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for My
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Story by
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"How are the preparations going, Mitsuha?"
"Huh? Preparations for what?"
"How dare you! I'm talking about my fifteenth birthday party and debutante ball, obviously!"
"Uh...? Huh? WHAAAAAAAT?!"


A Fireworks Show in Another World
The show came to a furious finale as fireworks rocketed in rapid succession and finished off with an impressively large one, a *shakudama*.


"Thank you so much for coming! I knew you'd save us!" Princess Remia clasped her hands before her chest as her eyes welled with tears.
Don't bother with the dramatics, princess. I see through the lies of the Jedi.


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KODANSHA

Saving 80,000 Gold in Another World for My Retirement 8

A VERTICAL Book

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Birthday

“How are the preparations going, Mitsuha?”

“Huh? Preparations for what?”

Just as Mitsuha returned to her county residence, she was met with a peculiar greeting from Beatrice who was here taking care of business for Beatrice Company.

“How dare you! I’m talking about my fifteenth birthday party and debutante ball, obviously! It’s finally time for me to enter high society!”

“Uh…? Huh? WHAAAAAAAT?!” Mitsuha screeched. *H-How could this be?*

“It’s almost my birthday. Debutante balls don’t have to be on the exact day of birth, but you do want to host them as soon as you turn fifteen. This is all common knowledge! You promised me a parade with lights, food stalls, and a…a spectacle of fiery flowers, remember?! And I want the food to be even better than what you served at Lady Adelaide’s ball! I’ll be really mad if it’s not!”

Mitsuha screamed internally. After organizing the debutante ball of Viscount Ryner’s daughter Lady Adelaide, she promised Beatrice she’d do the same for her. Mitsuha kept her fingers crossed that Beatrice would forget she ever said that, but to her horror, the girl remembered every word.

Beatrice was thirteen when Mitsuha first met her. Although it hadn't been two full years since then, her second birthday was coming up and she was about to turn fifteen.

Well, I was eighteen when we met and I'm almost twenty now. I should've expected this…

Nobles in this kingdom didn't throw extravagant parties for minors, unlike nobles in Vanel. Mitsuha was aware that Beatrice had turned fourteen at some point, but she didn't know her exact birthday.

The Bozeses likely held a small party with just family and servants, but they would've invited me if I was in town. That means it was probably when I was in the capital and they were in their territory (or vice versa), and also before I told Count Bozes that my secret Traversal art doesn't actually place much of a burden on me.

Hmm, what to do. Should I prioritize the party over county work—no, I'll have to juggle both…and hurry!

Beatrice's debutante ball would have to be held at the Bozeses' mansion in the capital. It was going to be a big event with a lot of guests. There was no way they'd host it in their rural county.

With that in mind…

Food's gonna be easy!

Preparing the meals was going to be a no-brainer. Mitsuha could borrow Marcel and his culinary team at the Ryners' house. There was no way they could refuse her if she got down on her knees and begged. *Yeah, yeah, I know. I have no shame.*

Stalls covered!

Teaching the cooks and servants how to make one dish each shouldn't be hard. Most Japanese festival foods were simple to make and a lot of them could be prepped beforehand. There was no need to train one cook to make *all* the food. She just needed to teach one person how to make *ikayaki,* one person how to make *takoyaki,* one for candy apples, one for cotton candy, and so on.

That'll be a cinch.

For the cotton candy, she was thinking about renting one of those self-serving machines so the customers could make their own. *Drop a coin in the slot, pour some sugar into the spinner, and gather the floss with a chopstick. All I'd have to do is provide the electricity to run it.*

The ice cream stall needed nothing more than a cooler and an ice cream scooper. *Scoop the ice cream and serve it in a crispy cone. Easy-breezy.*

Takoyaki, too. I've made it myself many times. Octopus isn't a staple in my fridge, so I usually substitute it with chikuwa *fish cakes. They make a perfect savory snack.*

There was no need to build authentic *yatai* stalls. Makeshift temporary stalls were going to be enough. They'd only be used for one day—a few hours, even—so they didn't even need wheels like the Japanese ones. As long as they had counters to serve on, it was good enough. The cooking could be done behind the stalls, so they didn't need to be durable either.

Sweet, no problems there!

As for the electrical parade… Urgh…

Mascot costumes could cost up to a hundred dollars to rent, and Mitsuha wanted about twenty of them for the parade. She was going to bill Count Bozes for it all, so she wasn't worried about budgeting. It was a trivial expense considering how much the nobles in this kingdom spent on parties.

The problem was the parade floats—the kind with flashy lights. *I don't even want to think about what those things go for.*

New floats cost thousands of dollars. They were likely custom-made, too, which meant they wouldn't be manufactured in time for the party even if they were to be ordered right away.

What about the fireworks…

Aaarghh, damn it!

Beatrice isn't gonna let me get away with handheld sparklers or black snakes you can buy at a convenience store… Real fireworks must cost tens of thousands of dollars… The count would cover the money, but who the hell is gonna set them up and launch them?! There's no way an amateur can do it!

I won't have to worry about notifying the local municipal office or getting a permit to handle explosives since Japanese laws don't apply in this world. But who in Japan is gonna sell real fireworks to me? Gunpowder is a hazard. Even the smallest mistake could result in a deadly explosion.

And it's not like you can buy a fireworks firing system at your local electronic appliance store. There's no chance I can handle this by myself!

What should I do…

“Is something wrong?” Beatrice asked.

“Nope. Nothing at all…”

Crap. Craptacular…

“Huh? You wanna hire us to launch some fireworks?”

“That’s right!”

Mitsuha was visiting a city in Japan known as a hub for fireworks dealers.

There were various types of pyrotechnician businesses in the industry. Some manufactured and launched their own fireworks, while others bought shells from vendors and focused on directing and staging shows. There were some companies that did everything from planning the shows to manufacturing and launching the shells.

The one Mitsuha was visiting today was a small company that handled manufacturing and launching—the hands-on tasks. They operated on minimal staffing, each of whom specialized in a specific role. Pyrotechnicians couldn’t work together without full faith in each other’s skills, as the smallest mistake could cost lives.

The only people you find at companies like these are dyed-in-the-wool pros. People you can trust.

That was why Mitsuha chose a small company over a large one. She also figured that a larger company would have a higher

risk of leaking customer data, as the employees would have to report to their bosses and seek permission for every little thing.

Which isn't a bad thing. That's how large companies operate. It's just inconvenient for me.

Thus, Mitsuha was here. She showed up without an appointment and was speaking to an older man who was likely the company president…or manager…or head of the workshop… or all of the above. The tired-looking man did his best to address her with respect, but he was visibly taken aback by her request.

A customer walks into a pyrotechnician's shop to ask for a fireworks show. Nothing weird about that, right? What did he expect me to do, order ramen? Now that *would be surprising.*

…Ugh, stop. You don't have to say it. I know he probably thinks I'm in middle school or high school.

"O-Oh, sorry… It's been a little slow since the summer ended. That's our busiest period. I'm always spacin' out this time of year. So, what exactly brings you here? Do you want to launch some surprise fireworks for your parents' wedding anniversary or something?

"Our cheapest No. 3 shells are 5,000 yen each, plus labor and installation fees. If you and all your siblings save up money from your part-time jobs, we can fix you up with a set of sixty No. 3s and No. 4s for 200,000 yen. It's the off-season and we've got some time to spare; we can submit all the necessary permits for you. Our project minimum is 100,000 yen, but if you spend over 150,000 yen, we'll throw in a few No. 5s and a No. 6 for free."

Japanese fireworks came in a range of sizes. No. 2.5 and No. 3 shells were the cheapest at around 4,000-5,000 yen each, *isshakudama* or No. 10s (which had a diameter of a little under a thousand feet in full bloom) cost just under 70,000 yen per shell, and *nishakudama* or No. 20s (which had a diameter of over 1500 feet) cost about 700,000 yen per shell.

It may have been a slow time of year and the workshop owner may have been offering their smallest shells, but sixty for 200,000 yen sounded like a steal. He was even offering some larger ones for free. That charge became even more generous when you considered that his company would also be transporting the fireworks, setting up the firing equipment, and launching them. The whole process required a team of highly qualified staff.

The man could've charged a lot more, given the long hours and significant labor fees the job would require. He was also willing to go through the trouble of submitting the permit requests to the municipal office—not that it was necessary this time.

...I have something much grander in mind than the little "surprise" he believes I'm organizing, though.

"Hmm... How many fireworks would you be able to launch for 3 million yen, including a few *shakudama*?" Mitsuha inquired.

"...Huh?"

I have no intention of cheaping out on Beatrice's debutante ball. I mean, it's the count's money, but still!

Spending 10 million-yen worth of Count Bozes's money on fireworks would've been going too far so she settled for a 3 million-yen budget, which was equivalent to one hundred and twenty gold coins in the other world. To the count, it'd feel like spending around 12 million yen. *Whether the count would find that price tag steep or cheap… Well, he'd have to see the fireworks for himself to judge.*

I received two hundred and sixty gold coins for planning Adelaide's debutante ball. That's apparently a bargain for such an event. Actually, the total cost of the ball was more because the viscount purchased the food ingredients available in their world.

Viscount Ryner is new to high society. Count Bozes's family, on the other hand, have been titled for generations and he's about to be granted the rank of marquis. The budget is going to be significantly higher. Spending a hundred and twenty gold coins on fireworks should be no problem.

The pyrotechnician asked, "Miss, is your daddy a big corporate executive or something? Are you launching fireworks to celebrate his company's event?"

Uh… I guess no high schooler is gonna have three million lying around to surprise her parents with fireworks on their wedding anniversary.

"Um, yeah, something like that," replied Mitsuha. "It's the coming-of-age party for the daughter of a major company's president, and I want to make it one to remember… Also, I know I

look young, but I'm nineteen years old. I'm an adult, and I was hired to organize this event."

"EXCUSE ME?!"

Oh come on, this can't be that unusual of a job. The owner of a pyrotechnics workshop like him should be used to customers asking him for fireworks.

…I know, I know. It's not the job he's surprised about, it's my age. Shut up already!

And so, Mitsuha and the man settled in to discuss the project.

"I'd like the fireworks show to be a slow-paced one. Can you reduce the number of shells overall, so we can have more of the bigger ones? The thing is, my guests have never seen fireworks before. I want the audience to watch them one at a time so they can take it all in, and then give them a multiple-shot grand finale at the end."

"So there'll be a lot of small children…" the man speculated. "If this is gonna be their first fireworks show ever, we've gotta do this right. All right then. Now that summer's over, we have plenty of time now. We already made most of our earnings for the whole year. I'll give you a special deal at the same price.

"Next, we need to go over the date and location, iron out the details of the program, and inspect the site beforehand. We'll also need to plan a rain date in case of inclement weather and stuff. Can I assume the party's gonna be over a month away?"

"It's in three weeks, actually… Sorry."

“WHAT?!”

And thus, Mitsuha and the man got down to the specifics.

“Is the venue nearby?”

“Yep. We’ll be there before you know it,” answered Mitsuha.

Who would choose to hire a fireworks company that’s far from the party venue?

The next day, Mitsuha, the workshop chief—*I’m not sure if that’s his title*—and one of his employees were driving out in the company car to inspect the launching site.

Normally, the company only accepted jobs that were at least a month in advance. That made sense, given that they didn’t just sell the fireworks; they also did their own site inspections, submitted the paperwork, made the shells, and more. They even offered customized fireworks that depicted letters and symbols. The short notice of Mitsuha’s request left them with no time to waste, despite it being the off-season.

“Is everything we agreed upon yesterday still okay with you?” asked Mitsuha.

“Of course. Skill and trust are the backbone of this trade. I make sure all my employees know that. Next to safety, nothing is more important than honoring our agreement with the client and maintaining confidentiality.”

Mitsuha had asked him that question a few times already, but she wanted to check one last time. They were on their way to do the site inspection, after all.

Installing the equipment was normally done on the day of or the day before the event, so the workshop chief wanted to take care of the inspection in advance. He was under the impression that the party space was local.

In reality, they were hundreds of miles away from Mitsuha's house in Japan. The event was obviously nowhere near her hometown, so she didn't need to pick a pyrotechnician close to her and increase the risk of being identified.

"By the way," said the workshop chief, "the only name you've given me is 'Nanoha'. I'll have you fill out our contract form when we get back. There's also the paperwork—the report and permit—we have to submit. Don't worry; all we need is your address, contact information, the date, and what you're using the fireworks for. It'll only take a minute. We'll take care of submitting the forms ourselves. Oh, and bring your *hanko* stamp next time."

"Huh…" Mitsuha was dazed. *Häagen-Dazed.*

I gave them my made-up princess name to be safe. Japan has the best fireworks technology in the world (in my opinion), so if the other countries find out that I bought fireworks from a Japanese vendor, they won't think anything of it. What I can't afford is for Nanoha to be linked to Mitsuha Yamano.

The workshop chief trusts me because I already made the 50% down payment. That's the only way he would've accepted such an expensive job from a girl who claimed to be nineteen but looked

(and acted) like a child. I offered to pay full price upfront but he insisted on half.

I figured it was enough to convince him this wasn't a prank… And that it might get me out of having to prove my identity. But now that I think about it, he's obviously gonna need the client's details to submit the permit. It's a decent-sized fireworks show, after all.

Mitsuha groaned internally.

Wh-What should I do…

Eh, oh well. I'll talk to the workshop chief about it after the inspection. He has no idea what he's in for…

"Oh, park in that empty lot to the left, please," guided Mitsuha.

"Huh? Okay…" The workshop chief was dubious, but he relayed the instruction to his employee who was driving.

He was rightfully confused. The lot had barely enough to park a few cars, let alone set up fireworks equipment. There were no event spaces nearby for hosting a party, and while it wasn't too far from the city, it was too far to walk from the nearest train station.

Little did they know that the spot had absolutely nothing to do with the actual scene of the party.

The vehicle pulled in and stopped. Mitsuha kept a sharp eye on the driver, making sure the engine was still on, the gear was in neutral, and the emergency brake was pulled—just in case the driver slammed the gas pedal in panic.

She began to chant, “O Otherworldly Goddess, please allow these skilled craftsmen to cross from this world into yours… Open the Aura Road!”

The incantation should act as a warning before I jump us to the other world. I’m sure it’s enough to clue them in on what’s happening… They are Japanese, after all!

“Jump!”

“WHAT THE HELL?!”

The three passengers and their car vanished from Earth, leaving behind only the echo of their cries.

“Hello-o-o! Welcome!”

Sabine peeped into the car window and greeted Mitsuha and her two guests. Her Japanese sounded quite natural. She was now fluent enough to watch Japanese DVDs and Blu-ray discs without any help; basic conversation was easy for her.

Standing behind Sabine were several guardsmen. The two newcomers may have been Mitsuha’s VIPs, but they couldn’t be left unsupervised. Especially considering she’d jumped the car directly inside the palace grounds.

The fireworks were going to be launched from the royal palace. It had an expansive courtyard and training ground, and it was located in the center of the capital.

And as expected…

“WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON?!” the two pyrotechnicians exclaimed again.



A sudden change in scenery, an adorable girl, and guards wielding spears—they were shocked to say the least.

"I see… Well, that explains it, I guess…"

After hearing Mitsuha's explanation, the workshop chief was nodding in satisfaction. They hadn't even left the car yet.

I knew he'd get it! What Japanese person isn't familiar with a good isekai *story or two?*

The younger employee was also nodding.

I didn't think they would adapt this *quickly, though!*

"So in a sense, this is *Barsoom*…" the workshop chief muttered.

"Huh? Bathroom?" Mitsuha was puzzled.

"I said *Barsoom*! You've never heard of it? Sheesh, kids these days…"

Is that supposed to be common knowledge?

"Anyway, if I have this right," the workshop chief changed the subject, "this is another world and we're currently at a royal palace. We'll be launching our show from here, and folks all over the city—who've never seen fireworks before—will be watching?"

Large scale fireworks were being made for entertainment purposes as far back as the Edo period in Japan, but that culture doesn't exist here. That makes sense, given that gunpowder hasn't become common yet. Even when they do start manufacturing gunpowder, it'll be a while before it's affordable enough for anyone

outside of the military. It's possible the military will use it to dabble in pyrotechnics instead of devoting it all to guns and cannons, but they'll probably start making signal flares before fireworks.

"Heheh…"

"Heehee…"

"Hehehehe…"

"Heehee heehee…"

Um? What's with the ominous chuckle, you guys?

'BWAH-HAHAHAHA!"

Now they're full-on hysterical.

"I—Zenjiro Nakabayashi, owner of Nakabayashi Fireworks—am going to put my absolute all into this job!"

"Damn right!" chimed in his employee.

Uh, they seem to be in a world of their own.

I'm not sure how to bring them back…

"Hmm… There are no issues with space or topography. Weather permitting, this site is suitable for launching. There's only one problem," the workshop chief said.

Yeah, I have a hunch…

"What to do about the explosive permit application and the report to the fire station. This is a real pickle."

I was afraid of that.

Getting permission in this world would be easy. All Mitsuha had to do was ask the king. The problem was that the fireworks company was going to expend a lot of gunpowder, which meant

they had to file a report stating that they were used for fireworks. They also needed proof of authorization from the local fire station and property owner. Even Mitsuha knew they'd end up in big trouble if they failed to do so.

"Gah, I guess we'll figure something out," the workshop chief shrugged.

"How?!"

Why is he so confident?!

"The client doesn't necessarily have to be you. We could claim that our client was a foreign cruise ship, and we launched from a barge or fishing boat at sea. That'd give us a reasonable excuse to not have any witnesses."

"Boss, you sure that'll get approved?" his employee asked.

"No clue. I could also say we used the fireworks for a festival in a small village in the mountains. Or that we were testing out some new fireworks; we wouldn't need a client for that. Worst case, 'We were taken to a different location at the last minute and our client was just a middleman,' leaving us in the dark about the real event organizer. That'd make us victims.

"Miss, it wouldn't be a problem if people in Japan think you're a criminal, would it? The Japanese police may be smart, but they can't come looking for you in another world. We don't know your full name or have a picture of you—we have no idea who you are! If they ask us to help create a facial composite, we'll make sure it looks nothing like you."

Um, huge problem!

He's probably joking… Maybe he thinks it won't actually come to that. Still, that's kind of concerning.

"Either way, hopefully I'll figure something out—no, I'm *sure* I will! Don't worry about it, miss!" the workshop chief grinned.

"O-Okay…"

I don't really get it, but he's the expert. If he's not worried, I'm not worried!

Moving on!

The workshop chief and his employee continued their site inspection. Mitsuha, Sabine, and the guards followed close behind.

The guards can't let two strangers wander the palace grounds alone even if I'm with them. That goes double considering there's a princess with us.

After the men finished their inspection, the chief made an odd request:

"Hey, miss. Do you think you could manage another 2 million yen?"

Another what?

"These folks have never seen fireworks before, so I wanna blow their minds with the best of the best. With another 2 million yen, I'll be able to…

"I'd be fine with losing money on this job if I'm the only employee in my company. But unfortunately, I'm a business owner, and I've gotta take care of my staff and their families. I know I said I'm gonna put my all into this job, but I can't do that

at their expense. Which is why I'm asking another 2 million yen! With that much, I'll be able to put on a show these folks'll never forget!"

Ah… Yeah, I get it. I get you, chief!

Now that he knows the whole story and that the expense is coming from someone's budgeted funds instead of a kid's savings, his ambitions are bigger. This isn't about the money; it's about his passion as a pyrotechnician.

But 2 million yen…? Exchanging from yen to dollars, dollars to gold… That's about eighty gold coins.

"I-I'll think about it…"

"Hey, Captain! Can you lend me an LAV and two trucks with their tops removed? I'll need them in about three weeks, only for three days. Oh, and if you could also let me borrow three drivers for about an hour, that'd be great."

"Slow down, li'l lady," the Wolf Fang captain said. "D'ya always gotta be so sudden with these requests of yers—actually, don't answer that. I should know better by now than to expect any different from you."

That's not my fault. I only turn to Wolf Fang when I'm out of other options…

"This job won't require any fighting or guarding, so it won't be dangerous. It's just for a party. I'll pay for the truck rental and the drivers, and I'll give you money for the decorations for the cars too. Please help me out!"

No one in the other world could help with decorative lights, and Wolf Fang had perfectly usable vehicles. Going to them was the best option. The mercenaries already knew about the other world too, and could be trusted to maintain confidentiality. She asked for a three-day rental because she needed time to decorate the trucks.

Oh, I almost forgot!

"I'd also like to ask some of your guys to wear mascot cos—you know what, never mind."

It might be better to hire novice mercenaries from the other world to wear the costumes. Locals from my county might be up for it too. It's part of my duty as a county lord to provide jobs to those who are struggling to make a living. The Wolf Fang guys are too big and bulky to fit into mascot costumes anyway. The mercenaries in the other world come in all varieties of size, gender, and age—some of whom would be considered underage in Japan—so finding people petite enough to wear the costumes will be easy.

Maybe I should hire the orphans… Actually, no. They'd be too small.

"What'd ya say? 'Mascot costumes'? Fine, fine… Some o' the guys are into that kinda thing, so I'll ask around for ya."

"Yes, please!"

Sweet, that takes care of everything that needs prepping time. I'll go to a mascot rental company later and pick out a few costumes. I'm sure the rest will work out.

I have to figure out the food and stalls too… Oh, that reminds me! I need to hire Kunz the carpenter! He'll reach out to others in his trade who can help.

I'm sure I can pull this off!

Mitsuha spent the next few weeks working on this and that for her county, and before she knew it, the day of Beatrice's party came. The Bozeses had worked on booking a date that didn't clash with the royal palace functions and other families' parties, and finally decided on the day of Beatrice's debutante ball: three days after her birthday.

Today was the big day.

"I'm scared, Mitsuha…" Beatrice whimpered. The star of the party was far from her usual lively self; she was pale.

We can't have that. She must be nervous because she's never had such a big event in her life. Beatrice spent most of her life surrounded by family, free to be herself. She's probably not used to this kind of thing.

"Don't worry," Mitsuha reassured her friend. "We practiced a lot, and the food and alcohol are perfect! You just have to do exactly what you did at the rehearsals!"

Yeah, I'm sure it'll work out! Probably! Maybe!

Hopefully…

God, I sure hope it works out…

No! Bad thoughts, Mitsuha! Get a hold of yourself! If I look worried, that'll only freak out Beatrice even more!

“Just trust me!” she said firmly, but Beatrice was still blue. She couldn’t be blamed for that. Her future was at stake.

Now that I think about it, Adelaide—the first girl whose debutante ball I hosted—had nerves of steel. I dubbed over her lines in the play, but she acted with so much confidence. She’s apparently becoming a leader among the nobles in her age group, which doesn’t surprise me at all.

I could’ve sworn Beatrice had just as much spunk, though. The Ryners are a new noble family that only gained peerage during Adelaide’s grandfather’s generation, so maybe she still has the grit of a commoner.

Regardless, it’s too late to change anything now. Beatrice just has to go out there and knock our socks off!

The debutante ball was being held in the courtyard of the Bozeses’ mansion in the capital. To differentiate this ball from Adelaide’s, Mitsuha chose an outdoor setting. Many of tonight’s guests had already attended Adelaide’s party. There was also the matter of the Ryners having the rank of viscount, whereas the Bozeses were a count’s family that was soon to become marquis. This ball had to blow the other one out of the water.

The weather this time of year in the capital was not too hot or too cold. The evenings were cool. The wind was blowing from the northwest at ten miles an hour with clear skies. The sun had just set, and it was quickly growing dark.

In one corner of the courtyard, a temporary stage had been constructed against the mansion. Count Bozes, illuminated by the

spotlight, was about to share his words of welcome to kick off the party.

Mitsuha was worried that the batteries wouldn't provide enough electricity, so she'd set up generators nearby. The whole courtyard would have to be lit up when it came time for all the guests to mingle. LED lights didn't consume much electricity, but she ended up needing a lot of electrical power.

"Greetings, everyone," Count Bozes began. "Thank you very much for gathering tonight for the debut of my daughter, Beatrice."

Girls weren't valued as much as boys in the countries of this world. That was to be expected in this era of civilization. Most countries on Earth followed the same path.

Beatrice, however, was the Bozeses' only daughter, and was doted on by her parents and siblings. She was close with the Lightning Archpriestess and Princess Sabine, and was even the owner of Beatrice Company. On top of that, she was the younger sibling of Alexis Bozes—the young man who was given his own title of nobility after his heroics in the battle to defend the capital, and was greatly admired and fawned over by fellow young nobles.

…But a sucker for his little sister.

Yeah, people are gonna salivate over Beatrice. Just as her parents and I feared. That doesn't mean we'll hold back on boasting about her virtues or sell her short, though. We're gonna give

everything we've got to celebrate her charm and worth. Her parents and I won't budge on that.

Our goal is to win over as many talented and kind upper-class boys as possible—preferably third sons and younger. That way, Beatrice could pick a respectable character who she also happens to fancy. There's no room for compromise.

Count Bozes wrapped up the introduction—at this point, the heroine wasn't present yet—and walked off the stage. The spotlight switched off. The sky had gotten considerably darker.

After a brief moment—*flash!*—a beautiful picture was projected onto the white wall behind the stage. It appeared to be a room somewhere in the royal palace.

"WHOAAA!" The crowd stirred.

Mitsuha had set up a projector just like at Adelaide's party. The stage was built against the mansion's wall for this purpose. The guests who attended Adelaide's party weren't surprised by the image, but everyone else was understandably in awe.

A voice began to narrate over the speakers, "There was a young girl—a close friend of the royal princess—who soon became a court lady and began to work at the royal court…"

The sound system was installed high on the building, rendering the voice audible not just in the courtyard, but the entire vicinity of the Bozeses' property. Mitsuha figured no one would complain about the noise. There wasn't a lot of entertainment in this world, so they might've found the loud voice curious. *I hope.*

Mitsuha wasn't doing the narration this time. She found someone from the Bozeses' house staff who seemed to have a knack for it and trained them for the role. Beatrice's lines weren't going to be dubbed over, either. A small microphone had been attached to the girl's dress collar so she could deliver them herself. It was the least Mitsuha could do to avoid the play being criticized as a rehash of Adelaide's.

If I'm gonna use the same tricks, the impact needs to be several times bigger than the first time around.

Once the narrator finished their part, Beatrice took the stage. *Here we go!*

"Listen up, foul merchant!" she recited. "I see your evil ways, always scheming and sending your minions to court. You will never seize the princess, or any other members of the royal family, or the citizens of this kingdom for as long as I am here!"

Writing a story about an internal dispute in the royal court could've been problematic, so the villains in the script were corrupt merchants. No one would take issue with that.

Since Mitsuha didn't have to dub the entire play herself, she was free to add more characters. She decided to include villains to the story. Each additional actor increased the cost of the play because she had to buy another mini microphone for them, but that wasn't a big deal. Mics could be reused, and the count was paying for everything anyway.

The stage show progressed and next came Beatrice's big scene. She struck a dramatic pose in her court lady's uniform to

intimidate the two villains. The play was nothing but a montage of highlights; there was no real story to it. The five-minute-long bit was pretty much a build-up to this one juicy fight scene.

The narrator began, “Some know her as the daughter of Count Bozes. To others, the owner of Beatrice Company. To the rest, an attendant of the third princess… But who is she really?!”

At that moment, seven stagehands (maids) walked onto the platform holding a long curtain-like fabric. They formed a single line in front of Beatrice and began to circle around her, using the curtain to obscure her from view.

Tension was building. Mitsuha was gripping a switch in her sweaty palm.

One, two, three… Now! Lights for Beatrice’s first outfit change, on!

Beams flashed from a disco ball hanging from the mansion roof and also from the foot of the stage. Colorful rays sparkled and danced across the yard.

“Bunny Flaaaaash!”

The plan was for Beatrice to slip out of the quick-change court lady costume and into a pair of slacks, which had been hidden in a floor compartment. There was also a specially made jacket to wear over the shirt she had under the court lady outfit. Once she was fully changed, she would kick her court lady outfit into the compartment and close the lid.

Please get this right! If the maids screw up the timing and expose Beatrice in her underwear, Lady Iris will kill me…literally!

The maids finished circling around Beatrice as rehearsed and started to exit to the other end of the stage. They could obviously tell if Beatrice was still in the middle of changing, so there shouldn't be any mishaps. If she wasn't ready, they would've kept circling her a few more times.

The last maid left Beatrice's side, revealing the heroine to the crowd in a gallant new outfit…accessorized with bunny ears and a tail. *She looks ear-resistible!*

The outfit didn't show any skin, of course. An actual bunny girl suit was out of the question. Women in this country weren't shy about revealing their back and cleavage, but showing any skin above the knee was taboo. Beatrice was only fifteen. There was no way Mitsuha was going to let her wear an outfit that displayed her chest.

Be it top or bottom, no skin allowed!

Well, there are plenty of other fifteen-year-old girls here wearing dresses that expose their chest, but Beatrice ain't wearing one of those on my watch! The dress she'll change into later (made by the degenerate dressmaker) is modest too.

…And no, I didn't dress her like that out of jealousy!

Anyway, the newly revealed outfit is inspired by a female version of the royal knight's uniform with modern elements to give it a dash of "superhero" flavor. It looks incredibly cool! The dressmaker put in a lot *of effort.*

In Beatrice's hand was a rapier—a real one. Borrowing it from the count was cheaper than buying a fake one in Japan.

She declared, “It is I, the angel of love who protects the peace of the royal palace! You can call me the Royal Rabbit!”

