by those close to him. He clenched his teeth in impotent frustration.

Mitsuha, on the other hand, was just getting started.

“Wanna know why I’m right? Because I said so! Now, feel the wrath of the one true God!” She switched back to her throat mic. “Machine gun one! Ten o’clock to two o’clock, mow them down in five seconds! Fire!”

The order was given, and the execution came soon after.

BA-BA-BA-BA-BA-BA-BA-BA-BANG!

These were loud, thunderous sounds the soldiers had never heard before, and what followed was the complete, brutal destruction of dozens of their brothers-in-arms. Bodies were torn apart, spraying flesh and gore in all directions.

“**AAAAAAAHHHH!”**

Hell truly did exist in this world.

“Wh-What? What’s happening...?” The imperial commander was at a loss. Neither his heart nor his mind could keep up with the violent reality that had opened up before him.

“Li’l lady, seems like each monster’s got somebody handlin’ it,” noted the captain.

“Pick them off one by one.”

“You got it.”

BANG, BANG, BAAANG!

More shots cracked across the field.

The commander snapped back to his senses and began shelling out orders. “Attack! Make the monsters charge! Hurry up and crush them! Follow them up with recruits!”

However, his forces didn’t budge.

“What’s the matter with you?! Hurry! What if that attack comes again?!”

“C-Commander, all the officers in charge of the monsters are down!”

“What?!”

Our men toiled for ages, learning how to communicate with those monsters through gestures and sounds. They were irreplaceable... invaluable. We had casualty after casualty, but they refused to give up. Us having the monsters on our side was the result of literal blood, sweat, and tears. And now they die here, without achieving anything?!

“All right, everyone, leave your vehicles and set up arms!” Mitsuha ordered.

Every mercenary, save for those manning mounted weapons, exited their vehicles, spread out, and readied their lightweight, stationary machine guns. The others prepared the assault rifles and rocket launchers they had on hand.

“Force the monsters to come to the forefront! We’ll overwhelm them once we have the momentum! Make the new recruits come out too, but remember, they’re just expendable farmers!

“Light machine gunners, you harass the monsters, but don’t outright attack them or the conscripts unless they charge! Then join the mercs manning assault rifles and aim for the real soldiers!”

“Huh? We’re not doin’ the monsters?” asked the captain.

“Nope. We’ll make them think they’ve been duped, so they never trust humans again. Then we chase them back to the empire. Maybe monsters from this territory will join them too... Eat a lot of their soldiers on your way back, my

lovelies!

"Then all those conscripted farmers will be terrified, and they'll turn on the empire out of hatred. They'll make sure no one is ever forced to ally with the empire again."

"Li'l lady, can I say somethin'?"

"Sure. What is it?"

"You're freakin' me out!"

BANG!

B-B-B-BANG!

B-B-B-B-B-B-BANG!

Gunshots claimed the lives of enemy soldiers one after another: the ones giving orders, the well-armored, and the ones on horseback. Losing those in the middle of the leadership pyramid was especially damaging, since they could no longer control the army.

The farmers, who carried nothing but cheap spears, refused to move forward. As for the monsters, they had seen their leaders fall one by one, and the smell of impending danger fueled their desire to flee back home.

Naturally, this fight was not just a matter of killing 20,000 soldiers; causing them to turn tail and retreat was just as effective. Even in wars back on Earth, it was rare that most people on the losing side died. A battle where even half an army was killed in action would be considered catastrophic. In fact, defeat often came once a side had lost about a third of its forces.

It was for this reason that Mitsuha had chosen to target the career soldiers; they were the meat of the army and the only ones who had a solid handle on what they were doing.

Mitsuha found herself wondering if there were mercenaries among the professionals. *If so... whoopsie. Sorry, fellas. You had a chance to make some money in this war, but now you're gonna get shot down just because you have better gear and fight better than peasants.*

Hmm, I wonder if Sven's crew got hired too. They probably feel lucky that

they're getting paid without really having to fight. Maybe you'll make even more in the chase that's gonna happen afterward.

Anyway, the enemy commander's doin' a solid job holding his people together, but I feel like more and more of them are retreating, and—What the hell is that*?!*

"They're here! Now we can fight back!" the empire's commander shouted, looking upward.

Above him, darkening the morning sky, was a swarm of wyverns. 36 of them, to be exact.

As he gazed upon the creatures, he thought of what a struggle it had been to raise them. A good number of soldiers had been killed during attempts to steal wyvern eggs, but a few had eventually succeeded, and the incubation process began. The first round of hatchings failed, with the young dying prematurely, which led the army to sacrifice additional soldiers to steal more eggs.

One man had even lost his life to a healthy juvenile. The thing had eaten him.

This majestic achievement is the result of hundreds of sacrifices and decades of work! The riders and wyverns are now united as one—these are the world's first flying riders!

The men mounted on wyverns wielded swords and pikes for close combat as well as javelins for ranged attacks, making them a formidable force. They could easily rain down spears upon the enemies, then fly behind the gates to fight them with swords, spears, and even the wyvern's powerful claws and beaks, making it easy to force open the gates and let the rest of the army inside.

It's beautiful, the commander thought, bliss bubbling up within him. *Ohh, how blessed am I to see this moment with my own two eyes!*

Mitsuha's voice abruptly cut through his excitement. "God! It's your turn!"

"Roger!"

B-B-B-B-B-B-B-B-B-B-BANG!

"Huh...?"

Seconds.

It had taken mere seconds to eradicate twenty-some years' worth of funds, bodies, and labor. The first flying forces of this world were reduced to nothing more than chunks of airborne flesh.

The enemy commander collapsed, his eyes filling with tears. *Our battle is just beginning; I know that. But I lost my superiors, my subordinates, my academy classmates, and even my cousin in order to create this wyvern army. All that, and it was torn to shreds in just a few moments. Forgive me, but allow me to mourn for a moment...*

THUD. THUD. THUD. THUD.

The ground shook as something appeared from behind them.

"What are you doing, you pathetic creatures?"

Dragons had come.

Ancient dragons, to be precise, and there were three of them. These beings had intelligence far beyond that of mankind and the ability to expel magic breath. They were the very reason behind the empire's absurd invasion.

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He was born in Dragon Valley 328 years ago. Dragons had a terribly low birth rate, so he was spoiled and treated like a child for quite a long time. That ended when a baby girl was born, followed by another boy. These two were now 127 and 76 years old, respectively.

They had been the first dragons born in over 200 years, so the new pair had brought immense joy to the rest of their village. The oldest of the three was pleased that he was no longer being babied and enjoyed acting as a big brother to the two fledglings.

No new children were born after these two, and the other dragons seemed to take it for granted that they would be mates. The two of them were aware of this, especially the girl, Lewlieu. Girls were always the first to mature, after all.

The older male dragon hadn't objected. *I can always get with that older girl with the cute scales, or the one who has that perfect tail, or any of the others. I'll be fine,* he'd thought.

Now, the younger boy, T'elli, had recently caught a certain sickness common among young dragons—the "I am a strong, wise, ancient dragon. I shall go out into the world and guide these fools" sickness.

He's adorable, the older boy had thought. *And since he respects me like a big brother, I guess I should show him a good time.*

Whenever anyone wanted to play around with humans, this strange, cranky old dragon from the mountain cave would yell his head off. He was all, "Don't mess with humans!" and "Don't lay a hand on them!". He died not too long ago, though, so he won't be a problem anymore.

Nowadays, dragons could do whatever they liked without fear of reprimand. They could gift power to a single country, laughing as the humans got carried away and used their power in odd ways. Or the dragons could just secretly manipulate several nations at once, reveling in the feeling of cross-species domination.

I wanted to try games like that when I was a kid, but that pile of scales would never shut up about it. Plus, all the dragons close to my age were girls, and none of them would've joined in. No, I don't have the sickness, I just want to try this kind of stuff.

And so, he had decided to invite T'elli to play. Lewlieu had also insisted on tagging along, much to his delight.

His grand idea had been to teach a couple of monster words to an ambitious human country, then just sit back and watch things unfold.

Things aren't going too well right now. Seriously, how did they mess up right at the beginning? It's really a bore if you can't take this capital, you powerless, pathetic creatures. How are T'elli and Lewlieu supposed to have fun? All right. I'll help them get things started, at least. I'll just crush this bunch, then destroy the gate with my breath.

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Whoa, we've got a big one! thought Mitsuha. *Three big ones, actually, but one's bigger than the others. He can speak, so I'll try to make contact. Oh, don't worry. I've experienced tons of first contacts through movies, anime, and sci-fi*

novels. Think of it as research material. I can handle this!

"Good morning to you, Mr. Dragon. Wonderful day we're having."

"Nonsense. It's not wonderful, and it's all because of you. Just let yourselves be crushed already."

This exchange was enough for Mitsuha to realize talking to him was meaningless. *Well, he* is *on the enemy side, I guess.*

Following the failure in communication, she tried shooting him.

B-B-BANG, B-B-BANG!

"What is that supposed to be?"

Doesn't hurt at all, huh? Okay.

"I'll do it!" piped one of the smaller dragons.

Oh, so I'm just practice for the babies, huh? Damn, this brings back bad memories... Makes my arm throb. But I guess a youngling will be easier to handle, at least.

"Just the two of us now, huh?"

Wait, what am I saying? This ain't an arranged marriage meeting!

The large dragon had backed up a bit, and there was a second small dragon beside him. Before Mitsuha could concern herself with that one, however, she had to take care of the one in front of her.

"Hey, wanna talk?"

"Die."

Guess not.

"Fire the assault rifles!"

B-B-B-B-BANG!

"Is that the same thing as before? Well, it doesn't hurt me at all!"

I can tell from your eyes that it does. Assault rifles pack way more of a punch than a pistol. And these aren't your usual 5.56mm bullets; they're 7.62mm. Is your skin more sensitive than the big dragon's?

“All weapons, prepare to fire. Light weapons, fire.”

Mitsuha wanted to reserve their most powerful weapons for later. She also wanted to find out which of them worked best against dragons, just in case she ever dealt with another one.

I’ll use this little dragon’s cluelessness and ego to find out their weaknesses.

B-B-B-B-BANG!

“O-Owch! Owie, owie, owie!”

For a moment, Mitsuha thought she had taken him down, but soon realized he was simply sore.

Are dragons weak to pain? Is it because they don’t feel much of it in their lives or because this one’s just a kid?

Wait, did he use dragon language? The pain was so bad it made him speak in his mother tongue, huh? Ah, wait, that’s not all. Apparently, I picked up monster words from the adult dragon. So, they know languages besides human.

She had tried a polite approach, especially considering they were dragons, the famed mythical beasts of yore. But she’d grown tired of doing so already, as well as this whole affair, so she decided to just finish them off. She needed to make sure to end it before any of them could retaliate.

Mitsuha scanned her forces and mentally confirmed that everyone was ready to fire. *That’s the captain’s people for ya!*

“Heavy machine guns, fire!”

B-B-B-B-BANG!

“*RAAAAAGHHHHH!*”

The young dragon roared in pain as his scales flew off and bullets ate through his thick skin, sending flesh and gore into the air.

The other dragons were frozen in place.

They probably didn’t expect humans to be able to hurt a dragon. Of course they wouldn’t know how to react.

“D-DAmn yOoUuu!” The wounded dragon’s face was so warped with pain and

fury that he seemed to have gone mad. He opened his jaw wide and began to inhale.

Yep. We all know what he's doing!

"Fire an RPG into its mouth!"

FWOOM FWOOM FWOOM!

The RPG-27 sounded off as three rockets escaped the one-time use, anti-tank weapon and zoomed toward the dragon's maw. Only one made it inside; the others exploded on his jaw and skull.

The juvenile collapsed, causing tremors in the earth around him.

"T'ELLIIIIIII!" Overcome by rage and despair, the other young dragon charged at Mitsuha.

"God, lend me your streeength!" she shouted.

B-B-B-B-B-B-B-B-B-B-BANG!

The 20mm autocannon roared, causing the second dragon to grind to a halt in the dirt beside the first.

Their companion was shell-shocked, unable to move. The two smaller dragons gushed from their wounds as they began to crawl, inching their marred bodies closer together. Once within reach, they extended their forelegs toward one another and touched them together in an intimate gesture. Shortly after, they stopped moving for all eternity.

"Ahh! Aaahhh! AAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHH!" The adult dragon shook out of his stupor, growing frantic.

"Ahh, aaahhhh, Lewlieu, T'elliiii! They're dead! They're both dead!" he wailed in the dragons' tongue. Mitsuha was the only one who understood him. "They were the first children in two hundred years! They were like a brother and sister to me! It's all my fault! I shouldn't have brought them into this stupid game! Aaaahhhh!"

After crying for a while, the dragon realized that the 20mm autocannon—the hand of God—the heavy machine guns, and several RPG-27s were aimed right at him.

“AAAAAHHHHHHHHH!”

No way! I’m gonna die! These things I thought were so puny are gonna kill me, an ancient dragon! EEEEEK!

The dragon ran away with all his power, trampling and tossing humans aside in the process. Once sure he was far enough away from the death-dealing machines, he took to the skies and escaped straight to Dragon Valley.



His escape had cost the empire a great number of troops. The dragon had taken the smoothest path—the main road—and that was exactly where their army was stationed. He had crushed any forces in the middle or sent them flying.

The main road was, of course, where the enemy's front-line headquarters had been. A bit further down the road were their supply squads, which carried the army's food, water, horse feed, and spare arrows, among other things. The supplies themselves had also been in the dragon's way, since they had been placed at the side of the road for convenience. Losing so many supplies and their chain of command instantly threw the Imperial Army into chaos.

Having lost their flying riders—the key to making their invasion a success—as well as the ancient dragons and monsters, the enemy had no choice but to prioritize retreat with minimal casualties.

The soldiers that could somewhat communicate with monsters had died, and the ancient dragons, in all their supposed majesty, had been defeated or scared off with ease. This had confounded the monsters, which Mitsuha finished off by using her newly-acquired orc and ogre languages to say things like, "You look tasty. Me eat you whole." The monsters had all made a run for the hills... sending them straight through the imperial forces.

Well, I don't really care about the rest, Mitsuha thought, fully intent on leaving the aftermath and pursuit to the capital forces, the local lords' armies, and the mercenaries.

She soon found out that the other gates had been assaulted by traitors of the kingdom. Their main goal was to keep the nobility and royalty from escaping, but they also had some soldiers try to break in. Instead of the limited resistance they had expected, they were met with machine gun fire and grenade launchers.

I'm glad the mercs at the other gates got something to do too. I didn't want them to be all sulky with me. Anyway, back to the city we go. Mitsuha turned around to call out to the captain, but he and his men were too busy loading one of the dragons into a truck. *Well, you do you, I guess.*

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Exhausted from battle and hardly lucid, Mitsuha entered the town... and a frenzy of people. She could hardly keep up with the crowd that swarmed her, so she answered them only in her thoughts.

"Lightning Archpriestess"? That joke's over; don't beat a dead horse.

A servant of God? Oh, cool, you heard my speech. You fell in love with my words? Must be the suspension bridge effect.

You want me to marry your son? Wait, Your Majesty?! Since when were you here?! And no, I don't need anyone who sparkles too much.

Huh? Leuhen? Well, I wouldn't mind taking him. His presence is pretty soothing.

Ah, please stop jostling me! My left shoulder hurts like hell! You're gonna open the wound—Ahh, it's bleeding!

Hey, Wolfgang's pretty popular, too! They're getting the "Godsent soldier" treatment. That woman with the baby says she wants you to touch her child. Go on, do it. Ah, hey! No touching the mother herself! And no, there aren't any women who want you to touch their breasts, you asshole!

It would've been problematic for the mercenaries to stay for too long, so Mitsuha intended to send them home as soon as possible. *Keeping them around could open up a whole new can of worms, and I don't want any of their guns or something getting stolen.*

She couldn't world-jump in a place like this, however, so she gathered them in the inner courtyard again. After sending them back to Earth, Mitsuha returned right away. There was still so much to do, after all. She even paid a visit to Alexis. He had been pretty worried about the battle and was overjoyed to learn that the kingdom had won.

Gonna sleep now, Mitsuha thought. *And I'll take tomorrow off. Probably wouldn't be able to work properly anyway.*

◇ ◇ ◇

Months—no, years later, in the valley of dragons, two juveniles were brainstorming how to cure their boredom.

“Hey, wanna play with humans? They die if you just poke ’em a bit, but they make good pawns for games.”

The other dragon looked conflicted. “Hmm. But, y’know the weird old dragon that lives in the mountain cave? The one who gets really mad and yells stuff like, ‘Don’t mess with humans!’ and ‘Don’t lay a hand on them!’ What if the humans did something bad to him?”

“Ohh, that old fogey... Well, I guess we shouldn’t do it then. Even the grown-ups don’t wanna deal with him.”

“You’re right. See you tomorrow!”

“Yep! See ya!”

Chapter 15: Reward

Within a few days of the kingdom's victory, the empire's troops had lost most of their supplies and retreated with their tails between their legs. Plagued by run-ins with the kingdom's forces and attacks from various monsters, few nobles and soldiers managed to make it back home. Nobles carried with them an opportunity for ransom, and the kingdom had no reason to spare practiced enemy soldiers. The conscripted farmers, on the other hand, were left to return to their villages and work in peace.

Mitsuha was, as you might expect, once again summoned to the royal palace. This was an official event involving a proper audience with the king, so it was clear as day it would be an award ceremony.

Upon Mitsuha's arrival, dozens of people were already mingling in the hall. Among them were award recipients and bigwigs taking part in the event. Needless to say, Marquis Eiblinger was also present.

Though the fight at the main gate had overshadowed most of the war effort, Mitsuha and Wolfgang were far from the only ones who contributed. There were people who had uncovered vital information, armies who had fought hard to buy time for the capital's preparations, those who had distinguished themselves in pursuit of the retreating empire, among others.

Mitsuha was certain victory wouldn't have been possible without them. *What if the empire came a day early?* she wondered. *What if the intel the kingdom had was false or had holes in it? Wolfgang alone certainly wouldn't have guaranteed victory.*

During the ceremony, she was the first to be addressed.

"Mitsuha von Yamano. Your contributions in defending my kingdom from the empire have been invaluable. No doubt, you deserve a reward. Is there anything you desire?"

"I want three things," Mitsuha replied.

“Three?” a noble gasped.

“Such greed!” said another.

“That’s a commoner for you,” added a third.

I can hear you, you know! thought Mitsuha. *And I bet that’s what you want!*

“Very well. Speak.”

The busybodies quieted themselves, waiting.

“Firstly, there’s someone who deserves a reward much more than I do.”

“What? Who might that be?”

“The loyal, courageous youth who stood in the way of the bolts that would have hit me and Lord Eiblinger instead.”

“Ohhh.” The nobles nodded in understanding. Some, when reminded of the brave young man, showed bitter expressions.

“Where is he now?” the king asked.

“Well, the wound on his shoulder was a mere scratch, but the one in his stomach is grave, so he’s currently battling death in a medical facility.”

“I see.” The king looked deeply pained. After all, in this world, such injuries were fatal.

Oh, Count Bozes is here, too, Mitsuha realized upon noticing his face in the crowd. *Sorry*.

“Without his act of bravery, I would have died, unable to lend my aid in battle. Therefore, my contributions are his, and he must be rewarded.”

Those nobles who had initially bad-mouthed Mitsuha were now completely in her favor.

I mean, I’m not being greedy—I’m paying my respects to a dying hero... in their eyes, anyway.

“I understand. Though he is noble by birth, he has yet to inherit his title. I will honor his service and appoint him a proper title of his own. Thus, I grant him the title of Baron. Furthermore, it may be passed down in due time to any child

who does not inherit his own position as Count. In this manner, the young man's achievements will live on with his title... forever."

Following these words, Mitsuha heard faint sobbing in the audience.

Oh man, it's Count Bozes. This must be a real honor.

"Are there any objections?"

Yeah, right. Nobody would—

"I object!"

Who's the punk that—Wait, Lord Eiblinger? The one he saved?

The room let out a collective gasp.

Now the center of attention, the man continued, "I could not agree more that the man deserves a title. I merely think that if baron is all he gets, no one else need get a reward."

Huh? Mitsuha tilted her head.

"Viscount is the least he deserves! Speaking as someone whose life he saved, a lesser honor than that would be a disgrace!"

Ohhh. His reason for protesting was clear.

"I beg your pardon," the king said. "I meant no injustice. Does anyone object to granting this youth the title of Viscount?"

Nobody will, obviously, Mitsuha thought. *If the hero of the hour doesn't get this, everyone else is getting zilch. Nice work, Eiblinger.* She looked around the room and noticed the marquis profusely apologizing to Count Bozes. *Do they know each other? Oh, of course they do. They're both in the upper echelon of nobles.*

With that decided, Mitsuha resumed speaking.

"Thank you for your consideration, gentlemen; I feel a weight on my heart has lifted. Now for my second request."

And actually the most important one.

"It concerns the soldiers who fought at the main gate."

Her words caused a stir in the audience.

“Since I was unable to sit idly by while the kingdom was in danger, I sought help from my homeland.”

“Homeland?”

“What country is that?”

“How?”

“Is that where the lightning wand came from?!”

The commotion grew even louder.

“Left with no other choice,” Mitsuha continued, “I used the secret, life-draining art of ‘traversal’ to go to my homeland in an instant.

“However, getting my country’s army to act on such matters is a long process involving numerous meetings, authorizations, and documents. Getting it done in time would’ve been difficult, especially since it would have been for the sake of a country my homeland has no diplomatic relations with.

“Because of this, the only ones who came to assist me were my friends. They voluntarily abandoned their duties, took the country’s divine weaponry without permission, and used up a great deal of firepower. I imagine they will face harsh punishments for doing so.”

“Ohh, what a tragedy!”

“Egads! Those kindhearted champions!”

Everything was going according to Mitsuha’s plan.

“We were in such a hurry that we didn’t wait for the stars to align. Due to our lack of preparation, the traversal ended up being imperfect, and some of our men lost their lives in the process.”

“Dear me...”

“How terrible!”

I’ve got ’em now. Mitsuha struggled to suppress a grin. *Time for the final push!*

“If you were to thank my homeland with a monetary contribution, it would justify my friends’ actions and show that they helped foster positive relations my nation and yours. It could also make up for the losses incurred by our use of the divine weaponry, and it may even ensure their punishments are less severe.

“I must add that families of those who die on unauthorized missions receive no compensation from our government. Perhaps your generosity can support them as well.”

There was not a dry eye in the room by the time she finished.

“Treasurer!” the king shouted. “What do we have in our coffers?! No amount is too high for those who saved the capital, if not the whole kingdom, from utter destruction. Wring out as much as we can!”

“At once, Your Majesty!”

All right, that’s Wolfgang’s payment in the bag! Wait, they’re not about to bring out something like a measly three thousand gold coins, are they? Even if I don’t pocket any of it, I still need at least forty thousand. That’s about a billion yen after conversions! It’s half of the money I need to save for my relaxing retirement—the full amount for one world. On this side, that much is like four billion yen back in Japan.

“Three thousand!”

WHAT?!

“My family shall give them three thousand gold coins!”

Ah, it’s just Count Bozes. Wait, really?!

“I myself will supply five thousand!”

Lord Eiblinger...

“Two thousand five hundred!”

“Sorry, but our household took a real hit during the invasion. A thousand is the best I can do.”

“Three thousand!”

“Two thousand!”

One after another, the nobles came up to offer their own gold. The king was bound to give much more than the marquis, so it was clear she'd get the forty thousand she needed and then some.

Wondering what I would've done if this hadn't worked out? Welp, I'd just sell pearls in a different country and then make myself scarce. If I went around selling them to nobles all over the world before rumors caused the price to plummet, I could rake in some serious cash. Forty thousand seemed like a pretty, uh, reasonable limit for that kind of business.

"Thank you so much, everyone. I'm positive my friends will face a lesser sentence, and children who lost their fathers will be able to get the education they need to take over their posts and responsibilities."

Mitsuha pretended to wipe away a tear.

"I also understand that many lands on the empire's route to the capital suffered during this invasion. Orphaned children, farmers whose fields were destroyed, and others will surely need financial support. I will be sure to speak with my little br—I mean, the king, and ask if my homeland can support you in any way."

"You would go that far?!"

"Such benevolence..."

The owners of these lands were moved to tears. While many expressed their gratitude, however, there were some among them preoccupied with her slip.

Was she about to say "little brother"? they wondered. *She was, wasn't she?!*

But it was no mistake; Mitsuha was fully aware of what she had just implied. It probably wasn't news to anyone that she wasn't the simple noble girl she claimed to be, however.

It was time for her third request.

"Finally, I want you to make me a citizen of this country."

"She wants *what*?"

"I am merely a drifter who came here after abandoning my homeland. But now I want to become part of this city, and this country, and make it my new

homeland.”

The nobles were audibly moved. In the end, not a single one of Mitsuha’s requests had been selfish, and she had even displayed commendable patriotism. With everything she had done for the kingdom thus far, there was no room for doubt in their hearts.

“Hmm. I must say, I already *do* consider you part of my kingdom.” The king thought for a moment, then cracked a smile. Apparently, he had come up with the perfect solution. “Very well. I shall use my authority to put forth a motion to ensure your status as one of us.”

Yay, I’ll have citizenship now! Mitsuha cheered internally. *That means I’ll be protected by the authorities and have an easier time doing business. A total win-win!*

“Mitsuha von Yamano, I bestow upon you the title of viscountess!”

SAY WHAAAAAT?!

Mitsuha grew numb, hardly able to process the rest of the ceremony. Others received their rewards and had their wishes granted, but it all went in one ear and out the other for her.

Why did this happen?!

◇ ◇ ◇

A few days passed after the award ceremony. Mitsuha was running her store as usual, but the many non-paying customers stopping by made her days more difficult. It wasn’t as though she had anything against them; what with her outrageous prices, it was to be expected that some people would come again and again before resolving to make a purchase. Mitsuha wanted to treasure them just as much.

Upon hearing of Mitsuha’s deeds and newly noble status, Sabine became even more attached to her than before. However, the frequency of customers —especially the ones only there to speak with Mitsuha—made the princess’ blood boil. She now had no chance at all to watch her precious DVDs.

As for Mitsuha herself, she had no real complaints regarding the common

folk. Most merely wanted to see the savior of the country and express their gratitude. Nobles and merchants, on the other hand, were much more troublesome to deal with. And although her sales had increased, it wasn't proportional to the customer growth.

Crap, I should really rethink my inventory.

Craving a change of pace, Mitsuha decided to take a trip. Well, you might argue that the word wasn't entirely fitting, since getting to her destination took only a moment—just a jump to Earth and back again.

On this particular occasion, she made her way to Colette's village. It wasn't that she had forgotten to visit. There was simply a great distance between the village and capital, meaning she had to space out her visits so as not to give herself away.

"Hey, Colette! Long time no see!"

Mitsuha was welcomed like one of their own. It could very well have been because of the souvenirs she'd brought along with her, but she wanted to believe that wasn't the case.

The villagers had yet to hear about what had transpired at the capital. While local lords employed messengers to notify them of major occurrences, commoners had to rely on traveling merchants and carriage drivers or passengers to get their information. Even then, it was still too early for any travelers to have arrived since the invasion. Count Bozes was still in the capital, as well, and soldiers sent to fight on the front lines were in the midst of their triumphant return home.

Even if they didn't really fight, they technically won just by being on the winning side. Let them be "triumphant", I say.

Mitsuha went on to tell Colette and her parents—Erene and Tobias—of her exploits in the capital, leaving out everything about the invasion. She mentioned that she had opened up a shop, helped out with a party, and so on and so forth. She made sure to downplay the details, implying her store was small and she was merely renting the building, or insisting she wasn't the host of the party by any means. However, she did her best not to tell *too* many lies. After all, the village could be visited by someone from the capital at any time.

Maybe I'm overly cautious, but it makes up for not being overly tall... Agh, what am I thinking?!

Everyone was immensely happy for her. Even with all the trivializing, Mitsuha's achievements were considered greatly successful by the villagers' standards. She had traveled to the city where she wanted to go, opened up a store there in no time at all, and now made enough money to get by on her own. It was only natural for the crowd of farmers to be captivated.

They informed Mitsuha that a soldier had come asking about her, and it had them quite worried.

Of course they'd look into me, she thought. *I'm a stranger with a suspicious backstory who hangs out with the princess.*

Mitsuha brushed away their worries, and soon had them convinced that the soldier was merely looking to know more about someone renting a place in the capital.

I guess farmers don't have the sense to question why an actual state soldier would be involved in something like that. Oh, uh, oops. My bad, guys.

She arranged to stay overnight as part of her "weary traveler" routine. After speaking with the villagers, she spent the remainder of her time playing with Colette. The younger girl had even been excused from her farm duties for this special occasion.

Mitsuha left the village the very next day. Everyone wanted her to stay longer, but she told them she had merely stopped by on her way to see what the nearby seaside villages had to offer. Once Colette forced her to promise she would come again in their usual ritual, Mitsuha headed for the sea.

If I go there just once, I can easily come back whenever I want. I wanna see what kinds of products come out of this world's seas, anyway.

She briefly contemplated meeting up with Beatrice Bozes, but decided against it. The count was still in the capital, and Mitsuha would surely see him at a later date. If she were to meet Beatrice, and the girl then told her father about their meeting, he would notice the contradiction. In order to ward off any strange requests, she had convinced royalty and nobility alike that "traversal" was a life-

sapping technique only worth using in the rarest of instances. She didn't want to ruin it for herself.

During her official audience with the king, Mitsuha had claimed to have proficiency in traversal, but added that delivering the kingdom's letter of thanks and the money alone would cost her a great deal of life force. The nobles had been immensely sympathetic, including one who had muttered, "I thought she was small for a twelve-year-old. It seems this technique is the cause."

Wait, I can barely even pass for twelve?! she'd thought bitterly. *And don't look away from me, you little—*

It may also be important to note that Mitsuha had explained away Wolfgang's return journey as part of an automatic effect applied to the traversal when it was first cast.

Eventually, Mitsuha arrived at a small seaside village about the same size as Colette's.

Isn't Count Bozes a powerful noble? Or is every village about the same size? The center of the Bozes' territory was a bona fide town, but even that wasn't anything to write home about.

Considering the absence of starvation and child trafficking in Colette's village, it was likely a prosperous place. Mitsuha found the fact that the village could easily support a wandering stranger such as herself impressive on its own.

Count Bozes must be doing a great job... and now that I think about it, callin' it "Colette's village" makes it sound like Colette is in charge. Welp, I'm not too good at remembering names, so I might as well keep on using it. I don't even remember the name of the empire that attacked us. Well, that messenger guy we sniped probably said it, but whatever.

"So-and-so's dad" could stay "So-and-so's dad" as far as Mitsuha was concerned. The name was tucked in her memory somewhere, but she wouldn't feel inconvenienced should it escape her. She didn't even remember the names of the owner of the restaurant or the pompous merchant. "Owner of the restaurant" and "pompous merchant" were enough for her. If two people happened to fit the bill, she would simply default to something like "Owner A" and "Owner B".

Even the seaside village would be “fishing village” to her, despite the fact that it hosted industries beyond just fishing. She learned soon after her arrival that the fish caught here were either sold locally, exported to nearby villages, or shipped out to stores in the county’s central town. Mitsuha considered telling them to secure a place for direct sales, but it occurred to her that this would take business away from the stores. Merchants were locals, too, and thus fully taxable.

You pickle and dry them, too, huh? And you even sell some of these to the capital? Hmm. These are your fishing ships? Really? I see, I see. All right, that’s enough for today!

Satisfied, Mitsuha jumped to her home in Japan. She checked her email and her mailbox, then went off to stock up on ingredients and daily necessities.

Boy, having a car sure helps when you’re buying a lot!

She also made rounds throughout her neighborhood just to make an appearance. People would worry if they didn’t hear from her for too long; she was a child living all by herself, after all.

Hey, I’m eighteen, and I can pass for a fifteen-year-old in Japan! Oh, that’s still a child? Damn, you got me.

◇ ◇ ◇

At last, the day for Mitsuha to receive her title arrived. Incidentally, she wasn’t the only one who would be given the honor. While ennobling as a reward was uncommon, a number of nobles had lost their titles for their betrayal or refusal to answer the call to arms, and their positions needed to be filled.

Of course this is a special case. If people got noble titles too often, you’d have no one but high-ranking elites all over the place.

The eccentric seamstress had finished the dress Mitsuha had asked for right on schedule. After hearing her customer had been summoned to a royal ceremony in another country, the lady had spent an entire night making the dress. She had even prostrated herself before Mitsuha, begging to come along, but of course Mitsuha couldn’t take her.

Some other time, maybe. Wondering what happened to my other dress? It was all covered in blood. That a problem? Oh, and my left shoulder is completely healed. There's a bunch of other things I did in preparation for the ceremony. Stay tuned for more details after these commercials!

This event, which also took place at the palace, had even more guests than the award ceremony. Nobles from all over the kingdom had come to the capital despite it not being the ballroom season. Needless to say, Marquis Eiblinger and Count Bozes were among those present.

Mitsuha was last in line. *I guess mine's gonna be the climax? Oh, it's because it'd be tough for everyone else if the audience got all soppy. Got it.*

The proceedings went smoothly, and finally, it was Mitsuha's turn.

What's that? You're all in love with my dress? Why, thank you! I'll be sure to pass that along. Would that lady like it if I took some orders for her? Not sure what she'd think about being paid in gold coins, though.

"Mitsuha von Yamano, I hereby grant you the title of viscountess!" the king proclaimed.

Following his words, Sabine handed Mitsuha a dagger. It was small, about the same size as a kitchen knife, but held a special meaning: "With this power, banish monsters and defeat our enemies to protect your land and your people. If you betray the king's trust, you shall plant it in your own heart."

Man, that's hardcore. Mitsuha gulped.

The others had received their own daggers from the chancellor, but Sabine had insisted on giving Mitsuha's herself. Mitsuha gladly accepted and was about to walk away when the king called out to her.

"Viscountess Yamano. Seeing as he is not present, can you accept the title intended for Count Bozes' son, Alexis?"

Mitsuha looked over at Count Bozes, who nodded silently. She knew exactly how to respond.

"I refuse."

Both the king's and Count Boses' jaws flopped open, and silence filled the

room. Paying them no mind, Mitsuha whirled around and headed for the main door.

“The impudence!”

“Capture her!”

Voices cried out, but no one dared to stop her. Even the king had yet to recover from his bewilderment. As she approached the door, the guards stood paralyzed, unsure of how to react.

Mitsuha then threw the door open, revealing a figure behind it.

No longer a boy, but not yet a man, he ambled toward the throne. His right arm hung from a sling around his neck, and his stomach had been bandaged several times over. He wasn’t wearing a shirt, but had his left arm in a jacket with the other side hanging over his right shoulder. The buttons were undone, but it made him exude virility rather than vulgarity.

His footsteps on the plush carpet made no sound, but it was almost as though you could hear them echo throughout the room. Tears slid down Count Bozes’ cheeks. Marquis Eiblinger nodded as he patted the man’s shoulder. No one said a word as the boy—no, the dignified youth—stood before the king.

It was up to Mitsuha to break the silence. She took a breath and cried out, “Give it to him yourself!”

Roars of joy erupted from the crowd.



“My apologies, Your Majesty. I’m not entirely looking my best,” Alexis said.

“It matters not, my boy.” Teeming with bliss, the king declared, “Alexis von Bozes, I hereby grant you the title of viscount!”

“It would be my pleasure to accept.” The young viscount, inconvenienced by bandages, awkwardly bowed his head.

“You are Count Bozes’ firstborn, yes? After inheriting your father’s title, you may retain your viscount status and pass it on to your second child.”

Alexis shook his head. “I have no intention of doing so.”

“What...?”

“Theodore, my younger brother, can have my father’s title. I shall take the viscount status for myself. After all, it isn’t just something I inherited! It’s a title I was given by the king himself! It’s the beginning of a new, honorable noble lineage, and I would be a fool to let it pass by me! Besides...”

“Yes?”

“By the time my father retires, I will have ascended and become a count myself.”

The king shook with laughter, and Count Bozes couldn’t help but smile. Once the king had calmed down enough, he gave Sabine some sort of signal. In response, she prepared to take the next dagger.

You know what? I’ll celebrate with a little treat, Mitsuha thought.

“Sabine, you already gave me mine. You should let your sister have a turn!”

“Ah, you’re right!” Sabine looked at her siblings sitting behind the king, and beckoned her dear sister, the second princess.

Totally blanking on her name, by the way.

After some momentary confusion, the second princess stood up. Realizing he would get his reward from a girl in her late teens, Alexis went from looking dignified to terribly flustered.

Yep! He loves it! Sabine’s cute and all, but healthy young men prefer girls their own age.

Suddenly, the first princess—the one in her mid-twenties—stopped the second princess in her tracks. Ignoring her confused younger sister, she took the dagger with a sour expression, and handed it to Alexis without even making eye contact.

Umm, what's going on here? I have no idea, but Alexis, you should stop looking so disappointed. Do you have a death wish?!

Chapter 16: Yamano County

Mitsuha now had a noble title. This made her a real, honest-to-goodness noble. Not a superficial noble in title alone, but a full-fledged noble with her own territory... which came with the responsibility of running it.

Why did this happen?!

She decided to meet with the king, the chancellor, and the person in charge of area management. The latter—rather than an expert in running noble lands—was merely a human database who knew the kingdom's territories and their locations, sizes, and special features. His job was to assist nobles with acquiring or inheriting new domains.

Mitsuha began by describing the type of land she wanted. "I want it to have a shoreline, mountains, rivers—oh, and I want it to be small."

"You want a *small* territory?"

"Yes. A place that's too big and has too many people can be more trouble than it's worth. I want to have a tightly-knit community that's more like a family. Ah, and keep me as far away from the border as possible! I don't want to be a part of any disputes."

The king smiled.

"Then we have to look in the north," said the dominion database. "That's the only part of the country that has a shoreline." It was apparent he knew what he was talking about.

"Please, have a look at this map," he began, gesturing to it. "You have large rivers flowing into the sea here, here, and here. And these are your smaller rivers. There are vast plains around the big rivers. They're counties, of course—already taken by other nobles.

"If you want a small area close to the sea and mountains, don't have a problem with a small river, and filter out the lands that aren't open or belong to the king himself, there's this one, that one, and this one here. Picking anything

besides those would mean chasing out some other noble."

Whoa, chasing somebody out? That'd make 'em hate me for sure. Should I just go with it and fight for a better spot? Nah. I bet most of those families have had the same territories for generations. The land's probably part of them at this point, so I'm not gonna mess with that.

"Then... is this one okay?" she asked, pointing.

"Indeed. This land belonged to a now ex-baron who was stripped of his status when he chose to ignore the king's call during the invasion. He planned to side with whichever side was the victor once it was all over. Since it's quite a distance away from the capital, it's large for a baron's territory. It would be on the small side for a viscount, but still plausible. There's a small river and a mountain that's not too steep. It certainly aligns with your conditions.

"Are you certain about this one, though? There are lands fit for viscounts closer to the capital. They would be more profitable, at the very least."

Mitsuha declined, since she didn't really want that. Being far away from the capital meant less visits from nosy nobles and meddling merchants, and the distance wouldn't affect her operations whatsoever.

Anyway, I've got my own land now! Wait. It's in the north... Has a shoreline... That sounds real familiar.

Shortly after, she found out that it was right next to the Bozes' county.

Was this really a coincidence? That database guy... Does he know Count Bozes? I wonder if he set me up.

Mitsuha entertained her conspiracy theory for a moment, but had no difficulty making her decision. The count could help her run her domain, his family was full of good people, and it gave her a good excuse to visit Colette more often.

Huh? Alexis' land neighbors mine, too? It's on the opposite side from the Bozes' county? Have I been put in a Bozes sandwich? I have, haven't I?! She was now convinced that this had been planned.

You wanna pass through my land so you can visit your parents? Yeah, yeah.

Sure.

Huh? One "yeah" is enough? Yeah, yeah. Whatever.

Having an imaginary conversation, she began preparations to visit her territory. Wondering about her store? Not to worry, she had no plans of abandoning it; she would simply close it for the time being. She didn't intend to bring it along with her world-jumping power, either. Not now, anyway. However, her heart went out to the poor souls desperate for shampoo, so she aimed to reopen as soon as possible.

Mitsuha spent the next three days going through territory management training from someone recommended by the king himself. There was a great deal to learn in such a short amount of time, but Mitsuha's modern knowledge made the lessons much easier. She already knew the basics, such as taxation, budget management, and morale. Her level of understanding surprised even the teacher.

She also captured their lessons on a tape recorder so she could review them whenever she felt like it.

Viva science!

After completing her crash course, Mitsuha was ready to leave. She planned to travel to her land by a regular coach, of course. She didn't have her own private carriage, wasn't sure where to get one, and had no desire to spend the next few days alone with her driver.

Jumping directly to the Bozes' county was always an option, but she wanted to take at least one good look at the road between the capital and her domain. Sure, she took the same means of transport on her initial trip to the capital, but her attitude had been much different back then. She now had to think about what she could do for her land: look into the problems with traveling to and from the capital, see the state of the surrounding areas, and so on. Mitsuha could learn a lot from the other passengers, too, now that she knew what questions to ask.

Before she left, a good number of people came to her asking to be hired. It was only natural; being one of the first employees under a new noble was a coveted status. They would be higher on the hierarchy than all those who came

after, and since the head was a child—in their eyes, anyway—they had a chance to usurp her or use her power themselves. Perhaps they could even get their own family into her lineage.

And if greed alone did not apply, they could just as easily be spies tasked with finding out more about her homeland's technology, particularly the "divine weaponry". Regardless, Mitsuha couldn't take the risk.

I'm not gonna hire those who are clearly in it for the good stuff. You worked for a noble before? You say you're a veteran when it comes to running lands? A real pro? No way, you're gonna double my profits? And you, you know how to handle the people? I should just leave it all to you, then?

You're all morons. If you were that good, you wouldn't be desperately searching for a job in a place like this.

She refused them all, set the store's security to the maximum defense mode, and asked her neighbors to call the palace soldiers if they saw anyone skulking around. After that, she met with Sven's party and requested they keep an eye on the store's surroundings whenever they were in town. She also introduced them to the neighbors, and vice versa.

Both groups informed her that no one would dare sneak into the Lightning Archpriestess' place, but she mostly ignored them. In the end, the king dedicated some palace soldiers to patrol the area.

On the day of her departure, Mitsuha arrived at her stagecoach to find Sabine waiting for her with her bags.

Whoa, whoa, whoa! Sorry, little lady, but I'm gonna have to chase you away. The princess' bodyguards—concealed nearby—had planned to take her back by force at the very last moment, and they did exactly that. *So you let her hold onto her dream until it almost came true, huh? Wow, that's harsh.*

Mitsuha's stagecoach was bound for the Bozes' county. The home of a new viscount wasn't important enough to have a fixed carriage route, so this was her best option.

She wore a dress you might expect to see on a normal commoner girl. It was plain, but flowy and charming. This dress was intended to make her seem more

approachable to her fellow travelers.

I learn from my mistakes. I'll also be super friendly and chatty. Sabine's "Paradise waitress" persona will probably be a good reference for that.

Underneath, she wore a Walther PPS on her right thigh and a small knife on her left. The usual Walther was tucked under her arm, but the one on her leg would be easier to draw in an emergency. Both the 93R and the revolver were tucked away in a holster in her bag because they would attract too much attention.

The bag full of weapons was at her side, while a bigger bag containing her spare clothes and other effects sat on the stagecoach's storage shelf. Larger baggage usually went on the roof, but there weren't too many passengers, and the driver hadn't wanted to separate a young girl from her belongings. It wasn't terribly big, anyway.

At present, the carriage had twelve passengers. Since it was outbound from the capital, that number was unlikely to increase. As it went through its stops, there would be fewer and fewer people inside.

Shortly after departure, Mitsuha called out to a friendly-looking young man she presumed was a merchant. She presented herself as a clueless trader heading to work in the land of a new noble.

No lies there. I am a trader, and I am pretty clueless about this world.

Though she was still a child, the merchant enjoyed speaking with a cute girl. She listened to him intently and offered up some good questions—proof she was interested in what he had to say. The girl understood him and clearly had a good head on her shoulders; during their conversation, he even learned a few things himself. It was obvious she would make an excellent merchant. So much so that he even thought of talking to his wife about passing his trade on to a daughter instead of a son.

The two spoke naturally, and the whole exchange was smooth as butter. Their positive energy caused the onlookers to join in, and by the end of it, everyone had learned a great deal from one another.

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Two days out from the Bozes' county, the coach was attacked by bandits.

"Isn't this kind of thing supposed to be rare?" asked Mitsuha.

"Oh, uhh... It's happening more often lately because of all the empire's soldiers scattered around. There's the farmers who stayed here because they'd be in for a bad time if they returned, the low-ranking officers who could be executed for the defeat, the washed-up mercenaries who didn't get paid... Many chose to skitter up north because the kingdom hunted down anyone going south."

"Oh, yeah. Guess 'rare' doesn't really mean 'never'... I should remember that."

While just about every passenger was starting to panic, Mitsuha was chatting with a somewhat refined, middle-aged man as if the ongoing assault was no big deal.

I can't get enough of these guys. They just have that "dad" aura around them. No, I don't mean that they smell. It's the aura!

Mitsuha was calm because she could jump out of the situation at any moment. The man was calm because of the so-called "right of extraterritoriality", an unwritten agreement of sorts between mercenaries and bandits. Unlike mercenaries hired for protection, those you happened to come across had no obligation to protect anyone. Putting their lives on the line for someone without a contract involved just wasn't worth it. The same went for the bandits—fighting a mercenary who sat idly by while they pillaged was often to their own detriment.

The mercenaries had no reason to defend bystanders, and the bandits had no reason to fight the tough, penniless mercs. Just like that, their interests coincided. A mercenary's presence in this situation could also reduce the amount of post-battle murders and brutalities, so it could feasibly work out for passengers and contracted mercs as well. However, bandits still wouldn't hesitate to kidnap women and children.

Including Mitsuha, there were nine passengers. Out of these, one was a wife, another a young woman, and two more were young girls. Mitsuha didn't count the coachman—the bandits wouldn't harm him, after all. If too many coachmen

were lost, these vehicles would stop traveling altogether. This would be bad for the country and the local lords, and they would have no choice but to initiate a bandit hunt. The lack of transportation would make it harder for bandits to get by, too. For these reasons, the bandits didn't even consider coachmen during raids, and the drivers themselves never interfered. In their minds, giving in to righteous indignation and fighting back would only place a target on the backs of all their fellow coachmen.

"I'll fight," said one of the men.

He was obviously a farmer, and two of the four women were his family members—his wife and daughter. It went without saying that he didn't want to see them kidnapped before his very eyes, even if it meant his death.

The next to speak up was an elderly man. "I'll fight with you. My children are already fully grown, and in the past I committed many misdeeds in order to protect my family. I'd say it's high time I lend a hand to someone else. I've also brought all my wealth, and I'd quite like to see it survive this journey along with me."

"Thank you." The farmer bowed his head.

After glancing at Mitsuha, the young merchant joined in. "I'll help, too."

"I want no part in that," said a man who appeared to be in his early twenties. "We just have to give them our money and possessions and we'll come out of this unharmed, right? There's a stray merc with extraterritoriality here, after all. If we resist, we'll just end up hurt or even killed. Giving up is the way to go here, you fools!"

No one could blame him for his cowardice. Everyone prioritized themselves above all else. Even the farmer probably wouldn't have decided to fight if he didn't have his family with him.

The last to speak was the mercenary. He turned toward the farmer and asked, "Hey, wanna hire a bodyguard? I'll make it one silver."

"Huh?!" everyone shouted in unison.

Mitsuha grinned. *What a man,* she thought.

“What?! Weren’t you going to use the right of extraterritoriality?” cried the young man.

“That’s a condition for mercs who aren’t hired, young’un,” the merc shot back.

Oh, man. Why are there so many great guys among mercs? You know what, I’ll help too.

“From falling in love to running your land, Mitsuha’s General Store will tell you how it’s done! Want me to get rid of the bandits? Just one silver, please.”

The mercenary was visibly surprised, and Mitsuha beamed at him.

Yeah, I just can’t resist a refined, middle-aged man.

The mercenary had a short sword as his primary weapon. He gave Mitsuha his spare dagger, and she began to feel like the old man wasn’t the commoner he’d seemed at first glance. She dug through one of her bags, took out a hunting knife, and handed it to the young merchant. The look on his face was delicious.

A lady isn’t proper if she’s not into knives! They add to our beauty!

Then, Mitsuha took out her gun belt and hung it around her waist. It had the 93R, the revolver, and some spare magazines. The bullets in the 93R right now were hollow-points. They were reserved for monsters and humans not wearing metal armor, and therefore fit the situation.

The revolver was loaded with armor-piercing bullets. The “armor” there referred to kevlar vests, not the plate mail abundant in this world, but it would surely work on whatever the bandits were sporting. As far as Mitsuha knew, bandits who wore metal armor were rare, since they preferred mobility over defense.

Once she was completely outfitted and battle-ready, Mitsuha earned a strange look from the other passengers.

As for the farmer, he wielded a wooden plank he’d pried off the vehicle. He was strong, but not used to battle, so this was clearly better than giving him something sharp.

The bandits had blocked the path ahead and the one behind them. There

were eight in total. Three had the look of practiced mercenaries, while the other five appeared nervous and blatantly green. Mitsuha guessed they were ex-farmers that had been conscripted into the Imperial Army.

Four of the passengers left the carriage to fight, leaving the young merchant behind to protect the women from being taken hostage. This type of stagecoach required one to use both hands to enter, so even an amateur like him had a chance to fend off potential invaders.

Oh, and just so you know, the ones who paid the two silver were the farmer and the young lady. One each.

The first to speak was one of the three merc-looking bandits. “Leave yer valuables here and ya won’t get hurt. And take off your clothes. Ya can keep yer underwear on, though. As fer the women, leave ’em here too. They don’t gotta take their clothes off... Not now, anyway.” He grinned with malice.

God, I hate this, Mitsuha thought, grinding her teeth. *This worm’s no merc, he’s a walking insult to Sven’s party, Wolfgang, and this refined middle-aged guy next to me. Disgusting.*

The elderly man and the farmer didn’t want to kill anyone, and it was entirely possible they would be killed themselves. It was basically Mitsuha and the mercenary versus the eight bandits. Five of the bandits were obviously new to this, but then again, it wasn’t clear how strong the mercs on either side were.

Mitsuha stole a glance at the man beside her. *Our merc seems pretty tough, if you ask me. I have no idea if he really is, though.*

They were clearly outnumbered, and Mitsuha didn’t want to attack until the bandits made it obvious that they were prepared to kill. She knew it was naïve, but she had to consider all the possibilities.

“So, merc. Extraterritoriality, right? Go on, walk away.”

The old merc didn’t move an inch. “Me? I’m a, uh... hired guard,” he replied in his deep voice.

In Mitsuha’s mind, the “hired guard” bit was replaced by something else.

Bodyguard, bodyguard, bodyguard...

“Whazzat now?” One of the bandits pulled out his weapon.

All three experienced bandits had swords, while the remaining five were split between swords and spears, three-to-two. Just one of them drawing his sword was enough for Mitsuha’s personal rules of engagement.