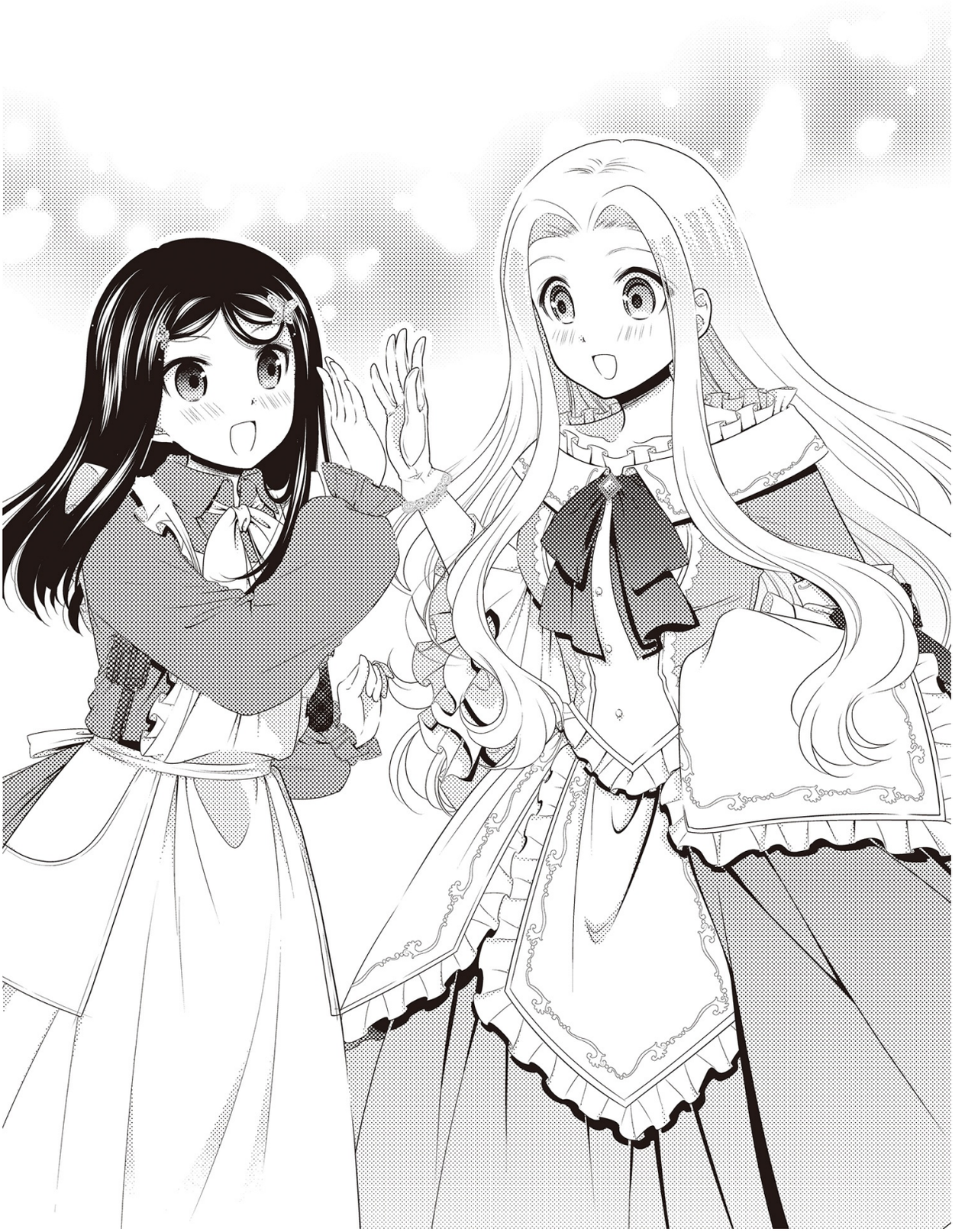
Time for light effect number two! Music, on!

“These long ears hear all that transpires within the royal court! You’re going down, villains!”

The evil merchant duo let out a battle cry. Clangs of their weapons reverberated through the courtyard.

Sweet, this turned out great!

Clap!



The play had ended and Mitsuha gave Beatrice an enthusiastic high five. Beatrice had just changed into a normal ball gown (made by the degenerate dressmaker).

“Perfectamundo!” Mitsuha rejoiced.

“Hehe!” Beatrice was positively glowing. She’d just finished her high-stakes mission and absolutely nailed it. Her confidence was fully restored. There was no more reason to worry about her.

That said, while her part in the play might’ve finished, her night was far from over. She was the belle of the ball and had much more to do.

“Beatrice!”

Mitsuha turned around and saw Sabine approaching.

“You’re going to be my court lady? I’m so happy!”

“That wasn’t real!” Mitsuha and Beatrice exclaimed together.

It seemed like Sabine was confusing the play with a real announcement of some kind.

I made Beatrice the third princess’s court lady in the play based on her experience as Sabine’s tutor in real life, but she’s not actually *going to join her court. Come on, Sabine… You should’ve seen enough Japanese media by now to be able to tell fact from fiction…*

The three girls were currently in a nook beneath the stage. Beatrice needed to return to the party to mingle with the guests as soon as she was done changing. That meant she didn’t have any time to dawdle.

“Beatrice, ignore Sabine and go back to the party!”

“Got it!”

“Hey! You guys are mean!”

Today’s top priority is Beatrice. Sabine couldn’t matter less in comparison…and she understands that. She’s just nagging us because she knows Beatrice is going to have my full attention today and is looking for a way to involve herself somehow.

Mitsuha knew that if they engaged with Sabine, they’d be stuck with her for a while.

Beatrice ventured into the fray. The plan was for her to walk around to greet the adults at each table and socialize with the children.

The food and drinks had been prepared without issue. Mitsuha hired Marcel and his team, and a few of Viscount Ryner’s servants to help with the cooking and ensure no one was overwhelmed with tasks. She provided them with plenty of ingredients, so they’d be able to deal with any unforeseen circumstances. There was nothing to be concerned about on that front.

One of Mitsuha’s goals this time was to give Marcel the experience of working without her, as she’d gotten involved with the cooking at Adelaide’s party. The Bozeses’ chefs took the lead, but Marcel had slightly more experience with Yamano Cuisine. It was a great opportunity for Marcel and the Bozeses’ head chef—who was much older than him—to learn from each other.

Perfectamundo!

All Mitsuha had to do was walk around and survey the party to make sure there were no problems until it was time for the next item on the schedule.

All right, I should get moving too!

“You’re free to stay here, Sabine, but I’m going back out to the party.”

“O-Oh, wait for me!”

The tables were set with food and drinks all over the courtyard. Servers were weaving through them with trays full of drinks.

The sky had grown completely dark, yet the courtyard was well lit. Several of the guests were surprised by the brightness, but those who were familiar with the LED flashlights sold at Mitsuha’s General Store were unfazed. Military associates and people from the royal palace were explaining how the lights worked to the newcomers.

Mitsuha sold LED flashlights for an expensive enough price that the military wouldn’t be able to buy them in bulk. Making them a luxury item was the best way to ensure they wouldn’t all end up in the government’s hands. Only nobles and other wealthy people were able to afford a small quantity. If a real war ever broke out, the military may end up purchasing a couple for the sentries or to use as night signals.

Anyway, food and refreshments were on the tables—but not too much. There was a good reason for that. The promise Mitsuha

made to Beatrice after Adelaide's ball was "an electrical parade, a fireworks show, and food stalls for Beatrice's debut."

Mitsuha hired Kunz, who called on his apprentices and fellow carpenters to build the stalls. The stage was also their creation. The food stalls were simple wooden structures instead of authentic yatai stalls, so they didn't cost much to make. The booths were going to be taken apart after the party so the wood could be reused.

Each stall was being operated by a servant who'd been trained to make one food item. The actual cooks were busy making the regular party dishes and had no time to help with the stalls.

What about the orphans' popcorn stall, you ask? I couldn't exactly bring the orphans to a debutante ball and work them like dogs. We do have popcorn, though. One of the servants is running that stall.

The menu included pizza, hot dogs, skewered meat, candy apples, cotton candy, sponge cakes, sushi, tempura, takoyaki, ikayaki, *yakitori, yakisoba,* etc. Some of the items like tempura, takoyaki, and cotton candy required equipment from Earth to make. Mitsuha rented or bought them, along with propane gas tanks and power generators. She taught the servants to make everything else with ingredients from this world. *The locals need to make some money too.*

The food at the stalls were free, of course. It was part of the planned menu, just presented differently.

Mitsuha knew that the attendees either wouldn't understand how to eat the street food or might be afraid to try new things. She decided to combat this by planting actors. The Ryners, the Bozeses, and other acquaintances were asked to sample the food beforehand and then react positively at the party as if it was their first time. That would encourage the other guests to try a bite.

Mitsuha stepped back and observed. Adelaide was walking around the stalls with a crowd of followers. Theodore was eating skewered meat. Unassuming guests slowly began to gather around the food stalls. *Good. Good, good, all good!*

Where's Beatrice—there she is!

Beatrice is intact. She's before me, port side. …Stop it, Mitsuha. She's not the Exelion!

Wait a minute—

To Mitsuha's horror, Beatrice was surrounded by a massive crowd of guys. A good number of them were in the "geezer" age bracket. She couldn't tell if they were introducing themselves with the goal of simply forming a connection with the Bozes family or if they were more romantically inclined.

Well, many noble marriages are set up for political reasons, so it's not uncommon for partners to be two or three decades apart in age. That said, I'd raze this kingdom to the ground before I let that happen to Beatrice! I'm sure Count Bozes, Lady Iris, Alexis, and Theodore feel the same way.

Besides, Beatrice would never accept that kind of marriage. She's seen how much dumb fun Sabine, Colette, and I have together,

and she's just acquired her shiny new toy that is Beatrice Company.

That girl has unleashed her true form. There's no going back.

All right. We need to draw their focus away from Beatrice now. Let's get their att—CAN I STOP QUOTING GUNBUSTER *ALREADY?!*

Anyway, old geezers don't have a chance!

Mitsuha wasn't in a dress. Organizing the ball required all her time and focus, and she didn't have a minute to waste on anything else. She chose to wear her general store outfit in hopes that it'd send the message: "Don't bother me! I'm busy managing this party!"

Most of the guests knew that Mitsuha threw Adelaide's debutante ball, and surely all of them knew about her friendship with Beatrice. If that wasn't enough to figure out that she was organizing this party, the play and food stalls should've made it *especially* obvious.

As such, no one was brave enough to approach her as she bustled about the courtyard without stopping for breaks or snacks. The guests were all aware of the potential consequences of angering the Lightning Archpriestess. Plus, Beatrice was the star of the party; following Mitsuha around would've been a bad look.

Fortunately, the Bozeses didn't invite any problematic characters. This party was way too important. They even left out some names that should've been invited, given their position. What was the point of having authority if you didn't use it to protect your precious daughter?

Mitsuha wasn't running around or micromanaging the party this time. She was here as a director, to set plans in motion and deal with any accidents that only she could fix. So far, everything was going smoothly.

The food stalls were proving popular. A little too popular, in fact. Lines were forming at each one. Fortunately, none of the stalls were running out of food, so Mitsuha wasn't too concerned.

Even if something were to go wrong, none of the guests would make a fuss about it. Unlike the Ryners, the Bozeses were a powerful house with a long history. To insult them was to put your life in peril.

That's a terrifying thought!

Okay, it's almost time. One of my promises to Beatrice—food stalls—has been fulfilled. Next up…

Mitsuha pulled a miniature transceiver out of her pocket and pressed the transmission button.

"Electric lights parade, move out!"

"**Roger that!**"

A few minutes later, there were loud noises approaching from outside the mansion.

They're here… Let's do this!

Mitsuha got on the stage and grabbed the microphone.

"May I have your attention, everyone! The Goddess's celebratory parade is passing before the mansion! Please go and take a look!"

Awesome, the guests are moving toward the street. I wanna see this too… Not that I don't trust everyone to do their jobs.

Yesss, here they come!

An LAV was rolling down the street, followed by two trucks. The three automobiles were decked out with garishly bright electric lights.

Lifted trucks have nothing on them!

All seven colors of the rainbow streamed about as disco balls reflected their rays in every which direction. The trucks had to be supplied with extra generators and batteries because they couldn't power the excess electrical lights on their own. Music was blaring through the speakers.

Colette, Noelle, Lia, and the rest of the Yamano Munchkin Maids were waving from the first vehicle's roof hatch. The girls, too, were decked out in angel wings, halos, magic wands and other light-up toys.

The trucks, which had their hoods removed, were carrying young female mercenaries dressed as the Goddess and her angels. Animal mascots worn by male mercenaries were marching beside the slowly processing vehicles. Mitsuha prioritized hiring mercenaries who were having a hard time financially and told them they could have the leftover food. They happily agreed to the job.

It technically wasn't leftovers; the mercenaries were going to get all the untouched food on the buffet trays. They'd be having

the same things the party guests were being served.

They'd be dining like actual nobles and they'll even get to try the newest Yamano Cuisine and *have the yatai experience. Talk about a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity!*

The women on the trucks pointed their laser toys at the crowd. The lasers projected star- and heart-shaped beams of light onto the audience. Mitsuha thought about throwing goodie bags full of candy at the crowd but decided against it. The parade was on the street outside the mansion, which meant there were a lot of civilians watching. Throwing candy would've started fights and erupted into pandemonium. Someone might've even gotten run over if they dove under a vehicle to grab a piece of candy.

It didn't take long for the parade to attract a mob, bright and loud as it was. Earlier that evening, Mitsuha had visited the neighboring mansions—with gifts in hand—and warned them that the party might get loud. Most of the neighbors were nobles who were invited anyway, so it was unlikely anyone would complain about the noise.

The electrical parade seems like a big hit! Aww, look at those children following the mascots and clinging to them… The guys inside the costumes are playing along, too, Mitsuha thought as she watched the mercenaries pick the kids up and spin them around. *That's adorable!*

This fulfills my second promise to Beatrice!

Only one remains.

The Wolf Fang drivers completed the parade route just like they practiced during the walk-through earlier in the day. The route was one lap around the Bozeses' mansion; a goblin could've memorized it. They were back at their starting point, which was a warehouse belonging to a nearby baron.

The baron's estate was small, but the warehouse was spacious. It was used to store local specialty products from his barony to sell in the capital. Most nobles considered it embarrassing to build a warehouse next to their mansion, but he did it for the good of his people, knowing that his territory's products could be sold for slightly higher prices in this city.

He's a good, savvy lord who puts his people above his ego.

Mitsuha had paid him a visit too, with a box of confectionery in hand, and asked if she could borrow his warehouse for the day. He was immediately on board. He couldn't possibly turn down a direct request from the Lightning Archpriestess, especially when she said it was essential for the debutante ball of Count Bozes's daughter. Besides, all he had to do to accommodate was temporarily transfer the contents of his warehouse elsewhere.

The baron would normally never get a chance to interact with the Bozeses on equal footing due to the difference in status and faction. His name wasn't even initially on the invitation list. The baron knew how important this chance was, and he happily accepted Mitsuha's gift and invitation to the party. He refused to accept the money she offered as a storage rental charge.

I guess the fact that he helped us out of the goodness of his heart will be worth a thousand times more than a small payment. He's a smart lord.

The trucks Mitsuha rented were smaller vehicles meant for military use but they narrowly fit through the warehouse entrance that was wide enough for carriages. She'd jumped the decorated trucks into the warehouse the day before and spent the afternoon directing the mercenaries' dress rehearsal.

Once the flashy vehicles pulled into the warehouse, Mitsuha checked her watch.

"And now, if I may have your attention," she announced, "I ask that you please return to the courtyard and resume the party!" She wanted the guests to watch the next attraction over food and drinks.

The locals who gathered for the parade began to disperse. They weren't heading home, however. They were on their way to secure good viewing spots. Mitsuha had been advertising what was to come because she didn't want to send the capital into an unprecedented panic. Posters were put up everywhere—guild headquarters, the bulletin board in front of the royal palace, the city's major parks. Novice mercenaries from every guild were hired to spread the word. It was important to make sure as many people as possible knew about it beforehand.

Okay, it's almost time.

Mitsuha pressed the transmission button on her mini transceiver.

“Unlimited Fireworks, this is the viscountess. Five minutes before showtime!”

The workshop chief’s voice buzzed through the speaker, “**Great! Ready when you are! This’ll be underwhelming compared to the big shows in Japan, but we’ve prepared enough to present to this world what Nakabayashi Fireworks—no, what Japanese fireworks are all about. Behold the might of a pyrotechnician!**”

No one can match a craftsman’s passion, no matter what world you’re in…

The guests had returned to the courtyard, and were relishing the electrical parade over drinks.

Mitsuha checked her watch. The mercenaries in the parade were probably done changing out of their costumes and had found a good viewing spot by now.

I would’ve felt bad if they missed the show because of a gig that I gave them. Colette, Noelle, Lia, and the rest of the Munchkin Maids are part of the team too. They’re commoners, so I can’t let them into the ball, but they could at least watch with the female mercenaries. I’ll invite them to the after-party later so they can have their fill of leftovers.

It’s been five minutes!

Mitsuha picked up her transceiver.

“Unlimited Fireworks, this is the viscountess. It’s time! Feuer!”

“**You got it! Watch and be amazed, miss!**”

The rest was in the hands of the professionals.

…Huh? Are you wondering why I said "fire" in German?

Mwahaha, that wasn't German! It was the language of the Galactic Empire!

Quit worrying about the little things!

Bang!

Whoosh…

KABOOM!

"""""""""WO-O-O-O-O-OW!"""""""""

The show kicked off with a giant boom. It looked like a No. 20, which cost 700,000 yen and had a radius of over 1500 feet in full bloom.

Ouch… 700,000 yen burst into flames in five seconds… And that's not including labor fees! How did I let the workshop chief talk me into this. Is he a Ferengi in disguise?

It was the first fireworks show ever to be held in this world. The chief didn't want to start off with a tepid introduction. Launching multiple fireworks at a time was a crowd-pleaser but it wasn't an option this time because of the limited budget and because Mitsuha asked him to give the audience enough time to admire each one. A rapid succession of fireworks meant blowing through a lot of shells in a very short span.

Given the advancements in pyrotechnics, it was unlikely the team was lighting each fuse manually. They had a pre-

programmed system that ignited the electric fuses remotely. Safety came first, after all.

That's it for the No. 20 shells, I think. They were probably going to stick to No. 10s (a 70,000-yen shell with a diameter of a thousand feet) and No. 7s (about 30,000 yen per shell) for the rest of the show. Smaller fireworks like No. 3s (around 5,000 yen) might be too underwhelming, though a skilled pyrotechnician could find fun ways to incorporate them.

After the initial No. 20, the fireworks team launched one shell at a time while occasionally throwing in a few multi-bursts for a change of pace. They were making clever use of what their tight budget allowed. The workshop chief had heard from Mitsuha that the party was being hosted by a count for his daughter's birthday, and not by the royal palace, so he couldn't ask for too much money.

That said, the fact that he'd been offered the royal palace's expansive grounds to use as the launching site—while under the strict surveillance of guards, of course—might've been enough for him to realize that the birthday girl was no ordinary count's daughter.

Or maybe craftsmen are unconcerned about things like that…

Regardless, it's surely occurred to him that if this job goes well, he might be hired again for the birthday party of a marquis's daughter or a princess. When that time comes, I'll make sure to squeeze a large enough budget out of the host for the chief's company to make a healthy profit. I doubt the money will ever

matter to him as much as the desire to impress first-timers, though. He and his employees are all total dorks when it comes to their job. (I mean that as a compliment.)

Earlier that day, the workshop chief and his employees had been world-jumped to the royal palace grounds to set up their equipment. Mitsuha explained nothing to the workers and swore them all to secrecy. Only the employee who drove with the workshop chief for the initial inspection knew where they were and what the show was for. The rest were simply there to follow the chief's orders and carry out the fireworks show.

They obviously figured out that this was another world, but that didn't matter. Who was going to believe a far-fetched tale like *We went to another world and launched fireworks*? If one of them did talk, they'd be dismissed as a liar when the chief and the other employees denied their claim with a chuckle. They'd also have no proof that they went to another world, as the guards had been ordered not to let them take anything—not even a blade of grass or a single leaf.

The royal palace ended up being a really convenient launching spot. It confines the fireworks crew to the palace grounds, and it's a good excuse to keep them under the guards' surveillance and restrict their actions. I guess it doesn't really matter in the end, though, given I can just leave any unnecessary items behind when I jump everyone back to Earth. I'm just being strict to emphasize the confidentiality.

The fireworks show was proceeding according to plan. It didn't come close to the first-rate shows in Japan, but the team did their best with the assigned budget and short notice to put together a great performance using a wide variety of shells.

Some of the guests cheered while others watched in stunned silence. A smattering of them even cried, hailing the fireworks as a miracle of the Goddess.

They weren't the only ones watching, of course. Citizens across the capital roared with delight as blazing arrows shot from the royal palace and burst into colossal fiery flowers against the blackened sky.

The cheers were loud enough for the workshop chief and his crew to hear from the royal palace. The pyrotechnicians had performed many fireworks shows of much larger scales, but this had to be one of the most rewarding and exciting productions of their careers.

I hope they're happy…

The show came to a furious finale as fireworks rocketed in rapid succession and finished off with an impressively large one, a shakudama.

Now all Mitsuha had to do was jump the pyrotechnics team back to Earth. She figured they'd be done packing up by the time the after-party for the servants and mercenaries was over.

Food and drinks were brought to them beforehand, so they'd be able to eat once they finished dismantling the equipment. None of the drinks were alcoholic, of course. It was late enough at

night that jumping the company's truck right next to their workshop wasn't an issue, but the employees still needed to drive their own cars home afterward. *I don't want any accidents on my conscience.*

It took some time for the dazzled guests to come to their senses after the show. Once they did, some began praising the Goddess for delivering a miracle in celebration of a young lady's coming of age. Others were rambling so excitedly that spittle was flying from their mouths. They were lucky it was night and no one could see.

Not everyone thought the fireworks were the work of the Goddess, of course. Those who witnessed the whole operation at the royal palace knew better. As did Count Bozes, who footed the bill.

There was one more person who knew the truth, and she was charging this way…

"Mitsuha!"

Huh? Why is Sabine angry? She looks pissed*, in fact. Shouldn't she be praising me for how amazing the fireworks were?*

"Why…" Sabine was seething.

Mitsuha's confusion grew.

"Why did you use those *now*?! What are you going to do for *my* debutante ball?! Everyone will accuse me of rehashing Beatrice's party if you show that at mine! You'd better have something even more mind-blowing for my ball!"

"Uh…"

That only made Sabine angrier.

“Is that all you have to say?! Have you actually not thought about this? Please don’t tell me you’ve exhausted all your best party entertainment ideas. You must have more, right? Right?! … Right?”

Well, crap… Craptacular.

What should I do—oh, perfect timing!

“Prince Leuhen!” Mitsuha called out. “Are you enjoying the party? How did you like the fireworks?”

“Hey, don’t run from me!” yelled Sabine.

I’m not passing up an escape opportunity like this! Prince Leuhen is like a bulletproof vest against Sabine’s attacks. She adores him so much that she wouldn’t dare interrupt our conversation or raise her voice around him. Mwahaha.

“Mitsuha…” Leuhen gazed up at her, “You’ll plan something even more amazing for my coming-of-age party, right?”

“NOT YOU TOO!”

The rest of the party went smoothly without much need for direction from Mitsuha. Once the guests left, she joined the after-party with Count Bozes’s servants, the Ryner family’s team, and the cast of the electrical parade. They celebrated around the leftover food and alcohol.

The Bozeses, Sabine, and Adelaide were there too. Adelaide wasn’t the kind of girl who’d ditch her servants at the party and leave. It was getting late but she’d be going home with them, so

that wasn't a problem. Her parents left a while ago out of consideration for the staff, of course.

…Hold on. Why are the first princess, the king, and the chancellor here? Even Princess Chii…

Read the room, guys! This is a staff party!

Now that I think of it, thank goodness the first and second princesses are already adults, and that Beatrice doesn't have any little sisters. Seriously… Thank goodness.

Mitsuha headed for the royal palace once the after-party was wrapped up. There was nothing at the Bozeses' mansion that she needed to retrieve immediately. Any remaining food and alcohol belonged to them. She'd grabbed the laptop and projector as soon as the play was over and jumped them to her house in Japan.

The curtains and lighting equipment were to remain up until tomorrow. No one would be dumb enough to risk robbing Count Bozes, and an inebriated servant removing the lights in the dark was a recipe for an accident.

Why do today what you can put off until tomorrow? Hasta mañana, amigos!

The fireworks team comes first, anyway.

"Great job, guys!" Mitsuha hollered at the pyrotechnics crew at the launching site.

The firing equipment had already been packed up and loaded onto the truck. The chief and his employees were enjoying their meal on the lawn.

They're drinking tea. Juice wouldn't pair well with the food. Like I said earlier, no alcohol. I wouldn't be able to sleep at night if there were any accidents later.

"Hey, miss! Great timing! Come and sit down with us!" The workshop chief beckoned.

"Yeah, sit down!" the other employees echoed.

Wait. They're not drinking alcohol…right? she sweated as she took a seat.

"In my fifty years of being a pyrotechnician, I've never once felt *this* happy!"

…Who are you, Mr. Machida from The Gutsy Frog*?*

"I can't imagine a greater honor as a pyrotechnician than putting on the very first fireworks show for an entire country's people. We had a great responsibility to show them the wonder of Japanese fireworks, and I think we did a bang-up job, if I do say so myself."

Oh no, I feel a monologue coming…

"There's nothing quite like spending hours and hours working on something to absolute perfection, and then watching it explode and fade away. Those precious, fleeting moments… Now *that's* what I dedicate my heart and soul to."

I'm finding it harder and harder to believe he's not drunk…

Uh, the rest of the employees are getting emotional too.

I mean, I understand how they feel. The cheering throughout the capital tonight was deafening. This night will become a legend

to be remembered in this world forever. You'd have to be a robot to not shed tears of joy after an achievement like that.

Oh well, I don't want any food to go to waste. I'll stay with them until they're done eating.

Afterward, Mitsuha world-jumped the pyrotechnicians back to Japan and saw them off. She planned on paying the second half of the bill plus the extra 2 million yen—and a little tip—by tomorrow.

Should I do a domestic wire transfer—no, I shouldn't use my Japanese bank account. There's a chance the transaction could be traced back to me.

Depositing cash at the bank isn't a good idea either. The tellers would definitely remember my face if I showed up with that much money, and they might even usher me to the back where the branch manager's office is. I'd end up on security footage too, which could be used to identify me.

That leaves me with no choice. I'll have to pay them directly in cash like last time. Wiring money from my overseas account sounds like too much of a pain. Scrounging up that much in cash is gonna take a few days. The workshop chief will have to wait. I've got errands to take care of today, and the chief said there's no rush…

Withdrawing money from my Japanese bank account would be quick, but then I'd have to spend time replenishing it with money

from abroad that I made by "selling sculptures." That money would be taxed heavily, too.

This expense isn't for me. It's for a mysterious client who, perchance, might be an otherworldly princess named Nanoha. That means there's no reason for "Mitsuha Yamano" to pay taxes on it!

She nodded to herself.

I'm afraid I'll get stuck listening to the workshop chief and his employees geek out about fireworks again when I go back there, but oh well… I don't see any other choice.

The next day, Mitsuha returned to the Bozeses' mansion. She had to collect the LED lights, power cables, generators and batteries, meet with the count to discuss payment and review the event's outcome, and some other things.

All right, let's go find him!

"Mitsuha, that was the BEST PARTY EVER! Last night will be remembered in the kingdom forever along with my name!" Beatrice threw her arms around her friend.

"You've really done it this time, Mitsuha…" Count Bozes looked exasperated. Lady Iris stood beside him, seeming tense.

…He clearly didn't mean that as praise.

The count continued, "You announced to the entire city that large, loud flowers of flame were going to bloom in the sky in celebration of Beatrice's debutante ball—which was perfectly necessary, I'm not blaming you. If you'd put on *that* kind of show

without giving the people prior notice, it would've caused an unprecedented panic. The problem is…"

He took a deep breath.

"Many of the people in the capital who saw the display believe that it was sent by the Goddess in celebration of 'Saint Beatrice' reaching adulthood. They reveled all through the night, and some are still out there toasting to it as we speak!"

Yikes! I jumped right to my Japanese house last night to take a shower and crash, so I had no idea any of that was happening.

"Umm, what if we asked the archbishop to deny that it was the Goddess's doing?" Mitsuha suggested.

"The archbishop is the one who spread the word in the first place! He's been proclaiming that last night was a 'miracle of the Goddess' and that a 'new saint has been born' for all to hear!"

"Aw, dang," sighed Mitsuha.

Now that I think about it, I didn't give a heads-up to the church.

"Also…"

There's more?!

"We've been getting an endless stream of messengers from other royal families since early this morning, all of them carrying marriage proposals for Beatrice. We have over thirty of them now! They're all desperate to form familial ties with us and welcome a saint into their home.

"What the hell are we going to do?! Beatrice just turned fifteen four days ago! Tell me you can fix this!"

Jeez, I've never seen him so mad! He's always said he won't let Beatrice get married for as long as possible, and that he'll make sure her husband takes their name rather than the other way around. That's not gonna be easy, given that she isn't the heir and won't become a countess or marchioness…

Mitsuha glanced at Lady Iris. Surprisingly, she didn't seem very angry. Her feelings about the marriage proposals aligned with the count's, but she was a woman, after all; she knew how happy she would've been to receive a debutante ball that grand, and how hard Mitsuha worked for Beatrice. So no matter how bad the situation was, Lady Iris wasn't going to yell at her.

"Also…" added Count Bozes.

What?! We're not done?!

"His Majesty said that he expects Princess Sabine's debutante ball to be every bit as spectacular as Beatrice's. And that you'd better not forget Prince Leuhen's coming-of-age ceremony either."

"NO-O-O-O-O!" Mitsuha screamed.

Sabine and Leuhen had made the same threat last night.

A part of her knew she'd end up having to throw Sabine's debutante ball eventually. She was just trying not to think about it. The first and second princesses had already reached adulthood. *Phew,* Mitsuha was relieved—so relieved that Prince Leuhen's coming-of-age ceremony never even crossed her mind. She only associated fancy coming-of-age parties with girls, but of course boys had them too.

Theodore, Count Bozes's youngest son, was already fifteen when Mitsuha met him, but Leuhen was much younger. It'd be an embarrassment for the royal family if the second prince's coming-of-age party failed to live up to the debutante ball of the daughter of a count's. But unfortunately, between the fireworks, food stalls, and electrical parade, Mitsuha had already used all her hidden aces.

Craptacular… These parties are gonna be the death of me.

Oh, something just occurred to me. How come I don't get invited to debutante balls as a guest that often? I'm asked to organize them all the time—which I always turn down—but it's pretty rare for me to receive an invitation. I get invited to other kinds of parties all the time…

Curious, Mitsuha asked that question to the count.

"…Are you dense?" he said bluntly. "Debutante balls are a noble girl's biggest chance to be the star of the show and display their appeal to young men. What kind of girl would invite an obviously superior marriage prospect who'd steal all the attention? You'd only be invited to a debutante if the girl is not yet interested in getting engaged, or if forming a connection with you was a higher priority to her or her parents."

Oh, that explains it…

And I know what he really meant by "obviously superior marriage prospect." He wasn't talking about my attractiveness or, you know… The sizes of certain body parts… He was referring to the fact that I'm a viscountess, the princess of a powerful nation

who can summon divine soldiers at will, and a close friend to Zegleus's royal family. Which means I'd get invited if the girl's parents aren't ready to let her leave the nest or if they really want to form a friendship with the Lightning Archpriestess.

That's too bad. I'm a hot commodity at parties in Vanel, though.

"Anyway…" The count changed the subject.

Oh, great. He has more…

"What are you going to do to fix this?"

I-I don't know… I'm just as stumped as you are, count.

All Beatrice could do was anxiously watch the two talk. She was more than satisfied with how the party turned out, but that didn't matter right now. She was well aware that the matters they were discussing would affect the rest of her life and that it wasn't her place to interrupt a conversation between Count Bozes and the Lightning Archpriestess.

Urgh, Mitsuha groaned. *Urrrrggghhhh…*

"That's enough, dear. You've picked on Mitsuha plenty." The sympathetic words came from Lady Iris.

"I-I'm not picking on her… I'm just giving her a little scolding!" Count Bozes protested.

I'd gotten that sense myself. He wasn't doing it to take his anger out on me. He just wants me to think about my actions.

"I'm sorry…" said Mitsuha.

Once Mitsuha apologized, Count Bozes cooled off. It was time to get down to business.

"Aherm," he composed himself, "I suppose I could refuse the marriage proposals. Some of them are from dukes who have royal blood, but I have no shortage of excuses to throw at them. I could say we're too busy managing the naval harbor, or that we can't make any moves until my rank of marquis is announced, or that it'd be an insult to the Goddess to marry Beatrice off so soon after she was elevated to sainthood. Blaming everything on you could work too. I anticipate we'll receive proposals from high-ranking nobles and royals from abroad, but our king will obstruct that. It'd be foolish to hand over a saint to another country. The problem is…" he trailed off.

Oh yeah. The "Saint Beatrice" rumor.

The church, the highest-ranking noble families, and the royal family were going to fight relentlessly over her. The king and most of the nobles in this kingdom were decent, and it was unlikely anyone would be dumb enough to get violent with a saint, but that wouldn't stop *some* people from trying to drag her into their ranks out of sheer devotion to their faith.

…Namely the church, the church, and the church.

The church pestered me like you wouldn't believe. They wanted me to be their priestess, even if in name only, because they wanted to use "the Lightning Archpriestess, savior of the realm" as a trademark. Like hell I was gonna let them use my name like some celebrity endorsement!

Not that they had any bad intentions. They just wanted to increase donations and sermon attendance, sell Lightning Archpriestess merchandise, and hold special events related to me. No thank you to any of that!

Mitsuha suggested, “We have two options: either let the people continue to believe Beatrice is some kind of saint or explain to everyone that fireworks are a divine tool for entertainment in my country. Both have their pros and cons. I did warn everyone about the show ahead of time, so…”

And yet everyone still *thinks it was a miracle of the Goddess.*

Count Bozes countered, “We could try that… But aside from a few people, the capital’s populace believes that you are tied to the Goddess. In their minds, the Goddess gave you the task of warning the public because she decided to appoint your friend as a saint and celebrate it in such a bombastic manner.”

Ahh… Right. Everyone thinks I’m connected to the Goddess, so naturally they’d assume the warning was a divine message straight from the deity’s mouth. Which also means that no matter what we do or say, we won’t get in trouble because it was a “divine message.”

Mitsuha thought for a moment.

“Well then, let’s just ignore it!” she concluded.

“Huh?” Count Bozes, Lady Iris, and Beatrice choked.

“I don’t see the need to make any kind of official announcement. Everyone in the capital saw what they saw. Convincing them otherwise is gonna be a challenge, and if they

discover any lies or inconsistencies later, we'd be in big trouble. If we explain nothing, then we have no accountability. It's not our fault that people saw the fireworks and assumed it meant Beatrice was being named a saint."

The Bozeses were at a loss for words.

Explaining the fireworks would result in other nobles coming to me begging to have them for their daughters' debutante balls. This way, I could just tell them, "Go and pray to the Goddess yourself," and leave it at that.

After some thought, the three of them seemed to come around to the unusual wisdom of Mitsuha's words.

"Oh, what should I say if someone asks?" Beatrice spoke up. "What if the king or archbishop comes to me with questions? I can't just ignore them."

That was a likely scenario.

"You could just put a finger to your lips and say, 'It's a secret!' They'll probably assume the Goddess swore you to silence. No one would pry further—oh, it's the nobles and the church who are gonna probe. Definitely not the king and chancellor. You don't have to worry about them."

She'd explained the fireworks to the latter two when she sought their permission to use the palace grounds as a launching site. She informed the guards, too, of course. That meant a decent number of people in the royal palace knew the truth. It was one of the reasons Mitsuha wasn't worried about Beatrice being glorified as a saint.

It'd be tough for Beatrice to live anything close to a normal life if she was worshipped as a saint. That kind of thing can be left to commoner girls whose only goal in life is to marry a crown prince.

Beatrice snapped, "Why would the Goddess swear me to silence after celebrating my sainthood in such an extravagant fashion?! That would make the Goddess look stu—a little challenged in the intellectual area!"

She's right about that… But there's no harm in people thinking a nonexistent Goddess is stu—a little challenged in the intellectual area. No one's going to be brave enough to publicly insult her, especially not in a religious society like this one, and so soon after witnessing her miracle.

Okay, that's taken care of!

"We have one more important matter to discuss," said Count Bozes. "You'll be able to provide party entertainment for the third princess and second prince, right? Please tell me you're able to prepare something more impressive than what you did last night."

Grk… That's the biggest problem I caused myself.

"I-I have a few ideas. Flying dragons that can perform an aerial dance, or land dragons that can perform a volley of fire…"

"WHA?!" the Bozeses shrieked. All three pairs of eyes were popping out of their sockets.

Mitsuha had been racking her brain for ideas since last night. For the former, she was considering an aerobatics demonstration like the ones performed by Blue Impulse of the Japan Air Self-

Defense Force or the U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds, accompanied by a formation of combat helicopters playing Richard Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" over loudspeakers. The inability of the pilots to practice beforehand and familiarize themselves with landmarks would make that difficult, however. Mitsuha could take aerial pictures and have someone chart it; the pilots were professionals and should be able to use that to put together a decent show as long as they didn't attempt to do any difficult maneuvers.

For the latter, Mitsuha had in mind a weapon demonstration using tanks, self-propelled artillery, mortars, and guided missiles in what would basically be a miniature version of the annual Fuji Firepower Exercise in Japan. She wouldn't ask Japan, of course, but rather a country that could suit her needs. One of the militaries from the nations that attended the World-to-World Meetings might be willing to help. They'd ask for payment, but a bucket of seawater and two or three hallucigenia-looking things would be enough.

Oooh, I just thought of another killer idea. What about a night-time laser show or projection mapping against a building? Or a fog screen projection? I think it'd be doable if I used the castle's outer wall or set up machines on the spires to create a mist…

None of this has to be perfect. The people in this world have never seen laser shows or projection mapping before, so it shouldn't take much to amaze them.

That's three ideas. I hope that's enough…

“C-Can they be done at the royal palace?” Count Bozes asked.

Ah, crap… The aerobatics demonstration, the laser show, and the projection mapping will be fine, but there’s no way the dragon fire is gonna work! They’d have to be out somewhere in a barren field for that.

After a brief discussion on how to deal with the politics of Beatrice’s future, they decided to move on to other topics. The Bozeses’ payment to Mitsuha was one of them. She gave them a quote before the party, but there was always bound to be a discrepancy between the quoted budget and the actual money spent.

“Your total for the fireworks is 5 million yen… Which converts to 200 gold coins here. I’m charging an extra twenty percent to cover other miscellaneous fees and so I can make a profit, which brings your total to 240 gold coins.”

The food I gave to the pyrotechnicians wasn’t free, you know! And that’s only one of the many things I had to spend on behind the scenes!

“Huh?! That’s it?” The count leered in disbelief.

To the average person, 240 gold coins would feel like around 240,000 dollars. That was a trivial amount to a powerful noble like him considering the impact the party would have on his daughter’s future. The fireworks were by far the most expensive element; the rental mascot costumes, power generators, stalls, and the food cost next to nothing in comparison. Mitsuha even

saved them money by grocery-shopping on Earth for some of the ingredients that were considered a luxury in this world.

She also bought a cotton candy machine instead of renting one. It wasn't expensive, and it could be used on other occasions like for small events at the orphanage. Other expenses like the payment to Wolf Fang didn't amount to much.

That was from the count's—soon-to-be marquis's—point of view, not Mitsuha's, of course. She didn't want to overcharge the Bozeses, especially not for an event as important as Beatrice's debutante ball. A twenty-percent commission was modest.

That said, I had no intention of doing this for free or for a loss, and I certainly wouldn't give such a good deal to other noble families. I'm saving gold for my retirement, after all. There's no telling when I could lose my world-jumping ability, get stripped of my peerage and territory, or be forced to flee this kingdom. Money makes the world go round!

Count Bozes's payment to Mitsuha wasn't his only expense for the party; he had other things like the extravagant food and alcohol. Despite all that, it was unlikely the party cost him anywhere near 1,000 gold coins, which was equivalent to about a million dollars. Considering the power the Bozes family displayed last night to the nobility and populace of Zegleus, and the potential effects of making them believe they were connected to the Goddess, a few hundred gold coins were well worth the price.

Last night is going to be an unimaginable boon to Beatrice and the Bozes family… So I'd thank you not *to lecture me any further*

about it, Count Bozes.

And thus, while some anxiety about the future lingered, Mitsuha and the Bozeses managed to reach a solution that would let them avoid any immediate crises.

After the talk, Mitsuha grabbed her LED lights, power cables, generators, and batteries, and decided to head home. She'd warned everyone not to clean up without her, so the equipment was exactly where she'd left it. The last thing she wanted was for someone to tug on the cables and burn them out or break an LED light. Some of them were rentals, and some she was hoping to reuse.

Okay, time to clean up!

Sabine was currently around eleven and a half years old. That gave Mitsuha three and a half years until her debutante ball. Leuhen was almost ten; she still had five years.

It wasn't time to panic yet. Science would advance in the next three years, and circumstances could change. There was even a tiny chance the age of adulthood in Zegleus would be raised to eighteen by then.

Who am I kidding?! The chance of that is zero! Nada! Damn it all…

Regardless, Sabine's party is a few years away, so there's no need to worry about it now. Not thinking about it for three years and then full-on panicking a few days before the date is much more

preferable to stressing about it for years. I'll pretend this problem doesn't exist until I can't anymore.

Why do today what you can put off for future-you to tackle? Hasta la vista, baby!

Anyway, Operation Beatrice's Birthday was now complete. Regular birthday parties were held every year but they weren't nearly as extravagant as debutante balls. All Mitsuha would have to provide for those were food, alcohol, and sweets. The host could figure out entertainment on their own.

I'd break if I was expected to put in this much effort for every birthday party every year. I'd also end up having to do Alexis's and Theodore's, the three princesses', and the two princes' birthdays. That's eight a year. I would literally die!

The Bozeses may have been a count's family, but they'd run out of money fast if they threw parties on the scale of yesterday's every year. They threw many other parties throughout the year too, including birthday parties for Count Bozes and Lady Iris, anniversaries for when the first Bozes earned his title, and goodwill gatherings in their territory to show friendship to nearby nobles.

The goodwill parties didn't cost much because they didn't need entertainment, but money still had to be spent on food, dresses for the ladies, and decoration, which added up. Mitsuha wondered why you couldn't just wear the same dress again, but the etiquette was that you had a new dress tailored every time. The only ones who didn't were the less affluent barons' families.

Tailors and seamstresses must be laughing all the way to the bank. And that's exactly why I'm building a dressmaking industry in Yamano County.

Anyway, I'm done here! All that's left is to make the rest of the payments!

It was the day after Beatrice's debut. Mitsuha jumped to Yamano base number four: the gallery café Gold Coin. More specifically, she jumped inside the small storage booth attached to the back of the café that she'd built specifically for jumping purposes. She snuck out of the booth, circled around the building, and entered the café through the front door.

It was almost closing time. The sound of the door chime drew the attention of Rudina, Sylua, and a handful of customers, but they all turned away when they saw Mitsuha's harmless demeanor. The kitchen was closed for the day. Rudina was cleaning the tables with Sylua. Mitsuha gave them a little wave as she walked across the seating area and headed for the stairs.

The customers probably thought she was Rudina's or Sylua's younger sister, given the time she arrived. That would've been the most obvious guess if you didn't know the young café workers were former orphans without family, but that wasn't the kind of thing a chef or waitress normally revealed to a customer.

Oh wait, it's pretty clear from my appearance that I'm not related to them. Still, I could be a half-sister or stepsister.

Mitsuha had informed her two employees beforehand that she wanted to hold a meeting after closing. She was going to prepare dinner herself, so they knew not to make anything.

She passed by the employees' bedrooms on the second floor and entered the storage room where the spare tableware and cooking utensils were kept, as well as some food with longer shelf lives. There was also a desk and a laptop that connected to the internet. This was where Mitsuha sent her email orders to Colette's Sculptures.

The wares and food stock were pushed against the wall, making a clearing in the middle of the room. A table and three chairs were set. Mitsuha secretly jumped in during the day while the girls were working and removed some of the stock—hopefully, they wouldn't notice anything was missing—cleared some space, set the furniture, and tidied up.

I'll have to put everything back before they notice anything's missing. They never go upstairs during business hours. They always replenish the stock in this room after closing time too, so they definitely *didn't come in today. They're both insanely serious about their job.*

All right…

"Double jump!"

It's time to start preparing!

It was eight o'clock at night, closing time for Gold Coin's evening service. The girls would actually close the store a little later, as

they couldn’t kick out the customers who were still eating. They had to clean up afterwards as well.

Fortunately, while the world was full of rude customers who refused to go home after a restaurant closed, most of this café’s diners were reasonable people who never stayed more than ten minutes past eight. The regulars understood that staying late placed Rudina and Sylua in greater danger, and they clued the other customers in.

Mitsuha was grateful for that. While the girls lived at the café and didn’t have to face the dangers of walking home in the dark, nighttime was still unsafe. The later they closed the café, the greater chance they had of being targeted by thieves. Clean-up started when the last customer left, which meant they’d be alone in the building.

Every night after Rudina and Sylua finished cleaning, they closed the shutters, turned off the lights on the first floor, and activated a number of vicious security traps. There was no way in hell a burglar could pass through all the traps on the first floor and the staircase in the darkness and reach the girls on the second floor.

There was a police station nearby—which was why Mitsuha chose this location in the first place—but that didn’t remove all danger. There was a possibility that the café may have been guarded by government officers, but it wasn’t like Mitsuha specifically requested for additional security. There may not have

been any at all. It'd be idiotic to count on that assumption. At least they were blessed with kind regular customers.

It might be a good idea to start doing things like customer appreciation days, coupons, and point cards. Inviting customers to café anniversary parties or anything exclusive like that would be a bad idea, though. Showing favoritism to some customers over others is suicide for a business.

Customers who get special treatment tend to get cocky and start acting like they own the place. They might even start letting themselves in behind the counter as if they were staff and try to help out or order around other customers. That obviously isn't fun for anyone else.

Giving preference to certain customers seems like an especially *bad idea when the employees are two young girls. I don't want anyone getting any ideas or doing something inappropriate to them.*

Yeah… There are certain lines you just can't let customers cross.

Mitsuha had instructed Rudina and Sylua to come upstairs once they were done cleaning. The café was closed tomorrow, so they didn't have to do any prepping. It wouldn't be much longer before they came up.

Knock, knock.

It was Rudina and Sylua.

"Come in!"

The door creaked as Rudina turned the doorknob and stepped into the room. Sylua followed behind her.

Pop! Pop! Pop!

“Ahh!” Rudina yelped and froze at the sound of Mitsuha’s party poppers. Sylua instinctively reached under her skirt but the second she saw it was just her boss, she slowly pulled her hand back out. Nothing was in her palm.

Wait. Waitwaitwaitwaitwaitwait! What did she just…?! Yeah, she did… She reached into her skirt…to pull something *out.*

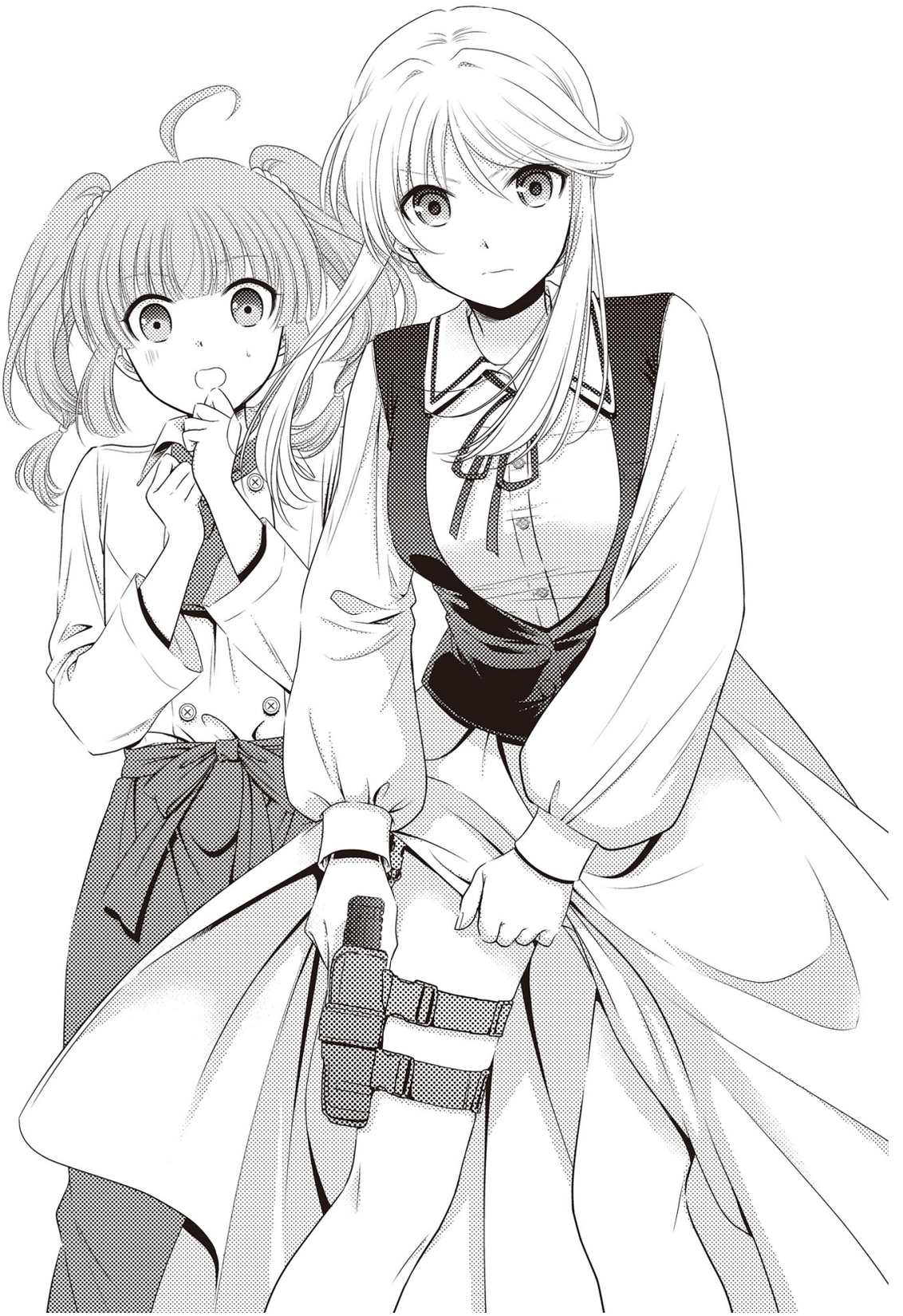
Right hand under the skirt…

That’s the same place I keep my Walther PPS. And did she just position herself so Rudina comes right between us…?

Mitsuha shivered.

“U-Umm, w-w-well, i-it’s your b-b-b-birthday, Sylua! I-I thought it’d be nice to celebrate…” Being their employer, Mitsuha had access to the girls’ personal information, including their birthdays.

Technically, their real birthdays were unknown. It was apparently common for orphans to choose either the day they entered the orphanage or the day they were adopted as their birthdays. Their actual ages were usually unknown too, but a small child’s age could be guessed with reasonable accuracy, so they were at most off by a year from the age they believed they were.



Anyway, as far as Gold Coin was concerned, today was Sylua's eighteenth birthday.

…Huh? Sylua's not moving…

"…Birthday?" Sylua stared, dumbfounded.

It was rare to see her so flustered. In fact, this expression was a first for Mitsuha.

What's going on? Don't tell me she's never heard of birthdays. She's already had seventeen of them. Well, eighteen now…

"Birthday…" Sylua repeated.

Her eyes fell on the table. It was set with an assortment of food, a cake, and one-liter juice cartons. Mitsuha decided to splurge on the two-dollar cartons instead of the dollar drinks she usually got.

Uh, is she okay?

After another long silence, Rudina took Sylua by the hand and led her to one of the seats at the table. She sat down and stared blankly as if her soul had left her body.

That's concerning. What the heck is happening…

"So you're saying you've never had a birthday party before?" probed Mitsuha. "Or been invited to one? And you always thought that birthday parties were something you'd never see in your lifetime? Pretty much a dream as far-fetched as receiving an invitation to a royal ball?"

Sylua, who still seemed a bit out of it, nodded.

"What about you, Rudina?"

“I have… At the orphanage. They’d host a small party for all the kids who share the same birth month. They also sang for us and gave us little gifts like handmade dolls and things… Oh, and one extra dish for dinner.”

Yeah, birthdays do seem like something an orphanage wouldn’t want to miss entirely. It’s one of the few constants the kids have to look forward to. I’m definitely going to give them proper celebrations here at Gold Coin.

People in this country are considered adults at fifteen, but I guess that doesn’t matter.

Mitsuha brought presents too. She wanted Sylua to enjoy the day.

…As soon as the birthday girl pulls herself together.

Sylua’s turning eighteen, but I’m the oldest here at nineteen. Anyone would think that I’m the youngest, though.

Why would people think that, you ask? Shut up! You know very well why!

Chapter 84:
Scholar

Sylua's first ever birthday party ended up being a fun time once she returned to her senses—well, almost. She was still short-circuiting a bit. The total cost of the party was one millionth of Adelaide's and Beatrice's birthday party—not including presents—but she was probably just as happy.

How do I know that? Because that *stone-faced Sylua actually showed some emotion! Excitement, joy, and even gratitude.*

Mitsuha left the party but Rudina and Sylua kept celebrating; they lived there and didn't have work the next day. It was important for a boss to give their employees time to relax and have fun on their own.

I didn't read all those office worker novels for nothing. Or the office lady manga.

Anyway, I have an appointment with someone tomorrow and should hit the hay. I wonder if I should sleep at my Japanese house tonight… Sabine might be waiting to ambush me at the general store, and I know I won't get any sleep if she's there. My house is safer.

Giving Sabine a key might've been a mistake…

Mitsuha was in a private booth of an upscale café on Earth. Across from her sat an elderly man whom she had invited for tea.

They met up at a different location first—in the capital of the country that she always relied on for aerial reconnaissance—and then jumped to the café that was in another country. This way, she wouldn't have to worry about hidden listening devices or spies disguised as employees. Jumping to a different country almost certainly shook off anyone who may have been tailing them too.

It'd be terrifying if they did *manage to follow us!*

The old man was one of the scholars on the reconnaissance flight. He already knew about her world-jumping ability so there was no need to hide it. They were in a country with a different official language from his, which meant none of the employees or customers would be able to understand their conversation—unless one of them happened to be fluent in a language that was being spoken halfway across the world.

"Thank you very much for taking the time to meet with me today, sir," said Mitsuha.

As a person who could jump to any point on Earth instantaneously, she truly was grateful to anyone who set aside time and money to see her. Travel always bore the risk of getting in an accident, and this renowned senior academic had limited time to spare. It meant a lot that he accepted her invitation.

"No, I should be thanking you," he replied. "An exclusive meeting with Her Royal Highness and Viscountess Nanoha—the older sister of a king from another world, she who set Earth's academic world ablaze. What an immeasurable honor. How

fortunate I am to be here… So let's waste no time on trivial pleasantries!"

"Trivial," huh? He's much older and highly intellectual, but he doesn't seem very interested in manners and formality. Well, his words were polite. I guess he's just so passionate about his research that he doesn't care much for those things. The more time we waste on small talk, the less time he'd have for questions. He wants to get to the meat of our conversation as quickly as possible.

Not that I'm offended. That's probably just how academics are. And this goes to show that no matter how old a man gets, he's a boy at heart. I don't think he has any ill will. He's not belittling me as if I'm a woman or a child. He seems like just another boy who's absorbed in pursuing his dreams.

"Very well," said Mitsuha. "I'll get right to it. In the interest of saving time and clarity, I'd like to avoid any overly polite speech or beating around the bush. I'd prefer to speak frankly, if that's okay with you."

"That's music to my ears! May I start by asking why you wanted to meet with me?"

"Yes, certainly."

I know I said we should speak frankly, but I don't want to be rude. I value respecting elders. That was mostly just a safety measure in case I slip up and say something impudent. I don't exactly have a ton of experience speaking to famous academics. He probably only ever interacts with subordinates, disciples, and students who are way below him on the totem pole, so I was afraid

I might offend him given my appearance, age, and general lack of class.

Well, it's unlikely any slip of the tongue will send him into a blind rage considering our respective positions, but I don't want to make him uncomfortable. There's no going wrong with trying to build a friendly relationship.

Anyway, it's time we get gabbing!

"Hmm, that's a hard question…" The scholar furrowed his brow.

Mitsuha had just asked him how much the animals, plants, and minerals she'd been handing out were worth. She wanted to know their financial, academic, and political value.

The man continued, "I can't even begin to imagine what might be discovered from the samples we currently have. They might wield something as consequential as a new material, drug, or genome. If they were to be put up for auction, bidders would compete to no end until they're literally priceless. Researchers in the relevant fields wouldn't hesitate to kill a few dozen people to get their hands on just one piece of a sample."

"Good lord!" Mitsuha cried out. *Oh yeah, I remember Lady Iris telling me something similar about what would happen if I put the pearl necklace up for auction.*

"There's no guarantee the samples will make anyone money immediately, of course, but significant long-term profits are highly likely. Their academic value is enormous, and gaining

exclusive rights to any one sample would make that person very powerful indeed.

“Imagine what would happen if someone were to make a groundbreaking discovery. Even if they honor your rule not to monopolize their findings, just being at the forefront of the research will give them a massive lead over everyone else and allow them to get patents and other things that would lead to untold riches.

“Many discoveries have already been made from the dragon samples—the most-studied object out of all your gifts. Do you have any idea how much a specimen sample from another world would be worth if a country had exclusive rights to it, unlike the dragon parts that were shared among various countries?”

Ahh… I might’ve been handing out samples a bit too lavishly. At least I’ve only been offering one per request rather than one per flight.

“As an aside, I recall you only let the air force and navy take pictures in the other world. Meanwhile, you let the crew members of the army helicopter take home valuable animal, plant, mineral, and soil samples, and you even gave them the honor of setting foot there. They received medals for that accomplishment when they got home. Would you mind giving the air force and navy a similar experience so they don’t feel left out?”

Are you serious… I mean, I guess it is unfair for me to treat one better than the other—hey, wait a second!

“*Soil* samples? I didn’t approve of any—”

“Did you not notice?” he said. “Everyone was purposely falling and getting their feet caught in soft dirt and mud.

“Ah…”

AAAAH! I’ve been had! I checked them for any concealed plant or mineral samples—and made sure to exclude them from the world-jump to Earth—but I didn’t think about the dirt and mud on their clothes! I removed the insects, bacteria, and viruses, but I wasn’t about to give them a full cleaning service…

Argh, I’m so mad!

The academic senior chuckled as he watched Mitsuha fume.

This was the man Mitsuha had secretly made connections with during the helicopter reconnaissance. She invited him for tea to find out the precise value of the samples she’d been giving out. She didn’t want to put gold or gems from the other world into circulation on Earth. The samples were her precious negotiating chips, and she could end up wasting them if she didn’t understand their market demand. Their monetary worth could drop dramatically if she brought over too many.

She wanted to avoid that but without more information, she couldn’t possibly determine how much of which samples she could bring over before their value started to depreciate. While she trusted the Wolf Fang mercenaries, they weren’t scholars, merchants, or politicians. They wouldn’t have the faintest idea how to answer her questions. They sold the dragon parts without issue because it was a seller’s market and they could name their

own prices, but they probably had no idea what their worth was in the academic, economic, or political worlds.

Besides, Wolf Fang was only involved in the dragon-slaying. Mitsuha was the one handing out everything else as gifts in exchange for favors or as parts of deals, so she didn't know how much they would've actually sold for.

What's that? Why didn't I ask the diplomat from the World-to-World Meetings or someone from a major company?

Haha… As if I could trust them. They think I'm a naïve girl who knows nothing about this world. That's why I invited this man here to exchange information.

…Huh? Now you're asking if I can trust him? Think about it. If he lied to me and I found out, it'd be a problem for him. I'd never ask for his country's help or give them samples from the other world again, and the same goes for meetings with him. The government, the military, and even his colleagues would have to hear about the sudden change of circumstances from me. Cutting them off without saying a word would be wrong.

He's a smart man, as an academic should be. He definitely knows what I'll do if he causes me trouble, and because I know he knows, I can trust what he tells me.

To an extent, anyway. I'm not dumb enough to believe every word he says.

"So, is it my turn?" the old man asked.

"Oh, yes."

Give and take is important. I need to be willing to answer his questions too. That's the only way to have an equal exchange of information.

"Hmm… So you're saying that your world's natural environment bears a striking resemblance to Earth's, but is not exactly the same…" the academic pondered.

He'd been to the other world and landed with the crew of the helicopter, so he knew that its gravity, atmospheric composition, and solar spectrum were nearly identical to Earth's. He also knew that the shapes of the continents were different from those on Earth.

It was natural to want to hypothesize after seeing so many near-identical animals and plants. The similarities were staggering, but he saw them with his own eyes, and it was his nature as a scholar—his raison d'être, even—to craft theories that explained them.

Yeah, it's hard to believe Earth and the other world aren't related, given how closely they resemble each other. I sure as hell can't explain why, though.

"That's right," nodded Mitsuha. "But if a renowned academic like yourself from a world far more scientifically advanced than mine can't explain it, then I certainly couldn't. The difference in the continents' shapes make me lean toward it being a parallel world. If it really is a parallel world, then the branch point must've been a very long time ago."

The only way it could be is if it diverged from Earth long before the continents settled into their current forms, and the point of divergence was an event major enough to cause that great a difference. But if that actually happened, then how do you explain the nearly identical wildlife? Could the world have diverged that long ago and still ended up with so many similar species? Parallel evolution can only go so far.

"Hurmm…" the man heaved. "There must've been a significant event in the relatively recent past that disrupted the worlds on a continental scale…"

In this case, "relatively recent past" meant within the last few hundred thousand years.

You call that recent?! Anyway, there's no use thinking about that stuff. We have no way to confirm any theories. It'd be a different story if we dug up the Statue of Liberty or something from Earth on a sandy beach. But until then, might as well shelve that topic…

The old man decided to change the subject. "Anyway, what is the species status in your world of those creatures that resemble the anomalocaris and hallucigenia?"

Oh, he's talking about the thank-you gifts I gave after the last reconnaissance mission.

Mitsuha answered, "Those things are everywhere. Very little of their bodies are edible and they're not caught in big hauls, so no one makes a living off fishing them exclusively. But if someone happened to catch one, they'll eat it."

“P-People eat them?!”

That probably sounds as blasphemous to him as fishing for coelacanth on Earth to use them for sashimi or sushi. Or cooking a steak out of dragon meat. But anomalocaris and hallucigenia are about as common as prawns are on Earth.