B-B-BANG!

The man who had drawn his sword was blown away.

“Huh...?”

One of their own had just fallen to the ground in an instant. Unable to process what had just occurred, the bandits were frozen in place. No good mercenary could pass up such an obvious opening. And the mercenary on the passengers’ side was definitely good.

He took out his short sword, ran up to the bandits, and slashed at one of them with amazing speed before spinning around and slashing another.

He’s strong!

Within seconds, the enemy lost their main force. The five still standing were panicking, but they didn’t let go of their weapons.

You can have some good beginner’s luck with spears, so I’ll take out the spearmen first.

B-B-BANG! B-B-BANG!

The machine pistol barked out its three-round bursts.

By Mitsuha’s standards, the “ex” in “ex-farmer” was very important. They had stooped far too low and were now actual bandits—murderers. Mitsuha was certain they had killed people already, and if left alive, they would surely kill again. For all she knew, those victims could be someone dear to her. She just couldn’t let them go.

The mercenary made short work of the three remaining sword-wielders. All in all, it was a victory so flawless you could hardly call it a fight.

◇ ◇ ◇

Back within the shaking stagecoach, the farmer told Mitsuha everything he

knew about the Bozes' county. He was doing his best to repay their savior with knowledge. The other passengers pitched in, and she ended up with a substantial amount of new information, including some that wasn't readily available.

Mitsuha also asked the merc, the elderly man, and the farmer not to tell anyone about her. They all agreed. The former two seemed accustomed to keeping secrets, and the farmer couldn't refuse someone who had put her life on the line for his family.

The others had stayed inside the coach, so they hadn't seen anything. They heard the gunshots, of course, but had no idea what the sounds were. The four fighters had also agreed to pretend they each had a part in defeating the bandits. Specifically, they agreed to say the mercenary took out five while the remaining three handled one each. Only the first part was true.

The stagecoach was now full of weapons and valuables taken from the bandits. The passengers planned to take them to the local lord, where they'd be checked, then returned to whoever brought them. The check was necessary to know, for example, whether or not the weapons were supplied to the bandits by another country to let them interfere with local business. There was little doubt that the bandits were remnants of the empire, so they were bound to get the things back immediately.

Since Mitsuha wasn't going to the Bozes' county, she gave her share of the weapons to the farmer. The man tried to refuse, but she convinced him by saying she wasn't going to the county's main town, and that a normal girl about to work outside of the capital had no business having those sorts of things. The farmer said he wouldn't sell his share of the weapons and instead use them to train and become strong enough to protect his family. After the whole bandit affair, his wife and daughter trusted and respected him more than ever.

Before the attack, the man in his early twenties had been speaking with the young woman, but now she completely ignored him or merely glared. He was obviously depressed, but her scorn was rather well-deserved.

You could search everywhere on Earth and *this world, but you wouldn't find a single woman who'd smile at a man willing to hand her over to some bandits!*

Once they arrived at a particular crossroads, Mitsuha exited the coach. She would walk the rest of the way to her land, which she tentatively called “Yamano County”. The other passengers waved goodbye, with the exception of the young man, who sat curled up in a fetal position.

Now, you might be wondering why no one ended up figuring out who she was, but the answer to that is simple.

This was a world with no television or internet, so the spread of information was slow and unreliable. The more it was passed on, the worse it became, like some extreme game of telephone. Because of this, the only ones who knew what Mitsuha actually looked like and the details of her battle against the empire were the people who were there to see it. Everyone else ended up being misinformed to varying extents.

Not only that, but most of the passengers weren’t in the capital during the battle, and those who were had only heard her distorted voice through the speakers. Most of those who had seen her had merely caught glimpses of her in the distance.

As for the gunshots, the sounds heard around the capital were those of RPGs, heavy machine guns, and 20mm autocannons. Compared to these, the firing of a handgun was nothing. The “divine soldiers” had also used what they believed to be long wands of lightning, and Mitsuha’s handguns didn’t even come close to this description.

Perhaps the bandits, being ex-empire soldiers, realized what they were up against, but as the saying goes, “dead men tell no tales”.

◇ ◇ ◇

After eight days of travel on land and ten seconds on water, Mitsuha finally arrived at Yamano County.

Yeah, I crossed a river. What about it?

Upon seeing the county’s capital peeking from between the trees, she felt sure of one thing. *I’m not calling this a “capital”, that’s for damn sure! It’s not even a town; it’s a village! Calling it a capital is too embarrassing! Ugh, “town” it is, I guess.*

Before entering, she decided to go back home. She had been away for over a week, so there had to be lots of email and regular mail piled up... and she desperately needed to use the bathroom and take a bath.

◇ ◇ ◇

Mitsuha walked into the village. Since following the main road would lead to the sea, it was an actual dead-end settlement. Because of this, travelers were scarce, which was probably why she attracted so much attention.

Oh, it's because a little girl in a dress came here all by herself without any real luggage? All right, then.

Mitsuha was hungry, so she first went to dine at the local eatery—if that term applied to a place that only sold meals for locals, by locals. This visit doubled as an opportunity to gather information, which is why she'd skipped eating food at home. She ordered whatever they had on offer and asked for the village's name. They simply called it "town".

No name? These really are my people. Though it's not a "village", then, huh?

Because it was a seaside town, the meal she was given was primarily fish, but there was nothing else noteworthy about it. The eatery was in a small corner of a small town, and it wasn't anywhere near lunchtime, so Mitsuha was the only customer. While chatting, she asked for opinions about the previous lord in charge, and the lady who owned the eatery wasn't too talkative in that regard.

The fact that he was a disgraced noble had brought shame upon them all. There was no telling what kind of person the next lord would be, and it was unlikely that this poor embarrassment of an area would ever know a good ruler. The lady might have been willing to gossip and complain with someone close to her, but it wasn't something she would mention to a stranger. Mitsuha didn't press the issue, however, and merely asked for the location of the ex-lord's mansion before going on her way.

The mansion was on the outskirts of town. Since the town was small and its buildings were sparse, Mitsuha had no trouble finding it.

Yeah, I'm not calling this a "mansion", either. It'd be humiliating. "Residence" seems like the best option. Just "house" or "dwelling" would be kinda sad.

Still carrying all her possessions on her back, Mitsuha went to the front door and rapped on it loudly with her knuckles.

“Yeees? Who is iiit?”

It opened, and there stood a maid who looked no older than seventeen.

Though the previous lord and his family had lost their noble status, the servants weren’t at fault. Unless they were personal retainers, one couldn’t take servants from land they had once possessed. Besides that, the next lord would be in need of servants as well. Most of them were also locals who had family in the area, so they couldn’t just abandon them.

But even if they had been gathered from elsewhere, neither the lord nor the servants knew what happened in these scenarios. Therefore, besides the ones who left of their own accord, the servants stayed at the residence and served the next lord.

Of course, some servants would quit if they decided they didn’t like the replacement, and the new lord could fire the servants he had problems with. Servants also increased their chances of being removed if they were caught speaking about how things were under the previous lord.

Anyway, most of the servants still remained, ready to welcome her. Of course, none were the previous lord’s retainers or dependents.

All right, these are my servants... For now, anyway.

“Um, I’m Mitsuha,” she said.

“Huh? Mitsuha?” The maid looked puzzled.

“Mitsuha von Yamano. Viscountess and new ruler of this county.”

“Huh? Oh, I see. Wait, WHAT?!” The girl’s reaction was to be expected. Regardless of whether the new lord was a girl who didn’t look any older than twelve, it was highly unlikely the ruler would go to their new territory all alone.

“Please gather the servants. I’ll greet them all.”

“Um, yes! Right away!” The maid hurried off.

Once all the servants had been assembled, Mitsuha addressed them. “Hello,

everyone. I am the new local lord, Mitsuha von Yamano. This territory is the same size as before, but it will now be ruled by a viscountess, rather than a baron."

The servants were shocked, and you could hardly blame them. Viscount was a direct upgrade from Baron, and it meant a great deal. They could now expect better payment, treatment, and social status, as even the servants were regarded differently depending on what kind of noble they served. "Viscount's servant" was a powerful title, whether in finding work or searching for a spouse. It was like the difference between a table knife and a short sword.

They had been informed that the capital was sending a new noble to rule over them, but they were told nothing about the person in question. Things like the rank, gender, age, and appearance had all been a mystery to them.

Of course, that had been entirely intentional. Withholding this information prevented the servants from making unfair assumptions about their soon-to-be ruler. They could draw their own conclusions once they saw him or her in person.

Because of this, many servants were elated. They now worked for a viscountess—a gentle little girl, at that. If they played their cards right and sweet-talked her, they could make a wonderful life for themselves, and if they manipulated her... the possibilities were endless.

"So, there you have it! I hope we get along. I'm new to this 'ruling' business, so please help me out in any way you can. And like I mentioned before, I will hold interviews for all of you at a later date. Now, please return to your duties." Mitsuha finished her introduction, making sure to appear as gentle and courteous as possible.

Some were relieved that they had received a nice new ruler. Others chuckled as they underestimated her, and others still became gloomy as they lamented the future of this land. The impressions of the eighteen servants were hardly aligned.

◇ ◇ ◇

Mitsuha ate her dinner alone, as servants couldn't eat alongside their ruler. Though they were in a seaside area, there was a lot of red meat on the table.

Probably the previous lord's tastes, Mitsuha thought.

Praising the food, she ate everything she was presented. It was standard for nobles to be given enough to leave leftovers, so she obviously overate this time.

After taking a bath, she locked herself in her new bedroom and jumped back to her house on Earth. She jumped back, bringing along a small cardboard box she had prepared beforehand. Next, she unlocked the door and walked around her residence. She watched the servants work, cheering them on here and there, then returned to her bedroom. Kneeling in front of the cardboard box—which was significantly more empty than before—she took out various security equipment and set it up around the door and windows. Once she was finished, she went to sleep.

Beep.

Mitsuha was woken up by an electronic noise. It was an alarm set to go off when something passed the security laser at her door. Grasping the Walther beneath her sheets, she looked over and saw the maid that had welcomed her at the door yesterday.

"Good morning. Are you already awake?" the maid asked.

"Morning! I slept so well in here. Is breakfast ready?" Mitsuha let go of the gun and smiled.

After breakfast, she took another stroll around the residence. Once back in her room, she placed a cloth over the door handle to cover the keyhole and took out a bunch of electronic devices. They were extremely small voice recorders she had purchased in Akihabara. They automatically began recording when they picked up sound, then stopped after a certain amount of silence. She had set them up all over the place last night.

"Let's hear what you all picked up, then."

She cracked a mischievous grin.

◇ ◇ ◇

Mitsuha was a good-tempered, gentle ruler. She always smiled, looked out for her servants, and walked around the fishing, mountain, and farming villages in

her area to greet the locals. Many assumed she was in poor health, however, as she often retired to her bedroom at midday.

Thinking they knew what kind of person Mitsuha was, some servants resumed diluting expenses or making secret deals with merchants. They'd refrained from doing these activities until they examined their new ruler, but now that that was done, they were doing them almost brazenly. There were also attendants who ran off during work hours after leaving their jobs to others, butlers who aggressively approached the village girls, maids who snuck goods out of the residence, and so on.

The head butler had noticed the danger and expressed his worries, but Mitsuha just continued smiling as if nothing was happening. Her diligent, faithful servant was at a loss. *If these ingrates are allowed to continue, our county will be in disarray. Something must be done.*

Days went by, and the misconduct showed no sign of stopping.

"It's time," said Mitsuha. *Time to crack down.*

"All right. The six of you are discharged due to conduct unbecoming of a servant," Mitsuha declared, eyeing the guilty parties.

It was so abrupt that the accused servants exploded with indignation.

"What is this idiocy? Why me?!"

"Is this some sort of joke? Viscountess or not, you cannot discharge someone without a legitimate reason!"

Mitsuha looked at them with an icy expression. "Idiocy? And *who* is the idiot here?"

"Wh-What?"

"I'm asking, who's the idiot here?!" The shouting from what they had thought to be a weak, soft ruler dampened their bravado.

"Hans," she said, turning to one man in particular. "I always praised your cooking, didn't I?"

"Huh? Uh, yes..." Hans—the head chef—was bewildered.

“Yes, I always said your food was good, yet for some reason, the taste just kept getting worse. Shouldn’t praise normally make you motivated to do an even better job?”

The chef fell silent.

“Why didn’t that happen? Do you know the reason?”

With every word she uttered, he grew paler.

“It’s because you thought that a child like me wouldn’t notice the drop in taste and so you just chose low-quality ingredients. They got cheaper and cheaper, but for some reason, our kitchen expenses stayed the same. Isn’t that strange, Hans?”

By now, Hans was as white as a sheet.

Mitsuha then moved on to the man at his side. “Hey, Gunther, isn’t there something wrong with the wheat numbers?”

“Pardon?”

“The amount of wheat we gained in taxes from the villages and the amount we sold to the merchants is slightly different, isn’t it? Someone’s writing down the wrong numbers. And who would do that, huh? Did no one notice? Who’s in charge of that, again?”

“Uh...”

“Now, Tilde, the day before yesterday, you pushed your own job onto the chore maids and went somewhere, didn’t you? You took a lot of our spices, too. Were you visiting that tailor again? The one with a wife and kids?”

The head maid half-collapsed into her chair.

“How about the rest? Want to hear what I have to say about you?” It was an intense question from the ruler they had thought was gentle, mild-mannered, and nice.

None of the three remaining knew how to respond.

“Do you know why I’m a viscountess? It’s not because I had a viscount father who died early. I got here by myself. I am the first, the only, Viscountess

Yamano! *Don't* underestimate me!"

Mitsuha's glare choked the air out of the room.

"Again, you're all discharged due to your misconduct. It'll probably be hard for you to find work now. You have one hour to pack up and leave. If you're still here after once that time is up, I'll consider you trespassers on viscount property, whereafter I will capture and execute you. Get out!"

Six bodies rushed out of the room. Mitsuha ignored them and spoke to the elderly butler at her side. "Sorry if I worried you, Anton. I won't be inspecting documents at night anymore. I'll sleep properly, so I won't be going to bed at noon, either."

She handed him some documents from her pocket. "These merchants take bribes. Stop all trade with them. And we have some common folk who interfere with others. Observe and deal with them accordingly."

"My word... Lady Mitsuha..." Anton's eyes were brimming with tears.

"Also, the new head maid is Kathe. May she make me proud." Mitsuha held back a yawn. "Anton, you know what I said about not sleeping during the day? I lied! I'm gonna take a nap. Oh, and starting tomorrow, I'm gonna get serious about developing my land. We'll all be busy from here on out. Good work today, everyone. Dismissed!"

With that, Mitsuha left the room.

The twelve servants left behind were just standing there, completely flabbergasted. They were surprised by her sudden change, sure, but there was something else they felt. Was it astonishment? Amusement? Thrill? Curiosity? Excitement?

That had to be it—pure excitement. They knew they were in for something interesting. Something fun was going to happen soon. At the very least, it was clear that tomorrow would be more enjoyable than today.

One of them noticed another servant grinning. "Lorena, what are you smiling about?"

"Hey, you're doing it too!"

The first servant hadn't even realized it.

◇ ◇ ◇

While Mitsuha had been playing the mild-mannered good girl, she'd had many opportunities to jump between worlds. She stole these chances whenever she could, whether it be locking herself in her room or while walking around her territory to gather information.

On one occasion, she announced that she was taking a brief excursion to learn more about her county. Leaving unaccompanied, she jumped to Japan to speak with some electrical equipment suppliers about modernizing her life in the Yamano County residence. This was her second time doing so, and she spoke with the same salesmen as before, so the whole ordeal went smoothly.

Then it was time to check her email and mailbox. *Let's see... Oh, Micchan's coming back from college for break. Nice! And the crazy dress lady's asking if I need to doll up another cute girl. Nope, not yet. Maybe I should ask for a dress for Sabine? She'll be paid in gold coins, though. Then again, she'd probably like that even more than yen.*

A short while later, while browsing the internet, she came across a piece of breaking news.

Huh? "Dragon Finally Discovered"? What kind of clickbait is this? Hold on, is that what I think it is?!

In a flash, Mitsuha jumped to the mercenary headquarters.

◇ ◇ ◇

The members of Wolfgang had been paid a few days after the invasion. Since both the king and the nobles had paid more than expected, their compensation ended up growing to 60,000 gold coins. Of course, Mitsuha had taken a cut, which pushed her closer to her goal. Her "deep pockets" were slowly filling up.

As Mitsuha soon discovered, the mercenaries had been so excited about their victory that they wanted to be known as "Dragonslayers" and show off their prize to the world. They assured her they would keep her identity a secret at any cost, so she didn't mind whatever else they wanted to boast about. They could spin any number of details in their wild war story without including her.

At this point, the mercenaries were convinced she was a princess from the other world who had the magical power to travel between there and Earth. They believed she had come to their world to learn and absorb all the knowledge she could. Her ability to speak in any language must have been some sort of translation magic, ergo she could use magic, ergo she was from another world. They also assumed she was a few centuries older than she looked.While she might have been older than she appeared, they were a bit too far off.

Mitsuha thought they had bragged about the dragon only to other mercenary groups, but it went far beyond that. According to the captain, they no longer had the remains; they had been taken to some university laboratory. One scholar had shown interest in the horned rabbits and left them his contact information. When the mercs had called him, he'd flown over immediately. Upon seeing the genuine dragon remains, he had been swept up in a flurry of excitement. He'd called his contacts all over the world, and the mercenary base was soon swarming with scientists.

Wolfgang's mercenaries had an explanation planned out ahead of time. They explained that a princess from another world had summoned them, their weapons, and vehicles to her world to pit them against a demon king's army. The mercenaries had won and returned home, bringing back a dragon on their truck. Even they believed in this story to a certain extent, so it was hard for others to doubt them.

While feeding their guests this story, they hid the fact that Mitsuha could go between worlds at will and that she was a regular visitor. Instead, they insisted it had been a once-in-a-lifetime encounter. As for her name, they claimed it was "Princess Nanoha". Much like this character, Mitsuha was small, had a penchant for cannonfire, and tended to shoot before asking questions. In all likelihood, one of the mercenaries really *did* have an obsession with Japanese animation.

Normally, no one would believe such a cliché story, but the dragon corpse was proof enough. A certain fantasy novel publisher assumed it was an unofficial PR campaign for one of their movie adaptations and accused them of copyright infringement. Considering the dragon was very real, however, they didn't have a leg to stand on. Their intervention did make one wonder what

would come of a movie adaptation of all this, however. Not only was their story great and glorifying—the experiments and analyses of the dragon DNA could be a great boon for them.

Apparently, the two members who were on vacation during the invasion, unable to participate, had been devastated to the point of tears. The rest of the team pitied them so much that the payment, instead of being split among the participants, was deposited into the group's funds and shared among all members as bonus pay. This way, even those who hadn't participated got a piece of the pie, even if it was a bit smaller than that of those who had.

Of course, not all of the payment was given out. They left a couple hundred million dollars in their treasury for weapons and maintenance, as well as potential support for those who might retire due to age, injury, or disease.

The two mercenaries who had missed the event didn't want money. They whined about how they wanted the "Dragonslayer" title, to see the other world, and serve the princess.

Too bad, thought Mitsuha once she was finally caught up. *None of my business.*

◇ ◇ ◇

One day, a few guests came knocking at Mitsuha's door. The head butler informed her there were three men. They didn't know her relation to the events at the capital and had simply come to meet the new noble. Mitsuha guessed they were either looking to get a higher position, or perhaps bribe or threaten her. She considered merely turning them away, but upon hearing what they claimed to be—a scientist, a mercenary, and a merchant—she noted their variety and figured that it was hard to become a chief vassal or financial officer from those jobs.

They came all the way to this rural area, so I suppose it's only fair to meet with them. I'll size them up in the reception room. What? Why not a throne room? Don't have one. This ain't a royal palace. Also, a scientist? Here? Is the translator in my brain glitching out?

The welcome party in the reception room consisted of Mitsuha, Anton the butler, the three head maids, three normal maids, and three male servants

standing near the walls. She had prepared so many people in case the guests hadn't come to talk and needed restraining, or something of that nature.

Of course, she'd equipped her gun belt for worst case scenarios. The Walther she always had on her shoulder took too long to take out, after all. The table was large and there was lots of space between her and the guests' chairs, so she would have more than enough time to pull out her gun and shoot.

"This is Her Excellency Viscountess Yamano."

Led by a maid, the three guests stepped inside.

"Forgive the sudden visi—" The one at the front froze and fell silent right after he entered.

"Hey, what's wro—" began the second.

The third one didn't say a word and simply stood in place.

"Mitsuha!" the first two cried out.

"Huh? Well, if it isn't the mercenary and the merchant."

I should really remember their names.

*"*Why are *you* here?"

"I'm the viscountess here, Mitsuha von Yamano."

"You mean 'viscount's daughter', right?"

"Nope."

The three were at a loss for words.

"Then why were you riding that coach?"

"I had no other option."

"Why were you alone?"

"Because I had no vassals or subordinates."

Unable to respond, they awkwardly shuffled in silence.

Mitsuha treated them to some tea and snacks, and they got down to business.

“So, what are you three doing here?” she asked.

“Well, first of all, we just happened to come here together because we took the same stagecoach. We’re all here on our own business,” stated the merchant. The other two nodded.

It made sense that they came here after visiting the Bozes County. They had to spruce themselves up before coming here. Mitsuha’s main town had no inns with bath services, after all. Also, it made sense that someone who’d been on that carriage for over ten days had come here because they’d heard of the newly-appointed local lord. They certainly hadn’t looked like acquaintances when Mitsuha was traveling with them.

“I’ll hear you out separately, then,” said Mitsuha.

“Very well. Allow me to begin.” The first to put himself forward was the merchant. Mitsuha’s identity as Viscountess Yamano surprised him, but since she was someone he’d spoken with on his travels, he quickly settled into a rapport with her. “I am Petz. A merchant, as you know. I came here to talk to you about circulation of merchandise,” he began.

Y’know, I just called him “merchant” in the stagecoach, so this is my first time hearing his real name.

According to Petz, Mitsuha’s predecessor had controlled all external trading, banned other counties’ merchants from doing business, and prevented local money from flowing out of his land.

Upon hearing that the previous lord was being replaced, Petz had come with the hopes of opening up a new market. Yamano County was so remote that it was hard to make the trip here profitable, but since it was right next to the Bozes’ county, he could incorporate it into trade routes passing through there, making it worth the time and effort. Seeing as he was so young, he declared, he would like to mature alongside the young Yamano County.

Yep, we’ll grow, all right. Anyway, I needed a merchant with ties to the capital, and Petz is clearly a trustworthy guy.

Huh? You’re saying I’m a capital merchant, too? Hey, I need a guy who sells goods from this world. What’s the use of me trading Earth stuff between here

and the capital?

"Very well, Petz. Please do so. And if you can, please buy our county's products and sell them in the capital. We have much more than dried and pickled fish. I have plans to develop new ones as well."

"Oh, that would be just splendid!"

"I'm new to this, so do you think you could visit me again in a few days? We'll discuss the details then. In the meantime, I'll talk to the servants and villagers to find out more."

"Very well. I will stay in the villa—I mean, the *town's* inn for the time being."

Yeah, I can totally understand calling it a village.

"Now, Mr. Mercenary, why are *you* here?"

"My name is Willem. A mercenary, of course. I grew tired of the city life and wanted to relax in a peaceful countryside, but fighting is all I'm good for. As I thought about what I could do, I heard about this place.

"This county is even more rural than the Bozes' land, has barely any people, and lacks a single skilled vassal, knight, or mercenary. It's completely defenseless, so I thought you might hire me until you gather some vassals and a proper defense force. And don't worry, I'm not looking to become an official vassal myself."

Well that's some honesty, Mitsuha thought. *He's right, though. If I wasn't here, this territory could be destroyed by just a single decently large bandit group. We need some defense ASAP, and for that, we need some key employees. A refined middle-aged man like Willem will fit the role just right. He's a real man among men.*

"Very well. Just like I told Petz, we'll revisit this in the near future."

"I'll look forward to it, milady."

"Lastly, we have you... the one who tried to hand me over to the bandits. I'm all ears."

"Wha—?!" the man was taken aback by her frankness.

Hey, man, that's just how I know you! I don't know your name or what you do, and it's weird to go just by looks and call you, like, "twenty-ish lookin' guy" or something.

Anton and the other servants silently shot daggers his way, making him sweat.

"My name's Yorck," he said. "I'm a scientist."

What a name.

"Well, Yorck, I'm listening."

"We scientists are seekers of truth. We study and research under Platidus, our teacher in the capital. Upon hearing of the advent of the new lord, he sent me here with the hopes that the young, malleable mind in charge would be open to learning new things and give support to our brand of knowledge. If you could take me on as a temporary guest lecturer, I could bestow upon you fragments of wisdom from Platidus' school of thought."

Now *this* piqued Mitsuha's interest.

"What kind of wisdom?"

He thought for a moment, digging through his mental archives for the right piece to tantalize her. "Hmm... Well, what would you say if I told you that it's not the sun that revolves around this world, but the other way around?"

Just look at that smug face.

"Oh, the heliocentric theory," Mitsuha replied. "You're about to tell me that this land is actually a sphere that spins around its own axis and that's what gives us night and day. But that's obvious, isn't it?"

"How did you—?!"

"Anything else?"

"Then, err, how about the reason rainbows appear in the sky?"

"When light hits water droplets in the air, they're split into different colors depending on the angle at which they enter, right? That's why rainbows only happen when there's sunlight during and after rain."

“Ngh!” Yorck frantically mopped his brow.

“Is that all?”

“Why you...! The mystery of the moon, then! Why does it slowly disappear, only to come back later?”