You might as well eat one if you catch it. Why pass up a valuable source of protein?

Mitsuha and the scholar spent a while longer exchanging their thoughts.

“I don’t even know how many years it’s been since I’ve done something that felt so worthwhile… This has truly been a pleasure. Thank you,” the scholar said.

“It was nothing. Thank you for sharing as much as you did. It was very helpful. But…was it okay for you to tell me all that? Wouldn’t it go against your own nation’s interest? Would you get in trouble for not telling your country’s leaders that you met with me today and about the conversation we had?”

Mitsuha preferred he didn’t share the things she told him, but didn’t mind if he ended up doing so. He had a career and was in a delicate position, and she’d feel awful if he was branded a traitor because he refused to disclose the details of their meeting. If a group of intelligence officers in black suits interrogated him, she’d totally understand him spilling the beans.

“Oh, don’t worry about that. I’m not a public servant. I’m just a scholar who was hired to assist with the aerial survey and the investigation of the samples. No one has the right to criticize me

for who I meet with in my free time or what I choose to research. I have no obligation to report to anyone."

That makes sense. But still…

"I didn't tell you anything that would inconvenience me if you did share it. If you feel the need, you can chirp away," Mitsuha said.

"'Chirp'…? You have the most interesting turns of phrase."

Huh? Did the translator in my brain translate that too literally? Or too loosely? I hope I didn't offend him by saying something stupid…

"That may be so," he continued, "but if I report everything you tell me, you'll either choose not to see me again or hold back the next time we talk. If there's even the smallest chance of that, I am absolutely not going to 'chirp'! Hah!"

Yeah, that's fair… He's an elderly man with limited time left to devote to his studies. He's got his priorities in the right place.

Chapter 85:
The Rise and Fall of the Empire

Mitsuha gave the senior scholar one of her email addresses that the Wolf Fang captain managed on her behalf—not the one she gave to the World-to-World Meeting attendees, but the one she shared only with important people so their emails wouldn't get buried by all the spam. This way, the scholar would be able to reach out to her if he needed to. A few others knew the email address like the person who endorsed her when she set up a Swiss bank account and the liaison of the country where Gold Coin was located.

If the scholar's message was urgent, the captain would notify Mitsuha on her smartphone, which he'd set up under his name. She'd see the message as soon as she was back on Earth.

I'm constantly jumping back to Earth. In fact, every time I use the bathroom or take a bath. I do have a toilet at Mitsuha's General Store, but uh…it's not exactly my home in Japan.

So yeah, I always carry two smartphones with me when I'm on Earth: one for "Mitsuha Yamano, the Japanese citizen" and one I'm borrowing from the captain. That includes when I just go to my house to use the bathroom.

If I didn't make a habit of it, I'd probably go for days without checking my notifications. People need a routine, and I definitely don't trust myself!

“Mitsuha, we have a problem!”

As usual, Sabine was waiting at the general store. She had a key now, so Mitsuha found her on the third floor playing games instead of waiting in front of the shop. And as usual, Chii and Leuhen were there too.

What is this, a daycare center?!

But wait… Sabine looks like she’s in serious mode. Seems like she actually has something important to tell me and was only playing games to pass the time until I got here.

“What’s the level?” Mitsuha asked.

“C-6.”

“Wow… Really?”

Asking for the “level” of a problem was a way of testing Sabine. The young princess knew not to mess around when her friend mentioned the word. This was a symbol of trust between them.

Level C meant that the matter affected human lives on a nationwide level, but not their kingdom’s. The number represented urgency. Six meant that nothing was going to happen within the next few days, so there was no need to panic yet. This was also a foreign problem, so it wasn’t something they could step in to interfere with.

Level B denoted that the problem concerned their own kingdom, while Level A meant it concerned their kingdom and other surrounding countries or potentially the entire continent. Level S indicated that the problem posed an existential threat to

humanity, at which point there was nothing Mitsuha could—or was willing—to do.

The problem at hand concerned another country but could escalate and affect their own land eventually—like an invasion from a powerful nation, a monster stampede, or an epidemic.

“Fill me in!” Mitsuha demanded, engaging serious mode as well.

Meanwhile, Chii and Leuhen were glued to the game and munching on candy.

Are you two sure you don’t wanna show a little *more decorum? You’re both ahead of Sabine in the line of succession!*

“Suspicious activities have been detected in the empire,” the third princess said. “They’re strengthening inspections along the border and at fortified cities, moving around troops, and transporting food and military supplies.”

Yep, that sounds like a typical invasion prep.

The empire Sabine was referring to was the same one that invaded their kingdom with three ancient dragons in tow: the Aldar Empire.

“Hold on,” Mitsuha cut in, “Didn’t they just suffer a heavy blow from their failed attempt to invade us? They should still be busy licking their wounds. They need to rebuild their army, replenish their lost weapons, stock up on new provisions, raise money to make up for their immense losses, hire new officers and recruits, regain the trust of their people—”

“Isn’t that exactly why they’re closing in?” countered Sabine, “With one major victory, they could fix all those problems at once. Only the truly desperate would take such high risks; they have no other choice.”

“Ah…”

That made sense. No one in a dominant position would bet on an all-or-nothing gamble that had little chance of success.

“And you’re saying that this time, their target is someone else…” Mitsuha suggested.

The empire wouldn’t be dumb enough to attack Zegleus again after how poorly the last attempt went. Aldar staged that invasion fully prepared with monsters and ancient dragons and yet they were still devastated. There was no way they had fully recovered from it.

To make matters worse for them, Zegleus and the other countries had raised their defenses since. Each country had likely sent spies to pose as regular citizens of the empire for frequent updates.

Unlike on modern-day Earth, it was utterly impossible in this world to pull off a surprise attack when your country was under surveillance. There was no hiding the movement of thousands of soldiers or the gathering and transporting of military supplies. Mobilizing an army took time, too.

“Who’s their target? You said Level C-6, so it must be another country.”

“Judging from the movement of resources and soldiers, it’s probably the Kingdom of Dalisson,” Sabine answered.

“Dalisson?” *That name sounds familiar.* “Dalisson, Dalisson… Where’s that?”

“It’s our neighbor! It was literally the first country we went to on our trip!”

“Huh—oh, you mean where Princess Kak-Kak-Kak lives!”

I totally forgot the name of that country…

“The king is ill, and the crown prince is still a little boy. Remia is currently in control as the princess regent. She’s lower in the line of succession, so I can see why the empire would think Dalisson is politically unstable.”

Sabine was right about that. At first glance, the situation seemed like a perfect opportunity for a disloyal subject to attempt to elevate the young prince for their own interest. But in truth…

“…Dalisson’s been there, done that!” Mitsuha and Sabine quipped in unison.

That matter had been nipped in the bud.

Word about the failed rebellion had surely spread throughout the continent by now, but the empire may have assumed that more ploys were going to spring up. They likely still believed the kingdom was in tatters because of the dismissal of so many important political and military leaders, and deemed that the nobility wouldn’t be loyal to Princess Remia. The other nations, however, didn’t know about the promise Mitsuha and the delegation made to the princess privately, and how it would

almost certainly prevent anyone else in the nobility or military from trying to betray her.

Princess Remia demonstrated her boldness as royalty. The Kingdom of Zegleus—and its king personally—pledged their support for her. In addition, Mitsuha promised as a friend to keep her safe.

Loyalty toward Princess Remia was actually pretty high among the populace, the nobility, and the military right now. The Aldar Empire, on the other hand, was on the verge of collapse.

I guess that's why they're plotting this reckless invasion…

The empire's army was in shambles after the brutal one-sided defeat. The wyvern troops and monster battalion they worked so hard to develop were wiped out. Their people must've been livid and despondent. Many noble officers who participated in the war seeking glory ended up dying in battle or ruining their reputation by getting captured as prisoners of war. The imperial government was forced to bail them out with massive ransom payments. It was a huge blow to the economy. As the final nail in the coffin, they were denied entry into the Great Alliance, which united most of the continent under a military pact.

The sole purpose of the Great Alliance was to fight off invasion from cross-continental enemies. The members would work together by sharing knowledge of their weapons development and conducting joint military drills, but the alliance would not interfere with disputes within the continent. They'd

have to form their own pacts for that. As such, being left out of the pact didn't change anything for the empire.

…At least not officially. In reality, no one would be dumb enough to believe that, least of all politicians. The members of the alliance were collaborating on developing revolutionary new weapons. They were forming amicable ties to support each other in times of need. Most of the influential countries on the continent were a part of the alliance, and being excluded from it meant the empire was going to be left behind with their old, outdated arms.

To make matters worse, their failed invasion got them labeled as both a dangerous country that couldn't be trusted and as a weak idiotic country that couldn't even pull off a surprise invasion attack.

Mitsuha pointed out, "Their country is falling apart, their government is unstable, they're strapped for cash, and they've completely lost the trust of their people. They really do have no choice but to go for broke, huh… It's easy to ridicule them as fools, but I can sympathize. They're backed into a corner and forced to take a gamble they know is stupid."

Sabine nodded in agreement.

The empire wasn't truly out of other options. For instance, they could've groveled to every member of the alliance and signed treaties that were advantageous to them. But Aldar's very foundation was built on oppressive diplomacy backed by their great military strength. Humbling themselves to other countries

would completely undermine that. The leaders, nobles, and military personnel took pride in the empire's strength, and would never tolerate such an act.

Sucks, but that's just how the world works.

"What should we do, Mitsuha?"

"Hell if I know…"

There was nothing she could do. Aldar and Dalisson were foreign countries. If the target was Zegleus, Mitsuha would do all she could (without endangering herself) as a noble to protect those dear to her. But she had no reason or need to get involved in a foreign dispute.

Dalisson and Zegleus were on amicable terms, but they didn't have anything like the Security Treaty in Japan that would compel one side to fight for the other in the event of a war. Also, Mitsuha's promise to Princess Remia was only that she'd rescue her friend if she was in physical danger. She said nothing about aiding her country in a war. The promise was meant to be nothing more than an intimidation tactic against domestic subversives.

When I said I would protect her from "invaders from another country or the demon king's army" and whatnot, I literally meant I would protect only her, *not her country or her citizens. It's a promise between the two of us as individuals. Not an international agreement.*

The delegation's promise won't save Dalisson either. It only states that our kingdom would prioritize Dalisson when sharing

new military equipment, not that we would fight for them. I could promise Princess Remia personal security all I want, but I can't get involved in a foreign war without permission from my king.

Using my position as the Goddess's envoy and the Lightning Archpriestess to rescue one person won't cause any problems, but interfering with foreign conflict will. I'm a noble of Zegleus, after all… So the most I can do is jump to Princess Remia when the enemy soldiers arrive at her doorstep and whisk her away to wherever she wants to seek asylum. Oh, I'd be willing to take the young prince and some retainers, too.

In any case, I might as well meet with the king about this…

"So yeah, that's why I wanted to speak to you."

Mitsuha was at Sabine's house, also known as the royal palace. She was talking to the king privately.

"It's not like I can do anything, but I just wanted to get a grasp of the situation," she said.

The king looked confused by Mitsuha's words. *I don't think I said anything weird…*

She elaborated, "I know this conflict doesn't involve our kingdom, but Princess Kak-Kak-Kak's country is a member of the Great Alliance. Letting it get occupied or annexed by an enemy nation could be bad for the alliance, right? And if Dalisson goes down, another country could be targeted next."

"Princess Kak-Kak-Kak?" The king was perplexed. "What's that? Some kind of mythological monster?"

Whoops, that's the nickname I use with Sabine…

"Um, I meant Princess Remia."

"You are not to call her that in front of anyone else. Do you understand me? Do *not.* I mean it!"

"…Don't worry, I know…"

"Why did you pause?! Do you think I'm kidding?"

Oh, drop it already…

"Anyway," the king said, "don't do anything without my express permission, Mitsuha. If you get any ideas, talk to me first. Got it?!"

"Yes, of course that's the plan—oh, but in the event of an emergency, I will rescue Princess Ka—I mean, Princess Remia using Traversal without your consent."

"Yes, I see why that would be necessary. Feel free to save the prince, the chancellor, and their retainers as well."

That would give Princess Remia enough to establish a government in exile. Leaving her brother behind would be like handing the legitimate heir to the throne on a silver platter, so the siblings needed to escape as a set. Saving Princess Remia alone wouldn't be pointless—it would save her life—but from the standpoint of her country's future and the happiness of her people, it would accomplish nothing.

I can't wipe out the imperial army by myself. Well, technically I could. It'd be a cinch if I hired Wolf Fang again or dropped giant boulders from the sky onto the enemy's stronghold… But while I'm

willing to kill for self-defense, I don't like going out of my way to take others' lives. I'm not a homicidal maniac.

I'll only kill if there's no other option to protect myself or those dear to me.

"Mitsuha!" Sabine burst into the room. "Remia just called!"

Because of the delicate nature of the topic, only the king and the chancellor were present in the room. The crown prince, first princess, and Sabine were told that the meeting was of no particular importance—the three were merely catching up on each other's lives—and that their presence wasn't required.

Despite that, Sabine barged into the king's office without knocking. If any of her siblings had done that, they would've been harshly scolded. Sabine, however, existed outside the law.

Is the king too soft on her? Not that I'm one to talk…

Regardless, it seemed like Sabine had interrupted the conversation with appropriately urgent news. No one could fault her for that.

"It's not time for one of her scheduled calls, is it?" Mitsuha asked.

Remia had an arrangement with Sabine to call on the radio at the same time of day, once every three days. This one wasn't the right day or time for that.

"It's not," Sabine shook her head. "I know you're here in the capital, but I've been leaving the radio switch on for the past few days just to be safe. I thought Remia might try to contact us outside of the usual time…"



And this is exactly why Sabine is Sabine. She knows precisely what to do at the right time, and she figures it out all on her own. She's as subtle as a demon, yet bold as an angel…

Sabine referred to Princess Remia without her title. That wasn't exactly appropriate, being younger, having been a princess for a shorter amount of time—which came hand in hand with age—and being lower in her respective line of succession, but Zegleus was the more powerful country, and Sabine and Princess Remia were friends. No one was going to complain about it and risk upsetting the two girls. They both had a glare that could kill.

"What did she say?"

"She said, 'We've detected foreboding signs in the empire. Mitsuha, start preparing to fulfill your promise.'"

"WHAT THE HELL?! I only promised to protect her and her alone—and that was mostly to quell any rebel forces in her kingdom! She knows that, right? I mean, I'll keep my word…but it clearly sounds like she expects something other than fleeing solo."

"Obviously," said Sabine. "She's interpreting your promise as broadly as possible and demanding that you fight for them. I'd do the same if I were in her shoes. She's gathering as much foreign support as possible to save as many lives and prevent as much damage as she can. If you agree to help, she'll gain fighting strength without having to go through cumbersome negotiations or placing her kingdom in massive debt. There's also the benefit

of you being the Goddess's envoy, which would put her on the side of justice.

"In addition, there's the chance of you summoning the divine soldiers who annihilated the imperial army and their ancient dragons. She's in no position to worry about appearances; of course she's going to grasp at any straws and never let go," Sabine finished off with a shrug.

Damn it! Princess Kak-Kak-Kak got me good!

"What should I do…?" Mitsuha looked despondently at the king.

"This is all because you made a promise like that…"

Oh, come on! Count Kolbmane told me to say something that would strengthen Princess Remia's position! It was all his idea! I was just following orders!

If Zegleus had already learned of the empire's intentions, then Princess Remia's kingdom had surely known for some time. The level of military technology on this continent made it impossible to conceal the mobilization of a large army. The spies in the empire would've picked up on the signs. There were moles among the military and nobility as well.

Princess Remia waited to ask for help until she had proof that the empire was going to invade her kingdom and calculated the best way to utilize Mitsuha's promise. She didn't mention this matter at all during her last scheduled call, although she almost certainly had most of the information by then.

Princess Kak-Kak-Kak's more cunning than I give her credit for. There's a reason those traitors wanted to get rid of her…

I doubt she bears any ill will toward me or our kingdom. Her people are her top priority, the same way my people are to me. Although unlike me, her citizens' lives might even be more important to her than her own. She wouldn't think twice about getting down on her knees and begging or risking raising ire from other countries for the safety of her citizens. People like her are unpredictable and much trickier to deal with than people who prioritize their own pride and money.

"I caught the attention of the wrong person, didn't I…" Mitsuha slumped her shoulders.

The king said to her coldly, "It's because you're naïve. You did this to yourself."

"Hey, that's not fair! I was just following orders as a part of my role! This is a workplace issue. As my boss, you have a responsibility to help me!"

I'm not gonna let him pin all the blame on me, damn it!

Mitsuha argued, "You're the one who ordered the delegation leader to persuade me into saying something that would strengthen Princess Remia's position, right? My promise to her was a result of *your* orders. Shouldn't the responsibility fall on you, then?"

"Grk…"

Mwahaha! I read a lot of "revenge of the office worker" novels when I was considering getting a job right out of high school. I

know exactly what to do when your boss tries to pin the blame on you!

I have to be careful not to let him reverse UNO-*card me, though.*

"Technically, I'm the one who made the promise to Princess Remia," admitted Mitsuha. "I offered it not as Viscountess Mitsuha von Yamano, but as 'Mitsuha' the ordinary girl and made it clear it was a personal promise that had nothing to do with our countries. I don't plan on involving you or the military. I'm just going to give what little help I can manage myself. And if Princess Remia wishes it, I'll jump her, her brother, her chancellor, and her retainers here with Traversal. But are you fine with taking in not just refugees, but a government in exile?"

The king only took a few seconds before answering:

"Yes. Should the need arise, I would house a government in exile… But make sure you get the princess *and* the prince."

That was the only right answer. If the empire secured Dalisson's legitimate heir to the throne, they could kill the king and use the young prince to set up a puppet regime. And with that, they could either dispatch soldiers "under the new king's orders" to put down the rebels under the guise of keeping the peace or strong-arm Dalisson into an alliance. It'd only be a matter of time before Dalisson was annexed into the empire. The empire would then move on to target other countries.

On the contrary, if both the princess and the prince were secured, they could blazon abroad to neighboring countries that

they were trying to reclaim their homeland and raise troops. The presence of both royal siblings would put justice firmly on their side and win the support of Dalisson's populace.

It was hard to say what would happen after the imperial army was driven out of Dalisson. Would the siblings rebuild the government together? Would Zegleus and the neighboring countries use Dalisson's great debt to them to interfere with their politics and station their own troops in the name of preventing another invasion from the empire?

I don't really understand any of that political stuff, nor do I care. Either way, a better life would await the Dalissonians than living under imperial rule, at least.

There was one more thing Mitsuha needed the king's approval for.

"Your Majesty, I have one more request. I ask this not just as 'Mitsuha,' but also as 'Viscountess Mitsuha von Yamano.' I would like your permission to assist the Kingdom of Dalisson."

Having that approval from the king would allow her to boldly interfere in the situation without having to make excuses later. If an emergency were to arise, she'd be able to act freely as Mitsuha Yamano, the Lightning Archpriestess, and as Viscountess Mitsuha von Yamano of Zegleus.

"Hmm? Oh, I guess I don't mind…"

Sweet, he just gave me permission to carry out a mission without any opposition… Can I stop rhyming?!

He probably thinks I'm gonna summon my divine soldiers again, but I only did that last time out of necessity because the invading army was at our doorstep. This time, I have time to prepare. I'd rather world-jump with a smaller force…or maybe use a high-speed vessel.

He obviously knows my provincial army is too feeble to make any difference in combat. Anyone could see that. He's likely assuming that I want to fight as a noble of this kingdom to prove that I've cast off my previous identity as the princess of a foreign nation.

Which he wouldn't be completely wrong about.

"Hey captain, can you fly a helicopter?"

"The hell d'ya have in mind this time…" the Wolf Fang captain groaned. "We ain't got choppers. None of us can fly one, and takin' care of 'em is a damn chore. Those things're a money pit, and it wouldn't be long before someone crashed it and drained our account. Only militaries, filthy rich groups, and lucky bastards with connections to a helicopter company have access to 'em.

"Besides, choppers are only used in large-scale warfare. That's the governmental army's job. If an independent group like us forked out the cash for a chopper, all the dangerous jobs would be forced onto us until we burn out. That just ain't worth it… But, uh… D'ya need one?"

"Yeah…"

“Fine, I’ll find ya one. But I’ll hafta ask another mercenary group. Is that okay?”

“Yes, that’s great!”

Asking another mercenary group would mean she’d have to work her way from the beginning to build trust and negotiate payment. Mitsuha trusted the Wolf Fang captain’s connections. She was sure he’d pick a reputable gang.

“Just so ya know, an attack helicopter made for combat ain’t happenin’. Those cost a goddamn fortune. The best they’ll be able to do is a transport helicopter loaded with weapons. Is that okay?”

Aww man, I guess that means no Apache or Cobra. So it’ll be a transport or utility helicopter equipped with door guns and guys with assault rifles. Virtually an improvised fighting chopper as opposed to an attack chopper designed specifically for combat. The enemy won’t have SAMs or anti-aircraft autocannons, though, so that won’t matter. It’ll just have to stay out of their bow-and-arrow range.

An improvised fighting helicopter was similar to a “technical,” which was basically a regular pickup truck loaded with heavy machine guns, autocannons, and recoilless rifles. Its biggest flaw was its paper-thin armor, but helicopters were fragile anyway, and that didn’t matter if the enemy couldn’t hit it.

“I’d also like a bunch of squad automatic weapons, preferably ones where you can swap the barrel quickly—something that could handle long hours of rapid firing. I

want them in belts, of course. Make them 5.56mm. Oh, and some mortars too, and plenty of ammo for all those weapons," Mitsuha said. *Oh, and just in case…* "I also want about three portable surface-to-air missiles."

The captain stared at Mitsuha in dumbfounded silence.

The last request was in case the helicopter crew betrayed her. It was best to be wary of people you didn't know on a dangerous mission like this. The last thing she wanted was the mercenaries getting any ideas from being in an isekai scenario—*Overpowered in Another World with a Chopper Full of Modern Weapons.*

If a disaster like that happened, Mitsuha could jump them into the ocean on Earth, but not if they took her out with a headshot first. She needed to give the Wolf Fang guys a way to subdue them without her. It might've been an unlikely scenario, but it didn't hurt to be prepared.

The helicopter crew wouldn't survive long with their limited personnel and weaponry, but they could still cause a lot of damage in a small amount of time, and it'd be my fault. It's the Yamano way to take as many precautions as possible. That won't change whether I'm in Japan or in another world.

"So is this another war?" the captain asked.

"Yep."

Had she requested one non-combat helicopter, he could've assumed it was for any special mission. But she also asked for guns and mortars, making it obvious she was preparing for a major battle.

“Sweet. All fifty-nine members of Wolf Fang are at yer disposal! We can move out at any time!”

The captain’s getting hyped. I hate to burst his bubble, but…

“Uh, I actually only need about six Wolf Fang members in addition to the helicopter crew.”

“What…?”

“I said I only need six people…”

“What?”

“Six. People.”

“WHAAAAAT?!”

“I only asked for all those SAWs in case you don’t have time to change a barrel. I’m overpreparing just to be safe. You might not even use them…”

“No-o-o-o-o-o!”

The captain spent a while badgering Mitsuha about her staffing limit, but she didn’t budge. She eventually got him to move on and discuss the details like how much ammo they should bring. After that, he quickly went back to pestering her to take more men, which Mitsuha ignored.

“My guys’re gonna riot! There’ll be bloodshed when they fight over the spots,” he complained.

Not my problem…

He suggested using Wolf Fang members for the helicopter crew, but the crafts obviously needed to be handled by the mercenary group that owned them. Inserting Wolf Fang members—who had no experience with helicopters—in the crew

would throw off the team play and risk an accident. It'd be terrible if anyone were to lose their balance and fall from the rocky aircraft. It was best to leave the helicopter in the hands of the original crew.

Mitsuha would've been anxious only taking men she didn't know, however, and she wanted a minimal support team from Wolf Fang on land. Minimal meant no more than six. She also needed them to take out the helicopter if necessary.

The situation was different from the battle to defend the capital. She wasn't pressed for time like she was then. In addition, the empire's target wasn't Zegleus, which made her an unrelated outsider interfering in a foreign conflict. Mitsuha knew not to do too much of the heavy lifting. She was only there to help. It was Princess Remia and the people of Dalisson who needed to win the battle.

Mitsuha and the Wolf Fang mercenaries could easily repel the imperial army without suffering any casualties if they didn't hold back. However, she couldn't allow that to happen. What would come of Dalisson, the Aldar Empire, Zegleus, and all the countries of the Great Alliance who were preparing for invasion from the New World if she did pull it off? Thinking that you could end a war without any ally fatalities would've been the height of folly.

Actually, I'm pretty sure I could pull it off if I tried hard enough. But winning a war with zero loss isn't normal, and I don't want government leaders to start taking that kind of thing for granted

and getting bad ideas. That's why I have to hold back…even if doing so results in more deaths.

People need to fight for their own nation. If a god conveniently appears out of nowhere and wins their war for them, they'd be without dignity or a sense of achievement. What would be the point of having a unified nation or trained soldiers? Someday, that god—me—will be gone.

Princess Remia sought my help, but there's a limit to what I can do. And that limit is for me to decide. I'm the only one who can take responsibility for my decisions.

I'm not exactly thrilled about having to ask Wolf Fang to arrange a helicopter team, but oh well. Nothing goes exactly according to plan.

Anyway, I'm the client. The captain has to do what I ask.

"We came to an agreement with the other mercenary group," said the captain. "They've got two choppers and they're willin' to lend us both. They own two in case one breaks down or is under maintenance—and also so they can cannibalize one to fix the other if both get busted—but right now, both are good to go."

Aircraft in general were less likely to see action than wheeled vehicles. If a mercenary group had only one helicopter, it'd be spending more time in the hangar than on the field. Securing jobs that required a chopper wouldn't be easy with just the one in storage all the time.

One helicopter would've been good enough for this mission, but two would bring greater certainty and save time. It would've been a pain if their only helicopter broke down right before the mission. Mitsuha was grateful to have two.

Three portable surface-to-air missiles were more than enough for the two. Wolf Fang might not have a helicopter, but its members were experts when it came to surviving against helicopter raids. Aircraft wouldn't last long without fuel, maintenance equipment, and spare parts anyway. Without a carrier or base to return to, they were little more than single-use weapons.

Two helicopters sounded great, but there was one thing Mitsuha was concerned about.

"What's the price, captain?"

She was talking about the fee for the job. Two helicopters obviously meant double the fuel and labor costs. She shuddered to think how much money they had asked for.

"Three hundred thousand," the captain answered.

"Huh? Really?"

Three hundred thousand dollars was a little more than 30 million yen. The last time Mitsuha hired Wolf Fang to fight in the other world, she ended up spending a total of 60,000 gold coins after dropping the initial 40,000 security deposit, the latter of which was equivalent to about ten million dollars. Dividing that between fifty-seven people resulted in a little less than $175,000 per person.

By contrast, this new mercenary group would be supplying two helicopters, each manned by a seven-person crew, totaling fourteen people, and would be getting a payment of $300,000. That would only give a little more than $21,000 to each person. That was certainly a lot of money to make in one day, but Mitsuha felt it was too cheap for a life-risking job. Helicopters were absurdly expensive to maintain, too. Even if they avoided damage to the helicopters, made a profit on the job, and didn't consider depreciation, this gig seemed way too treacherous for that amount.

Mitsuha gulped, "They'll be charging separately for arms and ammunition, right? Isn't that still a little too cheap, though?"

She intended to be reimbursed by Dalisson in the form of a reward or an "offering to the Goddess that Zegleus worshipped" for her assistance. The expenses for the mercenary group's help sure as hell wasn't coming out of Mitsuha's wallet. If Princess Remia proved reluctant to compensate, Mitsuha would threaten her to make sure she did.

Why should I have to pay out of my own pocket to fight someone else's war?! Which is why I don't intend to haggle this time. I wouldn't do something so shameful to professionals who are risking their lives!

"Huh…? You tellin' me to up the price? Don't be too hard on 'em, li'l lady. They ain't bad guys."

"Huh?"

"Huh?"

We're not on the same page here.

Mitsuha asked, "Uh, we're talking about the retaining fee for the mercenary group, right? For borrowing the two helicopters and hiring their crews?"

"I'm talkin' about the participation fee they're payin' for the privilege of fightin' in the other world."

"WHAT?!"

They're *paying* us *to take them to the other world?! What kind of logic is that!*

"I know we were overpowered as hell in the other world but mowin' down foes to protect the common people and then gettin' a hero's welcome afterward is a dude's wet dream. And those guys are mercs too, ya know? They've seen how much we profited from our last job and want it for themselves."

Oh, I see… The other mercenary groups know that Wolf Fang made enough money off the dragon parts to be set for life. Of course they'd want the same. This particular mercenary group is even willing to throw money at me to ensure they get their golden ticket to the other world.

"They woulda done it for free, but then the other mercenary groups woulda made a stink. Trust me, the others would never stop bitchin' about it. I ended up making 'em sign a contract with the steep participation fee so no one else would complain about favoritism. Business ain't exactly boomin' for mercenary groups right now. Can you give 'em a break and settle for the three hundred thousand?"

“I’m not that greedy!”

Mitsuha didn’t mind taking them to the other world for free—she was willing to pay them to fight, after all—but if accepting the money meant it’d help prevent problems within the mercenary industry, then she wasn’t going to turn it down. Much appreciated, in fact.

I feel bad about them losing so much money over this assignment, though. I’ll have to offer them valuable rewards if the mission is a success. Giving them live animals would be a bad idea—they wouldn’t have the means to provide them with good habitation—so I guess the prize will have to be plants and minerals.

I’ll have to think about this…

It was possible that one of the countries on Earth would’ve been willing to give Mitsuha military assistance. They’d have done so for free, while demanding something other than money in return.

A developed country would probably never agree to send off their own military for a conflict that had nothing to do with them, or participate in a one-sided massacre or invasion. They wouldn’t be able to explain the expenses—or worse, casualties among their soldiers—to their citizens while keeping the expedition to an alternate world a secret.

There were some countries, however, that didn’t care about such things and had a ruler who could send soldiers at their own discretion. That could’ve worked, but Mitsuha didn’t want to

collaborate with anyone who was overzealous about compensation or wanted to use the experience for military training. The mercenaries could be accused of the same thing, but at least they were men she hired. She could make sure they followed orders and promptly remove them if they didn't.

The mercenaries were Mitsuha's tools, and as their handler, anything they did was going to be her responsibility. Relying on tools that might disobey her because they were under the authority of someone higher… *Now that's a terrifying risk to take,* she shuddered. There was also no telling what a country would demand of her afterward.

If this battle required a larger army, she might've considered that option. She was willing to put up with those consequences to protect those dear to her.

Are all lives equal, you ask? No way. The citizens of my own kingdom are way more valuable than the lives of bandits and enemy soldiers. Duh.

But the situation hasn't gotten that bad yet. There's no need to panic.

"Got it," agreed Mitsuha. "Let them pay that amount. I don't know the day of the mission yet. I hope that's okay. The enemy's military is already mobilizing, so it's only a matter of time before they reach the border."

"Yeah, that's fine. I've been readin' history books to study up on armies from that era. We still have a few days, right? We ain't

got nuthin' more important going on than taking a trip to the other world, so don't worry 'bout scheduling."

"Oh, all right."

I guess that makes sense. Now they need to fight over which five people get to go. I hope that doesn't turn bloody…

What's that? Aren't I taking six people? The captain's obviously gonna include himself, so that leaves five spots. You can bet a hundred gold coins on that.

That's too obvious to be worth betting on? Yeah, maybe…

"Appear! I have arrived!"

"Gyah!—oh, it's you, Lady Mitsuha!"

"Don't call me 'Lady'!"

"Oh, sorry…"

Mitsuha jumped to Dalisson to see Princess Kak-Kak-Kak, also known as Princess Remia. She appeared directly in the princess's room so no one else would witness her. She left Sabine behind; this was going to be a conversation for adults.

What? Princess Remia probably thinks I'm younger than her, which would make me a child? Shut up! That doesn't matter!

"Thank you so much for coming! I knew you'd save us!" Princess Remia clasped her hands before her chest as her eyes welled with tears.

Don't bother with the dramatics, princess. I see through the lies of the Jedi.

“I said I would protect you, but I never said anything about involving myself in a war and protecting your country!”

“I’ve already told my people that the Lightning Archpriestess is going to save us. Kak-kak-kak!”

“Jeez, you’re not even being subtle anymore!”

Damn it! She totally trapped me! If I don’t do anything now, the Lightning Archpriestess’s reputation will be ruined.

“Grr…” Mitsuha bit her tongue.

Well, I did intend to help from the start…

“You’re aware that what you’re asking for exceeds the clause of our promise, right?” Mitsuha asked.

“Y-Yes… But I saw no other choice to help my people…”

Princess Remia knew what she was doing. It was natural for a royal—especially one ruling in place of the king—to want to save her people even if it meant forcing another country into risking the lives of its soldiers. To the citizens of Dalisson, she was a good ruler.

That doesn’t mean I appreciate the position she put me in, though! I have no reason to let her manipulate me. Just like her, my interest lies in protecting the lives of my own people.

I’d normally just refuse this kind of request outright, but she’s in a really tough spot, and she is *my friend.*

This might just be Sabine’s influence, but Princess Remia speaks to me like you would to an older sister. Does she think that the Goddess’s envoy stands above a princess? I thought we were past that.

…Oh, I know what she's doing! She's buttering me up so she can establish a "Princess and the Lightning Archpriestess" dynamic duo to the public, which would strengthen public approval. Which would also mean she might dump all the responsibility on me in case everything goes wrong.

This cheeky little…

"All I have to do is tell your people that your proclamation was news to me, or that my promise of protection was limited to you alone. That will paint you as a liar and ruin your reputation," Mitsuha warned.

"Urgh…"

Oh crud, she looks like she's gonna cry—wait, she's definitely acting! Sabine uses this trick sometimes! Is there some kind of training course that all princesses take where they learn this sort of stuff? Royals are terrifying!

"Nice try but that trick won't work on me! I've seen Sabine use it way too many times. I will help you, though… I kinda don't see any other choice. But I said 'help,' okay?! Your army will have to do most of the work! Got it?"

"Y-Yes, ma'am!"

"In the event that I need to rely on my country's army for support, it'll cost a lot of money—transportation, divine energy to power the soldiers' weapons, among other things. Are you gonna be able to pay for all that?"

"Yes, of course. I am not so shameless as to ask for help without giving proper compensation."

It seemed like Princess Remia intended to foot the bill all along. She at least had to say so or risk Mitsuha abandoning her, but it was still reassuring to hear.

That said, not knowing how much the princess was willing to shell out left Mitsuha uneasy. She didn't know how much money to demand from a country that was about to spend a fortune on war expenses, let their land get ravaged by an invading army, and suffer many casualties.

I don't know the market price of war. The last thing I want to do is charge a ridiculous amount and unduly burden the people of Dalisson. But charging too little would set a bad precedent and make Princess Remia likely to ask me for help again in the future. Plus, I refuse to lose money on this.

Princess Remia isn't a bad person, and as a friend, she's very loyal. But she's ruling a nation on behalf of its king; she will *put aside her principles and personal desires to serve the best interest of her people… Even if that means doing something that could make me think less of her.*

Well, losing her relationship with me would harm her country, so I'm sure she won't go too far…

Oh, I know what to do!

"So, how much are you willing to pay? I'll figure out how many divine tools and soldiers I can ask for based on your budget," Mitsuha said.

"Grk!" Panic flashed across the princess's face.

As Mitsuha expected, it looked like Princess Remia had been hoping to pay as little as possible. But she was a royal who valued her people and would spare no expense to protect them. Her intention was to gain as much support from Mitsuha as she could at the lowest possible price. That was what would benefit her people.

However, Mitsuha's question just made it clear that paying less would result in less support and prolonged conflict. The less she spent, the more soldiers would die, and the more land would be devastated by the empire. She had to figure out the right number without ruining her kingdom's finances.

"This probably isn't a decision you could make alone," Mitsuha added. "Speak to your chancellor and your minister of finance, okay? I'll see you later.

"Oh, and call Sabine on the radio when you want to reach us. Keep us updated on the imperial army's advance and when it's estimated to reach your border. I need to know how much time I have left to prepare my army. The speed and accuracy of your information will have a major impact on the amount of suffering in this war. Do you understand?"

Princess Remia's eyes were lifeless. The quality of aid will depend on how much she's willing to pay—that thought was a punch in the gut to her. Mitsuha grasped her shoulders and shook her. *Gently, of course.*

"…Y-Yes, I understand fully! Information means life and death in battle! One sentence of intel can be more powerful than

a thousand soldiers!”

That was what Mitsuha wanted to hear.

I taught her a few things so this country can act as a buffer for mine. I guess she took that lecture on war tactics from the Lightning Archpriestess very seriously.

“Sabine, have someone stationed in the operations room—which is your room—at all times.”

“Okay, Mitsuha!”

She wanted to make sure the radio was always manned. Princess Remia could contact them at any minute. Sabine was just a child, but having a man in a lady’s room was still improper. That job would likely go to the maids rather than guards.

“Sabine, I’m sure you don’t need to be told this, but you don’t believe in old conventions like ‘Commoners are no different from mutts. There’s no need to be mindful of changing or sleeping in the presence of a male peasant,’ right?”

“Of course not! What kind of monster do you think I am!”

Yeah, that was a long shot…

Mitsuha half-heartedly quelled Sabine’s steam and quickly excused herself.

If I stick around any longer and give her a proper apology, she’ll start demanding a consolation prize or something. Which is fine if she expected candy or something normal, but she always takes advantage and asks for something I’d normally never give her like a radio or a bike. I can’t show her any weakness.

Things were about to get really busy with strategy meetings between the Wolf Gang guys and the helicopter teams. The mission wouldn't succeed without sufficient preparation, accurate intel, and swift action.

The enemy army would be using swords, spears, and arrows against the mercenaries' automatic rifles and machine guns, but there was no guarantee none of the mercenaries would get hurt or lose their life. Their powerful weapons wouldn't do much to protect them from a volley of a few hundred arrows. The helicopters could also take an arrow or a spear in the wrong place—like the turboshaft engine—if they got too close to the ground. That would lead to a disaster.

"Time to go, guys!"

Thanks to Princess Remia's frequent updates, Mitsuha was able to approximate the date and time the imperial army would cross the border. And now, that day had come. The twenty-one-person army from Earth—six Wolf Fang guys, fourteen helicopter crew members, and Mitsuha—were about to put their plan into motion.

The helicopters were parked on Wolf Fang's base. Mitsuha could've jumped to the other world with them in the air, but that would've been an unnecessary risk to take. The pilots had never experienced a world-jump before, and jumping an aircraft without herself on board might lead to accidents.

Mitsuha and the mercenaries planned meticulously for the operation. The imperial army had just crossed the state line into Dalisson the previous morning. This meant that Dalisson was officially the victim of a surprise attack—the unfortunate country that wasn't even given a declaration of war. It granted them a righteous cause to play offense. What's more, the battlefield was on their territory. They now had an excuse to annihilate the enemy if they wished without causing an international scandal.

Letting the imperial army into their domain didn't come without a price for Dalisson; all the villages and landscape in its path would be razed. But that was a necessary sacrifice in the game that was war. The immense expenses, the devastation of the terrain, and the citizens' lives were all chips on a poker table.

Dalisson could've invaded the empire to avoid fighting on their own soil. However, they chose to let the empire raid their land to ensure that international sentiment would be on their side…while knowing that a substantial number of citizens would lose everything.

The kingdom had evacuated the villagers in the enemy's path, of course, while also clearing out the food and valuables. All that was left in the villages was a little bit of food laced with poison. Plenty of booby traps were set up for good measure.

The Wolf Fang team was already on site. It didn't make sense to send the ground force and the aerial force at the same time. The ground force should've finished setting up the mortars by now.

Mitsuha was currently on Earth with the two helicopters and the fourteen mercenaries—seven on each craft. Curiously, three of the mercenaries were women.

I wonder why? Female mercenaries can't be common. Maybe they begged to go on the mission and wouldn't take no for an answer. Or maybe three of the male mercenaries decided to take their girlfriends or spouses in case something happens to me and they end up getting stranded in the other world? Not that it matters. As long as they do what I'm paying them for—wait, they're *paying* me*, which means I have an obligation to make this trip worth their while!*

Mitsuha was world-jumping them into the courtyard of Dalisson's royal palace. She was fulfilling Princess Remia's wish to make a display of the divine soldiers being fielded from the palace. Mitsuha was sympathetic to the request; as the regent of the kingdom, Princess Remia needed to boost morale and increase her popularity with the citizens.

Politicians have it hard.

Mitsuha climbed into one of the helicopters. The rotor was already spinning, ready for takeoff. By the time they arrived at their destination, the imperial army should be just about setting up camp for the night.

All right, jump!

"Appear!"

"WHOAAA!!"

They were greeted by a thunderous cry of bewilderment in the palace courtyard.

“What the hell?!” Mitsuha exclaimed. Princess Remia had invited a crowd of civilians into the royal palace.

Mitsuha had told the princess that no one needed to be there because she and the divine soldiers were going to sortie as soon as they appeared. Despite her warning, it seemed the princess had decided to open a section of the palace grounds to make a spectacle of the divine soldiers’ appearance.

At least she kept the courtyard clear as I asked. There could’ve been a gory accident when I jumped the helicopters. I don’t even want to think about the sight of bodies colliding and melding on a molecular level with the choppers.

Well, I know for a fact that that won’t happen…according to the nugget of information the spiritual being crammed into my brain. But a soldier or guard could’ve mistaken one of the choppers for a monster and attacked us or did a hooray in celebration at the coming of the divine soldiers only to get their arms chopped off by the rotor… Any number of tragedies could’ve occurred.

Eh, whatever. At least Princess Remia didn’t ignore my orders to keep the courtyard clear.

Mitsuha glanced toward a group of people who appeared to be members of the royal palace and spotted the princess waving at her.

Let’s do this!

She grabbed a microphone, switched the radio's frequency to UHF, and shouted at the helicopter team:

"**Operation Headhunt starts now! Both helicopters, takeoff!**"

This was war, but Mitsuha didn't want more deaths than necessary. That went for both the ally side and the enemy. The empire's leaders who chose to declare war may have been bad people. However, that wasn't necessarily true of the soldiers who were forced to fight. Mitsuha and the mercenaries would have to fight for self-defense, but they didn't need to go on a killing spree. Ending the match as quickly as possible would be for the best.

There were two methods of making an army retreat quickly: sparing the commanders' lives and convincing them to withdraw or by destroying the entire command center, causing the soldiers to flee in confusion and terror.

This time, Mitsuha chose the latter.

A commander who'd been ordered to fight a war that his country couldn't afford to lose wasn't about to retreat that easily. They'd undoubtedly be hanged when they returned home. Their only option was to keep charging no matter how devastating the war grew and force their way into the city. Seizing the capital would mean victory, even if they lost ninety percent of their soldiers in the process. That was the kind of war this was.

The best way to minimize damage on both sides was to cut off the enemy's head early in the battle so the foot soldiers would lose their will to carry on. Fleeing would equal less deaths on

either side. Mitsuha's plan was to eliminate the chief commander, the deputy commander, and their staff officers in one strike. She aimed to incite chaos so that the enemy no longer knew who was supposed to assume control.

Without a leader, even the strongest of armies devolved into a disorderly mob. The imperial army would be as harmless as a baby.

Destroying their command center using just the ground force was challenging. First of all, it was impossible to know where it was, and penetrating deep enough to reach the core would be a herculean effort. *I guess if you've gotten that far, you almost certainly already won. With both sides having lost a lot of soldiers, too. There wouldn't be much point to that.*

But what if you attacked from above? Overlooking the enemy from the sky would make it easy to study the layout of its forces and instantly locate the command center. Then all you needed to do was let it rain bombs and bullets, which was exactly what the helicopter team was going to do. It wasn't like the enemy would have anti-aircraft weapons. Aside from spears and arrows, of course.

Quashing the army's leaders will hardly be a scuffle.

Raucous cheers were heard throughout the capital as the two utility helicopters lifted off. They headed for the imperial army's campsite where the Wolf Fang mercenaries were standing by. For an infantry team lugging military supplies, it was about a day's walking distance from Dalisson's border. They had some ways to

go before they reached the capital, but for a helicopter, it was a quick flight.

Letting the imperial army advance far enough into the country before engaging in battle was key. Dalisson being the victim of a surprise invasion would allow them to justify their attack. No one would be able to argue otherwise. No country wished to be invaded, of course, but there were advantages that came with it, such as knowing the terrain much better than your opponent and being able to call the shots for when and where to initiate. Once across the border, even a child could figure out the route to the capital. The army's precise location could also be estimated from its marching speed.

Such calculations weren't even necessary, as scouts and local volunteers were regularly delivering information about the enemy's whereabouts and actions.

There was another important advantage to being invaded: you could prepare traps. The imperial army had crossed the state line in the morning. There were only so many places they could set up camp that same evening. Mitsuha chose the most likely location and had the Wolf Fang mercenaries find an elevated platform they could overlook it from and set up ten mortars. She'd been coordinating with Wolf Fang over the radio and received confirmation that they'd finished setting up.

Mitsuha also jumped there herself before bringing the helicopters over to make sure the enemy was pitching their tents. She planned on delaying the operation by a day if she incorrectly

predicted their campsite, but she was relieved to see that it wouldn't be necessary.

Ten mortars seemed excessive for six mercenaries to manage, but setting up that many and aiming them in slightly different directions was probably easier than each person only having one and needing to adjust their aim each time they fired.

The mortars they brought were rather compact and had a firing range of less than three miles. Wolf Fang couldn't afford the latest equipment used by the armies of developed countries. But the cannons on these mortars were light and easy to fire. They were perfect for a mercenary group. Obtaining and maintaining large-caliber self-propelled howitzers would've been much more of a hassle.

In short, mortars were more than sufficient for this mission. The helicopter teams would be doing most of the work anyway. The artillery was just a party favor to add to the chaos.

The two helicopters were closing in on the enemy campsite.

"**We're approaching the target. Descend!**" Mitsuha commanded into her headset.

"**Yes, ma'am!**" the two pilots responded.

The helicopters needed to stay low to delay detection from the enemy for as long as possible. Shortly after, she spotted a flash signal from ahead. Wolf Fang's position wasn't visible from the enemy camp, so their signal was only noticeable to the helicopters overhead.

Mitsuha pointed out, “**That’s the signal from our guys. Proceed according to the plan. I’m heading down!**”

“**Helicopter 1, roger that!**”

“**Helicopter 2, roger that!**”

There was no need to give orders at this point. The mercenaries knew what to do, and professionals didn’t waste their breath.

“Commence operation!” With that, Mitsuha jumped to Earth and then to Wolf Fang’s mortar station.

There’s no way I was gonna stay in that helicopter when it started rocking with the doors wide open! I could’ve fallen out, and I definitely would’ve gotten nauseous. It was cramped in there too, so I would’ve just been in the way.

If there’s any place an amateur doesn’t belong, it’s on the front line of a war.

“Ready the cannons!” shouted Mitsuha.

“They’re ready!”

The Wolf Fang mercenaries were way ahead of her. She just wanted to throw that line in for cool points.

The two helicopters that were hovering above them began to ascend. They were going to scan the enemy’s encampment to pinpoint its command center. They also needed to locate where the horse carriages and supply wagons were parked. The high altitude would also help to avoid any oncoming arrows and spears from the enemy.

Mitsuha had suggested launching an attack after the imperial army soldiers went to sleep because that would increase confusion. The darkness would've delayed their response too. But the mercenaries disagreed; poor visibility would make it difficult to find the headquarters and supplies. Spotting the targets was easiest during dinnertime because of the campfires. The command center was almost certainly in the middle area of the camp. The military supplies were likely by the side of the road. There was no reason to put them anywhere else. Fortunately, the campfires weren't bright enough to illuminate anything up in the air.

A cacophony of turbine engines and rotors rumbled from the pitch-black sky. Was it lightning or some kind of natural disaster? The imperial soldiers panicked as they scoured above.

Mitsuha could see the enemy's camp from the top of the hill where Wolf Fang set up their mortars. She couldn't tell where the command center was because she didn't have an aerial view like the helicopters, but she still got a sense of the soldiers' panic. She'd brought Starlight night vision goggles for this purpose.

It's about to get really bright, so I should put these away. The helicopter teams probably mapped out the camp's layout by now…

BOOM! BOOM!

It started!

That was the sound of one of the helicopters dropping two rocket bombs onto what was believed to be the headquarters

tent. The other helicopter was expected to do the same with the supplies and wagons.

BOOM! BOOM!

Right on cue!

The utility helicopters each had two M60 machine guns—one on each side—and two unguided rockets, none of which were the latest models. As was typical of mercenary groups, the helicopter's arms were all nearly old enough to be considered antiques. Even so, they were the crew's most prized weapons. They might've become a symbol for the group, just like Wolf Fang's mounted 20mm autocannon that they called the "hand of God."

That was it for the rockets. Next up was…

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

The choppers began sweeping the encampment with machine guns. They didn't fire their 7.62mm belted ammo indiscriminately, but rather focused their aim on the people near what was guessed to be the headquarters tent as well as the leaders of each unit. The goal of this mission was to make the enemy flee, not to wipe them out. There was no need for senseless killing.

Hundreds—potentially thousands—of enemy soldiers would still lose their lives, but that couldn't be helped. They were invaders who were storming Dalisson without even calling for war.

And next we have…

Da-da-da-daaaa-da, da-da-da-daaaa!

Music began blasting from the speakers on the helicopters. It was Richard Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries."

I knew it. The only helicopter anthem known to man. The chopper crews are playing it to intimidate the enemy and encourage them to flee. I doubt they've got an R2R deck on board like in the movie. Modern sound systems are compact and don't consume much electricity or take up much space.

I wonder how the imperial soldiers are reacting to the song. To them, it probably feels less like "Ride of the Valkyries" and more like "Ride of the Ghost Demons."

The helicopters turned on their searchlights as they played the obscene music. There were no anti-aircraft weapons to worry about, and the dancing lights heightened the soldiers' panic.

Okay, it's time…

"Fire the mortars!" Mitsuha commanded.

Shing! Shing! Shing! Shing!

The weapons the Wolf Fang mercenaries had were simple muzzle-loaders that fired as soon as the shells hit the base of the cannons. The cannons were yard-long tubes that, frankly, didn't look very durable. When launched, they made a barely audible high-pitched whistle. Some larger mortars made a loud *pow,* but they still sounded like toys compared to howitzers.

Despite their flimsy looks, these mortars had a firing range of about three miles and were easy to shoot successively because all you had to do was drop the bomb into the tube. The cannon and

bombs were small and light, making it very convenient for this type of operation.

They were not, however, suited for precision shots. The angle of fire was much too high for that. They were meant more for inducing panic, and less for maximizing kill-per-shot. Still, the mercenaries were firing at a campsite full of people, so each round was taking out some lives.

There's no use feeling bad about that. This is war, and we're on the side of the victim who's being stormed into. We need to bombard the enemy until they flee, or else tens, possibly even hundreds of times more people will die…on both sides.

The enemy was devolving into a state of panic. After a long day's march, the imperial soldiers were preparing dinner and getting ready to sleep under the starry sky. The next thing they knew, they were surrounded by pillars of fire and explosions. Their comrades left and right were being blown to pieces. All they could hear were deafening booms and cries of agony. It was total pandemonium.

The soldiers weren't in formation nor were they receiving any orders from their superiors. They had no idea what to do as death rained upon them with blinding brightness.

The mercenaries had mixed a few tracers into their machine gun rounds to help them aim in the dark. The head of a tracer bullet was packed with incendiary substances like yellow phosphorus, red phosphorus, and magnesium. When fired, it burned and emitted a flare, allowing the shooter to trace the

trajectory of the bullet and correct their aim. Tracers had some disadvantages like revealing the sniper's location and having a slightly different trajectory from regular bullets, but the advantage of the frenzy they invoked with their flare was worth it.

When shot from a close enough range, tracers could even be used as incendiary bombs. They still weren't as effective as actual incendiary bombs or incendiary armor-piercing ammunition, but they were good enough to burn carriages and wagons.

Not that that's why they brought the tracer bullets…

After a while of scrambling about, the soldiers seemed to realize that the deathly beams were mainly falling in the center of the camp, so they started to retreat toward the outer edges. They likely weren't acting on orders; they were merely prompted by their instinct to survive.

BOOM!

An explosion quaked the camping ground as the soldiers scattered in all directions like spiders, albeit much slower. It was one of the landmines the Wolf Fang members had laid.

Landmines were economical yet deadly weapons that cost anywhere from a few dollars to hundreds of dollars. Anti-personnel mines were especially cheap and placed a great burden on the enemy by injuring the targets instead of immediately killing them. There were no downsides to mines… for the ones planting them, that is—unless you laid them on

domestic soil or a path you intended to march through in the future, or cared about post-war consequences and ethics.

There was a treaty on Earth banning landmines, but not all countries accepted it. Mines were also easy to obtain on the black market or to make yourself.

Regardless, this wasn't Earth, and that treaty didn't apply in this world.

Mitsuha did at least make an effort to avoid the worst consequence of anti-personnel mine use: harming regular civilians long after the war ended. She had the mercenaries lay only a small number of them, precisely record where each was buried, and keep track of how many exploded so they could recover the remainder afterward.

There were landmines that were designed to self-destruct after a preset period, and even ones that could be detonated simultaneously with a radio signal, but those were expensive and difficult to obtain. The same went for bounding landmines—mines that launched into the air before they exploded to maximize damage over a larger radius—or mines that were made to explode after being passed over a certain number of times, killing the high-ranking personnel who walked behind the foot soldiers. The ones being used for this operation were the cheap kind that triggered immediately when stepped on.

Anyway, I will not *allow civilians to be harmed or the land to become an exclusion zone after the war. The treaty on Earth might*

not apply here, but I won't break my own rules. To do otherwise would be to sacrifice my dignity.

No worries, though. I could simply jump the mines above a volcano on Earth with the snap of a finger. Then I wouldn't have to fret about the mercenaries miscalculating how many were used or recovered. The reason I made the Wolf Fang guys keep a record was to emphasize that I won't tolerate any abuse of these weapons, and that I have rigid rules about their use. I don't want the guys getting used to the idea of incorporating landmines on every mission in this world.

Wolf Fang only set up the mines in front of the campsite in the direction of Dalisson's capital. There were none at the rear or sides of the camp. If they'd buried any mines at the rear, the enemy would've stepped on them already. They were the cheap kind, after all.

The ground force had moved on from firing mortars at the camp's core to aiming at the sleeping quarters and where the landmines were hidden. The imperial soldiers were sparse in that section, but the goal was to herd them into fleeing back home, not to kill as many as possible. Despite all the blasts at the front of the campsite, the mercenaries were holding back on firing and letting the landmines do most of the work.

Apparently, mortar bombs are expensive. I mean, compared to landmines, which cost less than ten bucks. Howitzer bullets and guided missiles cost an arm and a leg in comparison.

I doubt the enemy can tell the difference between landmine explosions and mortar bomb explosions in the dark anyway. All they need to understand is that heading for the forefront equals explosions, and going backward means safety.

The lights went out in the encampment. The imperial soldiers must've extinguished the campfires and lamps to make it harder for the assailants to locate them. Little did they know, the mercenaries had searchlights, infrared thermal scopes, and night vision scopes. Visibility was not an issue.

If anything, turning out the lights only added to the mayhem. The imperial soldiers were unable to find their weapons and armor or work out where their commanding officers were. The soldiers were scattered, and the officers had no way of rallying them.

Imagine being one of those imperial soldiers right now: taking off your armor, getting ready to eat and settle down for the night. Then suddenly, you have to flee into the darkness. No time to re-equip yourself. You're separated from your comrades, officers, and commanders. You're a single cog that fell from your designated spot in the machine…and now you're worthless on your own.

The Wolf Fang members were slowing down their mortar attacks as they steadily readjusted their aim toward the middle of the camp. As if that wasn't enough, the two helicopter crews continued to ruthlessly chase the soldiers. "Ride of the Valkyries" blared through the speakers and the flailing searchlights intimidated the targets as the machine guns blazed away.

Sweet, the retreat has fully begun. I think that's enough for today!

"Cease the mortars!" Mitsuha ordered at the ground force. She pressed the switch on her radio and commanded the aerial force, **"Cease firing at the soldiers! Incinerate the carriages and supply wagons!"**

"**Helicopter 1, roger that!!**"

"**Helicopter 2, roger that!**"

The operation was almost complete. The aircraft crews should be able to burn the carriages with tracer bullets if they fired from a low enough altitude. They also had a stock of Molotov cocktails. Destroying the supplies was no problem. A fraction of the materials would survive, of course, but the army would have no way to transport them with their carriages torched and horses gone.

The imperial army had lost its command center along with most of its superior officers, and even its equipment and supplies. The foot soldiers were bolting in terror through the darkness.

Some of them might regroup at dawn. But the drafted civilian soldiers were likely to abandon their duties and keep running until they reached their hometowns. Meanwhile, the commanders and superior officers would never turn up. The remaining soldiers would be left to starve without any supplies. They might try to sneak back to the camp in the hope of collecting whatever remained, but the supplies would be burned and the carriages unusable.

Yeah, the chances of them continuing to charge after regrouping are extremely low. I'm gonna stick around to observe them just in case. If they do continue their invasion, I'll just hit them with the same volley again.

Mitsuha turned on her radio.

"The situation is resolved! We're returning to base. Touch down next to the mortar camp!"

"**Helicopter 1, roger that!!**"

"**Helicopter 2, roger that!**"

All that remained was to return to the Wolf Fang base on Earth. Mitsuha also had to check in with Princess Kak-Kak-Kak, but that could wait.

I'm sure she's expecting the helicopters to make a triumphant return to the capital, but I'm not too hot on that idea. People could get hurt. Besides, I don't want the mercs to join any celebrations. Having to interpret for them the whole time would be annoying, and they might get some weird ideas. Someone would have to keep an eye out on the aircraft and weapons, too. I could send the helicopters back to Earth first, but that would disappoint the public. It'd be best to avoid that hassle altogether.

Oh, I should round up the rest of the mines… I would've asked the Wolf Fang guys to dig them up, but it's too dangerous in the dark and we're pressed for time. I'll just discard them with my world-jumping ability and make it clear to them that landmines are not to be used without my express permission.

I'm sure they already know that, but just in case.

The helicopters landed. They touched down a good distance from the mortar camp because of the loud and gusty spinning rotors. The crew members had to make sure everything was clear before Mitsuha jumped them back to Earth. It was important to follow the routine procedures.

As agreed upon beforehand, the two helicopter captains disembarked with the engine still on and approached Mitsuha.

“Is everything all right?” she asked.

“Helicopter 1 suffered no injuries to personnel or damage to equipment!”

“Helicopter 2 also suffered no injuries to personnel or damage to equipment!”

“Good. The mission is complete. We’re returning to home base!”

Man, that felt really cool. Now I just need them to say, “Roger that!”

“Um… I’ve got a little request,” the captain of the first helicopter said.

“Huh? What is it?”

While the mercenaries had a significant advantage in weaponry, they weren’t completely free from danger. Someone could’ve been killed by an arrow or a spear when they descended to destroy the carriages. One of the helicopters could’ve crashed, too. This was a life-risking job, and Mitsuha owed them for

accepting it—or rather, paying for the privilege to perform it. She wasn't opposed to the idea of compensating them somehow.

One of them said, "Well, it's not every day you get to go to another world, so we were hoping we could take home some soil and grass. And take some pictures and videos."

"Oh, that's no problem at all! Just so you know, I always exclude any bugs and germs when I jump things to Earth to prevent the spread of disease."

"Yeah, of course. This won't take long."

With that, the captains waved at the crew members in the helicopters and watched as they hopped out, carrying buckets and small shovels. They clearly came prepared for this. The copilots remained on the crafts. It would've been careless to leave them unattended while the rotors were still spinning.

"Can we show our pictures and videos to other people?" one of the helicopter captains asked.

"Only if none of our faces are in them," answered Mitsuha. "And don't put them on TV or the internet where anyone can see them. I'm okay with you using them to brag to your friends and other mercenaries or as proof when selling the soil and grass. Basically, you can show them to people who already know about the other world, but not to anyone who doesn't."

Yeah, they probably lost a lot of money on this mission from the cost of ammo and everything else. And sure, maybe they wanted to participate in a rumble in another world, but they can't take that big a financial hit and not suffer. Besides, I originally

intended to hire them for as much as a few hundred thousand dollars. I don't mind giving them this.

The soil and grass look pretty ordinary around here anyway. I doubt the dirt has any rare minerals, and the grass is just common weed—not a newly discovered species you can't find in an encyclopedia. There's nothing special around here that I'd use as a bargaining chip with countries on Earth. They can take whatever they want.

Well, except for animals or the corpses of enemy soldiers. I'd have to think about that first.

The helicopter crew members finished collecting their soil and grass samples a little while later. One of them recorded as the others worked, likely to prove the samples' authenticity. Mitsuha gave them permission to film, so that wasn't an issue.

They only collected perfectly ordinary soil, weeds, and flowers. I doubt any of them are gonna sell for much. I guess it's like how high school baseball teams take home soil from the Koshien *field as a souvenir. Little pieces of the other world like these would make a good keepsake to remember the experience by. And the best part is they didn't cost me a penny.*

It was time to return to Earth. The crew members didn't need to be inside the helicopters for the world-jump. The engines were still on, and the mercenaries were going to turn them off when they returned to the base. They planned on taking a bath, debrief, and then have a small party to commemorate their success. In the

meantime, Mitsuha was going to pop over to see Princess Remia and then join the mercenaries for the debriefing.