“Oh, it doesn’t actually disappear. It orbits this world, and it only *looks* like it vanishes and comes back because you just see the part of it that’s not blocked off, right? That’s enough, we’re wasting time here.”

“This can’t be!” Yorck grasped his head and he fell to his knees.

“Honestly, even if there was something I could learn from you, I’d refuse it just because you’re someone who’d abandon women and the other fellow passengers just to save his skin. As long as it came from you, I feel like it would defile me.”

Mitsuha called for a maid.

“You can go now. Take him outside.”

“I can tell you know a great deal. It boggles the mind, in fact.” Willem trembled with agitation. “But you... you’re a merciless devil!”

Petz nodded in agreement to his words.

Hey, flattery will get you nowhere!



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Mitsuha had her guests wait a few days because that was how much time her servants needed to properly clean up. Once they were done, she sprung into action.

First, she issued an order that no one could enter her room under any circumstances. She would use her office for normal paperwork and for giving orders to her servants and other subordinates, but she needed a more secure environment for handling more important documents and working on the PC she'd brought from Earth.

Mitsuha also had to consider her own safety. She had chased out the six malignant servants, but there were now six people out there somewhere with a grudge against her. They could easily assist bandits or spies by leaking information.

And though the remaining servants hadn't betrayed her so far, they could always be bribed or threatened into doing so—for example, if their family members were taken hostage. Because of this, Mitsuha stored all her top-secret items in her bedroom, which was outfitted with maximum security. With that, she was able to sleep soundly at night.

Letting anyone in there is gonna be a big no-no. The maids insisted I let them clean my room, but they relented when I told them I can do it myself.

Next, it was time to make her habitat more enjoyable. For that, she wanted to bring her own bath, cookware, and water tanks with pumps from Japan. At present, cooking and drawing water were tasks handled by servants. As she reflected on this, something occurred to her.

Should I really bring that stuff over? If I do, the servants in charge of those things would lose their jobs, right? They're good, diligent people. I don't want my land's unemployment level to rise just because of my own selfishness.

In the end, Mitsuha had decided to only set up her security system, an AV system, a mini-fridge, an LED light stand, a fan, an electric heater, and a generator to power it all. She gave up completely on air conditioning.

Now it was time to restock on employees. With a third of them getting

discharged, she needed replacements, as well as a defense force.

I'll probably have to hire people from my own county. After all, I can't just pull them out of other counties, and the free people in the capital would take too long to get here. Hmm, let me chat with Anton about this.

Mitsuha wanted to start off by hiring a few people she could trust, then expand from there. After all, she was planning to have her hand in all kinds of operations. She even planned to search for the relevant specialists in the capital when the time came.

Mitsuha had chased out the head chef, but she was satisfied with the young sous chef they still had. Under the previous ruler, the head chef had taken care of the noble family's cuisine, while the sous chef handled prep and the servants' meals.

Honestly, I'm fine with just one chef. The servants don't eat at the same time, they take turns. Plus, I don't need any big, fancy meals with all kinds of options I'll probably never eat. He'll do just fine by himself.

Huh? Someone's at the door?

Oh, it's the merc and the merchant. No, of course I haven't forgotten them. Probably.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, I really am. 'Time is money' is especially true for mercs and merchants."

"Oh, no need to worry. Considering what the future holds, I didn't mind waiting a few days," said Petz.

"Yeah. Same here," added Willem.

Well, that's good to know. Time to talk business.

Petz consulted Mitsuha about merchandise and taxes. Taxes differed depending on the county. Key trading locations and sparsely populated countrysides were radically different, so that much was obvious. Since her county had similar conditions to the Bozes', Mitsuha decided to make her trading climate similar to theirs, except a bit better—twenty percent of the sales price seemed reasonable in her mind. A remote land like hers already

meant an increase in travel expenses, and the local purchasing power was still pretty weak.

Afterward, she and Petz devised a trade route. It would begin at the capital, go to the Bozes' county, then head to Yamano County before going back again. Petz would also stop at towns and villages along the way, and by the time he arrived at Mitsuha's territory, he would have sold the capital's best wares. The locals would have to choose from the remaining supply, or whatever he had purchased during his travels.

Petz would pass through the same towns on his way back and buy up goods to sell in the capital. This would minimize the distance he'd have to travel, reduce decay on perishable goods, and lower the damages in case of a bandit attack.

To lure the trader into bringing good merchandise to her territory, Mitsuha had to make it profitable, whether by allowing price flexibility or by lowering taxes. Taxes couldn't be too low, however, as that would obviously reduce the county's revenue.

I also have to keep a good balance with the other counties. Hmm...

"What if I taxed your goods at twenty percent, and you handed over any items you didn't want to take back with you so we could do consignment sales with them. We'd handle that at our local store, so you wouldn't need to buy any space or hire workers. There'd be zero financial burden on you.

"Also, I'd send out some crafts made in our secret workshop. They're bound to make a killing, trust me. I could also do consignment sales with those, if you'd like to handle the commission."

"Huh?"

Petz almost couldn't believe Mitsuha's lucrative offer. The low tax—lower than in the Bozes' county, at that—was one thing, but the idea that he could turn all his excess goods into cash without spending anything was even more enticing. After all, wares that didn't sell on his first visit to a town weren't likely to sell during his second. A merchant would prefer to have more space for the things he could sell at the capital.

If someone took all the goods he couldn't sell, he wouldn't have to buy smaller amounts of new ones. This would allow him to leave the capital stocked up on enough of the fancier, more superior goods to supply both counties. And a free consignment agreement was like a free shop for him.

"Um, yes, please!" he replied hastily.

The "secret workshop" was a lie, of course; Mitsuha was merely planning to resell goods from discount stores on Earth—avoiding any currently for sale at Mitsuha's General Store, of course. This would surely increase her profits and the value of coming to the Yamano County, perhaps even increasing the frequency of tourists and visitors.

However, all of this was only a temporary solution. She needed to act fast and make sure things could continue without her.

This is great and all, but ultimately it's a band-aid fix. I've gotta act fast and make sure things can continue here if I disappear or whatever. So, I've got to think of something that can be made in my county and sold for a profit.

First things first, though, I need to set up a store run directly by the local government... myself.

Mitsuha and Petz had yet to discuss what goods he should bring and how frequently he should visit, but as these required the opinions of Anton, the servants, and the townsfolk, they decided to fine-tune it later.

Next up is the merc, Willem.

"Any idea what kind of defenses we'll need?" Mitsuha asked.

Willem cracked a strained grin. "Well, that depends on the enemy, so I can't tell you much. Though, geographically, this isn't a place that could be easily attacked by another country, so you could probably expect anything from small packs of monsters to large bandit gangs."

Yamano County had 676 people: 260 in the main town, 290 total in the three farming villages, 79 in the two mountain villages, and 47 in the fishing village. For a viscount's territory, the population was quite low.

I wanted this, though. It used to be a baron's land... but what should I do to

protect it?

"Should I bring someone from outside or look among my own people?"

"Hmmm. This place's far, so hiring someone from the capital would be expensive. Anyone who has family there wouldn't want to leave, either. And let's not forget about loyalty."

Outsiders might choose to desert when backed into a corner, or perhaps even decide to become bandits right after being hired. This area was so obscure that killing a lord's family and escaping with their wealth wouldn't be impossible. Worse yet, the murderers could very well end up not getting caught. This was a world without photos, newspapers, or TV, and you couldn't hope for a proper investigation.

Guess I'm going homegrown! It'll help me look for potential hires, too. I'll just have to get Willem to train them. But how long would it take for a recruit to be somewhat useful?

Ah! I've got it!

"Willem, I'm hiring you as an army commander for Yamano County. I plan to have a maximum of five career soldiers, all of whom will be commanders. Next, I'll round up thirty-six of my people and make them juggle both work and military service. We'll periodically pick new groups until we've got around two hundred men at least somewhat capable in battle. Once all that's done, we'll pick out the ones with potential and make them into permanent soldiers."

"What?"

"You *are* capable of making men's bodies, minds, and equipment ready for battle, yes?"

"Err, yes."

Mitsuha had decided to take the universal conscription approach. With so few people at her disposal, she couldn't support a large permanent army, but a small one wouldn't be enough for simple patrols, let alone a defensive battle. That was why she'd decided to enforce mandatory shifts of duty, during which many men would have to balance their professional and military obligations. She wanted to target able-bodied men who had no illness in their families and

who could afford to step away from their work without much consequence. And once one group's time was up, they would switch.

This wouldn't damage her county's productivity too terribly, and since they would come from their own homes, it wouldn't burden her or the servants much, either. She would at least make sure they were fed hearty lunches, however.

The thirty-six worker-soldiers from each shift would be split into four squads of nine each. Those nine would be split either into trios or two groups of four with the ninth acting as a group leader. There would be four officers above them all and Willem at the very top.

Mitsuha would allow women to learn to wield a weapon, too. Even if they didn't end up in battle, she felt it would be good for them to have a means of self-defense.

Now, universal conscription might have seemed like the device of a warmongering nation, but even permanently neutral Switzerland, often considered to be a symbol of peace, had universal conscription. Swiss men were required by law to learn how to use weapons, nearly every household owned a gun, and the people were prepared to at any time assemble into an army of 100,000. For a "symbol of peace", the country was actually quite militaristic. It took part in a military-industrial complex as well, exporting lots of lethal weapons.

You occasionally get weirdos saying Japan should become as neutral and peaceful as Switzerland, but since their neutrality's armed, it's basically like saying, "Screw with us and see what happens!" If Japan wanted to be like them, it'd have to do forced conscription, allow the possession of firearms, and start growing a defense industry. If you ask me, things are pretty peaceful as is.

Mitsuha also recalled that she had to create a census. One was absolutely necessary when it came to matters of military, taxation, and welfare. Keeping a population of less than 700 in check wouldn't be too hard, however, especially not with the laptop she'd brought over. She planned to make print copies, too, just in case.

I also gotta return to the capital, check on the store, and take care of that one

thing. Then I'll return to Japan and get cracking on that other thing. Oh man, am I busy! I was supposed to have it easy! Why's this happening?

Yeah, yeah. I know I pretty much asked for this.

Chapter 17: The Blog

Around 9:30 PM, two men sat in the night shift prep room of Ootsuki General Hospital in Japan.

“What? You’re looking at a case when the night shift’s about to start? It’s good to be studious and all, but you might get a patient at any moment, so you should find some time to rest. It’s part of your job.”

Shuhei Nishimura, head of the internal medicine department, lightly tapped the shoulder of Yuta Ishii, an intern intensely comparing a medical photograph and the contents of a textbook.

“Ah, Mr. Nishimura. Actually, someone I know is looking after a sick child, and they sent this photo my way.”

Shuhei slapped the back of Yuta’s head. “That’s not the kind of joke you make in a hospital. It’s in poor taste!”

“Huh?”

“There’s no way that’s real. You don’t know this disease?” He gestured to the photo, which showed part of a small child’s body. “We’re in Japan. There’s no way you’d find a patient in that state who’s not being properly cared for.”

Shuhei half-laughed as he spoke, but Yuta was completely serious.

“What disease *is* it, then?”

“Telling you won’t teach you a thing.”

“Please! I mean, look.” Yuta pointed to a manga magazine in the bottom-left corner of the image. “This magazine is from yesterday.”

“Come with me!” Shuhei’s expression changed as he grabbed the intern by the arm and pulled him into his office.

“What’s going on here?! Explain!”

Normally, Shuhei’s menacing attitude would have terrified Yuta, but this time

was different.

“It’s from a blog, okay? It was posted on a blog I like to read. The blogger wants to know about the symptoms, and they included a new magazine as proof that this is real.”

“Show me with this, then,” said Shuhei, handing Yuta one of his personal devices. “It’s completely detached from the hospital’s shared network. I only use it to keep records and email suppliers and researchers. It’s even got anti-virus. Just don’t think too hard and use it!”

Yuta took it from him, opened a browser, and filled the search field with the usual keywords.

“So, about that disease...” Shuhei added, looking at the screen. “It’s anthrax.”

The blog finally loaded. It was titled, “Help Me Out: Running Your Land as a Viscount”.

What a tasteless title, thought Shuhei. *“Viscount”? Really?*

“Where are the photos?” he asked.

Yuta clicked the red, flickering “Emergencies” section of the blog’s “Consultation Corner” and opened up the page. It contained a photo of a child’s skin, flushed with a wide, acne-like rash and marred by a black scab. The description read, “Other symptoms: high temperature, coughing, trouble breathing”, and the newest update was just two hours ago.

Shuhei’s mood darkened. *Damn it! If this is a joke, someone’s getting punched!*

“Can we contact the blogger?”

“Yes, provided they’re in front of a PC and either waiting for new emails or using an alert software. You don’t get replies if you don’t give them your own email address. Personally, I only comment on the blog. I haven’t given out my email yet, since I didn’t want my info to get leaked or something.”

“Do it. Use this address. Hurry! I’ll write the message.”

The reply came in no time.

“Everything written here is true. I’ll come right away, so please tell me where you are. And have the medicine ready. —Viscount”

“‘Right away’? We don’t even know what prefecture this guy’s from.”

Grumbling, Shuhei wrote down his address and the name of the hospital.

Another instant reply.

“I have your location. I will be at the front desk of the ER in five minutes. Please tell me how to administer the medicine.”

“What? Five minutes?! How is that even—”

I’m being fooled, aren’t I?! But if I’m not...

“Crap, crap, crap! Ishii, get some penicillin and tetracycline! Right now!”

This has to be a lie. Someone’s just messing with me. I know that. But if another child is in danger...

“What are you waiting for? Go!”

Yuta ran off as fast as he could—much faster than you should ever run inside a hospital.

Seven minutes later, he and Shuhei arrived at the ER, panting.

A girl stood waiting for them.

“I am Viscountess Mitsuha von Yamano,” she said.

If she could get here that fast, then the patient had to be close by too. Is this a miracle or a coincidence?! Shuhei thought.

However, when he asked the girl to take him to the child, she stubbornly shook her head.

“Don’t be absurd! The patient’s life is in danger! It’s a race against time! And I can’t give medicine to a layman without seeing the patient. Unauthorized injections are against the law!”

“Don’t worry about that. This is beyond Japanese law.”

“What?”

The girl refused to yield, insisting he tell her the amount of medicine to use

and how to administer it. She clearly had no relevant knowledge.

Can't expect much from a middle schooler.

After a few minutes of arguing, the girl claiming to be "Mitsuha" noticed tears in Shuhei's eyes. She took a deep breath, righting herself.

"Can you keep a secret?"

"I can."

"And you swear on...?"

"Myself?"

"Okay. Let's go together."

A moment later, the three of them vanished, leaving only a quiet *whoosh* as air filled the space they left behind.

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"Where are we?" Shuhei asked.

I was just in the hospital, wasn't I? Did someone bring me here while I was unconscious? But I'm still standing, and Ishii and the girl are with me.

"This way," said the girl.

Shuhei stopped thinking. This was the time for doing. He grasped the medical bag in his hand.

They followed her as she led them to a shabby-looking house. Inside, there was a worn bed and a little girl sleeping within it. There was also a woman sitting on a nearby chair, her top half resting on the girl's bed. Shuhei assumed she was the girl's mother, exhausted from looking after her child.

"Ishii, let's go!"

I'll save her. I won't let this one die.

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Some part of him still believed that the prior events had all been a dream. Shuhei moved the cursor on his computer and clicked.

"Help Me Out: Running Your Land as a Viscount"

Click.

There were no flickering sections.

“Disease Consultation”

Click.

“My body is heavy and I run out of breath quickly. —Boris the meat vendor”

Shuhei scoffed. *This guy again? I’ll bite.*

“Eat less. Move more. Run. —McCoy”

He’s way too fat. I thought it was a disease at first, but the guy weighs almost three hundred pounds, goddamn it. Says he eats orc meat, too. That’s practically cannibalism.

Shuhei went back two pages and saw the topic he’d clicked on dozens of times by now.

Click.

“Gratitude Corner”

“She’s slowly recovering. Thank you very much.”

The post contained a photo of a little girl.

I’ll just go back to work. Ah. But first, one quick comment on the “I Caught Something Straight Out of the Cambrian Period” post. The cooking method I thought of last night will be perfect for it, I’m sure!

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Mitsuha had set up a blog. It was called, “Help Me Out: Running Your Land as a Viscount”.

Like the title says, it’s a blog I use to get help from all the nerds—I mean, people who are knowledgeable about area management who’d never get to use their knowledge otherwise.

No matter how much Mitsuha knew, there was a limit to how much an eighteen-year-old like herself could do. She could use the internet, of course, but in her opinion, relying on text-based information of questionable validity

was too risky, and no amount of mere knowledge could replace actual experience.

And though you could search the internet endlessly, it didn't mean much if you hadn't the faintest idea of what to look for. How would one search for something you didn't know the name of, or if it was even real, for that matter? This line of thinking had led her to create this blog. It was a site where visitors would help a new viscountess in another world run her land.

Nerds—I mean, smart guys will definitely wanna flaunt their stuff and give just the right advice. I'll use their words as hints, confirm their validity myself, and put it to use in the other world. It's perfect!

Naturally, everyone thought it was just an act—a joke blog just for the heck of it—so you wouldn't find a single person who believed it was real. However, since many people took fantasy settings and simulation games very seriously, you could expect some really productive answers. Playfulness brought sincerity.

You can't have any real fun in video games if you just take it easy!

Recently, Mitsuha had been thinking of bringing some of the more productive blog regulars to her territory. Four of them were particularly smart, sincere, and friendly. She hadn't leaked a single piece of personal information, and even if they went on to say that they had been in another world, no one would believe them. It was absurd to begin with, and the existence of the "joke" blog made it even less believable.

The four also weren't the kind of people who would risk being branded insane and losing the trust of those around them. They seemed like the sort who would keep her secrets if she simply asked them to. Even if they weren't, Mitsuha just had to forbid them from taking photos or objects with them as proof, then ban them from the blog.

Wondering why I'd need to show them the other world? Because I'm starting to want people who'll help me out on a deeper level. I need something beyond the online act—help that'll take actual time and effort. I'll think of rewards for them too. I'll have to do it on the next three-day weekend.

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“Too bad, that’s just fools gold! No jackpot for you! Maybe you’ll win next week if there’s a rollover!”

A man left that disappointing comment in the “Mining Help” section, on a post entitled, “I Found Something That Looks Like Gold!”

Leave mining and forestry to me! he thought.

A while ago, he had discovered this strange blog, “Help Me Out: Running Your Land as a Viscount”. The site description simply read: “I suddenly became a viscount and now have to manage a territory. Please help me out!” To this man, it seemed to be an imaginative teenage girl’s fictional diary about the complexities of ruling her domain. It covered such subjects as rice agriculture, the fishing industry, and mining of precious metals.

This man found it well thought-out and strangely realistic. Many netizens were having a blast with it. If experts provided some valuable advice, the blogger’s result reports would read as ridiculously authentic, impressing those who had contributed. The rookie mistakes, for instance, would be so on-point that the commenters would feel as though the viscount had followed their instructions. The photos that came with the posts were quite well done, too, and everyone praised the CGI artist behind them. At this point, everyone was commenting as if the county was a real place. There were even emergency events like “Help This Sick Girl!” and “Help! Pests on the Rice!”

One day, the man—a regular poster—received an invitation.

“Thank you very much for helping me cheat my way into being a great ruler. We have a three-day weekend in two weeks, and I would like to invite you and three of my other reliable advisors for a small IRL meet-up in my county. I hope that seeing it with your own eyes will help you continue to advise me in the future.

Also, we will be there for all three days of the weekend. All you should bring are personal hygiene products and spare undergarments. I will prepare everything else. However, for the clothing, I would like to know your preferred sizes.

Starts: Saturday, 1:00 PM

Ends: Monday, 1:00 PM”

What the hell?! Damn right I’m going! I have no idea where the “county” is, but it’s a free three-day trip, so why pass that up? Will there be hot springs? Does this blog belong to some rich old retiree doing some farming in a depopulated village? That’s the feeling “my county” gives me, anyway. Also, I’ll get to meet three other regs! That alone makes it worth the trip.

He assumed someone who could cover all the expenses of a three-day trip for five people would have to be rich. The CGI work alone had convinced him that some good money was involved, and he found it hard to imagine the viscount would waste so much money on a boring excursion. In his mind, there was no way going to the meet-up could be a waste of time.

Is it an old lady? Or a retired middle-aged man with too much time and money to spend? What kind of person is this “viscount”?

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By 12:55 PM on Saturday, four people had gathered at a rooftop playground above a department store. The group included “McCoy”, a middle-aged man and regular of the “Disease Help” part of the blog; “Mountain King”, a twenty-six-year-old man and “Mining Help” regular; “Dry Fish”, a twenty-seven-year-old woman and “Marine Help” devotee; and “Greenpeas”, a twenty-three-year-old woman and frequent contributor to “Farming Help”.

They had quickly come to the conclusion that all four of them were fellow participants. Some assumed that one among them was the viscount, but it turned out not to be the case.

A few minutes later, just ten seconds before the clock struck one...

“Thank you all for coming. I am Viscountess Mitsuha von Yamano.”

“CUTE GIRL ALERT!” someone cried. Everyone besides McCoy, AKA Dr. Shuhei Nishimura, was already swooning over Mitsuha.

“I’ve called you here because this place is almost always empty, and the large equipment can hide us well,” said Mitsuha before beckoning them closer.

McCoy partially knew what was about to happen, but the other three were

clueless and followed her instructions with a little hesitation. They were soon completely hidden, and in the next moment, they had vanished completely.

“Welcome to the Yamano County!” said Mitsuha upon their arrival to the other world.

“WHAAAT?!” The three besides McCoy were initially stupefied, but once they had calmed down, they began firing off questions.

“Um, are the fields I told you to make actually here? Like in the reports? Y’know, those pics with the CGI?!” asked Greenpeas.

“There was no CGI. I took the photos with a standard digital camera. But yes, the fields are on the plains near the mountainside,” Mitsuha replied.

“The ship, then!” cried Dry Fish. “Where’s the mini all-purpose fishing ship?!”

“It’s still being tested, but it’s in the temporary shipyard in the fishing village. We’re a bit at the end of our rope with it.”

“What’s the problem?! Where’s the ship?! WHERE?!”

The women, giddy with excitement, aggressively approached Mitsuha.

“Hahaha.” Mountain King, whose real name was Tomoya Aoki, chuckled in self-derision. “I’d help with your mine, but doesn’t seem like there is one. And logging is too hard without heavy machinery.”

McCoy—Shuhei Nishimura—patted the dejected man’s shoulder.

Suddenly, a young girl nearby ran away from her mother and up to McCoy, embracing his leg.

“Uhm, hello?”

Mitsuha smiled. “This is Margaret. She’s the one you saved, Dr. McCoy.”

The girl’s mother caught up and bowed to him over and over.

“Aah... Aaahhhh!”

He tilted his head up for a moment, but it didn’t stop the waterworks.

“WAAAHHHH!” He crouched and wrapped his arms around the little girl.

My daughter, he thought, sobbing uncontrollably. *I couldn’t save her, but this*

girl, I...

"Man, am I the only one who's got nothing?" muttered Mountain King.

"Mountain King, please head to the mountains. Inspect them, and examine the trees," said Mitsuha.

"Huh?"

"I'd also like to know if we can build a house for charcoal production and a Japanese-style furnace. Y'know, a tatara."

"You want to do *what*?"

"I'm interested in steel made of iron sand, too."

"Huh? You serious?!"

Mitsuha wanted to be considerate of those who had traveled a long way for this, so she planned to have everyone arrive and split up for work on the same afternoon. With everyone preoccupied with their tasks, evening would come quickly.

Greenpeas went around the fields, checking for problems. Dry Fish shouted at the shipwrights building her new ship while Mitsuha acted as an interpreter. She also checked on the town's methods of processing seafood and inspected shellfish and seaweed. McCoy and Mitsuha went to Boris—the 260-pound man—so the doctor could speak with him directly. Mountain King went into the mountains.

By the time the group returned to the viscount's residence, it was completely dark. They entered the bath, changed into the clothes they were provided, and started a get-together. Everyone tried to stop Mitsuha from drinking, but she insisted that adulthood here started at fifteen, so they had no choice but to back down.

She probably drinks on the regular, anyway, they thought.

Seeing the county with their own eyes had lit a fire inside the participants. They chatted and argued about what they'd discovered, had lots of laughs, and quickly became drunk—an obvious outcome of the alcohol and good atmosphere.

McCoy, however, drank slowly and spoke little. He seemed to be lost in thought about something. Mitsuha understood this, but she didn't want to miss an opportunity to consult a doctor about something that had been bothering her.

"Doc. Can I ask you something?" she asked, sitting beside him.

"Of course. What is it?"

"Umm, if someone could slowly but surely heal from any wound and even regrow lost body parts, what would that mean for the rest of their body?" She had been thinking about this a great deal lately.

McCoy could still think through his boozy haze, but his mind was a bit jumbled. "Hmmm. Everything totally heals? Even lost parts? Does that mean that even bones and nerve cells come back? There's no oxygen decay, faults in DNA transcription, or telomere shortening? That's crazy talk, haha. But I guess they'd never get older. Or maybe they'd even regrow a new head once it came off. Hahaha."

Upon hearing his theory, Mitsuha collapsed.

"That's why a child like you shouldn't drink," McCoy hiccuped, shaking his head.

Mitsuha was in a state of mild, alcohol-induced delirium. "Hrmmm. That means I'm gonna need a lot more than eighty thousand for my retirement."

Huh? Is that really the most shocking thing about this? And is it really "retirement" if you never get old?

A short time ago, Mitsuha had begun to think that she wouldn't grow any more. Even at the ripe age of eighteen, she'd hoped to grow a bit—to gain a few inches on her breasts, chest, and bosom, for example. There wasn't a single sign of growth, however, hence why she had asked McCoy about regeneration. The answer left little room for hope.