What about my *bath, you ask? I was far from the mortars; I'm not covered in combustion gas from the gunpowder. Plus, I showered before the mission.*

What does it matter, anyway?! Girls don't get smelly!

I also learned a new trick recently: I can clean myself by world-jumping and leaving my sweat and waste behind. Don't worry, I don't do that with the poop inside my body.

Unless I'm horrifically constipated. In which case, I'd jump from a toilet.

The unused landmines had been collected and disposed of by Mitsuha before the helicopter landed. All that was left to jump back to Earth were the choppers, the mercenaries, the mortars and leftover bombs, and Wolf Fang's equipment.

"Are you all ready? Earth, here we come!"

Okay, now!

"Jump!"

"Appear!"

"Gyah!—oh, it's you, Lady Mitsuha. Where are the divine soldiers? And the flying sky boats? How did the battle go?!"

"Ow—that hurts! Let go of me!"

Can you not squeeze my shoulders and shake me like that?!

"Oh, sorry…"

Princess Remia quickly regained her composure after being startled by Mitsuha's abrupt entrance. Her reaction was understandable—the princess had been on pins and needles waiting to hear the results of the battle, and probably feared the worst when Mitsuha came back alone without the "flying sky boats." It wouldn't have been a stretch to assume that she fled alone after her divine army was wiped out.

Mitsuha reported, "The battle ended in defeat…"

"NO-O-O-O-O!"

"…for the enemy—oww!"

Holy crap, she just totally clocked me!

"I'm sorry! Please forgive me!" wailed Mitsuha.

Seriously, that was my bad. Some jokes are just not funny… And that was clearly one of them. I shouldn't have done that to Princess Remia who'd been waiting all this time praying for her country's survival, the livelihoods of her people, and my safety.

"I really am sorry! That was in bad taste!"

Princess Remia saw the earnestness of her friend's apology and quickly calmed down again. *Man, royals have incredible self-restraint!*

"No, it is I who should apologize," said Princess Remia. "That was immature of me. I've been educated in the ways of leading an army, so I should know how you must be feeling. The fear and guilt the battlefield inspires… Some become scarred mentally, others completely lose themselves… And the only way to repel such feelings is to force a smile and find ways to laugh.

“Commanders especially cannot afford to show hesitation or weakness. It’s their job—no, their *duty*—to lift their subordinates’ spirits with humor no matter how much pain and sadness they harbor inside. I know firsthand how difficult it is to come down from that heightened emotional state.”

Oh yeah, Princess Remia ordered the deaths of the rebel leaders and attended their executions. I remember her saying that was her duty as the one who imposed the death sentence of her own vassals…

The princess was also currently marshaling an army outside the capital. It made sense that she wouldn’t entrust the entire war effort to some girl from a foreign country—she had to prepare for the possibility of Mitsuha’s defeat. She might’ve even been preparing to deploy soldiers along the path into the city in case the survivors of Mitsuha’s attack continued to march on. That would buy time while making the enemy bleed as much as possible, and ultimately, they’d have to take shelter in the palace for a siege defense.

The princess also planned to place an evacuation order on the citizens in the invasion path and have them gather their valuables and food. That would minimize civilian deaths and prevent the enemy from looting their homes. The imperial soldiers whose jobs were specifically to pillage the locals would’ve been furious. Either that, or terribly disappointed.

She hadn’t placed the order yet; it wasn’t hard to act faster than an army of heavily armored soldiers transporting military

supplies. The civilians would've had plenty of time to vacate even after hearing about the Lightning Archpriestess's loss. For now, the princess only ordered the residents to gather what possessions they could and get ready to vacate at a moment's notice. They wouldn't be in too much danger once they left their homes; no invading army would pass up a castle under siege to chase down some civilians.

Anyway, Princess Remia had mentally prepared herself for war, and as far as she knew, Mitsuha was a former princess—now a viscountess—who normally never would've been in a position to lead troops. She assumed that warfare matters in Mitsuha's country were left entirely to the commander of the local army, and that the poor viscountess was pushing herself far outside of her comfort zone.

I'm not a genius tactician who can end a war without a single enemy or ally getting hurt. But I'm not dumb enough to show mercy and risk sacrificing my ally soldiers' and citizens' lives. Only a fool would do that. The lives of ten allies are worth more to me than the lives of a hundred enemies.

So no matter what happens, I won't regret the choices I made today. I did the best I could with the information and military strength at hand. It's silly to regret a loss caused by insufficient or faulty information or a wrong choice. That's a time for reflection—not regret—to learn from your failures in order to do better in the future.

Many enemy soldiers were killed in this operation. However, it was much more preferable to Dalisson's and the empire's armies going into combat and the kingdom's settlements getting pillaged and occupied in the process. Had the two sides fought this war without Mitsuha's involvement, the Aldar Empire would've won with a significantly greater loss of their soldiers.

The best way to prevent another war and minimize the death toll was to overwhelm the imperial army with strength so outlandish that the empire would fear Dalisson had some kind of a god or devil on their side.

You'd think the empire would've learned their lesson after attacking Zegleus. I wonder if all the high-ranking officers who witnessed the frontline of that battle died before they could bring word back home. As I recall, the imperial army was attacked after our battle by pursuit squads and raging monsters that thought they'd been deceived.

It's also possible the officers made it home only to be discharged as a penalty for the loss. Or they could've been executed because the government didn't believe their stories and concluded that the officers deserted their posts. Or the government simply wanted a scapegoat to direct the citizens' anger at. It's not easy being a military leader…

Mitsuha noticed Princess Remia staring at her in silence.

Does she think I'm gonna throw myself into her arms and start bawling? Please. I was a normal Japanese high school student not that long ago, but now I'm Mitsuha von Yamano, a business owner

and a viscountess. You won't catch me crying in front of a foreign royal.

I spent days mentally preparing myself for what would happen today, and my purpose was to protect the citizens of an ally nation. Many more people would've died if I did nothing…and the majority of them would've been ordinary civilians of Dalisson.

How will the gods judge my actions? A brutal slaughter, legitimate self-defense, or a fight for justice?

I don't actually care. Nothing I do is in service of any deity. I only acted to prevent the empire from gobbling up one Great Alliance nation after another and to protect the future of Dalisson and my own country. Without my interference, this war could've ended with way more deaths and injuries.

"Have you requested relief from other nearby countries?" Mitsuha changed the subject. She needed to get back to the Wolf Fang base in time for their meeting.

The princess answered, "I sent our fastest messengers as soon as it became clear the imperial army was going to invade. I don't know how many countries will agree to send soldiers, though… What is the state of the imperial army? Were you able to incapacitate a fifth—or maybe even a third of its vanguard?"

She'd likely heard accounts of the battle in Zegleus and assumed that two helicopters weren't much compared to that. To be fair, not many people died during that battle either. Most of the deaths among the enemy occurred when they were withdrawing.

“I think we killed a few hundred enemy soldiers,” Mitsuha said.

Princess Remia didn’t react.

“A few hundred” was a tiny fraction of the imperial army’s entire force. No army would ever withdraw over such a small loss. It had to be rare, anyway.

In addition, the imperial army was known for being highly disciplined. Their soldiers weren’t going to retreat that easily. A small-scale strike like that shouldn’t have impeded its invasion at all. Mitsuha couldn’t blame the princess for being dubious of her story.

“Anyway,” she continued the report, “We devastated the imperial army’s chain of command, and now the entire force is fleeing toward the border. If you don’t hurry and tell the nearby countries that you soundly defeated the enemy and that you don’t need aid, you’ll have to pay them extra for wasting their time and resources.”

“Huh?”

“Sending reinforcements costs money, you know. They’ll want compensation.”

“I don’t care about money right now!!” the princess screamed. “The imperial army *fled*?! You ‘soundly defeated’ them? How did you accomplish that with only two of those flying sky boats?!”

Princess Remia looked flabbergasted.

“Oh, that wasn’t the entire force. There were six men on land too,” Mitsuha said. *I guess that doesn’t change much from her point of view.*

“What?! Then…is there anything left for my soldiers to do…?”

“Nope.”

“WHAT THE HELL?! You said that you were only going to help, and that my army was going to have to do most of the work!”

“Oh, right…”

“Is that all you have to say?! This makes Dalisson look like a weak, sniveling child who had to rely on a foreign noble to chase away the bully! Other countries are never going to take us seriously now!

“I mean… I am grateful, nonetheless. I don’t know if we would’ve held out under siege until foreign reinforcements arrived, or if they were going to come at all. My father would’ve been able to weather this storm, but I’m just a girl, and our nation just recently lost international trust because of an attempted coup… And so many soldiers and civilians would’ve died if we actually fought the empire. It’s a miracle we got through this with only a few border towns ravaged and almost no victims. I should be groveling on my knees before you. And yet… And yet…”

Princess Remia was so agitated that she was letting her true self slip. Mitsuha understood where she was coming from.

I definitely messed up. She has to consider her country's reputation. But the idea of sacrificing your own soldiers' lives just for some participation points sickens me. That's a hundred times worse than killing enemy soldiers.



Would she be able to look the bereaved family members of the fallen soldiers in the eyes?

"I'm sorry. I didn't originally intend to do it all myself," said Mitsuha. "But I didn't want the soldiers of this kingdom to die meaningless deaths. If they had to risk their lives, it should be because they were truly needed to protect their country and their loved ones."

Princess Remia just stared at her.

How can I win her over here—oh, I know!

"What if you just claimed that your soldiers fought in the battle too?"

"Absolutely not! I'd be a laughingstock if the public found out the truth! And claiming someone else's war accomplishments is one of the worst things a person could do—whether they're a royal or noble or military commander! My kingdom's reputation would be permanently tainted, and it'd only be a matter of time before we fell to ruin!"

Damn, so much for that idea…

The conflict was over for now. Next came the political talks like indemnities and atonement. The question was if the peace talks would take place strictly between Dalisson and the Aldar Empire or if other countries would try to meddle.

The other countries might use Dalisson's presence in the Great Alliance and the need for collective security as an excuse to insert themselves. That would've been a guarantee if they'd sent

aid and participated in the battle. Fortunately for both Princess Remia and the empire, the war ended quickly.

It was possible Dalisson would take advantage of the massive blow Mitsuha dealt to the imperial army and respond with a counter-invasion. Princess Remia and her vassals were good people, but they were shrewd politicians. If Dalisson didn't do it, another country—Coursos, for instance, which was the kingdom with the haughty old king—might see a chance for profit and invade the empire themselves.

But while the imperial army had lost its commanders and devolved into a disorderly mob, the damage done to them was minor—that is, in terms of numbers, not ranks and positions. That meant the army could easily be restored to its full strength as soon as a few promotions to replace the commanders and officers were approved and the lost weapons and armor were replenished. As such, it was unlikely any other countries would actually try anything.

The empire would have to lay low for a while. The invasion attempt might spur members of the Great Alliance to form military alliances against them.

I don't want to weaken the empire too much and throw off the balance of power on the continent. Other countries might start flooding into their borders and fight over the territory, which could spark a world war. I flat out refuse to let that happen. I am thinking these things through, believe it or not.

I can't hear the word flat without thinking of my—never mind! You didn't hear that!

Anyway, none of that has anything to do with me. As far as Zegleus goes, the king and his vassals will handle international affairs. That's their job.

I should get back to the Wolf Fang base. I doubt mercenaries take long baths. Maybe I'm stereotyping…

Okay, jump!

As it turned out, bathtime wasn't over. The mercenaries were taking turns: first the Wolf Fang members, and then the helicopter teams.

The Wolf Fang guys washed off first so they could prepare for the debriefing and the after-party while the helicopter teams were taking their turn. The helicopter crews were currently in the bath.

Most of the prep for the debriefing and the party were done before the operation, so all they really had to do was wait for the food and alcohol they ordered to arrive. Hiring a catering service was out of the question because they were going to talk about their scuffle in the other world, which left delivery as the only option. They'd have to set the tables and clean up after themselves, but rugged soldiers like them could surely handle that.

The debriefing began a little while later. The operation went flawlessly with no casualties and barely any damage to the

equipment. There were no urgent topics to discuss or any mistakes they needed to figure out improvements for.

It'll be over before I know it, Mitsuha thought.

That expectation was betrayed in spectacular fashion. The debriefing lasted for quite some time as the helicopter crew members shared one harsh critique after another.

"Did we really needa descend that low? The goal this time was to kill as few as possible—except the command center. We were way too close to the soldiers who were withdrawin', and we shot more that we shoulda," one of them said.

"Were the landmines really necessary?" another challenged.

"Descendin' that low just so we could use the tracers as incendiaries was unwise. Underestimatin' spears and arrows sounds like a good way to get ourselves killed, and we coulda crashed too. Did you not consider the possibility of bolas or ballistae?"

Mitsuha and the Wolf Fang members didn't give the helicopter crews specific orders. Doing so would've been asking for a horrific accident considering none of them understood how difficult even hovering was. The instructions they gave were loose and open to improvisation.

They could've just done their own debriefing later… Well, they probably wanted to get the Wolf Fang guys' opinions, and I'm the client, so naturally they'd want to hear my thoughts too.

Wait, what's this "next time" they're starting to talk about? Are they inviting themselves back?!

Hmm… I guess they performed as I asked and didn't try to play any funny games. They seem like a trustworthy group. I wouldn't mind hiring them again if the opportunity arises… Although I hope it never does. My only concern is that hiring them again might anger other mercenary groups that Wolf Fang knows. Others probably want a chance to go too. I'd feel bad if I ended up putting an irreparable dent in Wolf Fang's professional and social connections.

The rather critical debriefing wrapped up, and it was time to wind down with an after-party.

I guess this is all part of how soldier-types party and drink after a day on the battlefield…

Hey, keep your hands off me and stop pressuring me to drink!

It'd been a few days since the battle against the imperial army in the other world. Mitsuha was visiting the Wolf Fang base.

"Hey, captain. I feel like I should do something to make up for the helicopter mercenaries' losses. They're decent guys, right? Do you think they might be in a tough spot after using their own ammo and paying that participation fee?"

She felt terrible if the mercenaries who lent her the helicopters were going bankrupt because of her.

"Don't bother. They've been rakin' it in since the mission," the captain said.

Mitsuha didn't expect that.

“Huh? Are they getting more job offers from the publicity of going to the other world?”

“Don’t be stupid. Takin’ a ton of jobs at once is a great way for mercs to dig themselves an early grave! Those who don’t take the time to rest and heal their injuries are the first to bite the dust.”

“Makes sense—wait, then how are they making so much money?”

“They auctioned off the soil and weeds they brought back from the other world.”

“Huh?”

Mitsuha did give them permission to do that, but it was because she didn’t expect ordinary soil, grass, and flowers to sell for anything.

The captain saw the confusion on her face and kept talking.

“Yeah, they were sayin’ stuff like the samples may look like common weeds but there’s a chance they could be totally different from the ones on Earth. Somethin’ about isotopes or genomes or helixes spinnin’ clockwise or counterclockwise or whatever. I don’t really get it myself. Anyway, some dude who wanted to study the weed won it for a shit ton of money. Then the mercs put up ‘Other World Weed #2’ for auction, which also sold for a fortune. Then they trotted out ‘Other World Weed #3’…”

“My god, they’re just weeds! That’s like when Mil Máscaras’s masks went for sale at a charity auction!”

“Yer a pro wrestling fan, li’l lady? That’s a really obscure piece of trivia, too. Where’d you learn about that?!”

“I’m surprised *you* know what I’m talking about!”

I guess dudes who fight enjoy watching other dudes fight…

“Anyway, the ‘Other World Weed Series’ went on for a bit. When that finally finished, they started the ‘Other World Soil Series.’”

“D-Don’t tell me—actually, I already know how that went…” Mitsuha sighed.

“Then after the ‘Other World Soil Series,” they moved on to the ‘Other World Pebble Series.’”

Mitsuha was speechless. Leave it to mercenaries to figure out how to squeeze every last dollar out of an opportunity.

“They’re also holdin’ screenings of their videos. They’re only invitin’ folks who already know about the other world, so they’re not breakin’ any of your promises. The ticket prices’re obscene, but that ain’t stoppin’ government employees and researchers around the world from payin’ to watch them over and over again. Those mercs are gonna be filthy rich. They don’t let anyone film the screening, so the viewers got no choice but to pay every time they wanna watch. Even though one viewin’ costs a few thousand bucks.”

“That’s evil! But I guess they’re not breaking any rules… Are the videos really that valuable, though? I can’t imagine watching the mercenaries dig up dirt and grass is that interesting.”

Why pay to watch sweaty middle-aged men play in the dirt when you can find children doing the same just about anywhere?

“Oh yeah, they’re screening the videos as proof of where the soil and weeds came from. But the battle scenes are what the audience is really payin’ to watch,” the captain said.

“Huh?”

“They filmed ’em from the choppers, apparently. One chopper filmed the other, and vice versa. That footage must contain all kinds of juicy info for the countries here to obsess over. I imagine a bunch of ’em are gonna want that soil and grass too. There’s no tellin’ what discoveries could be made. Anyway, those mercs are rollin’ in it right now. I guarantee they’ve forgotten all about the participation fee and ammo expenses.”



Huh?

“Don’t act shocked, li’l lady. You’re the one who gave ’em permission to show the videos to people who already know ’bout the other world… Oh, I checked to make sure none of our mugs are in the footage. They were never in the frame, so they didn’t even hafta be edited out. Don’t worry ’bout that.”

What?

“They’re clever bastards, but they’re keeping their word. Everythin’ they’ve done has been within what you permitted, right? They asked if they could film after they already took the videos from the choppers, but they woulda deleted ’em if you said no. They’re honest, upstanding bros.”

“WHAAAAAT?!” cried Mitsuha.

…I guess it doesn’t matter. They filmed first, then asked for my permission, but there’s no denying they asked. It’s not really an issue. All I learned today is that mercenaries aren’t naive enough to accept a job at a loss. They sure know what they’re doing, huh.

Chapter 86:
Post-War Business

“Why-y-y didn’t you invite meee?!”

“Eeek!”

One day when Mitsuha was back on Earth, she received a call on her smartphone that the captain set up for her. The voice on the other end was howling furiously.

Only a few people know this phone number and email address… Who could—oh!

“H-Hi…”

It was the senior academic she recently met with.

He continued to yell, “I heard all about it from an acquaintance who works for the government! You were collecting samples in the other world with some mercenaries?! Why didn’t you bring me along?!”

So it was the sampling that caught his attention, not the battle. I guess asking for his contacts and then ignoring him until I need him is pretty rude. There’s probably nothing a scholar like him would rather do with his time than collect samples for study… I feel bad.

“I’m sorry!” blurted Mitsuha. “I chose not to invite you because it was a combat mission. I couldn’t risk the life of one of humanity’s most important minds…”

“Oh… I-I see. I suppose I can’t argue with that.”

Mwahaha, that was easy!

Scholars were super amenable. All one had to do was compliment their accomplishments and their skill. That especially went for those who weren't used to being praised. This man obviously had an esteemed reputation—he wouldn't be receiving work from the government otherwise—but it was hard to imagine he was flattered frequently by the kind of people he often engaged with. Most of them were politicians and soldiers. His projects were government-related and confidential, so he couldn't brag to anyone either.

Mitsuha hadn't asked him for any favors yet, but she wanted to maintain their connection in case she needed his expertise in the future. She thought about compensating him somehow for acting as her advisor.

Hmm… What could I give him…

"I really am sorry. I promise I'll make this up to you," she pleaded.

"Good! I'm looking forward to it."

They spent a little while chatting before they ended the call.

Maintaining contact with people is really important… Speaking of which, I haven't met with the soldier boy in a while.

"Lady Mitsuha, I have a request for you," proposed Princess Remia.

Mitsuha had been visiting the princess once every few days to make sure she was having no trouble with the aftermath of the war.

“You can stop calling me that now! The conflict is over, so I’m not here as the Lightning Archpriestess anymore.

“Anyway, is there a problem? You rejected all foreign assistance using the same excuse, right? ‘To show Dalisson’s appreciation to the Lightning Archpriestess for repelling the imperial army, we will respect her wishes regarding the peace treaty,’ was it? You didn’t have to pay them anything because I used Traversal to transport your messengers to every country before they dispatched their armies, right?”

Princess Remia answered, “Yes, I owe you for that… Thanks to your secret art, I was able to deliver the messages retracting the requests for reinforcements before any of the countries had started mobilizing their forces. Most were either still holding conferences to decide what to do or simply waiting to see how things played out. That means not a single country had come to a decision to help us and act on it. They wouldn’t be shameless enough to ask me for compensation. Some of the military authorities and nobles who’ve been wanting to bleed my country dry will make a fuss, but they only have themselves to blame for not sending aid quickly enough.”

That made sense. A royal family couldn’t do something so callous without it reflecting poorly on their country. A ruler always had to consider their nation’s image on a global scale. They wouldn’t dare ask for payment when they hadn’t even acted.

Dalisson didn’t send messengers requesting military assistance until after they confirmed that the empire had begun the invasion. Very little time had passed since any of the countries received the message. Mitsuha then jumped the messengers bearing the recall requests to each country, eliminating travel time completely. The countries hardly had any time to react to the first message. A few of them hadn’t even received said first message yet.

“Also, it’d be for the best that I continue to call you ‘Lady Mitsuha.’ There could be eyes and ears anywhere. It will only cause trouble if anyone were to see that I regard the Lightning Archpriestess, the savior of our country, as if she’s beneath me.”

Oh yeah… She’s got a point. Just a few days ago, she was a princess ruling in her father’s place, and I was just a viscountess. Clearly, she was someone of much higher rank. That battle the other day changed everything, though. I’m now “the Lightning Archpriestess and the savior of the kingdom” not just for Zegleus, but for Dalisson too…

Mitsuha had one question: “The empire’s currently as harmless as a hedgehog without any quills, and no foreign countries are in a position to interfere in your affairs. What could you possibly want from me? Is the empire already threatening to cause more trouble?”

“The thing is… I would like you to help me throw a victory celebration.”

“Whuh?”

According to the princess, the war ended before the majority of her citizens even knew it had begun, and that wouldn't do anything to increase the popularity of the current administration.

Are you kidding me…

Only a small portion of the capital's citizens witnessed the helicopters. The battle had zero witnesses. Even if the princess were to announce, "There was a war, we won," no one would be convinced. Dalisson suffered no fatalities and gained no boon or territory from the empire—though the current peace talks could reward them with some indemnities.

While it was great that no one died, the villages within a day's march of the border were sacked and the land where the clash occurred was devastated. To add insult to injury, Dalisson had to compensate Mitsuha for her assistance. The empire's invasion was arranged out of desperation, so the Aldar Empire didn't have much money or even food to offer as settlement. Some countries in this era of civilization would've forced them to pay reparations anyway, knowing people would starve, but Dalisson wasn't that cruel.

"And that's why I want to inform my people of what happened," stated Princess Remia. "When they learn of the battle that occurred and celebrate our victory, it should increase my popularity. This way, I can ask for minimal indemnities from the empire—just enough to offset our rebuilding costs and payment to you—without upsetting the masses. In order to do that, I need to parade the divine soldiers and the Lightning Archpriestess to

the public and implicitly send the message: ‘The Goddess saved us. Be grateful and don’t you dare complain.’ Besides, the people will want to thank the divine soldiers. They won’t stand for their heroic efforts fading into obscurity without proper celebration.”

I can’t argue with any of that. Part of her goal with this celebration is to keep the indemnities from the empire minimal so the civilians in the empire don’t starve. I have no choice but to help, huh…

“Got it. If that’s the reason, I’ll cooperate. I won’t charge you for this one,” Mitsuha said.

“Really?!” Princess Remia squealed, clasping her hands in front of her. Her eyes were practically shimmering.

Don’t let her manipulate you, Mitsuha! It’s all part of her act!

“I’m only referring to the celebration, of course,” the viscountess pointed out. “I’m still expecting payment for the battle. That operation cost a fortune between the exhaustion of the divine weapons, the cost for using the flying sky boats, maintenance fees, and personnel expenses. The divine soldiers don’t fight for free!”

“Not to worry, I’m well aware of that!”

She’s not that *wily, I guess. Still, she’s the type who wouldn’t hesitate to carry the burden and play the villainess for the sake of her country. Fear not, though! I’ve learned how to handle her by now, and I won’t let my guard down!*

Mwahaha!

“So yeah, can you invite the helicopter crews back to the other world? There are no retaining fees or participation fees this time.”

“Care to elaborate on the ‘So yeah’ part?” The captain squinted.

Right. I didn’t explain myself.

“The princess has to throw a victory celebration to distract from the fact that they can’t ask for much in indemnities from the empire,” said Mitsuha.

“All right… I get the picture. Devastating losses and dominant victories have one thing in common—the fallout is a pain in the ass. I guess that goes for any world.”

I knew he’d understand. He’s not the captain of a mercenary group for nothing. With experience comes wisdom…

“Oh, can you bring out some of the LAVs and trucks too? The helicopters alone won’t make for a great show. Bring along some mercs who didn’t participate in the battle, too,” she suggested.

“What’re you—oh, fine, fine! I see your point. You can’t put on a parade with just two choppers.”

Yep, exactly.

“Thanks for reaching out to them for me. I’m counting on you!”

“Let’s do this!” Mitsuha said.

The fourteen mercenaries from the helicopter teams and twenty of the Wolf Fang guys were lined up in front of the vehicle

depot at Wolf Fang's base. The former were in their aircraft and the latter were inside trucks.

Additional Wolf Fang members aside from the original six were invited to make the parade look showier by padding it out with more vehicles. They were driving LAVs, trucks, and technicals—which were consumer trucks loaded with heavy machine guns and recoilless rifles, making them a powerful (but not very high-defense) combat vehicle. The extra traffic should make for a decent presentation.

"Jump!"

They appeared near the capital of Dalisson, just far enough away that they weren't visible from the city.

"Move out!" commanded Mitsuha.

The wheeled vehicles started their procession toward the capital. The helicopters were going to lift off afterward when she gave the order over radio.

Mitsuha, or the Lightning Archpriestess, was sitting on the hatch of one of the LAVs. The procession was meant to be seen, so she had to put herself on display.

It didn't take long for the main gate of the city walls to come into view. The mercenaries in the other vehicles leaned out of the windows and cargo beds as they waved at the onlookers along the road.

The gate guards were informed beforehand, so they let the trucks through without a hitch. Just before passing through the

entrance, Mitsuha used her radio to signal for the helicopters to lift off.

Once they were inside the facade, the mercenaries fell into formation with the capital army that awaited and proceeded steadily down the main street toward the royal palace. The helicopters soon caught up and hovered overhead, trying to stay parallel with the ground force. They were flying high above to minimize the engine noise and wind for the people below.

It was Princess Remia's idea for the capital army to join the parade, of course. She was hoping that their presence would lead people to believe that the army fought alongside the divine soldiers to repel the enemy. She wasn't actually going to say anything to that effect, which meant no lies would be told. Only Mitsuha, the mercenaries, and the imperial army witnessed the battle. Mitsuha and the mercenaries weren't going to blab, and no one was going to listen to the losers.

The minstrels can go crazy with this one. No one will be able to argue with their version of the story. That's why we chose to march in a formation that makes it look like the capital army fought too and leave the rest up to the people's imagination. Plus, it might've been difficult for the citizens to cheer for these strange vehicles without the presence of men who are familiar to them.

The trucks and capital army soldiers continued down the main street and into the royal palace grounds where they proceeded to the training yard. Mitsuha and the mercenaries parted ways with the soldiers and parked the vehicles in a corner.

Soon after, the helicopters touched down in the middle of the yard. The pilots turned off the engines and the aerial team joined the other mercenaries.

The six Wolf Fang members who fought in the battle deboarded their trucks while the rest stayed inside. Mitsuha then jumped the vehicles with the mercenaries still inside and the unmanned helicopters back to the Wolf Fang base on Earth. She returned alone in less than a second, so no one noticed she had gone anywhere; it just looked like the vehicles and aircraft disappeared on their own.

The fourteen extra Wolf Fang members who joined the parade weren't going inside the royal palace. Only those who fought in the battle were. Mitsuha felt that getting commended for something they didn't do was dishonorable for a soldier, and the fourteen men agreed.

She was also worried about leaving the trucks and helicopters unattended. There were plenty of nobles and soldiers with an interest in the divine soldiers' vehicles and weapons. They generally had self-control, but out of thousands of people, there was bound to be at least one bad actor who might've poked around.

A group of royal guards led Mitsuha and the mercenaries inside the palace. They were headed for the audience chamber.

"Welcome, Lightning Archpriestess and divine soldiers. You have my heartfelt thanks for the great service you have performed for Dalisson," Princess Remia began her speech.

The princess wasn't speaking from an elevated platform, and Mitsuha and the mercenaries weren't kneeling to her as one might expect of an audience with a royal. Instead, she descended from the dais to address them on equal footing. Sure, she was a princess, but she couldn't be seen looking down on the Lightning Archpriestess and her divine soldiers.

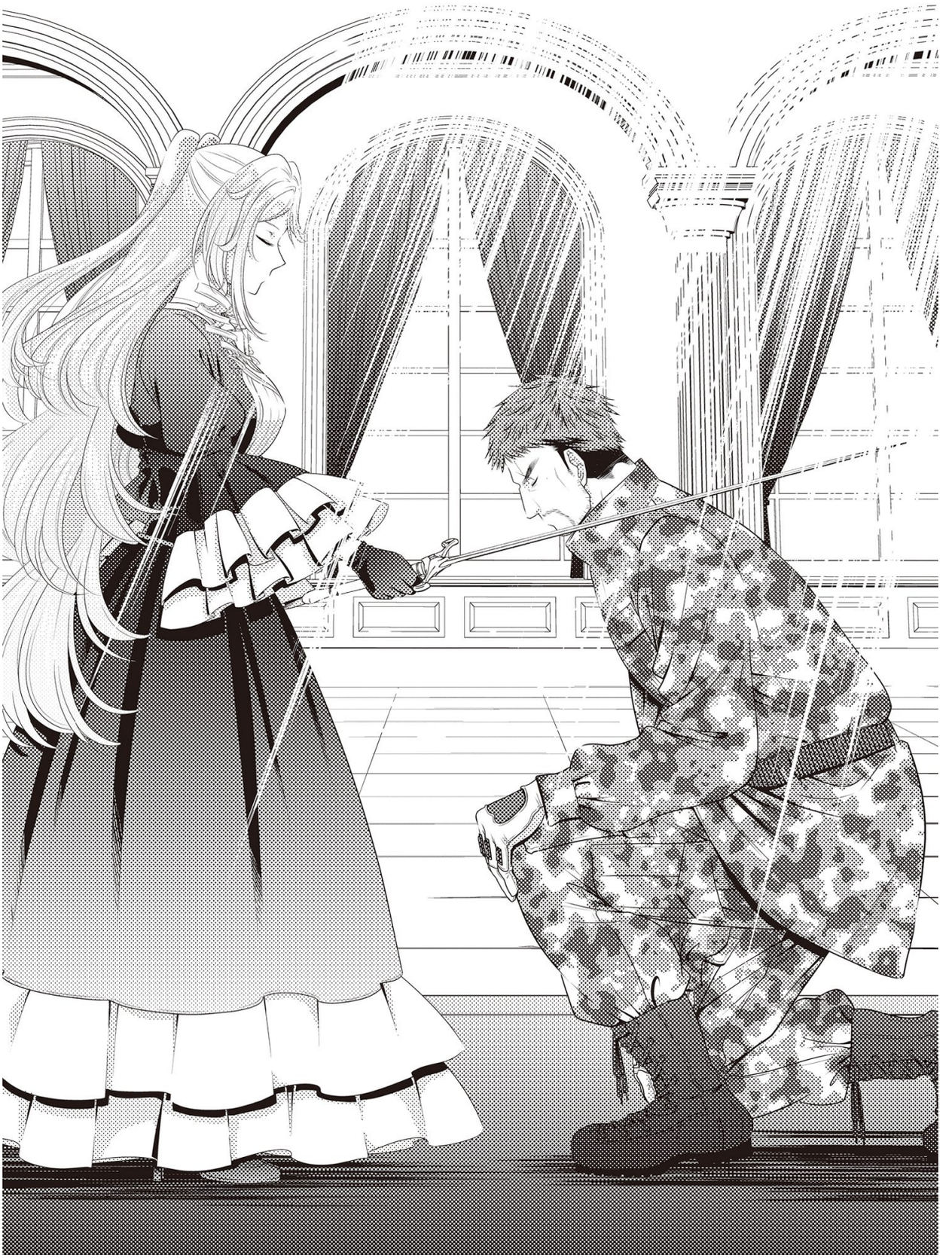
At the same time, a kingdom's acting ruler bowing her head to a foreign viscountess would've been problematic. This was a complicated situation. Princess Remia had to decide whether to treat Mitsuha as a foreign viscountess or as the Goddess's envoy.