No! That's just conjecture! I'll still grow! There's no need to panic!

As much as she wanted to believe it, she had prepared for this truth ever since she stopped growing at seventeen. Ultimately, she was was fine with

staying young forever. It wasn't as though she was immortal; losing her head would probably kill her, as would a pierced heart, or a jump into a blast furnace.

Oh well, no point in thinking too hard about it. I'll have fun until I'm bored of life. Also, there might come a time when I meet that "thing" again.

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In the morning, everyone awoke with severe headaches. Mitsuha, on the other hand, was perfectly fine.

Does my auto-heal work on hangovers? Diseases, too, maybe?

They planned to go to the capital in the afternoon. Until then, everyone made whatever preparations they deemed necessary. Around 1 PM, they changed into clothes that would allow them to blend in with the capital's crowd, then jumped to Mitsuha's General Store. Mitsuha had recently resumed business, but with extremely limited hours.

She had one particular place in mind for lunch: the diner, Paradise.

Upon hearing that people from Mitsuha's country had come to visit, Anel, Aleena, Bernd, and even Marcel wanted to try their hand and see what they would think of their Yamano Cuisine.

"We're in a whole different world, but we're going to eat normal Earth food?" whined her online advisors, but Mitsuha paid them no mind. She also planned to have them come to Paradise for dinner.

Anyway, what the hell's with all these people? Sabine, the whole Bozes family, the king, the chancellor, and especially you, first princess! Well, whatever. Guess I've gotta introduce them.

"Mitsuha, you're a viscountess, right?" Greenpeas asked. "Why is the count's family treating you like one of them? Why are you talking to a princess so casually? And... the king? Really?"

"Please, don't ask." Mitsuha just didn't know how to answer.

The Yamano Cuisine received passing marks from the travelers, and the Paradise crew cried tears of joy.

Next, it was time for a tour around the capital. They would go sightseeing first

and foremost, but Mitsuha told them to give her a shout if they noticed any lucrative business opportunities.

“Hey, why is everyone watching you with sparkling eyes, waving at you, and shouting? What are they saying?” asked one of the members.

“Again, just... don’t ask.”

There wasn’t really much in the capital worth seeing. The royal palace was the highlight, but it wasn’t as though the guards would allow them inside. Besides that, there were European-style cobblestone roads and old brick buildings, both of which were similar enough to what they’d seen in photos or on TV. At the very least, the outer wall was somewhat impressive. As Mitsuha considered how to improve her tour, she heard someone say, “Very well, I shall show you around our palace.”

Goddamn it, royals!

At dinnertime, they were served meals from the kingdom’s cuisine. Despite that, there wasn’t anything terribly interesting.

If this were a manga, you’d have a dragon steak or something. Funnily enough, you’re more likely to have one back on Earth right now. They probably froze the damn thing.

Later, after everyone had gotten drunk once again, McCoy approached Mitsuha. He looked really serious.

“Viscountess... would it be possible for me to live here?”

Oh, so that’s what’s on his mind.

“Yeah, it’s not impossible, but what if I die or lose my world-jumping power? What if you’re left here all alone? You’re a doctor, sure, but what can you do without medical equipment or medicine? You’d have to learn the language, too, and even if you did that, there aren’t any words for more advanced concepts. Imagine yourself explaining CT scans to a medieval person using only words they can understand.”

McCoy once again ascended into his own thoughts and walked away.

I feel like I just bullied him a bit. It’s unlikely that I’d die before him, and I don’t

think I'll lose my world-jump. But that's not impossible, and I don't want anyone planning their life around me and my power. Even I'm preparing a safety measure in the off chance that I do lose it: my plan to save eighty thousand gold coins for my retirement.

With no sobriety in their steps, they reconvened at Mitsuha's General Store before jumping to her Yamano County residence. There was no point in them staying at an inn, and the third floor of the store was Mitsuha's private space.

While passing through, everyone caught a glimpse of Mitsuha's prices.

"Holy crap, that's expensive!"

"These prices are criminal!"

"Insanity."

"This is a store straight from hell."

Augh! Shut up, you guys!

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The next day, everyone slept in. The only item on their agenda was to return home, after all. The clothes her guests had been wearing during their arrival had been cleaned while they were at the capital. After waking, they changed back into their normal clothes, had a late brunch, and did some final inspections. They looked at the ship, then checked the fields.

Too bad! That's not real gold, but fool's gold!

McCoy received another hug from the little girl.

Mitsuha returned the four of them to the playground on Monday at 1 PM sharp. Their otherworldly weekend was over, and it was now time for them to return to their everyday lives.

Chapter 18: Securing Human Resources

“So, how would you like to work for me?” Mitsuha asked.

The four mercenaries opposite her froze. All five of them were sitting at a table in Paradise.

“Err, you mean you want to make us your army’s, uhh...”

“Founding members and officers, yes. You would answer directly to a commander and lead thirty-six soldiers. Your initial salary would be five gold.”

“Well? What d’you need us to do?

“I can’t believe this!”

“Five gold?! That’s more than twice what we’d get in a busy month before getting the trailer!”

“Even now that we have it, we can hardly hope for more than four gold. It doesn’t seem like there’s any way to get more. When you consider that we might get hurt or sick, and that we’ll get older, a stable source of income sounds very attractive.”

Wow, my offer’s so good, it even got Ilse to talk!

“Five gold per month would be enough for all of us to live comfortably.”

“Huh? Oh, I meant five gold for each of you.”

“For EACH?!”

Now that I think about it, isn’t that about what officials in the Japanese Self-Defense Forces make? Well, whatever. I got them to work for me in one go, so that’s good.

The mercenaries had gotten their start in a small rural village, so they didn’t mind working somewhere similar. They dreamed of saving enough money to open up a shop in the capital, which seemed like a pretty tangible goal, especially with the raises they might get in the future.

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“So, wanna work for me?”

“Work for you?!”

This time, Mitsuha was in Colette’s house.

I mean, I can’t let her talents get buried in this backwater village, right?!

“Mitsuha, you became a viscount?”

“Yeah. The king himself just went and made me into one.”

Tobias and Erene shivered.

“But Mitsuha, Colette is still a child. If you take her away, we might never see her again!”

“Right, I forgot to mention that my county is right next to this one! From here, it’s even closer than this county’s capital.”

“Oh, you don’t say...”



A village girl getting to work for a noble was a real-life rags-to-riches story. That night, the village threw a lavish party to celebrate Colette rapidly rising up in the world. Mitsuha was also ascending into the local pantheon as a goddess of earth-shattering changes. During this extremely unusual event, simple villagers partied alongside the lord of a neighboring county.

It should also be mentioned that the villagers had heard of the battle at the capital, but they only knew that the star of the show was someone called the “Lightning Archpriestess”. They hadn’t the faintest idea that the Archpriestess had gone on to become a noble—a viscountess, at that—or that her land was right next to theirs. The people of Yamano County were just as clueless, despite serving the Archpriestess herself.

“Hey, wanna take me as a servant, too?” asked one of the villagers.

“Ahaha, well...”

“To think Colette’s gonna serve a noble,” marveled another. “Life sure is full of surprises!”

“Huh? Uh, I’m not hiring her as a servant. I’m thinking of teaching her all sorts of things so she can become my vassal.”

“Your WHAT?!”

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After leaving Colette’s village, Mitsuha gathered people in the capital. She didn’t mention her name, however; she merely said there was a demand for tradesmen in a rural county. She needed skilled blacksmiths, carpenters or shipwrights who could build at least small fishing ships, healthcare personnel, and so on.

She even went to Yorck the scientist’s teacher, Platidus. Pushing Yorck’s general aura of failure aside, she noted that his teacher seemed insightful and had an agreeable stance on matters of science. Platidus turned out to have keen senses when it came to inference; by now, he had already concluded that the Archpriestess and Viscountess Yamano were one and the same. He went out of his way to speak with her personally. His people were wary of her, likely because of whatever Yorck may have told them.

“That’s why the moisture levels in the air change a lot depending on temperature.”

“I see.”

“As you go higher, air pressure decreases and so does temperature. That causes this to happen...”

“What about when conditions are...”

“Oh, then it goes like this, and...”

“Mhm, mhm.”

Mitsuha and Platidus hit it off within minutes. She was impressed with how much the scientists of this world could observe and discern without any advanced equipment. She even donated ten gold coins to aid their research, telling them to contact her if they planned to use their findings to develop something practical.

As word spread of Mitsuha seeking new hires, the amount of confused buffoons and scheming swindlers who aimed to become a vassal or treasurer increased. She dismissed the former by asking for recommendation letters from the king, and chased away the latter after testing their math skills.

Sigh. They couldn’t solve a single one.

Luckily for her, there were no such offenders among those who came in for technical positions, and she even held a few interviews. However, each came with their own problems. Some were blatantly unskilled, others didn’t take the interview seriously because the interviewer was a little girl, and others still were aware of who she was and couldn’t control their giddiness. In the end, she didn’t find a single person who was fit for the job.

Well, if you think about it, experts who are both skilled and likable wouldn’t be looking for a job in the first place. Guess I’ll try my luck in my own land. Oh, and I should open up the store and sell some shampoo.

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A few days after she returned from the capital, her butler approached her with a complicated expression.

“Lady Mitsuha, you have a guest.”

“Who is it?”

“Erm, it is August, the first son of the previous lord.”

Oh, jeez. That sounds like a headache and a half. I can’t just reject him without meeting him, though.

“Take him to the reception room.”

Once they had assembled, her unwanted guest introduced himself.

“A pleasure to meet you. I am August von Tomsen, Baron Tomsen’s firstborn.”

“Huh?”

He can’t be serious, she thought.

“What brings you here?”

Mitsuha looked thoroughly unimpressed, catching the composed August a bit off guard.

“Right. You see, I caught word that our land had been inherited by a young lady, so I made my way here with the intent of showing you the ropes. It must be difficult without vassals, after all.”

Oh, I get it. He wants to become a vassal, then marry into the family to become a noble again—a viscount, at that—and bring his family back to their former glory.

“I mean, I don’t really need your help. I get more than enough from my servants.”

“Erm, pardon me, but you must be mistaken. There are some who have proved quite useless, no? Surely you need to learn how to use the trustworthy ones, like Gunther, to control them properly.”

“Huh? You trusted that snake? See, this is why your family was so hopeless. That guy was so blatantly corrupt, it’s not even funny. I fired him with the five other undesirables a long time ago.”

“You... what?” August was at a loss for words.

“Also, the Tomsen family lost their rank. You’re just commoners now. Why are you calling yourself a baron’s son and putting ‘von’ in your name? Falsely claiming to be a noble is a crime, isn’t it?”

“Oh, I merely said that to help you understand my role as the previous—”

“Silence!” Mitsuha cried. “Willem! Arrest this treasonous faker! He’s a criminal who has willfully wronged His Majesty the King and all the nobles of this country!”

August tried to fight back, but a pampered noble boy like him stood no chance against a seasoned mercenary. He was quickly captured and tied up.

“Let go of me! Who do you think I am?! Anton! Do something!”

The butler replied to him with a tone as cold as ice. “You must be confused. You are but a commoner named ‘August’. I am a loyal servant of Her Excellency the Viscountess Mitsuha von Yamano.”

“Huh?” August’s eyes darted around the room. What he saw were the people who used to serve his family, looking down at him with no expression at best, and outright disdain at worst.

His body went limp, and the servants dragged him out.

“Hmm, I don’t have any soldiers yet,” murmured Mitsuha. “What should I do with him? Oh, I know. Anton, send a messenger to the Bozes. Tell them we have a treasonous commoner who needs soldiers to escort him to the capital.”

“It shall be done. But...”

“But what?”

“Would the count really do something like that without compensation?”

Oh, he still doesn’t know.

“No need to worry. He and I are close acquaintances. Just send a messenger.”

“Certainly. I apologize for my impertinence.”

The messenger returned two days later, reporting that the escorting soldiers would be here the following day. The count had also offered to send some of his people to act as her bodyguards to prevent future unwanted visitors, but

she politely refused.

“Lady Mitsuha, you have a guest.” Anton looked exhausted.

I have a bad feeling about this.

“Who is it?”

“He claims to be the previous lord’s second son, Burckhardt von Tomsen. And he certainly is.”

My head hurts.

“Willem, let’s skip the formalities. Just go tie him up.”

The mercenary flashed a smile. “Well, at least we’ll get to send both of them off at once.”

In that moment, it occurred to her to ask one particular question.

“Hey, Anton, how many children does the previous lord have?”

“Three sons and two daughters, milady.”

You’ve gotta be kidding me!

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At last, Sven’s group arrived. Mitsuha had assumed that they would have sold their bike trailer by now, but they had actually dragged it along with them the whole way. All things considered, however, this feat wasn’t nearly as impressive as Count Bozes’ army traveling to the capital and back in full battle gear.

Mitsuha began by introducing them to Willem. She then gave them the names of the first thirty-six recruits.

You guys can handle the rest! Good luck!

She didn’t really believe that a bit of training would be enough for the villagers to win against bandits. Her makeshift army of two hundred might’ve been able to defeat a few dozen thugs, but it would be a Pyrrhic victory resulting in numerous casualties with the potential to destroy the morale and economy of her entire county. While arming them with guns could prevent this outcome, ammo and maintenance would depend solely on Mitsuha, and the guns would soon become useless if she was no longer present.

Mitsuha decided to teach a select few how to handle SMGs and change their magazines. They would only use the guns as learning tools; she would withhold them otherwise unless they became necessary. She already had an emergency arsenal inside Wolfgang's base, so she would simply have to transport it. Mitsuha even considered hiring the mercenaries again if circumstances called for it. She decided to consult the captain about such possibilities in the future.

Crossbows were also an option. Mitsuha wondered whether it would be possible to make simple ones in this world.

Man, I want a skilled blacksmith. I need farming implements, ship fittings, and tools to be made in-house. That'll definitely help us develop. I could probably get iron by bringing it from Japan. I don't need all that much, and I don't wanna harm the environment. As usual, I'll go with quality over quantity. I'll definitely want that Japanese steel that's made of iron sand. I'm also gonna need a tatara furnace and lots of wood, right? Hmm, what about titanium? Nah, you probably can't work with it in this world.

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Soon, Colette arrived in Yamano County. To be specific, Mitsuha herself had been her escort. The girl could have easily been attacked by wolves or bandits, so Mitsuha couldn't allow her to make the journey all by herself. Instead, she had taken Willem along with her to Colette's village to pick her up.

As for Sven's group, they were busy training the villagers.

"Wow, so you really are a viscount!" Colette chirped, eyes shining.

What the hell, Colette, you didn't believe me?!

Their county now had guards that doubled as trainers, plenty of recruits, and an innocent smile to cheer them all up. Satisfied with this, Mitsuha shifted her attention to cheating her way into reforming her land.

Should I use the three-field system? Crop rotation? Norfolk four-course system? The three-field system is better for transitional periods, so maybe I should just start with Norfolk? No, no, no. I'll just ask a professional. Greenpeas, was it?

Mitsuha was quite sad that they hadn't found any natural resources worth

digging for. She also had the fishing industry to consider, but they needed proper ships to improve in that area. Right now, her top priority was acquiring knowledge and information. She decided to dedicate more time to reading books and scouring the internet.

Before I make any real moves, I'm gonna need more servants.

Mitsuha was thinking about who to get for her county and how. Bribes and forgeries were rampant in this world, so referrals and recommendations were generally unreliable. As far as she could tell, she could only rely on recommendations from trusted parties and her own judgment during interviews, but even that could be subverted if the interviewee had good acting skills.

The count offered to lend Mitsuha his own vassals, but she refused. He already had Alexis to support, and Mitsuha was likely to do a number of things the vassals would find... unorthodox. Additionally, while she did trust Count Bozes, she didn't feel entirely comfortable letting him know everything about her territory.

Mitsuha needed a treasurer, an overseer for fishing and agriculture, a welfare manager, and two maids. She assumed Anton and the other servants would know one or two promising maid candidates, but didn't want to miss out on potential applicants from the rest of her county.

The treasury, fishing, and agriculture had been managed by three of the six servants Mitsuha had discharged and one of those still remaining. However, they had all primarily focused on taxation, liquidation, and illegal activities; they had known nothing about how to make industries grow. It was quite difficult to find the right person for those jobs.

She had hoped she could find candidates among the craftsmen in the capital, but her search hadn't proved fruitful. She needed people who weren't just skilled, but also had an open mind and a wide perspective, and she knew full well that no one like that would be out of a job.

I wouldn't care even if they were kind of weird. There could be some really talented people out there who're a little too strange to be hired by normal establishments. If only there was a place where I could find people like that...

Wait! I know exactly where to look! A real hive of well-rounded wackos—Platidus' school of scientists!

Their research space may have been peculiar, but it was legitimate, and Mitsuha was certain they would know where she could find people as keen and kooky as they were. "Birds of a feather", and all that.

I'll go talk to them right away. I'm already on good terms with the old man in charge, so it'll be a cinch.

Like lightning, her findings were almost instant. Her first candidate was a metalworker who had been kicked out from his apprenticeship for not listening to his master in favor of conducting some off-the-wall activities. He was now half-broke, working day in and day out to make ends meet while attempting to do research on the side. Platidus had told her he often came to order things he needed for his independent studies.

He showed Mitsuha the man's inventions and told her a little about him. She quickly concluded the metalworker was a stereotypical tech fanatic—skilled and with some actually good ideas. Mitsuha asked Platidus to arrange a meeting between them.

The other person Mitsuha felt would be useful was one of Platidus' disciples. The girl stood out among his students due to her interest in sociology over science. She didn't quite fit in because of it, but she was good with numbers and would definitely make a good advisor. According to Platidus, she wasn't a bad disciple, but it often seemed like they weren't on the same wavelength, and he believed Mitsuha could help her shine. Nothing had been said yet to the girl in question, but Mitsuha requested an interview with her as well.

The day of the interviews came quickly. The metalworker was Randy, twenty-three years old. Platidus' description of him was accurate, and Mitsuha had no problems with his personality. He was just a bit of a tech maniac who didn't work with others well. Most importantly, he was genuinely good at what he did.

This one's a definite hire, Mitsuha thought.

While she didn't feel she could trust him with management roles, he was bound to excel as a craftsman. In fact, he seemed completely open to new ideas, perhaps making him an even better pick for Mitsuha than the average

master craftsman. She could even count on him to make products using Earth's technology.

Next up was Platidus' disciple, Miriam. She had an infectious personality and was a fast thinker with great perception. With her interest in sociology, she would be a good candidate for a political role. Her proficiency in mathematics didn't seem to fit with the rest of her personality, but it made her a perfect treasurer.

Yep, she's got the job.

Platidus was as happy about their hiring as the two interviewees themselves. They had been at a stagnant point in their lives, and though they would now have to travel to the countryside, they would be using their best skills under the employ of a viscountess. Their joy was to be expected. Mitsuha told them to head to Yamano County as soon as possible, and the two of them rushed off to prepare.

They probably have to explain everything to their parents, Mitsuha thought.

Platidus suggested she also take Yorck, but she immediately refused. He was unsure as to why, however; Yorck had told him he was kicked out because Mitsuha hadn't been able to understand what he was saying. Platidus mentioned this to Mitsuha, and implored her to give him another chance.

Oh, no he didn't, Mitsuha thought before telling him the truth.

She explained everything from what had happened in the carriage to all the theories Yorck had brought up, noting just how basic they were and assuring Platidus that she already knew them herself, and she could've elaborated further if she so desired.

Mitsuha also couldn't trust a scientist who distorted reality for personal gain. No matter how rich she was, she wouldn't give him a single piece of silver. Also, if he had tried to sell out his fellow man to save his skin once, he would definitely do it again. In a bandit raid, he'd be more dangerous than the bandits themselves.

Additionally, Platidus had revealed that he hadn't sent Yorck to become a guest lecturer, but to simply ask that she become a patron and donate to their

school. Upon realizing that the viscountess was just a little girl, Yorck had decided to take advantage of his position.

So, he also misrepresented his teacher's intentions and lied to a noble... That's a double yikes.

Mitsuha asked Platidus not to use even a fraction of the money she had donated on Yorck's research, and the old man, feeling somewhat uncomfortable, simply nodded in response.

After their conversation, she world-jumped back to her county, proud of the progress she was making in her hiring endeavors. She *was* beginning to worry that careless use of her power would eventually lead to someone finding out about it, but it was just too convenient.

Also, with there being a whole week's worth of distance between her land and the capital, it was hard for anyone to keep track of where she was and when. In all likelihood, no one gave it much thought beyond "Oh, she's here again" or "Oh, she's back".

I'll just try not to think about it too much.

Even if someone realized she had traveled instantly, she had ways of brushing it off. She could simply say something along the lines of, "Going the normal way was a pain, so I just used traversal." On the other hand, Count Bozes and Lady Iris would inevitably scold her for not taking care of her life force.

Was that lie a mistake? But if I didn't say something like that, I'd have nobles and merchants all over me asking for access to my country every waking hour. That would've been way worse.

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By the time Mitsuha returned to her county, the servants had made a huge list of maid applicants, along with their own recommendations. People from all over had heard what a good ruler she was. Attracted by the prospect of being a viscountess' maid who wouldn't have to deal with a lord's abuse—or worse, become his mistress—they had applied for the role.

In a large county with tens of thousands of people, getting to work in the ruling lord's home would be like winning the lottery, but that wasn't quite the

case when there were only a few hundred. While a typical viscount's land would host several thousand citizens, this land had previously belonged to a mere baron. With a comparatively small pool of people, chances of becoming the viscount's servant were much higher, and so people had flocked to apply.

Even some people from Colette's village wanted Mitsuha to hire them. However, she couldn't allow herself to take too many people from other counties. Colette was her lifesaver and a dear friend, and Mitsuha had actually gone to Count Bozes personally to ask if she could take the girl under her wing, although she kept Colette's true talents a secret. Any leader would want to keep talented people for the betterment of their own territory. After all, who would want to see valuable human capital leave their borders?

Heheheh. Count Bozes, a few years from now, you'll really regret letting go of Colette!

Anyway, Mitsuha had a ton of candidates to choose from. The maids she had discharged included the head chore maid and ex-lord's personal attendant. The latter had thought her role was proof of being an "elite maid", and that it gave her impunity. Her transgressions had included taking home food and supplies as though they were hers, as well as acting as though she was above Mitsuha. She had once even gone so far as to say "I'll let you off with a warning!" before leaving.

According to the other maids, she had been a favorite of the baron and baroness. They had even allowed her to scold and discipline their children. But under Mitsuha's rule, none of this mattered, and the baron's housepet had earned her eviction.

Hell, I'm the real ruler here, not a kid! She thinks she can look down on me?! Damn it! Well, at least I got to enjoy the look on her face when I fired her. It was priceless.

Mitsuha contemplated hiring two standard maids. She also considered doing away with maid specializations. Simply put, she didn't see the point of splitting them into attendants, chore maids, and whatnot; the system only seemed to create a needless hierarchy among them. It wasn't a very specialized trade to begin with, so it seemed best to get rid of the differentiation and let all of them

do various tasks.

As Mitsuha had no family, she had no need for an attendant. If anything, she wouldn't be able to have peace of mind with someone taking care of her all the time. The attendant maids would be upset to lose their "superior" positions, but Mitsuha saw no reason to maintain the illusion that maids taking care of the ruling noble and their guests were better than any others.

Mitsuha assumed that the prettier maids had been assigned as attendants so they could double as the lord's concubines. If this had been a viscount's land to begin with, the role would've been filled by barons' daughters or girls from major merchant families to "learn high society etiquette". However, this had merely been a rural baron's land, and commoners were the best he could do. There weren't even any major merchants to be found.

Anyway, I need two or three "normal" maids. I'll see if anyone seems good enough for the job.

Soon, the day of the maid interviews arrived. Some had been recommended by those already working for Mitsuha, but she had no intention of showing favoritism. She asked that the referrers screen these applicants' documents for any false information. Naturally, it would be bad for them if they ended up recommending someone who had lied on their application, so Mitsuha felt she could trust the integrity of these applicants a bit more than the rest. It was nothing more than that.

Unexpectedly, there weren't all that many recommendations. While the current servants likely *wanted* to help their friends get a good job, they would be responsible if said friends committed wrongdoings after their hiring. The only upside if all went well would be the new hire's gratitude. There was also the possibility that the recommended person could rise above their status, which would be unpleasant at best. Beyond their own siblings, they weren't likely to recommend anyone else.

There were a total of 47 applicants. Yamano County had 676 people in total, 322 of which were men, and 354 of which were women.

Are there more women because men tend to get into accidents or die while hunting? Was there a war recently? Are the local women stronger, and so

they've come out on top? Or did it just happen to end up this way?

Man, is every single woman between her teens and her late thirties here, or what? At that age, they should already be working or helping out with the family trade. Are they really willing to quit for this? I guess working for a viscountess is just that attractive. Hmm, now I feel like there was no point in asking my servants for recommendations. Time to weed out the no-gos!

"I wish to learn many things here, become the best me I can be, and—"

That seems commendable at first, but I'm not paying you to polish your maiding skills. Colette's an investment that'll probably benefit me in the future, but I'd gain nothing from investing in a maid. Are you planning to get better here, then just switch to a better place? You're supposed to show off what you can give to the employer, not what you might gain. You gotta make hiring you seem worth it. This isn't a job training program or some school.

"I've heard enough. Next!"

"Please, wait! I've got so much more to say about myself!"

You're supposed to do that while the interviewer's asking you questions, and answer them in the best way possible. To say whatever you want after the questioning ends is against the rules, like throwing out rock, paper, or scissors a second late. I don't need anyone who wants to talk when things have already ended.