The same decision had to be made for the mercenaries—should she treat them as a foreign viscountess's private soldiers or as divine soldiers? The flying sky boats and armored vehicles made it hard to believe they were ordinary private soldiers. That wasn't to mention how they drove the imperial army to withdraw with so few people.

Well, whatever Princess Remia wants. I'm just doing this to help her deal with the fallout of the war. I did ask her for one little favor, though…

The mercenaries didn't understand a word that Princess Remia was saying to them, naturally. This was merely a performance to show the people of Dalisson that the princess invited Mitsuha and the mercenaries to the royal palace, and to give the nobles and military leaders the impression that the divine soldiers saved the kingdom at her behest. The mercenaries

didn’t seem to mind; they could sense her gratitude without understanding the language.



It was rare for mercenaries to receive such recognition. The fact that it was coming from a cute princess made it hit all the harder. This was going to be a moment to remember for them.

“She’s asking you all to kneel,” Mitsuha translated Princess Remia’s words.

Divine soldiers kneeling at a human might’ve been offensive from a religious standpoint, but this would be ignored because it was part of a ritual. They weren’t actually swearing loyalty to Princess Remia. The mercenaries saw themselves as ordinary men rather than as divine soldiers, so they kneeled without hesitation. Showing respect to a royal princess was just common sense.

“Now bow your heads,” Mitsuha said.

The mercenaries did as she asked. An attendant handed Princess Remia a sword. She drew it from its sheath and handed the scabbard back to the attendant.

Normally, a mercenary would react to a stranger walking toward them with a bare blade by leaping backwards and drawing their guns—they were, in fact, armed with two concealed pistols—but they did nothing of the sort. Mitsuha had warned them that this could happen. In truth, she arranged this with the princess beforehand.

Princess Remia approached the Wolf Fang captain, who was on the far right of the front row, and tapped his shoulders with the flat of the blade. She proceeded to do the same with the nineteen other mercenaries. Some of them were trembling as if

they were overcome with emotion. It absolutely would've been a touching experience for anyone who knew what that gesture meant on certain parts of Earth.

The mercenaries were being knighted. Knighthood was a minor noble title that wasn't hereditary like a baron and above were, but by the same token, it meant it had to be earned through one's own accomplishments rather than through one's birth.

Even those born in an era without an obvious class system had a deep fascination and respect for it. Mercenaries were considered lower-class workers who knew any job could be their last, and they'd just become knights in another world.

Well, not really. This was just a little performance I asked Princess Remia to put on. I explained that on Earth, there's no greater honor for someone who achieved something great than to receive this gesture from a monarch…and that this would be a way for her to thank the divine soldiers without spending a single coin.

The ritual for awarding peerage is actually different in this country. Tapping a blade against a person's shoulders has absolutely no meaning here. In Princess Remia's mind, she's just honoring them with a kind gesture that happens to resemble the knighting ritual on certain parts of Earth. But the mercenaries aren't actually being knighted.

It'll make them happy, and that's good enough. They're never coming back here anyway, and I doubt any of them will expect to receive a noble's pension.

They saved a country in another world by overwhelming the enemy force with their modern weapons, and then were thanked and knighted (or so they believe) by a cute princess. Talk about a teenage boy's dream.

The rest of the celebration proceeded according to Princess Remia's plan. The mercenaries were happy to be there too. The nobles and military leaders of Dalisson would be convinced of the princess's strong alliance with the Lightning Archpriestess and the divine soldiers, making them unlikely to ever oppose her. Everyone knew about the pull Viscountess Yamano had in the royal family of Zegleus, the leader of the Great Alliance, not to mention her command over the divine soldiers and their mysterious weapons and sky boats. No one dared to pick a fight with her.

It was time for one final touch.

What's that? Am I going to attend the celebration party? No way! I'd rather drown myself than attend a party full of conniving nobles and soldiers who all have something up their sleeves! The mercenaries wouldn't have anything to do other than eat because of the language barrier; I couldn't interpret every single conversation between them and the nobles and soldiers who'll bombard them with questions if I tried.

That's why we're leaving right after this ceremony. I've already coordinated that with Princess Remia, of course. She'll be the star of the evening, which she fully intends to take advantage of by

bragging endlessly and winning political points. We'd just get in the way.

"Farewell, everyone!" Mitsuha put her arm to her side and gave everyone a little wave.

Her one regret was that she wouldn't get to see the chaotic reaction in the audience chamber after she jumped herself and the mercenaries away, but disappearing right before the political leaders' eyes was an effective way to emphasize the miraculous powers of the Archpriestess and the divine soldiers. It would also prove that the divine soldiers could appear anywhere, any time to punish wrongdoers. No guard, however skilled, could protect someone from that.

A divine soldier could materialize in your bedroom, at the dining table, in the bathroom… They could emerge behind your back and slit your throat before you even realize what happened.

I'm sure their imagination is running wild, tittered Mitsuha.

…Okay, jump!

"My work there is done," Mitsuha said.

There were a few reasons the empire forged ahead to invade Dalisson: the military leaders' desire to make up for the failed invasion of Zegleus, the financial officers' desperation to save the floundering economy, the royal family's need to save face, and the nobility's expectations.

The invasion on Zegleus caused significant damage to the Aldar Empire. The imperial army didn't suffer a lot of casualties

during the battle outside the capital, but they lost a lot of soldiers as they were retreating. The local counties' armies and the monsters who believed they'd been deceived had done most of the battering. A handful of nobles were taken prisoner to be used for ransom. Some were even captured by the very mercenaries they hired. Those noble families lost a fortune paying the ransoms to recover their lords and heirs.

The biggest factor was that the Aldar Empire was a dictatorship. So were the kingdoms of Zegleus and Dalisson, but their monarchs couldn't risk angering the nobles by abusing their authority. By contrast, the emperor had ultimate power. Attempting to admonish him or preach to him or reprimand him could result in severe punishment. If the emperor wanted an invasion, no one could argue against it.

The empire turned their eyes to the Kingdom of Dalisson because it appeared to be in political turmoil. The king was ill, his young daughter was ruling in his place, and several military leaders and nobles had just been executed for treason. From an outsider's perspective, it certainly looked like easy picking.

What the empire didn't know was Princess Remia's arrangement with Mitsuha. The possibility of the Lightning Archpriestess getting involved didn't even cross their mind; after all, she didn't step in until the imperial army was about to breach the capital of her own country. By all appearances, she simply waited while the imperial army sacked every village and town on

its way to the capital, and the provincial armies suffered massive losses as they fought hard to delay the enemy.

The Aldar Empire might've assumed that while the Lightning Archpriestess possessed terrifying powers, she only had a small host of soldiers and only defended her immediate vicinity—the capital of Zegleus. It was true that she didn't have many soldiers, but she was far from being limited to one place.

It was also possible that the empire believed the "Lightning Archpriestess" was a fictional person invented to intimidate other countries. Only a small percentage of the imperial soldiers were on the front line of the battle and witnessed Mitsuha and the Wolf Fang mercenaries. Most of the army commanders and high-ranking officers were killed or imprisoned. The few men who made it back to the empire claimed things like "The enemy possesses unfathomable strength," and "They have the protection of the Goddess," but their words were dismissed as nonsense. That was especially easy to imagine of a dictator who believed his country's actions to be just, and that victory was guaranteed.

Regardless, it was natural to assume that, from a political standpoint, Zegleus couldn't possibly send their most powerful soldiers as aid to a country they hadn't entered a military pact with. Even if they were to send support, it would've been after a lengthy discussion among the most influential elites in the kingdom. From there, they'd select the commanders, summon the soldiers, and prepare the equipment and supplies. Only then

would the reinforcements head for Dalisson…trudging slower than a horse-drawn carriage.

The foreign aid couldn't have reached Dalisson's capital in time to save them from the imperial army's blitzkrieg. In fact, none of the other countries that Dalisson sought aid from had even started mobilizing their armies. If not for the irregular case of Mitsuha and the divine soldiers, the empire's invasion most likely would've succeeded.

Why didn't the empire properly investigate me and the divine soldiers before launching the invasion? There's nothing more dangerous in war than the unknown. Sending out a spy or two couldn't be that hard. Well, I guess it's not uncommon for someone who's backed into a corner to make irrational decisions. Trying to analyze their actions might be pointless…

Anyway, the helicopter crews and the six Wolf Fang mercenaries look happy, and Princess Remia should be able to handle any dissenters among the nobility, military, and populace after all we did for her. I mean, I didn't exactly have a choice considering what would've happened if I chose not to help her, but whatever.

The next time a noble gives Princess Remia grief, she can threaten to stick them at the front line of a battle with nothing more than a wooden spear. That should keep them in check. Most nobles think nothing of the idea of others dying for their benefit, but the second they're put in the others' shoes? Oh, how the tables would turn.

All right. That job came out of nowhere, but it's done. Back to my usual routine…

…And now that my meeting with the soldier boy just ended, next up is Lephilia.

The soldier boy changed so much. He seems more dignified than when I first met him. Nothing hardens a man like battle, I suppose. One experience can cause a boy to grow up so fast…

On to the next stop! Jump!

"Oh, Mitsuha! We have a problem!" cried Lephilia. "Larusia Company in the Kingdom of Voftress was attacked! Their inventory was damaged and there were casualties among the staff and guards. Larusia was injured too."

A vein bulged in Mitsuha's head.

There was one store in each country of the New World to act as a partner store for Lephilia Trading and distributor for Yamano County goods. Mitsuha had helped found them, and each shop was managed by a young businesswoman. They were her fierce comrades who penetrated the market, contributed to earning profits, and delivered her valuable information.

The girls all had one thing in common: they were born into a merchant family and had a sharp mind for business but were dismissed because of their gender. Before Mitsuha came along, the only fate that awaited them was to be married off to boost their families' businesses. Needless to say, they all pounced at the

chance given to them and tore into the professional world with dazzling smiles on their faces. The girls were courageous heroes.

And one of them had just been hurt in a senseless act of violence. Her youthful, unblemished skin had been bruised. Her valuable employees had been killed and injured.

“…Heh heh…”

“Mitsuha…?”

“Heh, haha…”

“Um, Mitsuha…?”

“So you have chosen death…”

“YEEEK!”

“Anyway, Lephilia, can you give me the whole story?” Mitsuha seethed with a bloodthirsty grin.

“Y-Yes, ma’am!”

“Hm,” nodded Mitsuha. “So you think it was the work of some idiots who couldn’t stand the idea of a random little girl monopolizing the famous Yamano County products in their country?”

“Yes. They’d apparently been pestering her for some time to hand over her trade source.”

Lephilia Trading had been attacked before too. That time was different because it happened in Vanel where Mitsuha’s home base was and Lephilia’s guards only suffered light injuries. The culprit was careful not to let things go too far, hence Mitsuha went easy on him. All she did was take back the goods he stole

(plus a little extra) and leave the criminal case for the authorities to investigate and suitably penalize.

That wasn't an option this time. The circumstances were entirely different. The only similarity was that a large company tried to put a young up-and-coming merchant in her place by stealing her business. This time, there were no city guards or merchants who would sympathize with Mitsuha. Other businesses were much more likely to pander to the big company—the culprit—in the hope they could get a piece of their profits.

No one was on Larusia Company's side. Not other merchants and not the authorities who had likely been bribed.

"Hmm… Hmm… I see how it is…"

"Eek!"

Lephilia was inching away but Mitsuha paid no attention.

The Bride Wore Black.

The Stars My Destination.

Man on Fire.

Bullet Path of Revenge.

The Beast to Die.

I, the Jury.

One after another, titles of books that Mitsuha's brother recommended as "basic educational literature" popped into her mind.

Search and destroy.

Enemies of women will not go unpunished, thought Mitsuha. *That goes double for enemies of my friends.*

And triple for enemies of mine…

Chapter 87:
The Cleanup

“Thank you for agreeing to help.”

“Leave it to me.”

Mitsuha was in the courtyard of Otsuki General Hospital in Japan with McCoy. She contacted the doctor ahead of time and arranged to meet with him outside. Fortunately, he managed to leave at the end of his shift without having to work overtime. He was holding a suitcase that contained medication.

Larusia had described her injuries as bruises and broken bones in her letter to Lephilia. The latter could be serious if the bones were misaligned and healed improperly or if the nerves or blood vessels were damaged, so Mitsuha decided to have McCoy examine her. It took days for the letter to reach Lephilia and it likely wasn’t until a few days after the attack that Larusia recovered enough to write. Maybe it was too late, but Mitsuha wanted to do all she could. Her young business partners were friends and kindred spirits.

“Jump!”

“Larusia, how are you feeling?”

“V-Viscountess Yamano?!” Larusia gasped.

Mitsuha jumped to Larusia Trading with McCoy and found the young store owner in her office giving orders to employees. Her face was swollen and bruised around her right eye and

cheek. The bruise had likely faded in the days since the attack, but the fact that it remained so prominent meant it must've been much worse. Her left arm was in a cloth sling.

Larusia rushed toward Mitsuha.

"I'm so, so sorry! The precious products you'd entrusted me with were all ruined, and my dedicated employees got injured… You left this important mission in my hands and yet I betrayed your expectations! Once we clean up this mess, I will pay with my life—"

Man, this girl takes her job just as seriously as Lephilia.

The other employees who never met Mitsuha looked at her in shock upon realizing she was Viscountess Yamano, the woman upon whom the company's entire business depended.

I need to calm her and the employees down and let them know Larusia Trading will be just fine.

"That won't be necessary," assured Mitsuha. "I'll deliver new stock to replace the unsold goods that were lost as soon as I can. I can allocate some of the stock intended for the stores in other countries. Try to fulfill the preorders you already have within their promised deadlines. Don't worry about paying for the replacement stock. The Yamano family will bear the losses from everything that was damaged before sales.

"I know it's been days since the attack, but I brought a skilled doctor from my country. Can you please gather everyone who was injured? Also…"

"Also…?"

Mitsuha grinned at the girl. “The Yamano family has a creed: Divine punishment comes quick. Sow evil and reap evil. Should anyone decide to mess with me, I must pay them fairly.

“Dr. McCoy, can you take a look at Larusia first? After that, I’m gonna have a nice, long talk with her. I want to know what happened in *full* detail.”

Huh? Why is Larusia shrinking away from me?

McCoy, not you too…

Mitsuha sent the employees out of the room so McCoy could examine Larusia. She couldn’t let a girl bare her shoulders in front of the men (other than the doctor). In the meantime, the employees went to gather the others who were injured.

After finishing his examination, McCoy concluded that Larusia’s broken left arm had been properly reset and would heal without further treatment. The swelling and bruising on her face, too, would disappear completely.

That’s a relief. Inflicting a scar on a pretty girl’s face is an unspeakable crime. Not that it’s okay to do the same to a girl who’s less attractive, of course.

The fact that she would make a full recovery changed nothing, however. The criminals still viciously attacked a girl, harming and scarring her. That was an evil and irredeemable act.

Even worse, one of the guards was killed. He was likely a hard-working man of strong moral fiber to lose his life on duty.

A merchant's weapons were his profits and entrepreneurship. Bringing violence and crime into that space, now that was an act of war. There were no international laws or Hague Conventions here to protect the criminals. They were about to pay with their blood.

Feel the wrath of the Yamano Clan!

McCoy used medicated tape to ease the swelling and pain on Larusia's face. She looked quite helpless in the bandage.

I forgot McCoy is the head of the internal medicine department, not the surgery department…

He also handed Larusia oral painkillers, which Mitsuha explained how to use. After that, McCoy went into another room to examine the other injured employees.

It was Mitsuha's turn to speak to Larusia.

Hmm, I see. Interesting…

There was a clear suspect but no evidence. The authorities showed no intention of investigating the case, and that wasn't going to change. Nothing about that was surprising.

"I'm sorry," whimpered Larusia. "There's nothing we can do without evidence… Even if we did find something, I'm afraid it would just be destroyed. Any witnesses would be ignored, too…"

Larusia hung her head low. Small dark spots formed on the floor, one drop after another.

So you made her cry… You made my dear friend cry…

“Eek!” Larusia looked up and flinched at Mitsuha’s expression.

Whoops. I thought I was smiling to reassure her, but was I doing a bad job? This reminds me of what Micchan 1.0 once said when I was trying to suppress my boiling rage with a smile:

“You look like a psychopath!”

McCoy had finished examining the other patients by the time Mitsuha was done questioning Larusia. She was relieved to hear none of them would suffer complications from their injuries.

Apparently, people in this world know how to reset broken bones, speculated Mitsuha.

Next, she summoned all the employees and guards who were present during the attack. She started by thanking them for their efforts, and then warned them not to put themselves in too much danger by resisting if the store was attacked again. She made it clear that their lives came first, avoiding injury came second, and the money and goods couldn’t matter less.

That might’ve made it sound like the deceased middle-aged guard died for nothing, but that wasn’t the case. He protected a young female employee who was about to be targeted by one of the assailants and ended up being beaten to death. He died saving a young woman’s life, not the goods.

After Mitsuha finished her briefing, she handed out gifts to the employees and guards in recognition of their hard work.

Everyone received one ruby, emerald, or sapphire pendant that cost around a hundred dollars each.

The gems were synthetic, of course. That didn't mean they were fakes—they had the same chemical composition as natural gemstones. They just happened to be man-made.

Mitsuha considered giving each person one gold coin, but the gems were much cheaper. The metal settings and chains could drive up the price of synthetic gemstone jewelry, but even then, they were practically free compared to natural gems.

Nonetheless, in this world, these jewels had the same value as natural gemstones. Mitsuha told everyone they were free to sell them, but they all vigorously shook their heads and insisted on keeping them as family heirlooms.

You guys have no idea how cheap those are… Eh, whatever. I guess it's a once-in-a-lifetime honor for a commoner to receive jewels from a noble lord, even if she's from another country.

Mitsuha considered buying cultured pearl pendants—usually a single pearl worth one or two hundred dollars, as opposed to a full beaded necklace—but pearls were organic and degraded over time. They only lasted around twenty years with proper maintenance—two or three without it—before they lost their luster and changed color. The metal fittings would rust too. Synthetic gems were a better option.

Seeing that they wanted to keep the gifts forever, Mitsuha made the right choice.

Oh, I guess the necklace I gave Lady Iris won't last very long either. I didn't know at the time that pearls degrade so quickly… At least she'll probably be able to wear it at Beatrice's wedding. That'll have to be good enough for her.

Giving gifts only to the injured would've made it look like I was rewarding them for resisting the thieves. That might've sent the wrong message, so I decided to give gifts to everyone who was present during the attack instead.

Including the person who couldn't be here today… Or ever again, for that matter…

"It is with a heavy heart I've come today to…" Mitsuha started to mumble the rest.

Trailing off and mincing your words during these occasions is the Japanese way, apparently… But I'm not going to beat around the bushes to say what I'm actually here for.

Mitsuha was visiting a woman today. She was telling her about how the guard died an honorable death protecting a young female employee. She also gave her a ruby pendant, three hundred and one gold coins, and certificates of gratitude (for protecting the employee, not the goods).

The guard was over fifty years old, all his children were married, and he even had grandchildren. He was set up to enjoy his final days with his wife in peace.

It would've been a different story if he were a soldier. Death on duty was a risk that every enlisted soldier was prepared for. A

man whose profession involved fighting and killing others had likely come to terms with the fact that he may end up on the losing side.

That was why Mitsuha didn't feel much conflict over killing enemy soldiers at war. She did her best to avoid it, but it was, at times, a necessity to protect her allies and loved ones. Witnessing your comrades die was difficult too, but in war, it was an inevitable fate.

However, this man was a civilian. He was a guard, but his occupation didn't entail killing thieves and intruders without question, nor would he expect to sacrifice his life for it. A guard was just a regular job, even if it was a little more dangerous than most.

Mitsuha wanted to do what she could for this hero gone too early—that was exactly what he was after risking his life to defend a young woman—and the people he left behind. Both financially and emotionally, they needed to be looked after. That was why Mitsuha gave his wife the certificates signed by Viscountess Yamano and Larusia Trading, the gemstone necklace, and the money. The gifts were to honor the deceased. To bring pride, some financial stability, and peace of mind to the bereaved family.

Mitsuha offered the next words for the same purpose:

"I heard something interesting once. There are apparently people out there who vanquish evildoers for a small price on behalf of the bereaved who couldn't. I *also* heard that they're

running a special campaign this week and accepting jobs for only one gold coin…”

The wife’s eyes, sullen with misery, glinted. She now seemed to understand why she was given an odd number of three hundred and *one* gold coins.

She reached into her bag, pulled out a coin, and quietly slid it toward Mitsuha.

“Please…”

Just the response I was looking for.

The criminal’s fate was decided before she gave me the money. But this will let her feel like she got revenge for her husband. Hopefully she’ll now be able to grieve healthily and enjoy her days with her children and grandchildren. Without being twisted by hatred and resentment…

There’s no guarantee of that, of course. Humans don’t get over losses like this so easily. But if it helps bring her even a little peace…

Money can’t heal the heart, I know. As someone who lost her entire family at once, I understand that better than anyone.

Mitsuha returned to Larusia Trading and told the young shop owner about her visit to the deceased guard’s wife.

“Wh?! You gave her a gem and three hundred and one gold coins?! What the hell were you thinking?! Are you stu—oh, s-s-sorry!” Larusia apologized frantically, realizing that it was no way to talk to her boss.

I don't get mad at people for scolding me if I do something stupid. If anything, I should be thanking her.

"But if you give out gems and gold like candy to employees and guards every time something like this happens, we'll go out of business! Imagine how much it would cost us if a carriage full of goods was destroyed. And it'll only be a matter of time before…" Larusia trailed off.

Yeah, I know what you're about to say.

"Before someone pretends to be a victim of a staged attack?" Mitsuha finished.

"Huh? You thought of that possibility and you still…?"

I know what I did. I'm not that *dumb.*

"This is the only time I'll ever give someone condolence money," reassured Mitsuha. "I wanted to make a display that the Entrepreneur Girl International Network partner stores can survive any attack without going out of business or surrendering their trade source. Nor would the employees quit or betray them. Your guards will stick around too after seeing that the family of their deceased coworker are being looked after. This was a performance, and one I won't ever put on again.

"I hardly think I'll need to once people learn the fate of the thugs who attacked your company. Not in this country, at least."

The exasperation on Larusia's face quickly disappeared. She looked at Mitsuha with resolve.

Yup, I chose this girl for a reason.

"And by 'fate,' do you mean…?" said Larusia.

“Yep. It’s time to show the public what happens when someone dares to hurt one of my friends and kill her associate. It’s time to unleash…the wrath of the Yamano Clan.”

This isn’t Japan. It’s not even Earth. That means I need to play by this world’s rules. While following my own rules. If my opponent is going to break all of them and play only by their rules—which is “Do whatever you want as long as you don’t get caught”—then I’ll be happy to go along with their rules. They can hardly complain about that.

Even I wouldn’t mount an attack against a suspect without proper proof, though. I didn’t act until I found the stolen goods hidden in the warehouse of the company that burglarized Lephilia Trading. I’ll wait to make my move this time too, no matter how sure I am of the prime suspect.

There’s only one company that relentlessly pestered Larusia to give up her trade source, tried to force her into a marriage with one of its clerks, and headhunted her employees after the attack. That’s pretty damning, but there were apparently other companies that were nagging her in one way or another.

Anyway, I’ll have to gather evidence. It doesn’t need to be admissible in a court of law; it just needs to be good enough for me to confirm the culprit.

The authorities and the nobility of this country are going to side with the crook. That means only I can bring him to justice.

I, the Jury.

On that note, let's do this.

Night camouflage leotard, check!

Head-mounted night vision goggles, check!

Miniature voice recorder, check!

The voice recorder had four hundred hours of storage, an auto-record feature that started recording when it detected a voice, and a standby life of three hundred days. *All that for only fifty bucks. I bought ten of 'em.*

Listening devices that sent radio waves—commonly known as bugs—had a short battery life and had to be monitored from nearby at all times. Juggling multiple of them at once was a challenge, too. That was why Mitsuha went with a bundle of spy recorders instead. Bugs were only good if you had an outlet to give them a semi-permanent power source. *But never mind the rambling. I haven't picked up a* Radio Life *magazine since my brother passed away…*

The bottom line is that recorders were better for this job. It wouldn't matter if someone discovered one; nobody from this world would know what they were by looking at it, and Mitsuha could jump them all away in an instant. She'd have to physically enter the store to plant them, but she had no need to do that to retrieve them.

Okay, it's about time…

Mitsuha, teleportation!

Late that night, Mitsuha teleported—er, jumped—to the store of Enoba Company. To say they were the prime suspect was an understatement; this company was so far and away the most likely culprit that Mitsuha couldn't imagine it being anyone else. In sports-betting terms, the odds would be 1.1 or possibly even 1.0, which meant you wouldn't be making any money on a winning bet.

She jumped near the store rather than directly inside it. It was highly unlikely anyone would be walking the streets at night and seeing her, especially given the absence of streetlights. She could just immediately jump away if anyone did.

Mitsuha made sure the lights were out in the shop—which she'd visited as a customer during the day—and jumped inside. All the expensive products had been cleared off the shelves and put away, so there were no guards in the store. They were stationed at the storehouse, the high-security storage room where the luxury goods were kept, the safe room, and the living quarters where the company owner's family slept.

There were obviously no infrared sensors, cameras, or alarms, and there probably weren't wooden clappers either. Even if the guards were alerted somehow, Mitsuha could jump away in a snap and they'd shrug it off as a mouse or something.

The only reason I can be so casual about infiltrating enemy territory is because of the peace of mind I get from knowing I can jump to my Japanese house at any moment. It's a flawless escape

method. Without my world-jumping ability, I'd just be an ordinary, helpless girl who couldn't even beat Colette in a fight…

Mitsuha didn't bother to hide a voice recorder on the sales floor. It would take a special kind of stupid to talk about secrets there.



She tiptoed further inside. Her vision was clear thanks to the night vision goggles. She decided against military camouflage clothing because she wasn't going to be in a battlefield or a forest. Her outfit of choice was a skin-tight leotard. It was practical attire for sneaking around a building since it wouldn't get caught on any furniture or display object.

Thanks to the flatness of my body, I can fit through tight spaces… Oh, keep your comments to yourself! I like to dress for the job, okay?! I'm not cosplaying a certain feline-themed trio of art thieves.

Mitsuha chose a khaki-colored leotard, which would actually stand out less than a black one. The tight fit of the suit also made it clear at a glance that she was a small, unarmed girl; hopefully her appearance would stop any guards from attacking her on sight.

They'd probably want to capture me for questioning, anyway. So as long as they don't catch me off guard, I'll be able to escape.

To tell you the truth, one of the reasons I decided to wear this is because I'm pretty sure no one will see me. It'd be embarrassing if anyone found me in this get-up. I wouldn't wear it in front of people on Earth, let alone in this world where I'd be assumed to be some kind of nympho.

Mitsuha continued to scout the building and walked past a small meeting room. *No reasonable person would discuss criminal activity there.*

Next was the reception room used to accommodate VIP clients. She snuck in and mounted a voice recorder to the bottom of a table.

The internal microphone picked up sound from all sides, which seemed like a good thing, but in reality, it meant that the mic wasn't selective of what it picked up.

Mitsuha adjusted the setting to start recording when it detected sound. Leaving the recorders on the whole time wasn't an issue thanks to the long battery life, but listening to the recording would've taken forever. She had ten of them, after all. Intermittent recordings were less viable as evidence in a courtroom, but that didn't matter in this world.

Pilfering the contents of the safe with her world-jumping ability would've been easy. But while there may have been proof of wrongdoing—like secret ledgers and forged documents—there wouldn't be anything describing an attack on another store, so there was no point in ransacking the safe. She decided to pass on it this time. *This time,* she thought.

The culprit vandalized Larusia Trading's products instead of stealing them, so there was no reason to check the storehouse. Unlike in Vanel, only one store in the entire country of Voftress sold Yamano County's specialty goods. That meant that if anyone tried to resell the stolen goods, they'd immediately be giving themselves away.

Trying to sell them abroad wouldn't work either; there was a monopoly on them in the surrounding countries, all operated by

one of Mitsuha's network of young female business owners. Anyone would instantly realize the goods had been imported. They wouldn't be able to get through customs. Not even the wealthiest merchant would be able to bribe every government official and tax officer in another country. The fact that the culprit destroyed the goods instead of stealing them was proof they understood that.

What's more, they attacked Larusia and her employees as a warning. Their plan was likely to intimidate the employees into quitting, which would force Larusia to shut down her business. Whether the older guard's death was meant as a threat to the other employees or simply due to the killer losing his temper after being blocked from the young female employee, Mitsuha didn't know. Nor did she care. It was all the same to her.

That's just like stabbing someone over and over again, and then crying, "I didn't mean to kill!" Did they think the victim was a planarian?

Anyway, I'm just here to gather intel this time. I haven't confirmed that this company is behind the attack yet.

I'm only about, say, ninety-eight percent sure it was them.

Mitsuha set up a recorder in another reception room.

Once all ten spy recorders were locked in place, she jumped away.

That was easy.

"…And so, I want you all to spread the word. *Casually.*"

“Yes, ma’am!”