"I want you to know how ambitious and motivated I am."

Hey, I don't need anyone who comes to an interview without those things! Everyone here wants to be hired! Do you seriously think you're special?

"I once had an important role working for a merchant family in the capital and—"

"Huh? Then why did you quit? If there was a reason to release you from an important role, don't you think it would be difficult to get hired here?"

"Err, what? No, I mean... A count's family once summoned me to work for them!"

"Oh? Then why come to a viscountess? You should accept that offer, no?"

“Well, um, I turned it town.”

“Really? Well, if you’re not satisfied with working for a count, a viscount would surely be devastating. Here’s hoping you’re summoned by a marquis next time. Next!”

Mitsuha felt she would soon have a database of every woman in Yamano County along with their traits, such as “liar” or “untrustworthy”. She was taking notes, as well as recording every single interview.

“I’m Noelle, number twenty-six.”

The girl who stood in front of Mitsuha looked to be Colette’s age, but she must have been older, given that the minimum age to apply was ten, and Colette was eight. The girl even looked slightly smaller than her. She had silver hair and an aura of meekness about her.

“Why do you want to work for me?” Mitsuha asked.

Noelle’s answer was brief but impactful.

“I’d be sold off if I didn’t.”

Whoa, that’s heavy, thought Mitsuha.

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Some time later, the interviews were over and all the candidates had left. The results would come at a later date. Mitsuha still had to check if they were all telling the truth.

All the candidates’ interview techniques left Mitsuha thinking there must have been some sort of maid interview crash course she hadn’t heard of. She had encountered a variety of responses over and over again, including—but not limited to—”Please hear me out one last time”, “I want to convey my enthusiasm”, “I used to do this and that”, “I’ve done charity work”, “I already quit my job”, “I want to improve myself”, and so on.

Every time she had heard one of these stock replies, she’d had to hold herself back from saying something along the lines of, “You’re the sixth person to use this technique!” Anyone could pick such low-hanging fruit, and it was to be expected that a proper interviewer would see repeats of them after speaking

with dozens of people.

Personally, I don't want to hear their shabby techniques and strategies, but their own, honest words, no matter how awkwardly they come out. Fronts and lip service won't help you get a job from me. I'm gonna choose from the ones who spoke with nothing but honesty. I mean, that could be a character flaw, but I prefer 'em all the same.

In the end, Mitsuha hired four maids: Noelle, who was ten years old; Ninette, twelve years old; Paulette, seventeen years old; and Rachel, twenty-seven years old. The majority being in their teens was easily explained—most above seventeen were married, and most of the applicants had been in their teens.

Mitsuha had contemplated hiring five in total—a lot more than originally planned—as she wanted all the good people she could get. However, during the post-interview investigation, one of them turned out to be lying and had instantly been dropped. The truth she hid wasn't something that Mitsuha couldn't tolerate, but she failed just because she'd tried to lie to her.

While Mitsuha did feel sympathy for Noelle, it wasn't the only reason why she had chosen the young girl; Noelle had shown she had the skills the job required. Even if she hadn't, Mitsuha would have stepped in to deal with the girl's problem as the local ruler. Noelle was quick-witted, perceptive, and had an excellent memory. She clearly had the makings of a good maid, and Mitsuha hoped she and Colette could become friends.

Additionally, Noelle's words about being "sold off" had spurred Mitsuha into a frenzied investigation, looking for potential human trafficking within her territory. However, she discovered that Noelle wouldn't have been sold as a slave, but rather shipped off as an apprentice to a merchant in a county some distance away, her parents receiving twenty years' worth of her salary in return.

Honestly, that's pretty much human trafficking. I can understand why she said that. Noelle's a smart girl.

In Yamano County, even children had ownership of themselves and the fruits of their labor. Parents couldn't simply sell them off. Thus, the money from the apprenticeship contract would be due to Noelle, not her parents, and trying to take it away would be a crime which warranted arrest. Once Mitsuha explained

this to her parents, Noelle's apprenticeship was miraculously called off. Of course, there was also the fact that she would earn more if she worked in this county.

Whether the money she earned from Mitsuha would go to her parents was an entirely different matter. Mitsuha wondered if the girl would really give her hard-earned money to people who tried to sell her. Her servants had their own deposit system, and their money could even gain interest. If Noelle's parents tried to take it by force, they would have to get through the Yamano defense corps.

Ninette was a blonde twelve-year-old who looked her age. In Japan, people might have guessed she was in her mid-teens; here, she was assumed to be eleven or twelve... much like Mitsuha.

I think she's a bit above me, though... in all the places that matter. Ugh!

She was Mitsuha's only servant who hailed from the fishing village, so Mitsuha was interested in her input on the improvements she was considering in that area. She also hoped that Ninette would get along with Colette and Noelle.

Seventeen-year-old Paulette had come from a mountain village. Despite how it may have sounded, there was much more going on there than hunting and gathering. While her father was a hunter, Paulette, her mother, and her siblings actually worked in a field.

As Paulette was approaching adulthood, she had run into a problem: there were no men in her small village she liked enough to marry, so she wanted to try her luck while working in a larger town. The offer to work as a servant for the viscountess had been a godsend.

She's basically a modern young girl, really. I'll chat with her when I'm improving the mountain villages.

Then there was Rachel, the twenty-seven-year-old. She was a widow from the nearby town whose husband had passed away from an illness. Now, she was raising their four-year-old daughter on her own. Now that she no longer had to struggle to make ends meet, her plan was to leave her daughter with her late husband's parents during her shifts.

Mitsuha had selected her because of her personal history. Rachel was the third daughter in her family, and her parents owned a medium-sized shop in town. From the time she was a child until her marriage, she had helped manage the store, take care of day-to-day business, and purchase stock to fill the shelves.

What a gem, Mitsuha thought.

Mitsuha didn't want to separate her from her child, so she offered Rachel a position as a live-in employee, meaning she could bring her daughter along with her. Rachel was dumbfounded by her offer, and burst into tears before accepting.

Pity? Favoritism? Whatever. I do what I want!

She also gave Rachel the option of making her daughter an apprentice maid, a position that would come with a small salary. After a bit of thought, Rachel agreed. Mitsuha felt it was the right choice; both mother and daughter would be together, paving a secure future for themselves. If the girl wanted to move out once she became of age, all doors would be open for her. No employer would turn down a fifteen year old veteran maid who had worked for a viscountess—Yamano, at that—since she was four. Working for, say, a count in his capital manor would be no mere dream.

I'd write down a recommendation, when the time came. She'd have to swat potential employers and suitors off like flies.

With the twelve original servants, Colette, the army folk, the two Platidus had recommended, the new hires, Rachel's daughter, and Mitsuha herself, the viscount's household now had twenty-six people, and that was without counting the specialized blog advisors.

Now it's time to make this county shine... via shortcuts, of course!

Mitsuha felt as though she had gone off track somewhere on her way toward a peaceful retirement, but the life of a retired viscount could prove just as relaxing. In order to get there, she needed to increase her county's wealth and stability.

Y'know, it just hit me: now that I've got so many people, I should assign

another chef. If I don't, the one we have is gonna have to work so hard he won't have any time off. He couldn't even rest if he got sick. That's exploitation of labor!

Guess I'll have the maids take turns helping him out. It'll prepare them for the homemaker life, and the chef can catch a break. Imagine the market value of a maid who knows how to make Yamano Cuisine! Not that I'd want anyone to take them.

Chapter 19: Viscounting for Beginners

Soon after, Platidus' disciple, Miriam, and the metalworker, Randy, arrived from the capital. Thus, the main force of Yamano County was complete.

Time to cheat in the game of politics! thought Mitsuha. *Well, I'll just improve the situation little by little. Nothing extreme.*

Mitsuha started by changing the servants' roles. Under her new system, there were no personal attendants or chore maids. The head attendant became a normal head maid, and the head chore maid became her second-in-command. All the others were now regular maids with the exception of Rachel's daughter, Leah. A four-year-old could only be an apprentice maid.

Gunther and the other discharged staff had directly handled some taxation during their employment, but from now on, those types of responsibilities would be assigned to "public officials". Only one servant who had been in charge of taxation remained. Mitsuha didn't feel he was terribly trustworthy, but he showed no signs of corruption thus far, and removing him would be a detriment to county affairs. She decided to leave him be, but made a note to learn the entirety of his responsibilities so she could seamlessly discharge him if he decided to go criminal.

The soldiers would simply be called the "Yamano County Army". That made them sound a bit more important than they were, but Mitsuha felt a bit of inflation was necessary every once in a while. Major Willem would be the commander, while Sublieutenants Sven, Szep, Gritt, and Ilse would be leading officers. Four out of the thirty-six civilian soldiers under their leadership would be sergeants, but they would rotate out every month or so. Even if the sergeants were not on duty, they could be summoned in times of necessity.

There were a total of 216 potential soldiers in her county, which would make six platoons of thirty-six. They would have to juggle their trades and military service for two months out of the year, which Mitsuha felt was acceptable. While it sounded like a lot of responsibility, any squads that weren't training or

on guard shifts could simply go back to their homes.

Miriam would be in charge of financial affairs and welfare, and act as Mitsuha's advisor. She would also make suggestions on how to captivate the masses or boost public morale. Mitsuha even planned to have Miriam read psychology and sociology textbooks from Earth. Well, she would read them *to* her—just once, though—seeing as Miriam wouldn't know the language and Mitsuha couldn't be bothered to do written translations. Miriam seemed intelligent enough to get a good grasp of the content this way. Additionally, Colette would be a trainee acting as Miriam's assistant.

As for Randy, he would be assigned to a workshop owned by Mitsuha herself. He would also be a member of the management team, as he was skilled and eccentric enough to provide out-of-the-box opinions, some of which could prove quite valuable.

On certain occasions, the more distinguished maids, cooks, soldiers, and other servants would be chosen to temporarily take on a more managerial role, with a chance of permanently securing the position. Mitsuha didn't know the process by which the previous lord had selected his servants, but they seemed like normal people to her—probably picked from the locals. Those she picked herself, however, had the potential to be something more.

At least, that's what I wanna believe.

As Mitsuha had expected, the maids serving as personal attendants didn't take the removal of specializations too well. For them, it was something like a loss of status. They weren't outraged enough to defy Mitsuha, however, and soon came to accept it. Their leadership had essentially stayed the same, so the transition was easier on them than they had expected.

Upon finishing the reorganization of the servants, Mitsuha decided to hold a meeting to unite all her people as one.



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All the key players of the Yamano County were gathered in the viscountess' meeting room. It goes without saying that one of them was Viscountess Yamano herself. Then there was the butler, Anton, the management committee, and the five leaders of the army. This group consisted of everyone who served Mitsuha directly.

Besides them, there were representatives of the common citizens—the heads of the three farming villages, two mountain villages, and the sole fishing village. They appeared to be on edge. While it would be natural for them to feel nervous in the presence of their lord, Mitsuha had exercised a sort of "Hey, I'm your friendly neighborhood ruler" campaign when she had first arrived, making her presence seem less intimidating. Rather, the main source of their anxiety was the information about Mitsuha that had finally reached their county.

They had found her unusual from the start. It was unthinkable for a young girl to start a noble lineage. After all, what could a child accomplish to earn such high status?

Furthermore, she was often visited by a young lord of the neighboring county—a new noble himself. It wasn't strange for two new, young viscounts to be on good terms with or consult one another, but it was certainly unusual for the viscount himself to stop by every few days. From what they had heard, he was also the eldest child of Count Bozes—ruler of the county on the opposite side.

Finally, there was the visit from the entire Bozes family. It was understandable for a new viscount to go and greet the neighboring counts, but they couldn't comprehend why the opposite had occurred. They also wondered why he had brought his entire family. Was he planning to annex the county? The family's attitude towards Mitsuha made that unlikely. They treated her like a daughter or sister, and the villagers couldn't help but notice the way the two sons behaved around the viscountess. In the end, they had come to understand that there was something unique about these circumstances.

That was when various details about the happenings in the capital began to seep through their borders. The townspeople had heard rumors slip from the lips of passengers and coachmen on shopping trips to the Bozes' county.

Inflated gossip oozed from major merchants, officer hopefuls, and noble messengers from the capital and beyond who had traveled to this county on a whim. It didn't take long for them to realize that Mitsuha was the one and only Lightning Archpriestess, and that she had chosen this county as her territory despite having better prospects as a viscount.

This was a poor, dead-end, backwater land at the edge of the country that had lost its previous ruler when he committed the equivalent of rebellion. It was barely sustained by mediocre agriculture, forestry, and fishing industries. Most of their products were used locally, and they had to buy other necessities from the Bozes' county for a relatively high price.

It didn't take someone like Platidus to see that this land had no chance to see a bright future or even a good ruler. Many had believed that at worst, the next person in charge would have been someone who received it as a punishment or joke, and at best, it would have been someone with no other choice. The county didn't operate at a net loss, but it also didn't make enough profit for the local lord to maintain a capital mansion or have a place in high society.

The citizens had cared little about who would rule them next, believing nothing would truly change. Someone like Count Bozes, who was said to be a man of good and honest character, was nothing but a dream.

You could only imagine their surprise when the new ruler was a viscountess who had willingly chosen their land. She was a young, powerful, and talented foreign princess. There were also rumors that she had fought off wolves until she was gravely injured just to save a single village girl in the Bozes' county, and that tale alone spoke volumes about her nature.

Up until now, the citizens were never given explanations or opportunities to ask about anything regarding the county—they had always been given orders. But now, they had been called to a meeting regarding the future of this land. Perhaps, they dared to think, this could make all their lives better. Their new leader was a star of hope. Disappointing her was unacceptable, and they wouldn't tolerate anyone who did so. They clenched their fists as resolve filled their hearts.

Yes, the representatives gathered here were tense... and no one could fault

them for that.

“Thank you very much for coming here, everyone,” Mitsuha said softly.

Her way of speaking was incredibly dynamic. She was capable of having polite conversations with those above her, speaking like a normal high school girl would with her friends, and spouting any number of bizarre things with her inner voice. Mitsuha also had a tendency to talk coldly when angered, and “borrow” lines or grow increasingly theatrical when she got on a roll.

Then again, altering one’s way of speaking based on the situation and the conversational partner was common. For instance, it could be considered crass and even foolish to speak to a work superior as though he were a close friend. There were some mediocre employees who treated their superiors as equals—or worse—simply because they were the same age, but age only mattered when all other conditions were equal for the involved parties. Perhaps it was for the best, as fools who prioritized age over the workplace hierarchy tended to slip up early on and were fired as a result.

Regardless, Mitsuha was always changing her style of speech. As both a noble and their lord, she could have chosen to emphasize that she was above them. However, this meeting wasn’t about dominance, but about listening and encouraging harmony, so she chose a gentle, polite tone for the occasion. The servants were already used to her quirks and found it to be a good way of discerning whether she was in her normal, angry, or dispassionate work mode.

“I have summoned you all here so that every single one of you understands what I will do to develop Yamano County. I will also hear you out if you have any suggestions. Status holds no weight here, so please be as honest with your opinions as possible. If you stay silent and end up unhappy with what we decide, I must say it will be no one’s fault but your own.”

The citizens’ representatives nodded seriously. It was hard to ignore status in such a situation, but they intended to try.

“First of all, since it is already being put into practice, comes our current defense structure. Are there any objections?”

A hand made its way upward. It belonged to one of the three heads of farming villages. He cleared his throat before speaking.

“Things are much better than they used to be, when our boys would be taken away and almost never returned; I also hear they are well-fed during lunch. But now we have a number of second, third, and younger sons asking if they can become permanent soldiers.”

“Oh, I see,” Mitsuha replied. “Well, after everyone has been conscripted at least once, I intend to hire a few promising volunteers. But since it’s impossible to keep many standing soldiers in such a small area, most will have to stay in rotation. Please tell the youths to do their best.”

He nodded in understanding. The others seemed to share his opinion on military affairs.

“Next, allow me to explain the changes in our agriculture,” said Mitsuha.

The heads of the three farming villages lost a bit of their composure. “Heads” might have given the impression of importance, but the men were merely representing small, clustered settlements. The farming villages were made up of twenty to thirty buildings each, while the mountain and fishing villages had somewhere between ten and twenty.

She began explaining such factors as repeated cultivation damage and nutrient deficiency. Dumbfounded at first, they soon leaned in to listen intently. This wasn’t merely some little girl chattering away. She was their ruler, and the foreign sage known as the Lightning Archpriestess. No one undervalued her words.

Mitsuha wanted to experiment on a few select farmlands before bringing up crop rotation. She couldn’t just force these people to adopt a new farming method right away—she had to gradually introduce it. After all, a single mistake here could be fatal to the entire county. Of course, Mitsuha could always use her own money to buy food from Japan and save everyone, but that wasn’t the point.

Instead, she began with simple, foolproof ideas, like spreading decaying leaves or ash to create a compost layer. Besides that, she told them to mix poultry manure and straw and let it ferment for a few months. She gave a hard pass to the idea of using human excrement instead. It took years to ferment, and the potential hygiene issues from such an operation were far too

frightening to consider.

Mitsuha also decided to try a tiny bit of fertilizer she had brought from Japan. She wanted to explore all her options, and she knew that their interest wouldn't budge unless at least one experiment yielded more crops.

In the end, the farming village heads agreed to devote areas of farmland to each of the different methods. They would also begin crop rotation, as unlike spreading compost, it was pretty much an infallible approach. It was also decided they would all simultaneously grow four types of vegetables, as well as increase the amount of cattle in the fields. Animal husbandry and crop rotation went hand-in-hand, after all.

Apart from that, Mitsuha asked them to dedicate a small portion of farmland to rice cultivation. Success wasn't guaranteed, but Mitsuha said she would buy the plants regardless of quality, so they gladly agreed. She felt it was a pleasant example of contracted cultivation.

The next item on her agenda was forestry. Her main goal here was to make wood profitable. Mitsuha was troubled, as she didn't really have a specific plan in mind. There were forests all over the kingdom, so one county's lumber didn't have any particular value; it was an extremely common local product. The same applied to woodworking. Anything that could be crafted in these villages could be made anywhere else.

She told the heads of the mountain villages to start planting new trees to replace the ones they cut down, but this wasn't something that could lead to profit in the near future. Having heard her elaborate farming plans, the mountain village heads had been hoping for something revolutionary for their own industry; her minimal response left them feeling disappointed. Seeing their crestfallen faces, Mitsuha panicked a little.

I've got nothing else? Really? Oh! What about shiitake mushroom cultivation?

She asked if anyone knew what shiitake mushrooms were, and everyone shook their heads. Naturally, they couldn't cultivate the mushrooms if they didn't have any to begin with.

Mitsuha had no solutions for hunting, either. Fresh game decayed quickly, but even if they had some way to preserve it, hunting down enough game to make

large amounts of smoked meat or jerky would reduce the wildlife population until it was no longer a viable source of food.

To make the situation less awkward, Mitsuha promised to examine the possibility of charcoal mining and bellows-based furnaces. She also ordered them to inform her right away should they find any potential ore veins, handing out enough documents with photographic examples for every villager.

The smelting method she had in mind involved a tatara. The tatara was a traditional Japanese furnace similar to other primitive bellows-based furnaces all over the world. It used iron sand to produce a high-quality steel called “tamahagane”, which was used to craft katana blades. It generally made up a third or less of all smelted iron, and the other two thirds, which were of lower quality, were used either for other parts of the katana or for daily necessities.

Maybe I can create something brand-worthy with that, Mitsuha thought. *That’s what I’ll do if someone finds valuable ore veins in my area.*

Lastly, she covered marine production. The head of the fishing village was hopeful. Due to the village’s small size, and because fresh seafood rotted too quickly to be sold or stored, it hadn’t been a very profitable place. The previous local lord hadn’t cared for it one bit. But Mitsuha, the new ruler, visited the village regularly—more often than the other towns, in fact—asked many questions, and gladly ate the fish cooked by the fishermen’s wives. She even had an interest in things such as boats and fishing tools.

Not only that, but for the first time ever, a person from the fishing village—Ninette—had been hired to work in the ruler’s residence. Suffice to say, the head of the fishing village was justified in his expectations... and of course, he got just what he wanted.

“First, we will intensify salt production and start selling dried seaweed in large quantities,” Mitsuha declared. “We will increase the amount of fish we catch, and either smoke or dry them in multiple ways to slow down the rot.”

“Ohh!” The fishing village head had a sparkle in his eyes.

Mitsuha was far more talkative than she had been during the forestry discussion. The two mountain village heads slumped dejectedly.

“As I said, to sell dried fish in large quantities, we will need to increase the amount of fish we catch. For that, I’m thinking of improving the nets we use and creating new fishing ships.”

“Ohhhhh!” Now the fishing representative was elated. Mitsuha’s decree was everything he had hoped for and then some. At this rate, the fishing industry would become lucrative in no time, and even Mitsuha herself would be reaping the benefits.

They could use any number of nets, including casting nets, gill nets, and even seines. The water was free of pollution, so seines could catch migratory fish at a steady rate. As the fishing industry had been heretofore underdeveloped, allowing the fish to populate as they pleased, they could anticipate major net hauls a short distance away from the shoreline. With a marine gold mine like this, even simple angling could bring in serious catches.

Mitsuha thought it acceptable to bring the first nets and other fishing equipment from Japan. Even if she didn’t, net preparation wouldn’t take too long. Once the people saw the effectiveness of the nets, they could examine them in detail in order to create something similar. The same applied to angling equipment.

As for the boats, Mitsuha decided to have them made locally. A small, secondhand boat would only cost her about two to three hundred thousand yen in Japan, but Mitsuha wasn’t sure she felt comfortable bringing something made of fiber-reinforced plastic to this world. While they would need boats to start seine fishing, the ones they currently had were at risk of capsizing under the strain of the net, multiple weights, and the people aboard.

In order to increase salt production, Mitsuha devised the plan of setting up vertical salt farms. There weren’t many people in the fishing village, nor did it have a great deal of space, so this was the most practical solution. They also required fewer people to oversee them than flood-based salt ponds.

Mitsuha would recruit people from the farming villages to help construct the vertical farms. The mountain villagers would prepare the timber needed for the finishing touches. Upon hearing that she would need a lot of wood for fuel, the heads of the mountain villages finally smiled.

For her next order of business, Mitsuha turned to address the local shopkeeper. Yamano County was a dead-end territory with only the sea beyond it, and so no travelers passed through. Anyone who had business in the area would simply go to the Bozes' county instead. Nearly every imported product sold in this town had been brought from the Bozes' county, so their prices were inflated. Because of this, the only ones who would buy anything in Yamano County were locals.

"Can you close your store?" she asked.

"CLOSE IT?!" the audience exclaimed.

And who could blame them? Without the only shop in the county, most of its 676 citizens—170 households—would be at a loss. It was the only place where they could purchase imported items, and even local goods would then have to be bought directly from the producers themselves. Would they have to walk all over the county just to do their daily shopping? They were firmly opposed to the idea.

"Oh, that doesn't mean we won't have a store anymore. We'll simply have a bigger one with a better selection. We'll stock it with goods from Petz, a traveling merchant, unique items from my home country, and the new products we'll soon be making here in Yamano County. I can't leave all that to a private store, so I'm thinking of opening one myself."

"And if I refuse?" the shopkeeper asked.

"I won't mind, but I still intend to open a new store, which will probably buy and sell at better prices than yours."

The storekeeper gulped. "But then I'd go bankrupt..."

"That's why I suggested you close up shop. You won't be out of a job, of course. The new store will need someone to go around each village and stock up. Plus, I'm even considering direct trades with the Bozes' county and beyond. I'll need someone who's used to these kinds of things."

After thinking about it long and hard, the storekeeper nodded. To be fair, he hadn't had much of a choice to begin with.

Much like her store in the capital, Mitsuha wanted to sell Japanese products

—at cheaper prices, even. That way, people would flow in from the Bozes' county and their other neighbors, which would stimulate the economy. Once she had reached this level of patronage, Mitsuha planned to improve the local inn and eatery. The inn would be open at all times, and the eatery would grow larger and become a proper diner with cooks who could prepare Yamano Cuisine.

I want to make it so the county can get by with what they have, but I won't feel bad about cheating a bit to get a jump-start on it.

Mitsuha then directed her attention to the village heads once more. She explained in greater detail her plans for the store, workshop, and salt farms, asking them to send people to help with construction. They initially thought it would be mandatory, unpaid work, but were surprised to find out she would be paying each worker a daily allowance. It was a rare chance to earn some quick money, and the villagers were sure to jump on it.

She inquired as to whether they knew any good cooks, and she was told that the owners of the eatery had a son working as one in the Bozes' county. Mitsuha would decide whether or not to summon him after talking to his parents.

Finally, Mitsuha brought up children's education. She felt it was absolutely necessary for their county to prosper. Without at least minimal reading comprehension and math skills, a person could only hope to work by way of physical labor. They were also at risk of being deceived, as there were a multitude of malicious merchants on the lookout for fools who would sign their unfair contracts.

Children were already part of the workforce, so her people were hesitant to agree, but they did once Mitsuha assured them it would only be every other morning and they would be fed lunch before leaving.

With that, she had covered every single topic on her agenda. When she opened the floor to questions, however, she was asked if the tax rate would stay the same. The highest tax rate that could be implemented here was seventy percent. This was beyond the limit at which the populace could make ends meet and would only be used in emergencies. If it stayed this high for too

long, people were bound to flee, or the ruling family would be targeted.

The highest *sustainable* tax rate was sixty percent, the lowest in the kingdom was forty percent—found in well-ruled territories—and the local standard was fifty percent.

Percentages didn't always mean the same thing, however. After all, there were counties that earned ten thousand gold coins as well as those raking in a hundred thousand. The tax rate in the Bozes' county, for example, was fifty percent—not because of greed, but because a rural, agricultural territory such as theirs couldn't expect much revenue from traveling merchants.

Yamano County's tax rate was at sixty percent—again not because of greed, but because it had been set by the previous lord, and she simply hadn't changed it yet.

"Oh, sorry, I forgot," she said. "Our tax rate is now thirty percent."

"D-Did she say *thirty* percent?!" Neither the citizens nor her own subordinates could believe their ears.

Mitsuha wasn't the type to pour money into lavish meals or fancy clothing, nor did she host parties. She didn't bribe the capital's high nobles or clergymen, nor did she buy any jewels. She could get by with just the money she earned from opening her capital store every now and then. Because of this, the taxes would only be split between the king, the payments for servants and other officials, upkeep of her residence, public works, education, and welfare. She hoped to make an independent profit via trading, salt farming, and other operations.

Mitsuha couldn't set the taxes too low because she had to consider the balance with the other counties, and she needed at least *some* semblance of a budget, so she figured thirty percent was a decent sweet spot.

To the citizens, however, this was life-changing. They were no longer entitled to just forty percent of their wealth, but a whopping seventy. This didn't mean they were merely seventy-five percent wealthier. Assuming that thirty-five percent of their wealth was used on food, fuel, clothes, and other bare necessities, they would only have five percent left to pamper themselves with.

If that forty became seventy, the people of Yamano County could now spend thirty-five percent of their wealth on personal luxuries, so they would be *seven times* wealthier. The local purchasing power would skyrocket. This would increase spending, which would increase profits from purchased products. In turn, this would improve the producers' own financial circumstances, which would increase *their* spending, which would again increase profits from purchased products.

Until now, money in this rural county had only flowed one way. But soon, their economy would flourish.

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A month had passed since the first meeting. During this time, Yamano County citizens built the store and the workshop. Almost none among them had any experience,and Mitsuha hadn't hired any professionals from the capital, so they had gone with the safest option of constructing one-story buildings. The plots were spacious, however, so the builders had made them wide enough to fulfill their functions.

The metalworker, Randy, had already brought the bare essentials he needed for metalworking, so he took to setting up the furnace and everything else he had. There were still some things he required, and Mitsuha would have to order them.

That's how it is officially, anyway. I'm actually just gonna transfer them over here with my power. Heavy loads take way too long to transport.

"Randy, I brought some materials. I hope these will work for you." Mitsuha asked as she barged into the workshop with a package. Randy was a bit baffled by her sudden appearance.

Well, I'm the one in charge here. Nobody would expect someone as important as me to come to a place like this all by herself, let alone carrying something heavy.

Though Randy wasn't the sharpest crayon in the box, he had enough common sense and decency to jump up and help her.

"Uh, I'll hold it! Please, allow me!" He pulled the load in Mitsuha's hands

away from her. It was heavier than he had expected, however. His knees buckled under the weight. While it seemed to put some real strain on his back, he was managing.

“Those are materials from my country,” Mitsuha explained. “Let me know if you want anything. You can ask for something harder or softer; these aren’t the only ones I can get for you.”

Randy opened the package and found various metal ingots inside. They were just for reference, so they weren’t very large, and each was inscribed with a code for differentiation. He took a few out and examined them closely. Engrossed by the metal, he didn’t even realize he had left Mitsuha to stand there and wait for him.

“Huh? That’s odd. What’s this? These ingots look similar, but they’re completely different. From how they feel when struck, they have their own degrees of toughness, but they’re all pretty hard. And then there’s this unusually light metal. It *is* metal, right? Wait, I need more time to examine them and...”

Randy was lost in his own world.

It didn’t seem as though he would be done anytime soon, so Mitsuha walked out. She had hoped he could make something for her right away, but she decided to come back later. Having once shared a house with her father and brother, she knew that if men got into that state, it would take a while for them to snap out of it. Randy would surely panic once he did, but that much was his own fault.

The salt farm was still a work in progress. It would be a vertical farm that used supports, so it would require little labor to run, take up a small amount of space compared to other methods, and be mostly unaffected by changing seasons or inclement weather—there was simply no downside to the structure. Mitsuha wanted to enter the salt industry as a competitor to rock salt producers, but first, she would focus on spreading it among her people and kickstarting the local pickled food industry. That alone would have a strong effect on the county’s economy, as this territory had never seen one thrive.

As for the school, it was already in operation. As the local population was

small so was the number of children, so one room in Mitsuha's residence was more than enough to teach them all. Plus, it made it easy to handle their lunches. The location also proved beneficial because Colette and the other children weren't the only ones learning—there were servants and other adults who had joined willingly. The illiterate servants had been quite embarrassed about their inability to read and write, and everyone was dedicated to fixing it.

The classes were taught by Miriam, Rachel, other people who could read and write, and Mitsuha herself. She taught well-received lectures on money-making and ways to thoroughly crush your enemies. One of her lessons, which incorporated a science experiment kit she had bought at a popular Japanese department store, was particularly popular. Even her butler came to watch.

Maybe some of the things I teach aren't good for children, but whatever!

None of the children minded going to school. Quite the opposite, in fact. They loved being able to have fun with other children their age while learning things they felt they would need in life. Plus, they were able to eat delicious food at the end of every school day. Many even complained that "once every two days" wasn't enough.

Then there was the store. Its total area was several times larger than Mitsuha's General Store back in the capital. It was stocked with the same types of things as the previous local store—wild game, foraged plants, seafood, vegetables, grain, cloth, metal farming tools, and other daily necessities.

Besides selling all of these products, however, it also bought fish. This hadn't been the case until the new store was built. Fish rotted quickly, so the previous shopkeeper, who had wanted to avoid wasting money, only made deferred payments for fish he ended up selling while returning all those he didn't.

If he hadn't done that, his only way to avoid severe losses would have been buying only miniscule amounts of fish, so no one could really blame him. Consignment had allowed him to stock up on as much fish as possible, and if luck was on his side, he would've been able to sell a lot. If not, the fishermen would get meager payments, and they would bring the fish back to eat it before it went bad. The storekeeper had never even discounted fish, even toward the very end of its shelf life. If he had, no one would have purchased fish until the

last minute.

The new store, however, bought any and all fish. So, unlike the previous store, they were able to sell it for cheap. Staff at the store also cooked fish in-house, increasing both its market value and their profit ratio by aiming for bachelors who couldn't be bothered to cook for themselves. Boiling and frying also postponed the fish's expiry date, essentially making it into a new product.

Any fresh fish that wasn't sold would be dried or pickled right after the store closed. That was all that was needed to make buying the fish viable, and the fishermen were highly motivated by the fact that every fish caught meant more money in their pockets.

The store also sold Japanese fishing nets and angling tools, and Mitsuha had already showed everyone just how effective they were. She had even traveled to a Japanese fishing village and asked a random elder how to properly throw a net.

I sure drew a lot of old people's attention. Ugh, I threw that thing so many times, I thought my arms were gonna fall off.

Mitsuha had also prepared a place to dry seaweed and shellfish. Besides the standard kelp, they also gathered sea lettuce and other local varieties of edible algae. Women and children also took part in the process, even doing some fishing around the rocky areas, contributing to the local income just as much as the men.

Everyone in the fishing village was more enthusiastic than ever before. Meanwhile, the people of the farming villages knew full well that agriculture was a more time-consuming process than fishing, but upon seeing the effects their new lord's work had on the fishing village, they couldn't help but be excited for the results of their experiments and the harvests that would follow. And Mitsuha, unable to look at the gloomy faces of the mountain village people, gifted them a whole bunch of Japanese axes.

Besides selling much of the same stock as the previous store, the new one also sold things Mitsuha bought from Petz or brought over from Japan. This included goods she had sold in the capital, like two-in-one shampoo, disposable lighters, CalorieMates, or bagged ramen, but there were also ultra-cheap

canned foods, long-lasting snacks, iron farm equipment, tableware, LED flashlights, writing supplies, and other useful items.

The locals now had enough purchasing power to afford such things, but Mitsuha's eyes were set on customers from the neighboring counties. Her goal wasn't just to sell things, but to also create an influx of people coming to Yamano County, which would create a steady flow of products and money. The products aimed at these travelers wouldn't sell for a while, but none of it expired quickly, so there was nothing to worry about.

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Rumors soon began to spread throughout the neighboring areas.

"Ya hear 'bout that store in Yamano County?"

"The Lightning Archpriestess herself is selling stuff from her country."

"It 'as more things than 'er store in the cap'tal, an' they're cheaper, too!"

"If you're lucky, you can even meet the Archpriestess herself."

"There's even a guy who bought somethin' from the Archpriestess 'erself an' he even, uhh, touched 'er finger!"

Yamano County was a seaside territory, so it wasn't strange for products "brought from her homeland by ship" to be cheaper there than in the inland capital.

Mitsuha prepared for the gradually increasing guests by remodeling the inn and eatery. She changed the hours so that it was always open, staffing it with enough employees to support that change. To top it all off, she even installed a bath.

The son of the eatery owners had been called back from the Bozes' county. Mitsuha had taught him how to make Yamano Cuisine and created a moderately expensive menu.

My county's development is going great... if you ignore the mountain villages, anyway.

Not having many options, Mitsuha brought some shiitake mycelium from Japan. She ordered the villagers to create numerous small holes in unprocessed

logs, mix the mycelium with wet sawdust, and stuff it inside. She then melted some wax onto a sponge and used it to seal the holes. That would keep the mycelium-sawdust mix from drying up and prevent insects from going inside. All that was left was to line them up in a dark, damp place.

The folk wisdom of mushroom farming!

Shiitake could be fried, boiled, used for soup stock, and more—they were as useful as mushrooms could be. If dried, they would even weigh less and last longer. Mitsuha intended to let the new visitors try them out, after which they would inevitably spread the word. Shiitake would be Yamano County's specialty product, and they would have a total monopoly on it.

Maybe I should get bamboo shoots too? They last a long time. Wait, no... there's small bamboo groves in every county. Same with yams, nuts, and fruit. I guess I don't have much else besides charcoal and metal production. I'll get started on gathering the iron sand, then. Wait, you need magnets for that, don't you? I'll have to pick up some of those neodymium ones. I wanna see how strong the "apex of permanent magnets" really is!

Mitsuha then had to decide whether to look for placer deposits on the coast, in the river, or seek out iron sand veins in the mountain. She figured it could be a good way for children to earn some extra money, though it would likely go to their families. The villagers still had it rough, as the blessings of the tax cut would only become apparent after the next harvest.

For now, I'll just get those magnets.

Chapter 20: Agents

Mitsuha visited the mercenary captain for the first time in a while. Developing her county had kept her far too busy to stop by. Besides grenades, which somehow always managed to end up behind her, she was already capable of using most of the weapons she carried.

That doesn't mean much though. I know how to shoot, yeah, but my accuracy is still really low.

The mercs had made a nice sum of money from the dragon scales, meat, and other parts. To keep some degree of fairness and prevent anyone from monopolizing the samples, they'd set limits on how much one country could buy. Calling their prices "expensive" would have been an understatement. Any countries that complained, however, had their shares put on auction or sold to megacorporations.

That's just nasty, Mitsuha winced.

They had also secured some of the rights to discoveries, inventions, and products born from research into the dragon material. All in all, Wolfgang was now filthy rich.

"Whoa, you'll get your share too. Don't look at me like that," the captain said.



Mitsuha narrowed her eyes, and it was enough to spook him a little.

“So, will you still do merc work?” she asked.

“Well, it’s the only thing we’re good at,” he replied. “Sure, we could divide the money and split up, but then we’d have nothin’ to do. We’d probably just waste our cash, get hassled for it, or get tricked an’ go back to being broke. Just keepin’ the team together’s safer. I mean, what kinda moron’d pick a fight with us? Though, yeah, it’s nice that we don’t have to take ball-bustin’ jobs just to make ends meet anymore. We’re not plannin’ to fight anytime soon.”

Makes sense, Mitsuha thought. *Why would anyone risk their lives for money if they’ve already got it made?*

“Oh, by the way, I told you that I’m running an entire county now, right? Would you help me out if we had a bandit problem or something?”

“You bet. Yer jobs get special treatment. People over there ain’t got guns, so it ain’t likely that any of us’d die. But if someone did, then that’d be all they were worth. I’m damn sure everyone’d volunteer for whatever job ya gave us.”

“Uhh, I’m not in a place that can be invaded by other countries, so I doubt I’d ever need as much firepower as last time.”

That’d be way too excessive.

“That aside, do you know where I could get a wooden ship that only needs a crew of about ten to twenty people?” Mitsuha thought that, unlike Japan, the countries around Wolfgang’s base might still use wooden ships without engines, but...

“A galley? What, yer place still got slaves or somethin’?” the captain asked. His eyes were wide open.

I guess I won’t get one here, Mitsuha concluded.

She had no training planned for the day, so she just loitered around the base. That was when she was struck with the idea to buy a tank or an autocannon.

Wolfgang’s “God” performed well during that fight... It was some damn good advertising. I’ll buy one once I’m richer, though. LAVs with 5.56mm guns are too weak. An infantry tank with a 20mm autocannon is where it’s at. Wait, just who

am I planning to fight?!

For now, she just decided to leave. Before returning to the other world, she decided to go shopping. Not in Japan, however; she could shop in this country just fine. She could get many things that were inaccessible in Japan, plus they were cheaper. In some stores, she was already a regular, so they often gave her extras or pieces of candy.

Yeah, I know I look twelve, damn it!

“Yer goin’ out to town?” the captain asked.

“Yeah. I’ve got some shopping to do,” said Mitsuha.

The captain lowered his voice. “There’ve been some weirdos sniffin’ around lately. I’m thinkin’ they’re spies from another country.”

“What’re they after?”

“A way to get to the other world, prob’ly. Or materials an’ tech we don’t have here. One of our morons uploaded your photos to our homepage, an’ since you an’ I started doin’ business, we’d exchanged those gold coins a bunch’a times before the ‘big reward from the princess’. Any pro who takes a good look at us would realize that you’ve gone between here an’ the other side tons’a times by now.”

“I understand materials, but... technology? From a world of swords and bows?”

“Ya know what I mean. Magic. Witchcraft. Voodoo. Whatever you wanna call it.”

“Ohhh.” Mitsuha now understood.

These people—or their nation—wanted to secure the rights to the other world and maybe even occupy it with their armed forces. They probably thought they could exchange twenty-four-dollar piece of junk for large plot of land, or a lighter for uncut diamonds.

Little did they know that Mitsuha’s world-jumping power wasn’t anything scientific or some dimensional tunnel between the worlds. Even if they captured and ordered her to take them there, she could just jump by herself, or

jump with them to the peak of a freezing mountain while leaving their clothes and weapons behind—the possibilities were endless.

As long as she wasn't killed instantly, she could world-jump to escape at any time, so people who were forbidden from killing her couldn't do anything to her. Even if they put her to sleep somehow to interrogate her later, she could jump away from them the instant she regained consciousness. They could only get something out of her if she was willing.

Great. Now I'm mildly interested in seeing what'd happen if I escaped while taking all the supports of the building with me. That potentially gory idea aside... They all think I'm from the other world, and even if they find out my real name, I don't have any close family members. Oh, how I'd laugh if they tried to take my uncle and aunt hostage. All in all, this really isn't a big deal.

"All right. I'm sure it won't be much of a problem, but just keep my name consistent with the story you told everyone. It wouldn't be good for me if my ***true name*** spread too far."

"Uh, yeah... Got it." Her emphasis on "true name" had caught the captain off guard.

Just ask that Japanophile on your team, cap. He'll probably know what I'm talking about.

One of Wolfgang's members drove Mitsuha to town. The mercs had even argued among themselves over who would be the one to do it, which made Mitsuha feel like her springtime had finally come. She could've gone to town by world-jumping, but since that always came with the danger of being spotted, and because it was less than half an hour away by car, she'd decided to accept the ride. Thirty minutes of idle road chatter didn't seem like time wasted either.

The road had no traffic lights along the way, so the distance between the base and the town was a pretty straight shot, about 31 miles long. A mercenary hive couldn't be too close to a civilian settlement, after all.

Once the merc had dropped Mitsuha off, he simply turned around and drove back to the base. He knew that once she was done shopping, she would just jump back to "her world", so there was no point in waiting for her.

For some reason, the mercs seemed to assume that, although Mitsuha could jump *from* any place on Earth, she could only jump *to* their base from the other world. They probably believed that anywhere was good for the jump's initiation, but the destination needed some sort of marker, which she had set up in Wolfgang's base.

Let them think whatever they want, I say. Could end up keeping me safe somehow.

As Mitsuha walked around town, shopping for ingredients and the like, someone called out to her.

"Excuse me, young lady, do you have a moment?"

She turned to see a blonde-haired, blue-eyed man in his forties with a pleasant aura about him. He looked to be just short of six feet tall, and he wore a dark suit. Alongside him stood two younger men who were also clad in dark suits.

Is that a rule for this crew or something?

"Yes. What is it?"

As she spoke, knowledge of Russian and Chinese languages flowed into Mitsuha's mind. The Russian was fluent, while the Chinese was slightly less perfect. He'd spoken to her in English, but she had already mastered that, so there were no changes there.

I guess he's a Russian who learned both English and Chinese.

Needless to say, Mitsuha replied to him in English.

"I would like to talk. May I?" he asked.

"Huh? Well, sure, if it doesn't take too long."

The man smiled. "Excellent. What do you say we chat over some lunch? Let us bring you somewhere."

A car as dark as their suits sat idle behind them.

There's no way a frail girl would just hop in there alongside three fishy-looking men and their driver. Do they think I don't know that much 'cause I'm "not from

this world”?

“I’ll have to pass. I was told that in this world, you shouldn’t go with people you don’t know or enter their cars.”

They furrowed their brows in frustration, clearly wondering who had told her such a thing.

“But I wouldn’t mind talking with you over some tea in that place over there,” Mitsuha added, pointing.

Left with no choice, the men nodded and followed Mitsuha.

I doubt they’re planning to kidnap me right away. They probably just wanted to establish contact this time. Still, you can never be too careful.

“Err, this place is...” one of the men trailed off, bewildered.

Boy, we’re sticking out like a sore thumb. Any secrecy they wanted is out the window, Mitsuha thought.

The establishment was full of young girls, and they were three men in suits. As you’d expect, this made them the center of attention. They had come to a café that specialized in sweets, and it enjoyed decent popularity among the local girls.

I chose it on purpose, obviously. They can’t pull anything shady here. Hahahaha!

Mitsuha walked to a corner table and sat with her back against the wall. Generally, she believed it was best to avoid situations that had no clear escape route, like interactions with pyramid schemers, cultists, or ex-classmates surrounded by friends she inevitably didn’t know. However, this time she was willing to forego her caution because of her world-jumping power and the nature of this establishment.

She called for a waitress and ordered a cake set. Two of the men went for coffee, while the third asked for a banana sundae topped with chocolate and whipped cream. The first two glared at him.

Oh, I get it. He wanted to try it, but didn’t have the courage to go in by himself. Well, mister, I hope you enjoy it.

“So, what did you want to talk about?” Mitsuha asked, making no effort to keep her voice down. She intended to emphasize the fact that she wasn’t acquainted with them; she was just a girl who had been approached by some strange men she didn’t know.

Her tactic was super effective. A group of women around twenty years old gaped at Mitsuha’s table in shock, then glanced at them repeatedly while taking their phones out of their bags. The men didn’t notice this, as they were looking at Mitsuha—who had nothing but a wall behind her—and their backs were turned to the other customers.

Just as planned.

Looking a bit uncomfortable, the man who had first called out to her began speaking in a hushed voice. “I’ll get straight to the point. Are you the princess from the other world?”

Yep, he’s not beating around the bush at all!

“Yes. How do you know that?”

“Oh, most excellent! Now, we are from a country that wishes to form a diplomatic relation with Your Highness’ kingdom. We can even dispatch our army to fight against the demon king!”

Yeah, yeah. You just wanna get a foothold in there and then take it all by force. But what d’you want from that world, anyway?

Modern weapons became useless without supplies and maintenance, and no matter how powerful they were, they’d be fighting on far too many fronts. The constant night raids would deprive their soldiers of sleep, and someone could sneak in and poison their food and water. They’d also have problems stocking up on those supplies, so they’d quickly burn through what they had and starve to death.

“Oh, but that matter has already been dealt with by heroes from this world,” Mitsuha lied. “All that’s left now is to take care of the remnants, and that’s something people of my world should do by themselves.”

The men’s surprise was written all over their faces. “Err, really? But what if a dragon attacks you again?”

“Oh, ancient dragon attacks are a once-every-few-centuries rarity. The mature ones are gentle and intelligent creatures, and the ones that do attack humans are just juveniles being naughty.”

That’s what I’ve been told by a scholar from that world, anyway.

“Is... that so?”

At this moment, their orders arrived. As Mitsuha looked up at the waitress and saw the state of the café, she almost choked. The hot spot for young girls was full of people who didn’t belong. There were men in scattered throughout the café, all wearing plain, dark suits that wouldn’t have stood out anywhere else. Not a single table was open, so these men had been forced to share with the female customers. They appeared to feel quite awkward about it.

The men at Mitsuha’s table had also noticed this, but they prioritized the conversation. If they were to leave Mitsuha, the other agents would surely jump on the opportunity to speak with her themselves. Turning a blind eye to the situation, they resumed talking to Mitsuha.

“Wouldn’t it be best for the future of your motherland if we established diplomatic relat—”

“Лояльность к Родине.”

“HUH?!” The three men looked absolutely flabbergasted.

“I’ve been told those are the words often said by Ivanov, a renowned hero celebrated in my country. He’s known for saving my great-grandfather’s life, among other things. Supposedly, it means ‘Loyalty to the Motherland’.”

The three men blinked, their cheeks flushing.

“H-He’s from our country!” one of them yelped. Everyone in the café turned to stare at him.

Now this is getting interesting.

“What? Ivanov is from this world? *The* Ivanov?”

“Yes! That name... those words... He *must* have been from our country!” The agents were ecstatic.

“Well then, um, do you know of his legendary divine weapons? The ‘Avtomat Kalashnikov-47’, ‘Tokarev’, and ‘Godlightning, Arrpeegee-7’?”

“Yes, yes, YES!” They were nearly crying by this point.

“This meeting must’ve been determined by your ancestor and our hero! Our countries should definitely establish a good relationship!”

The older man tried to lean forward and take Mitsuha’s hand, but another man abruptly cut in.

“May I have a moment?” he asked.

The agents Mitsuha had been talking to glared at the buzzkill and his associates. From what it seemed, the new people felt that the conversation was taking an unfavorable turn and had decided to intervene before their competition got ahead.

“Your Highness, would you be willing to talk with us as well?”

Mitsuha beamed at the intruder. “Yes, of course! I don’t want to say the same things over and over. I’d like it very much if we can settle this all at once.”

The men who had gotten to her first clenched their teeth in anger. Every other man in the room stood and walked over to their table, gathering around Mitsuha. Unable to stand by and watch as dozens of men surrounded a young girl, the other customers all took out their phones. They were going to call the police, of course. Some of the girls even prepared to save Mitsuha, gripping cake knives and forks in their hands.

The men, however, were too focused on Mitsuha to realize what was going on around them. They also assumed normal citizens wouldn’t go out of their way to get involved in something like this and would instead merely pretend they weren’t seeing anything.

Additionally, the men didn’t feel they were doing anything illegal. Equipped with this mentality, they had forgotten where they were and how the situation might have looked. Surrounding a girl who looked no older than twelve made them more than suspicious enough to warrant a police call.

“Well, now, this is a lot of people,” said Mitsuha. “Too many for this place, if

you ask me. I think we should talk at a later date, and in a better environment. I'll make sure to keep in touch, so can you give me your contact details?"

Her audience quickly whipped out their business cards and the like and handed them over to Mitsuha. The agent who had first approached Mitsuha looked extremely agitated, but he still believed they had the upper hand. He figured he could talk to her again once all the other agents were out of the way, or make an agreement to meet up in secret. After all, her ancestor's benefactor had been from *his* country.

Just as that thought went through his mind...

"Is this where all the reports are coming from?!" someone shouted.

He was one of *twelve* policemen storming into the café. There had been so many calls about a girl being surrounded by men that a whole bunch of patrol cars had arrived at the scene. After scanning the room, the officers became aggressive.

"Don't move! Little lady, do you know these people?"

Mitsuha replied pleasantly, "No, I don't. They called out to me in the middle of the street, told me to get into their car to talk and have lunch, but I had a bad feeling about it, so I said I wanted to go here instead." Not a single word of this was a lie.

The other customers were impressed by the girl's tact and relieved that they had made the right choice in reporting the incident. All of the agents around Mitsuha were at a loss for words, mouths agape. The officers were glaring at them something fierce.

If looks could kill...

After all the agents were taken away, Mitsuha was given some questioning and then released. The girls who had reported the incident warned her not to walk around by herself, then treated her to a parfait.

The agents were thoroughly investigated. They had their IDs checked and their fingerprints taken—they weren't having a very good time. The only agents who had called out to Mitsuha and brought her to the café were the first three, so those who had come after insisted they were merely worried bystanders

who had wanted to intervene. However, they were still suspicious, and so had been reported to public safety.

As for law enforcement, they were overjoyed at having acquired so much foreign agent data all at once. Because they had been captured, the detainees had essentially lost their value as agents. As bad as it was, however, it was still somewhat better than keeping their identities at the cost of looking like they had intended to kidnap a little girl.

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Some days later, all the agents received a meeting invitation via email.

Oh, so the princess was serious, they thought.

The invitation surprised them, as they believed she had been spinning a story to buy time until the officers arrived. Looking back at it, the princess hadn't lied to the officers, nor had she been the one to call them.

Maybe she was just being honest? Perhaps there was no malice in it at all, they reflected.

Obviously, that was not the case.

The three agents who had first approached her were also thinking something along these lines. Nothing the princess had said was technically false, after all. They believed she was just unaware of the ways of this world and had no idea about the implications of her own words. Most importantly, they shared a country with the great hero of the princess' homeland. There was no reason to doubt they had the upper hand.

"In three days at the mercenary base, huh?"

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Three days had passed since the invitations had been sent. The strategy meeting room in Wolfgang's base was almost completely full. It had enough seats for all of Wolfgang's members, but the ones sitting there now were representatives from countries all over the world. Among them were mercs acting as Mitsuha's bodyguards. The parent countries of the agents from the café were not the only ones being represented—Mitsuha had invited many

others.

The meeting was sudden and unofficial, so there were few big shots among the participants. Most of them were leaders of information agencies accompanied by their most trusted subordinates. Though more influential bureaucrats of external affairs had a lot of discretionary power, they wouldn't come to such meetings until things progressed.

Once everyone had gathered, Mitsuha began.

"Thank you for coming all the way here, everyone. We're here to negotiate diplomatic relations between my territory and yours. As I mentioned in the invitation, we will start with a rite of tribute."

A tribute was normally something a weaker country gave to a more powerful one, which would then repay them with something several times more valuable. However, Mitsuha was warping this tradition in her favor.

The representatives would all give tribute to her, but she would only respond to the one who gave her what she liked the most. Her payment would be mostly symbolic and worth little—the main point would be the honor of being chosen. It also wouldn't give the winner any advantage in the negotiations. She was playing them like fiddles.

Though there was little value in the material reward, they were all hell-bent on getting in the alien princess' good graces. Jewels, dresses, honorary titles... the things they had brought were endless. To prevent preconceptions and keep things fair, the participants didn't say which countries they represented. Even so, Mitsuha *did* know some of them without anyone having to tell her.

The representatives stifled a laugh when they saw one particular country smugly present her an AK-47 assault rifle, a Tokarev pistol, and an RPG-7. Their laughs were justified, as these were all weapons that had seen their peak popularity come and go a long time ago. They were barely worth anything, but the man who handed them over was nothing if not confident. Yet even that wasn't enough to faze Mitsuha.

Finally, it was the turn of a certain developing country.

"These are the certificates for two old, wooden, rowable ships. Both are forty-

two feet long and ten feet wide.”

Guffaws echoed around the room.

“Really?!” Mitsuha cried.

The laughter cut short.

“Oh, my... How did you know I wanted that?!”

“Ours is a country without money or specialties, but we still wanted to please you, so we asked the mercenaries about what you’d like, and they mentioned that you wanted a wooden ship.”

“Yes, yes I did! I really wanted this! Oh, we can finally start seining. They’ll do the job until we can start making our own ships!”

Instead of showing off their wealth or technology, these representatives had simply given her something they thought she’d like. Mitsuha greatly appreciated their consideration.

Small or not, sincere countries sure are great!

Upon seeing her excitement, some of the representatives from major countries began to panic and attempt to sell her “bigger and better” ships, but she refused. She told them she didn’t need any ships her citizens couldn’t run, maintain, or use as a reference during construction.

In the end, the winning country was the small nation that had presented her with the ships. Their prize was a breeding pair of horned rabbits, a decoration made of a strange metal unlike any on Earth, and two tickets for a three-day trip to the other world. The prizes were worthless to Mitsuha, but the people in the room stared like they would kill to possess them.

They had all realized that jewels and dresses weren’t the right strategies, but it was too late.

It’s not like I don’t like getting jewels. I can sell them for a pretty penny. I just feel like developing my land is way more important than money right now. Anyway, time to end the rite and get started for real.

“Now, let us talk. First of all, why are you all so keen on forming a diplomatic relationship with us?”

“Err, what?” Her audience didn’t quite understand.

“First of all, though I did have noteworthy status in one country, I’m now under the wing of another one. They gave me a small territory to run, but that’s it. I basically only have real power in my own land. I can’t negotiate with other countries, form contracts, or invite military into our lands without express permission from His Majesty the King.”

They had all been under the impression that Mitsuha was the current princess, so her words came as a shock.

“But... what about the battle against the demon king’s army?”

“Back then, we were short on time and options, so I had to hire some volunteers... heroes from this world. Their reward was nothing but gratitude. Right now, I’m nothing but a low-level local ruler.”

“Th-Then what of diplomatic relations?!”

“Again, I have no right to make such decisions, and I definitely can’t allow people from other countries to visit us,” she replied matter-of-factly.

They were all beginning to realize that circumstances were completely different than they had imagined.

“Then, could you make an effort to introduce us to the king?”

“What do you intend to talk to him about?”

“Why, things like diplomacy, embassies, and trade, of course.”

“And how would you do that?”

“Huh?”

“I truly have no idea how you plan to trade or dispatch your ambassadors. Do your countries have many people with world-jumping abilities? And do they have the skill to retain their life force when transporting objects or other people?”

The room fell silent.

“Oh, did you think I would carry everything for you? That would kill me in no time. And what would you do if I died?”

After a few moments, someone spoke up.

“Err... does anyone else have the power?”

“My power was given to me by a wandering god who happened to pass through my world. I’m the only one who can do this, and it’s not something I can reveal without careful consideration.” Mitsuha’s response left no room for hope.

“Umm, you can have this back.” Upon hearing of the troubles surrounding large-scale world-jumps, the representative who had given her the boats tried to hand his tickets back.

There’s no way he’s an agent, she thought. *He’s too good for that.*

“Don’t you worry about that. The burden from taking one or two people with me recovers over time. And the ships are more than valuable enough for me to sacrifice a bit of my life force.”

Upon hearing this, one man stood up. “Then please, take us to your country! As a man from the hero’s motherland, I want us to establish contact and form an alliance!”

The others had no idea what he was talking about. He ignored them and continued, “That is surely what is best for the sake of your motherland and Russia both!”

“‘Russia’? Is that your country’s name?” Mitsuha asked.

The man realized he hadn’t yet said it. *He must work in intelligence. He probably made it a habit to avoid saying his or his country’s name lightly,* she thought.

“Yes, sorry for not saying it before, but my country is called the ‘Russian Federation’!”

“Wait, what?” Mitsuha feigned surprise. The Russian representative didn’t know what to make of her expression.

“You tricked me! That’s not where the Great Hero Ivanov is from!”

He flinched at her sudden outburst, awaiting her next words.

“Ivanov’s country was called the ‘Union of Soviet Socialist Republics’!”

“Ohh, yes, that is the Russian Federation’s old name. It was simply changed,” he said.

“Huh? You just changed the name? You didn’t have an invasion, a rebellion, or a usurpation or anything?”

“No. Our country was Russia at first, but then it merged with a few others to become the Soviet Union. Then it went back to being Russia again.”

Mitsuha faked relief. “Ah, so that’s it. Our hero said he was from the ‘Ukraine’ area of the USSR. So now it’s the Ukraine area of the Russian Federation... I see, I see.”

Immediately, representatives here and there either choked on their drinks or spat them out. Then came the whispers.

“Ukraine...”

“Crimea invasion...”

Mitsuha pointed at one of them. “You there! Please tell me what they’re talking about!”

The man held back a chuckle and did his best to explain. “Well, Ukraine is a country that has a history of oppression at the hands of Russia. There was a major massacre back in the day. Even recently, Russia invaded Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula, bringing the country into a state of war.”

The Russian representative glared at the speaker while Mitsuha looked at the Russian with stone-cold eyes. It was just an act, of course.

Of course I already knew about Ukraine.

“You lied to me.”

“Err, no! That’s not what I...” His voice trailed off.

Now that she had publicly shamed him, she could completely ignore everything he said. In the eyes of her audience, he had tried to fool the princess, and he belonged to a nation that had oppressed her hero’s motherland.

It looked like the Russians would be the most persistent of the bunch, so I went and made a reason to ignore them. And my plan worked out perfectly. Yay me!

"Now, back to the matter of diplomacy. Even if we started trading, we couldn't exchange anything in large quantities. I'm sure you think you could make a profit off something insignificant, but I know this world's market, so selling something like disposable lighters for a gold coin each just wouldn't fly.

"Then there's what *we* have to offer: small-grained, low-quality wheat, meager amounts of fish, raw game that probably doesn't meet this world's safety standards... There's no demand for any of this here, is there?

"I can't allow uncontrolled trade of this world's goods, or bleeding my world of its money and gems. It could destroy industries or the economy as a whole, and you could hardly call that trade. There's no guarantee I won't get into an accident or fall ill somewhere down the line, so I don't intend to take up the heavy role of mediator and cart-horse, going around linking entire countries.

"With all that said, what is it that you want me to do? Please make it something that isn't a detriment to me or the nations of my world."

A few whispers danced around the room, but otherwise, no one seemed to have any ideas.

It was then that the representative of another small country piped up.

"Umm, would you be able to give us ore and animal samples?"

The others lit up. Unknown animals, undiscovered metals... These alone could generate immense amounts of wealth. Even the dragon Wolfgang had brought to this world was still a gold mine of discoveries.

"Oh, I can agree to that much," said Mitsuha. "Very well, I shall give some samples to both your country and the one that gave me the ships. Please return to me if you discover anything."

"Y-Yes, certainly!" The two who would receive the samples were overjoyed, leaving the rest feeling bitter and perplexed.

"Please wait!" said the American representative. "You need advanced technology to handle the animals properly! You should give them to the larger

powers. Our epidemic prevention infrastructure could handle any potential foreign bacteria or parasites they may have!”

“Oh, there’s no need to worry about that. I always make sure to jump without any malicious bacteria, viruses, or parasites. You would only have to keep the animals from escaping and multiplying in the wild.” Mitsuha revealed this fact as if it were inconsequential.

This was the reason she never worried about spreading pathogens whenever she jumped. The world-jump manual the “being” had installed in her brain covered that subject in detail.

“She can do *what*?” a few people blurted.

One of the audience members—an elderly man—stood up. He didn’t look to be part of an intelligence agency. Mitsuha’s best guess was that he worked in foreign affairs.

“Your Highness, umm... If someone suffering from infection, viral disease, poison, or a toxic substance jumped to another world with you and you made it so that the pathogens and everything harmful stayed behind... what would happen to them?”

“What?” It was Mitsuha’s turn to be surprised. She hadn’t even considered it.

The sick person would jump to the other world, leaving their pathogens and harmful substances behind, right? Ahh! I should’ve thought of that when Margaret was sick!

Mitsuha gripped her head in her hands, and an uncomfortable air enveloped the room.

Oh no! If this spreads, it’ll be earth-shattering! I’m not so dumb I can’t see the potential implications of my world-jumping on sick people. I need to make sure they don’t say a word to anyone! But how? They’re intelligence agents from all over the world!

*“*Everyone, listen!” Mitsuha said, her voice cracking. “Nothing happened just now, okay? You didn’t hear a thing!” Beads of sweat were breaking out on her brow. “I forbid anyone here from mentioning this to *anyone*, even if it’s your superior or someone even higher than that!

“If I *am* approached by any one of your countries’ elites about this, I will put your nation on a worldwide blacklist so that you can’t have any technology or information related to the other world. And if your country tries to obtain some regardless, it will be treated the same. You will not be allowed access to any research regarding the dragon or anything else, nor will you be allowed to interact with me. Anyone trying to mediate for you will receive the same treatment. However...”

Mitsuha took a deep breath.

“...if you all keep this secret safe, and something happens to one of your family members, I promise to try the world-jump treatment on them. But if the secret is leaked, I will retract this promise, as there won’t be any point to your sworn silence after that. If that happens, I will never, *ever* use my world-jump to treat any of you, your families, your government officials, or information agents.”

She stopped to think for a moment.

“Oh, but I wouldn’t mind starting to reward your silence again under one condition: the leak’s culprit and all those who heard the secret died, and I received concrete proof that there were no records or anything left.”

Silence followed.

The representatives exchanged glances. They knew they were all done for if any one of them reported this to their superiors, and all of them held their families dear. While the seasoned intelligence agency veterans would be able to keep quiet, the desk jockey higher-ups and politicians—who would be nothing but civilians if they lost elections—would jump on this in a heartbeat, and perhaps not even for their families. They would just smell the money in it.

And if the secret leaked... these people here could kill with ease. If not for themselves, then for their families.

I’m confident they’ll all keep their mouths shut. Considering the warning I gave, it’s also in their countries’ best interests.

Mitsuha then held a private meeting with the two representatives to whom she had promised samples, and they had a hearty chat about spinning wheels

and other things that might be useful to her county. Just as she'd expected, she got more out of her interactions with people from developing countries than first worlders. She was glad she'd gone out of her way to invite them. Their nations had even sent external affairs workers and ministers instead of intelligence operatives. The smaller countries had been more than willing to spare them for the visit.

Next, Mitsuha told everyone to contact her strictly through the mercenary captain and to stop trying to meet or follow her in town. She followed up with a warning that countries that defied these orders would be completely ignored from that moment on. Now, she felt she could travel around Earth's cities in peace, and because they were convinced that she was from another world, Mitsuha Yamano, the Japanese girl, would be safe too.

She wasn't convinced the major world powers would behave, but for now, her position on Earth was secure, so she decided to shift her focus back to her county and its financial affairs. By now, she had separated her earnings as a viscount and the money she earned herself, treating the former as her county's budget and using only the latter toward her goal of saving 80,000 gold coins for her retirement. They were essentially separate accounts.

Yamano County wasn't in a position where it would get involved in a fight with a neighbor. It also lacked notably fertile soil, underground resources, or militaristic value, and to top it all off, it was quite small. Mitsuha didn't have to worry about outside dangers, so she could focus entirely on making money.

All right! I'm gonna get closer to my goal!

At least, that's what she thought would happen.

There's no end to this, is there?!

Extra I: Family

Colette was fast asleep in her bed. Careful not to wake her, Mitsuha sat on the edge and looked at the girl's face.

To Mitsuha, who had lost her parents and brother and been left all alone, Colette was her only family. But she knew thinking this way was idle fantasy, of course. Colette had her own parents, and though the two of them were good friends, she was only here because they were employer and employee.

That makes me a villain, since I took this young girl away from her parents for my own sake. Then again, it didn't look like they were sad to see her taken away. In fact, they were all very happy for her. And with Colette being just eight years old, you'd expect her to feel lonely after being separated from her family, but that's not the case, either.

Mitsuha recalled how excited Colette had been to see a noble's residence for the first time, how she ran around exploring all its corners, how she played with the things Mitsuha brought from Japan, and how she clung to her, not out of loneliness or worry, but simply because she was happy to be with her. It didn't look like she cared one bit about being away from her parents.

Uh, that's kind of a problem in itself!

Of course, as the one who had taken her away, Mitsuha was in no position to comment on that. Mitsuha had lost her own family and been separated from her friends, so Colette was now the only one Mitsuha could trust not to betray her. She used the girl's talents—which greatly surpassed those of the average eight-year-old commoner girl—as an excuse to bring Colette to her side.

If Mitsuha had to guess, her parents were okay with parting with their daughter because it was this world's equivalent of sending their child off to live in a dorm for secondary education. Not only was Mitsuha the one in charge, but the village was only half a day away on foot, and their little village girl would be a candidate for a noble's vassal. To them, it was unbelievable. It was about the same as a prince on a white horse appearing before them and saying, "You're

the princess of another country. I'm here to pick you up." Even winning the lottery couldn't compare to this, so perhaps the only obvious choice had been to let her go.

Colette was the first person Mitsuha had met in this world and a literal lifesaver to her. She was strong—enough for Mitsuha to worry about her spine and ribcage when she came for a hug—bright, honest, sincere, and adorable. Colette was Mitsuha's friend, and she would protect her no matter what. Mitsuha even felt she could kill thousands of people for her, if need be, though she would probably just jump to Earth with her before she had to do something like that.

Then there was Sabine. Mitsuha would give her all to protect her too. But since the girl was a princess, she would have tons of guards around her at all times. The only way Sabine would be in any real danger would be if the country was invaded and the capital fell. Of course, if the girl so desired, Mitsuha would save her by taking her to Earth.

Knowing her, she'd probably say that royalty can't abandon family—no, the people—and run away. I wonder if I own any anime series that explains what it means for royalty to continue their lineage.

Mitsuha's mind also drifted to the Bozes' girl, Beatrice. She had promised the girl she would throw her very own debutante ball. Letting her die was out of the question.

Same goes for Leah, the little apprentice maid, Noelle, the youngest of the new maids, all the other young maids, and the old—I mean, mature maids... I won't lose a single one of them.

Mitsuha stroked Colette's hair, and it flowed between her fingertips. The power of two-in-one shampoo.

Ngh... Heavy.

Colette woke up to find something on her legs.

Mitsuha...

It was her dear friend, sleeping with her upper body resting on Colette's bed. She gently stroked Mitsuha's head.

I'll protect you no matter what, Mitsuha. I'll carry you to the village if I have to, or to another country if that's not good enough. I feel I could easily kill ten or twenty people for your sake.

Feeling Mitsuha's weight on her, Colette peacefully closed her eyes once more.



Extra II: The Mysterious Girl

Months had passed since the mysterious girl began visiting Wolfgang's base. She always appeared out of nowhere, and disappeared just as abruptly. That was no exaggeration—the girl literally vanished each time. But she was no ghost—she ate, used the bathroom, and got beet-red and angry when teased, making it clear she was very much alive.

At first, the captain had thought she was just a clueless noble girl from some tiny country. It wasn't unheard of for ladies from dangerous places to want to learn how to use firearms, after all. That was usually the job of their bodyguards, but the bodyguards themselves could be attacked, and there were places where they couldn't accompany the lady, such as ballrooms, changing rooms, or bathrooms. Ballroom defense was generally the responsibility of the ball's organizer, and the captain's take on that was that they couldn't complain if it got them killed, by terrorists or otherwise.

For this reason, it made sense for the girl to learn how to use handguns. He wasn't sure about the short sword, since it probably wouldn't see any use, but if she wanted to learn how to use one, that was her prerogative. The captain didn't care as long as he got his money. For all he knew, it could've been her way of exercising for a diet, which was all well and good.

However, the word "firearms" had given him the impression the girl would only want to learn how to use handguns, assault rifles, and maybe flashbangs and stun grenades to make send her enemies scattering, but she had actually insisted they teach her how to use the dangerous frag grenades, light machine guns, heavy machine guns, grenade launchers, mortars, recoilless rifles, and rocket launchers.

Some of that stuff's way outta the realm of "firearms" an' deep in the field of artillery! the captain thought.

Even if she learned how to use those kinds of weaponry, transporting and loading them wasn't something that could be done by one person, especially

not a little girl. Still, it was business, and the captain didn't mind teaching her as long as she paid.

I don't give a damn if somethin' happens. I warned her enough. Our work here is done.

They'd had to ban her from using grenades, however. She couldn't throw past the danger zone, and the ones she swung above her head always went behind her.

It ain't a joke, damn it! If those 'nades weren't fake, five people would be dead! Her included!

He had found himself sighing far more than usual.

Though it had taken three times longer than usual, they had somehow finished the training.

We deserve a whole lotta praise for bearin' all that crap!

He had believed it was all over, but now he knew how naïve that was. The previous captain had told him, "Always imagine the worst case scenario and prepare for something three times worse, 'cause that's exactly what you'll get", and now he knew he hadn't taken that advice to heart.

Finally, the day had come.

"Well, I want to hire *all* of you. We'd move out in the morning, day after tomorrow. There are about twenty thousand enemies, including monsters. I'll pay you forty thousand gold coins, guaranteed... if not more. You up for it?"

WHAT INNA ACTUAL FUCK?!

That had been the start of their fight against the demon king's army and its dragons—a battle for the fate of the world.

We're heroes. We got sixty thousand gold coins, the title of "Dragonslayers", an' a whole goddamn dragon, which got us even more money! Li'l lady, can I call ya an angel? I'd go for "goddess", but you don't have the cans fer th—OW! Did ya just kick me?! Wait, I'm sorry, c'mon, put that ashtray down, will ya?! It's heavy, expensive, and it hurts like hell.

Anyway, the mercenaries now had no trouble with funds. In fact, they were

filthy rich, and they had a guaranteed source of income from the patents that would come from research into the dragon parts.

They could divide the money and split up, but they all knew it wouldn't lead to anything good. They were self-aware buffoons who knew their place in the world and their own limits, so they had decided to just keep the team together and relax without taking any dangerous jobs. Those among them who were thrill-seekers could volunteer if they liked.

There was something the captain found more important, however.

Just what is *that girl?*

"So yeah, I want all your guesses," he said. "We'll start with... okay, Sparks." He pointed at a mercenary who was holding up his hand.

"She's a Magicannon Girl from the Dimensional World!"

"Next!"

"An elven princess! Look at that flat chest! She's gotta be an elf!"

"You moron! What if she shows up while yer sayin' that?! Yer gonna be eatin' the sole of a kids' size thirteen!"

"That's her shoe size?! Holy crap, that's tiny!"

"They don't sell adult shoes in her size, so she either buys kids' shoes or gets 'em custom-made... Boy, did she bitch about it."

The mercs made a silent vow never to talk to her about shoe sizes.

"I think she's a sorceress from the other world; a lady of noble birth who can travel between worlds and use translation magic! She came here a while back and spent lots of time studying, and that's why she knows almost everything about this world!"

Well, that seems 'bout right, the captain thought.

"Oh, I think she also knows healing magic. Whenever she got hurt during training, there'd be no sign of it in just a few days."

I had a hunch, too, an' it sure seems possible. That'd mean she ain't from Earth at all. She's native to the other world, an' her Asiatic appearance has

gotta be a coincidence. The country we went to was fulla white people, but she did say that she was from another country, which's prob'ly a place inhabited by Oriental types.

Well, it doesn't matter to me whether she's Asian, black, or white. Best way to look at it is not her bein' an alien, but that she's from an Earth with a different history. The humans there're too much like us for it not to be. Honestly, with horned rabbits an' goddamn dragons an' all, it wouldn't be weird for the people there to have horns too... or like, six arms or somethin'.

"All right, to summarize, the li'l lady's a magic girl from an Earth-like planet in a dimension kinda like ours. She started out as a princess in one country and is now a viscountess in another one. It's confirmed she can use three kinds of magic: world-traversal, translation, an' healing. There could be more. She came here a while ago, an' though there's some holes, she knows a whole lot about this world. Anyone seein' a problem here?"

No one said anything.

"All right, then nothing changes. If anyone asks, say her name's 'Nanoha', an' don't ya dare leak any other info. Don't even upload her photos to the net!"

Some boys just looked away. Don't think I don't see ya.

They had all reached a conclusion they more or less expected. Mitsuha had brought stability to their lives, and they had no intention of betraying her. They also felt like they'd be doing even more business with her further down the line. Their lives were now safe, their pockets full, and their days calm. For the mercenaries, this kind of life had always been a dream they never thought possible. But now that they had it, their hearts were filled with a yearning for something else.

Was it alcohol? Women? Gambling? Traveling? No, it was none of those.

It's that world, the captain thought. *We got a safe, clean life lined up fer us now, but all I can think about is that crazy, hella dangerous world. All those monsters, man. Goblins, orcs, ogres, an' tons of others... Shit, they had dragons. DRAGONS!*

I wanna go back. I need to go back! But I'm not a damn battle junkie! At least,

I don’t think so. But I really, really wanna go back to that world.

“Shit! Why do I wanna go there so bad?!”

“Patience you must have, my young padawan.”

The captain turned around to see the young lady smiling at him. She swelled with pride, like she had just said something she’d always wanted to say.

Uh, should I ask her? Nothing’ll change if she says no, but if it’s a yes, then it’s a goddamn godsend!

“C-Can ya take me there?”

“No.”

“DAMN IIIT!”

The captain ran out, ignoring whatever the girl said to stop him.

All I can do right now is run away!

“UUUGGGHHHH!”

He looked to his side and saw two others running and shouting alongside him. They were the ones who had been on break when Mitsuha called and thus were unable to become Dragonslayers.

I see. You guys asked too, huh.

“Ngh!” One of them wiped his nose, sobbing. “Wah... Waaah!”

Waaagh... Don’t cry, damn it...!

Afterword

Hey, I'm FUNA. Thank you very much for reading volume two of *Saving 80,000 Gold in Another World for my Retirement*!

In this volume, Mitsuha fought without restraint, unwittingly became known as the Lightning Archpriestess, and got a noble rank. What went so wrong on her journey to casually make money for her retirement?!

Mitsuha's running around the capital to develop her county. She tries to focus on her land, but then—OH, NO! A BACK ATTACK!

Mitsuha: "Save back attacks for volleyball, damn it!"

Please look forward to Mitsuha's endeavors in volume three! (Which will surely come out... I hope it comes out... It'd be nice if it does... It all depends on how well this volume sells!)

Also, volume one of Keisuke Motoe's manga adaptation of this series is out! Get up and go to wherever you can get it!

Oh, and check out the newest chapters on the webcomic magazine, *Suiyoubi no Sirius* (http://seiga.nicovideo.jp/manga/official/w_sirius/)! A new chapter comes out every second and fourth Wednesday. (*I Shall Survive Using Potions!* gets a new one every first and third Wednesday.)

My sincerest thanks to my editor, the illustrator, the binding designer, the proofreaders, the printing, publishing, distribution, and sales staff, the administrators of *Shosetsuka ni Naro*, the comment section where people pointed out writing errors and gave me advice, and of course, everyone who picked up this book.

Thank you so much!

Please continue to support this series through both the novel and the manga. I hope to see you again in the next volume...

Mitsuha: "My ambition has only just begun!"

Sabine: “Don’t stop until all the stars in the universe are yours, Lady Mitsuha.”

Mitsuha: “Oh no! I showed her too many DVDs! I’m a bad influence!”


Saving 80,000 Gold in Another World for my Retirement
2
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