The next day, Mitsuha asked the employees and guards at Larusia Trading to go out and bring up in conversation, in the most natural way possible, about what she did for them. Enough time had passed since the attack that the criminals didn’t have much reason to bring up the topic. She was trying to lure them into talking about the incident. They might discuss it if rumors stirred that Larusia Trading was planning to do something that could put a wrench in their scheme.

Yeah, they’re definitely gonna talk about this.

Three days later, Mitsuha retrieved the voice recorders. All she did was stand in front of the store and say the magic words: “Recorders, follow me!” as she world-jumped. Removing the devices meant she’d miss any further conversations they might have, but that didn’t matter. She could plant them again depending on what they revealed this time.

“On that note…” Mitsuha said suggestively.

“You want us to listen to three days’ worth of recordings?” Sabine leered.

Mitsuha appointed Colette and Sabine for the little side job. She had no desire to listen to three days’ worth of recorded audio on ten different devices by herself. The recorders only turned on when they picked up noise and automatically turned off after enough silence. There wouldn’t be seventy-two hours on each

one, which would total seven hundred and twenty hours across all ten, but still, it was an arduous process.

“I said I would reward you! Please help me!”

“Oh, fine… You really are hopeless, Nobita-kun…” Sabine looked exasperated.

“Why are you quoting *Doraemon*?! And don’t call me that!”

“Can we call you ‘Mitsuemon’ instead?” Colette joked.

“No! I’m not Japan’s beloved former *shogun* disguised as a retired crepe merchant!”

These two sure love their classic Japanese media… And I sure am kind to react to their every wisecrack.

Colette and Sabine were the only ones Mitsuha trusted and who also understood the language of the New World. Their reward wasn’t going to be in the form of money, though. They’d never accept that.

Colette receives a fixed wage, but that’s different. That’s for her to save for her future and to send back to her parents. Anyway, these girls would never accept cash for something like this.

Not that I’m getting out of it unscathed… Colette managed to pry an “anything you want” golden ticket from me, and Sabine got a “one convenience-item of your choosing from my home country” ticket. All I can do is pray those tickets won’t be the death of me…

You’re not allowed to ask for an RV or an MBT, Sabine!

“I found one!” Sabine exclaimed.

“Me too!” Colette followed.

It was the very next day after Mitsuha gave the girls three voice recorders each. The remaining four recorders she combed through were duds, but it looked like the girls had better luck.

“Here, I wrote down all the parts that sounded useful,” said Sabine.

“I did too!” Colette said.

They each handed Mitsuha a note. Instead of writing down the full quotes, they simply wrote down the device’s numbers and time stamps where each quote was heard.

“Great work, you two. Here are the goods I promised.”

“Yaaay!”

Mitsuha accepted the spy recorders and notes in exchange for the reward tickets she made by hand.

Please don’t cause too much trouble with those… I’m begging you!

“I’m tired… I’m going home,” Sabine muttered.

“Me too…”

That’s strange. They usually never want to leave my side… Oh wait, they stayed up all night, didn’t they?! They must’ve listened to the conversations over and over again to make sure they heard everything right.

Sabine and Colette weren’t completely fluent in New World language so they struggled to keep up with full-speed native conversations. They’d spent all night playing back the audio files to make sure they didn’t miss anything. The terrible sound

quality from the omnidirectional internal microphones couldn't have helped.

I feel bad about making them do that… I really *didn't want to listen to all ten devices myself though, even if they only recorded when they detected sound…*

Well, I'll jump Colette back to my county. Sabine will have to take the carriage home. I'm trying to avoid jumping directly into the royal palace. Besides, I've gotta let the guards who accompanied her here do their job.

Once the girls were gone, Mitsuha got to work listening to the audio at the specified time stamps.

Sweet! This is just what I needed!

The rumors spread by the employees of Larusia Trading had done the trick. A man who sounded like the owner of Enoba Company was ranting bitterly to someone—likely a head clerk or assistant clerk. He admitted to multiple things that clearly identified himself and his employees as the culprit. There was no reason to hold back anymore.

Also on the recordings were statements that proved collusion with the authorities and under-the-table connections with other merchants. There was nothing wrong with mutually beneficial business arrangements; there weren't any antitrust laws in this world yet, so nothing they did was illegal. *But they can't attack a rival company and get away with it! Not on my watch!*

Mitsuha decided to plant the voice recorders again to get the full picture. This time, she was also going to set them up at other merchants' stores and corrupt city guards' offices who were in cahoots with Enoba Company. She went out and bought more voice recorders for the mission. There was no reason not to; they were only fifty bucks a piece.

The recorders functioned as advertised but the audio quality was poor; hence the cheap price. In an attempt to fix this, Mitsuha bought some small external microphones and attached them to a few of the devices. *Hopefully that'll help…*

Okay, here we go again. Mitsuha, teleportation!

Yeah, yeah, the correct form should be "teleport," not "teleportation," but oh well. That's how the song goes. Besides, it's easier than devising a breath mint-shooting brooch like Mami the Psychic's.

Mitsuha hid five spy recorders at Enoba Company—she narrowed down the locations for greater efficiency—and fixed a couple more at other companies too. Her next stop was the city guards' headquarters.

She figured the security to be lax since a break-in at the city guards' headquarters was just as unexpected as a robbery at a police station on Earth. Not that there weren't any cases of police stations in Japan getting burglarized. Police officers had pistols, and some stations stored rifles, drugs, or gold ingots seized from criminal organizations. The city guards' headquarters would

have nothing of the sort, however. There was no sane reason for anyone to try to sneak in.

It was midnight. Mitsuha jumped to a spot inside the building she'd scouted out with binoculars earlier in the day. She was wearing the same outfit as last time: a leotard and head-mounted night vision goggles.

There was no need to go out and buy a leotard when I have something similar at home… Namely the school swimsuit I wore in middle and high school. Oh, shut up!

A one-piece swimsuit is not much different from a leotard, to be honest. The fitting and materials are similar, and they're both designed for exercising in. There are some differences—swimsuits are made with extra lining, so they don't become see-through when wet.

But no matter how similar they look, there's no way in hell I could go out in public wearing a school swimsuit at my age! Imagine being in a newspaper article described as "a nineteen-year-old woman wearing a leotard" versus "a nineteen-year-old woman wearing a school swimsuit." The latter would be so embarrassing! Well, this world doesn't have newspapers yet, and no one's going to see me, but whatever!

Durability-wise, school swimsuits would be a bit superior to leotards, but, you know… This is about public decency.

Mitsuha walked further into the building. On the off chance any guards were to be patrolling the halls, they'd be carrying a light. That meant she would notice them first.

Thank goodness there are no security cameras or infrared lasers in here… And good thing the guards are heedless about break-ins…

She set up voice recorders in reception rooms and the private offices of important staff. No one was going to discuss secrets in open spaces.

Maybe just two more somewhere… Just as she stepped out of one of the rooms—

"M-MONSTER!"

A man screamed as he drew his sword and swung at her.

Telepo-o-o-ort!

"Wh… Wh-What the hell just happened…" Mitsuha was heaving.

She'd jumped to her house in Japan. Making a successive jump straight to her county residence or general store wasn't an option. Colette and other servants would be at her residence, and there was a chance Sabine, Chii, and Leuhen might be at the store. She couldn't let anyone see her in *that* outfit.

It was sheer bad luck. There was no other way to explain it. The man was probably a guard on night shift. He could've been in the hallway for a patrol or simply because he needed to use the bathroom or was thirsty for some water. Mitsuha didn't notice him as she walked out of the room because he (for some reason) wasn't carrying a light. *I should've checked the halls before opening the door…*

But why did he attack me at first glance? Sure, I was sneaking through the building at night, but I was unarmed. And I clearly look like a harmless girl! I would've expected him to yell "Who goes there?!" or "Don't move!" before swinging at me. Isn't it common practice to capture an intruder and question them first? And yet he attacked without hesitation…

I chose the leotard outfit partially because it wouldn't get caught on furniture or make any rustling sounds, of course, but also because I thought it would ensure anyone who saw me wouldn't immediately attack. All I need is a few seconds to jump to safety.

Then… Why the heck…?

Welp, I'm a sweaty mess now because of that spook. I guess I'll take a shower.

She stepped into the bathroom and caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror.

"Oh… Yeah. 'Monster.' No wonder he attacked me without warning."

There in the glass stood a figure in a leotard, donning head-mounted night vision goggles.

That would *look like a monster to someone from the other world, huh.*

It was my own fault, goddamnit!

"Lady Mitsuha, there's a strange rumor going around the city," Larusia said. It was the next day and they were having tea at

Larusia Company.

“There is?” Mitsuha said as she took a sip.

“Yes. Apparently, there was a monster in the guards’ headquarters last night…”

Pffft!

Mitsuha spat out her tea and broke into a violent coughing fit.

“A-Are you okay, Lady Mitsuha?!”

“Oh, uh, sorry…”

Most people would complain after someone spat tea in their face, but Larusia’s first reaction was to show concern. *She’s so kind…*

Mitsuha had disappeared as soon as the guard saw her, so she was hoping he’d dismiss it as his eyes playing tricks or that he’d blame himself for being half asleep on the job and refrain from reporting it to his superiors. Why would he report anything if he had no proof she was there? Doing so risked making his colleagues assume he was a liar or that he’d been nodding off while on duty, or even insane. *I ran into a really diligent guard…*

“The rumor describes the monster as having the figure of an eleven- or twelve-year-old boy with big eyes bulging out of its head,” Larusia said.

“What?” *I can’t let that one slide…* “H-How was the monster described again?”

She knew she might regret that question.

Larusia answered, “It looked like a boy around eleven or twelve years old. The guard only saw its top half because he instinctively drew his sword and swung at it. It had dry, earth-colored skin and was totally naked. But he was certain that’s what he saw.”

Mitsuha said nothing.

“Uh, is something wrong, Lady Mitsuha?”

She clenched her fists.

“Um… Lady Mitsuha?”

And began to tremble.

“Wh… Wh-Wh-What’s wrong?”

“…He’s dead meat.”

You know, I don’t believe that all city guards are bad people. It’s most likely only a handful of the higher-ups who are guilty of taking bribes and living it up. I’m sure the vast majority of guards are respectable citizens who work hard for the city on a salary that’s way too meager for the dangers of the job. That’s why I was only planning on crushing the bad people and leaving the regular hard-working guards alone.

But hear me, guard who saw me in a leotard and described me as a naked boy*. You’re freaking done for!*

Mitsuha decided against setting up any more voice recorders in the city guards’ headquarters. She ended up with two unused devices, but she’d covered the rooms where she expected to pick up the juiciest info. *That should be enough.*

The headquarters might've increased security because of last night's incident and manned more patrol staff or set traps. There could've been guards hidden under the floor, above the ceiling, or inside cabinets. The risk of placing two more recorders in trivial locations was too great. She decided to leave the recorders alone for a while. The odds of them being discovered were slim.

The guards would've rushed to check the safes to see if the intruder had stolen any important documents, but it wouldn't have occurred to them that the trespasser had left trinkets behind. There was no way they would've noticed the small recorders that were hidden out of sight. If they did, it didn't matter since they only cost fifty dollars.

Well, it was a little more with the external mics, but whatever.

She was lucky that the sighting occurred in the guards' headquarters and not elsewhere. If an incident like that happened at a merchant's house, all the other merchants would've tightened their security. They might've ordered their guards to start patrolling at night to look out for trespassers. But the incident happened at the guards' headquarters which had nothing to do with the merchants. The stores wouldn't do much to improve their security.

The recorders at the guards' building won't need any attention for a while. I'll focus on investigating the merchants in the meantime. Safety comes first.

I'm at the identification stage right now. I can't let anyone catch on to me.

Who are our friends? Which ones are our foes? Once I have the whole picture, the latter will receive a nasty surprise.

"Are there any naughty kids around?" she sneered to herself.

In Japan, there were deities called *namahage* who visited the towns and villages to admonish wrongdoers and bring protection from disaster. One of them was about to appear in the other world.

"…So yeah, can you please help me?!"

"Again?!"

"You brought more than last time!"

Colette and Sabine made their displeasure known when Mitsuha dumped another mountain of voice recorders on them. They were the ones retrieved from the other merchants' stores.

They're right, though… There's certainly more than before…

"Don't worry. Each one has a lot more audio than last time!" Mitsuha grinned.

"That makes it worse!" the girls yelled in unison.

Wow, they're really on the same wavelength these days!

"Well, it might bring you some comfort to know I'm planning on doing this a few more times," said Mitsuha.

"How is that comforting?!" they synchronized again.

Talk about being one in body and soul!

"From now on, I shall call you White and Black! White for Colette's pure heart, and Black for Sabine's scheming ways!"

"Shut up!" snapped Sabine.

“Oh, you’re falling out of sync, Sabine.”

“There’s no use trying to distract us, Mitsuha! We’ll help because it looks like you have no other choice, but you’d better reward us for this!”

Despite all her complaining, Sabine’s always willing to help me when I’m in trouble. The same goes for Colette, of course. They never forget to demand a reward, though…

“Um, wh-what about the tickets I gave you last—”

“No! Those were for the last favor! This is a new one!” Sabine argued.

“Grk…”

This is bad… I’m not too worried about giving Colette another ticket to let her do whatever she wants but giving Sabine another ticket for an item of her choice from Japan could be the end of me. I’m gonna need their help with the audio a few more times too… But these two refuse to accept money from me…

Is there any other reward I can give them?

Maybe I should make this the last time I spy on the merchants and narrow my focus on the city guards and higher authorities…

Mitsuha and the girls decided they’d discuss the rewards for this and any future favors later. She warned them to keep their demands within reason, of course, and made it clear that they were not to pull any more all-nighters. Getting plenty of rest and sleep in between the job was a must.

Staying up all night and overworking yourself are bad for your skin. My self-healing ability probably takes care of that, though…

For their sake, Mitsuha gave them three days to work this time. During that period, the other merchant companies would go unrecorded. Instead, Mitsuha hid additional voice recorders at the store of the main culprit, Enoba Company.

I've lost track of how many recorders I bought at this point… A few dozen? It still cost me less than three thousand dollars altogether, including the external microphones.

Aren't prices a little too *low in Japan? I wonder that every time I step into a one-hundred-yen store…*

I don't intend to buy any more, though. I'd be really creeped out if I met someone who owns over forty spy recorders…

Mitsuha went to the third floor of her general store and hit play on multiple voice recorders at once. There was no need to listen attentively to each one. She could also skip and fast forward through irrelevant conversations. Going through each recording with a fine-tooth comb would've taken forever.

Well, this was a success!

The recording devices picked up a lot of damning conversations among the employees: mocking Larusia Trading, discussing how to get their hands on Yamano County goods, and arranging payments to nobles. *Criminals sure love to hear themselves talk, it turns out.*

But who could blame them for being loose-lipped? This wasn't modern-day Earth; bugging and recording technology didn't exist. There wasn't much you could do to spy on a conversation in this world other than hide under the floor, in the ceiling, or inside a cabinet. The next best option was to bribe someone. Being in the comfort of their own office rooms with colleagues they had absolute trust in sure made them lower their guards. The thick walls and lack of hiding places gave them a sense of security too.

On Earth, bugs and recording devices were far from the only concern. Laser eavesdropping—a surveillance technology in which a laser beam pointed at a window picks up the sound waves produced by speech. The vibrations against the glass are then converted back to audio waves—was one of them.

Secrets were not to be spoken, written, or digitized. That was common sense on modern-day Earth.

In this world, too, there weren't many people dumb enough to leave paper trails of their illicit schemes. Besides, having the need to prepare one was a clear sign of distrust in your accomplice, and plans with someone like that were doomed to fail.

While stealing the contents of a safe might've been useful for unveiling a different kind of criminal activity, the only hard proof for this case was the voice recordings.

Submitting the voice recordings as evidence to the authorities wasn't an option, however. They'd be dismissed as

fabrications or inventions of the devil. It was also inevitable the city guards would “accidentally” lose or break them.

Larusia Trading didn’t have any connections with the city guards or the nobility. No one was seriously investigating the case. As such, there was no way of catching the criminals who attacked the store through legal means. Even if Mitsuha did manage to corner them, the owner of Enoba Company likely never met with the hired guards directly, so he could simply claim that he was being framed. Then the perpetrators would inexplicably escape from prison or kill themselves.

That was why Mitsuha didn’t expect any help from the country’s law enforcement. She could only trust herself, Larusia, and her partners in the Entrepreneur Girl International Network.

Senseless violence shall be met with senseless violence. Those who harm innocent, hard-working people deserve no less.

I’m thoroughly investigating the enemy’s network to find out everyone who was involved. I’ll research every last detail before I act. Then, I’ll teach those scumbags who they made an enemy of. I’ll make them regret it…

I don’t need them to learn any lesson or reflect on their actions. I don’t need them to apologize or promise to do better. There won’t be any second chances. Just regret.

“Say your prayers…” Mitsuha whispered to herself.

There was a famous phrase from Shinran, a Japanese Buddhist monk: “Even a virtuous man can attain Rebirth in the Pure Land,

how much more easily a wicked man!”

Those words were often mistaken to mean, “Even bad people are reborn in the Pure Land, so good people have nothing to worry about.” Mitsuha knew the true meaning: “Even good people are reborn in the Pure Land, so it goes without saying that bad people who have no option but to rely on Amitābha’s grace for salvation are as well.”

Whatever gods the people of this country prayed to, they’d better pray hard. Because otherwise, there would be no Pure Land or paradise or any pleasant afterlife for them. Mitsuha was sending them straight to hell.

“I’m done, Mitsuha. Here are the ree-cor-ders and my notes,” announced Sabine. She’d just arrived at the general store on a mountain bike—the prize she snagged from last time.

“Ah, thank you.”

Mitsuha had already collected Colette’s recording devices and notes at the county residence. The three of them were cooped up in separate locations because the work required listening to audio, which took concentration—especially when listening to multiple devices at once. Mitsuha did her share at her general store, Colette in Mitsuha’s office at the county residence, and Sabine in her room at the royal palace.

The girls warned everyone at home that they were tackling a special task from the Lightning Archpriestess, not a personal

favor for their friend Mitsuha. Thanks to that, they were able to work undisrupted.

“I’m looking forward to seeing what my reward will be,” said the princess.

“I know, I know. Think of some ideas, okay?”

“With pleasure!” Sabine grinned mischievously.

I have a bad feeling about this…

Mitsuha pushed the ominous thought out of her head. Checking the clips that Sabine and Colette picked out took priority.

Sabine seemed to understand that too; she saw how emotionally invested Mitsuha was and refrained from pestering her to play or watch DVDs and Blu-rays together. She also deduced that Mitsuha was going to get right to work since the general store remained closed for business.

“Well, I’m going back to the palace. Don’t stay up all night,” Sabine said.

…Yep. Colette will always be my closest friend because she was the first person I met in this world and because we saved each other’s lives, but Sabine is the one who understands me best.

Anyway, time to start checking the recordings.

Two days later, Mitsuha had created a relationship chart using the data she and the girls obtained from the spy recorders. Enoba Company was at the center, and from it were lines that branched upward, downward, and to the sides.

Above Enoba were nobles and the chiefs of the city guards. Below them were smaller companies, subcontractors, cargo handlers, gangs, and hoodlums. On the left and right sides were companies of equal size that they had contracts with.

In Mitsuha's hands were a stash of voice recorders she'd just retrieved from the city guards' headquarters. She was about to listen to them and put the finishing touches on the chart. She'd already color-coded each party by their "levels" and detailed their exact contribution to the incident.

What "levels," you ask? The level of the crime and the level of punishment they'll receive, of course.

Who decides the weight of their crimes? That would be none other than me.

I,the Jury!

Chapter 88:
Revenge

It was time once again to display the cruelty of Gorgeous Mitsuha, inspired by the one and only Gorgeous Irene.

I promise I don't enjoy killing or committing crimes. But I'm not gonna twiddle my thumbs and watch as my friends and I are made victims.

What's that? Aren't all lives equal, you ask? Oh, please. Do you mean to tell me that if you could only save either the serial killer or a cute little girl, you'd actually struggle with that choice? Would you value the life of a knife-wielding maniac and not resist as they slashed you and your family? Of course you wouldn't!

Only those who value the lives of others deserve to be treated in kind. Enoba Company and their accomplices don't deserve mercy. They elected to try to eliminate a rising business rival with an outrageously violent act—forgetting their dignity as merchants. They will be reciprocated with an equally unjust attack.

I'm not gonna fight them on a level playing field, nor do I need to. I'm doing this quietly without resorting to violence. Well, violence against people, anyway.

Let the party begin!

Late that night, Mitsuha made yet another trip to Enoba Company. She checked to make sure the shop's lights were out and jumped inside. Next, she jumped the display shelves full of

goods to Earth and then back into the store. The catch? She returned with the shelves hovering high in the air, nearly touching the ceiling.

Crash! Shatter!

Okay, jump!

She repeated that process five more times in the stores of companies that colluded with Enoba Company. The racket of the shelves and products hitting the ground must've caused a commotion soon after, not that she stuck around to find out. Once she was done, she jumped right to her home in Japan and went to bed.

"Larusia, payback has begun! I've confirmed the identities of our enemies, and now it's time to crush them!" Mitsuha said when she visited Larusia Trading the next morning.

"Huh? What do you—oh, I mean, I'm sure you performed a thorough investigation, Lady Mitsuha, but there's no use in putting up a fight with them… The authorities would never listen to us…" Larusia looked resigned.

The authorities can kiss my ass!

"What do the authorities have to do with anything? When I say crush them, I don't mean complain to law enforcement. We're gonna put those crooks out of business with the help of *our* most trusted comrades. Larusia, did you really believe that the Entrepreneur Girl International Network is nothing more than a friendship circle?"

Larusia stared at Mitsuha in astonishment. It took her some time to manage a response.

“…Let’s do it!” she finally exclaimed.

“That’s what I wanna hear! All right, we’re gonna start by making a public announcement. I’ll reach out to everyone in the Entrepreneur Girl International Network, and I want your company to contact all your domestic retailers and clients. Here’s the rough draft of the announcement,” Mitsuha said, handing her a sheet of paper.

The girl skimmed it and looked up with a grin. It was the first time Mitsuha saw her smile since the incident.

It was a delightfully wicked smile, too.

By noon, the rumors were spreading throughout the city. “Six shops, each owned by different companies, had been inexplicably ravaged in the night,” it went.

There was much speculation about this incident. Why those six stores in particular? Did they have something in common? Was the attack the work of a human being? Could it have been a monster or a demon? Or was it perhaps divine punishment?

The average person had no idea what connected the six stores, but it was obvious to those in the business world. One was Enoba Company, a major and notorious name in the industry, and the other five were mid-sized companies that did their bidding. It wasn’t hard to imagine the six names earned a lot of resentment over the years.

That said, it was unthinkable that someone could raid all six stores at nearly the same time and escape so quickly, leaving zero witnesses. Was such a thing humanly possible?

The next day, stores all around the capital received a letter. They were hand-delivered by the employees of Larusia Company. The staff spent the previous day addressing the envelopes and dividing them up for delivery.

The letter was the draft Mitsuha showed Larusia. The two of them carefully revised it and Larusia handwrote the final draft. Mitsuha then made copies of it on Earth.

Shopkeepers all over the city read the letter in astonishment. Written in it were the details of the attack on Larusia Trading. It also noted the fact that the assailant had destroyed the goods and assaulted their employees—killing one—yet, for some reason, left without stealing anything. Furthermore, it stated that Larusia Trading would, for its own protection, cease conducting business with the companies listed in the letter and any affiliated companies or individuals.

There were six names on the list—the very same ones that had been the talk of the city for the last day.

“WHAT?! THAT’S UTTER NONSENSE!” the owner of Enoba Company, Bartaad, exploded after receiving a report from one of his clerks. He was already irritated as he was in the midst of overseeing the repair work for his sales floor.

“I-I’m just repeating what they said…” the clerk quivered.

The clerk couldn’t argue with the company owner, but he had to deliver his report accurately. Even someone with exceptional business and financial acumen couldn’t make the best decisions based on incorrect information. Humans were like computers in that sense. That was why the clerk shared what he heard without sugarcoating anything or brown-nosing, despite knowing he’d get yelled at. Bartaad was a crook but he didn’t demote or punish subordinates for delivering the truth.

“Our client is ceasing all business with us effective immediately?!” Bartaad exclaimed. “And other clients throughout the capital are sending us the same notice?! Why is everyone doing this?! That makes no sense! Is this about that mysterious attack on our shop? We only suffered a little damage to the display items in our flagship store. That’s just a scratch to a company of our size. Anyone should know that it won’t shake the foundation of our business!”

“I-I don’t know what to say…”

Bartaad was right, but the contract termination letters were flooding in and there was nothing he could do about it. The clerk was relatively young and lacked the experience to understand the reason behind the clients’ actions. Larusia Trading’s letter was not delivered to the six companies behind the assault, so they were in the dark as to why they were being cut off. They certainly weren’t aware that Larusia Trading alluded to the culprit’s identity in their letter.

Bartaad also didn’t know that the companies who received the letter interpreted the act as a full-force retaliation by Larusia Trading. They had no reason to endanger themselves for Enoba Company’s sake. There were plenty of other merchants who sold the generic products, but Larusia Trading was the only distributor of the popular Yamano County goods in this country. No one had to openly oppose Enoba Company; they could simply cease doing business with them for the time being.

It was practically a guarantee that merchants throughout the capital—no, the entire country—would do the same, so no single business had to fear retribution. There was no reason for any of them to hesitate about cutting off Enoba Company. They were all merchants, and they had to do what was right for their business.

Just when Enoba thought their situation couldn’t get any worse, it did. As similar requests began to pile up from abroad in the coming days, it became clear that not only were all their domestic clients cutting them off, but their foreign clients were as well.

Enoba Company was a major business that had a flagship store in the capital and several branch shops throughout the country. It also did plenty of business across borders. Right now, those foreign clients were sending in their letters of contract termination, each one saying much the same thing as the ones from the big domestic companies.

The foreign businesses had also received a letter from the sole distributor of Yamano County goods in Voftress saying that they refuse to do business with anyone that was affiliated with Enoba Company. Normally, losing business from one young and fresh merchant wouldn't have much impact on a company's profits. Continuing international trade with a major company was much more profitable.

But not this time. Yamano County goods were a sensation across the continent. Royals, nobles, and other powerful figures were ordering masses of them. Losing Yamano County's products would mean losing their most valuable clientele.

The moment a wealthy buyer couldn't obtain Yamano County goods with their usual seller, they were going to take their business to another merchant. Foreign companies had no choice but to cease doing business with Enoba Company.

"Damn it… What the hell is happening?" Bartaad seethed, tearing at his hair.

A clerk who finally learned what was happening shared his findings: domestic and foreign companies alike had received a notice from a certain trading company in the capital. Because of that, they were all shifting their stances in the same direction.

"What?! This is all that Larusia Trading girl's doing?! How could she possibly have this much influence?"

Bartaad had completely underestimated Larusia. She was the young daughter of a mid-sized merchant company and a total

novice as a business owner. She had no backing other than her father whom she wasn't on good terms with after leaving home to start her business. Bartaad could crush her father's company like a grape if necessary.

In theory, Larusia had no one to save her. Bartaad assumed a little threat would be all it took to make her fall in line. He'd then obtain the exclusive rights to sell Yamano County goods in his country and employ the girl as a pretty little token clerk for one of his branch stores. She'd make a nice mistress, too.

That was what he had in mind when he proposed a merger, but to his surprise, she rejected him. He wasn't too hard on her for that; all young merchants went through a phase of pursuing overambitious dreams before they got their first taste of reality. Her spunk reminded him of his own youth, and in a moment of uncharacteristic kindness, he decided to let her chase her dream for a little while longer. And so, he started off by offering her a normal business deal (one that would bring him great profit, of course).

His offer was to buy Larusia Trading's wholesale goods at a twenty percent discount. Larusia rejected him flatly.

Mitsuha prohibited the partner stores in the Entrepreneur Girl International Network from altering wholesale prices depending on the client. She personally disliked that practice, and she knew that people would try to threaten the young female owners into lowering the prices for them. As such, she made it

easy for the girls to reject proposals like that by claiming their supplier was strict about the wholesale prices of her goods.

Larusia likely would've rejected the offer anyway. After the cost of acquiring the goods, employees' and guards' salaries, rent and maintenance, utility bills, customer service expenses, office supplies, and taxes, her net profit was just under twenty percent of sales. A twenty percent discount would've put her in the red.

Mitsuha was the only one who had an absurd profit ratio; the Entrepreneur Girl International Network members' gains were moderate. One of the biggest reasons for that was the relatively hefty price they paid for the Yamano County goods. No one complained, though; the price made sense, given the fact that the goods (supposedly) had to be shipped from overseas and took months to arrive.

Larusia was still making money. Her customers were buying a lot of generic goods from her, hoping to win her favor and first dibs when the Yamano County products were in stock. That gave her a massive advantage over her competition, but she wasn't dumb enough to sell her goods at a loss when they were already in high demand.

Bartaad was simply trying to prey on her company because it was new and owned by a young woman, and if she didn't do as he said, he'd try to put her out of business and snag her trading routes. However, she expected he'd do so as a businessman and use business tactics like undercutting her prices—not by

launching a criminal and vicious attack. There was no way to respond other than to bare her fangs and strike back.

“Larusia Trading will cease to conduct business with the six particular businesses and any affiliated companies or individuals,” was all the letters said.

Nowhere in the letter did they accuse those companies of being responsible for the attack on Larusia Trading. The stores who received the memo were free to do business with whomever they pleased. No one had any right to complain. Therefore, there was nothing Enoba Company could do to call out Larusia Trading in this matter.

Not legally, anyway. But the word about Larusia Trading’s announcement spread throughout Voftress and beyond. If the company was attacked again, Enoba Company would be the primary suspect.

Bartaad was a skilled merchant in his youth, so much so that he earned the nickname Golden Tiger. But his company had grown so powerful that he could obtain any product he wanted and have full control over market prices. It was unthinkable that another company would ignore a demand from him. That was exactly why he failed to see how scared smaller companies would be of being blacklisted from purchasing Yamano County goods, and how they’d be willing to incur a little displeasure from Enoba Company to ensure that didn’t happen.

Even the fiercest of tigers grew old and fat, and eventually lost his fangs. With each passing year, he became accustomed to

an easy life and his strength declined to the point where he couldn't beat a mutt in a fight. Today, a pack of vicious she-wolves were circling the aging tiger with a thirst for blood.

"Please speak to Larusia Trading," said Mitsuha. "I have one merchant in each country who distributes my goods. Having to make multiple deals in each country is cumbersome, which I'm sure you understand. I agreed to meet with you today because you took the trouble of coming all the way here from abroad, but please direct all future business inquiries to the distributor in your country, which is Larusia Trading.

"And as I just mentioned, I only do business with one merchant per country. If their store goes out of business or their management changes, I'll start the selection process all over from scratch. It's not the store's name that I care about, but the personality and trustworthiness of the owner. Our agreement will not be carried over to a new parent company. That's clearly stated in the contract with each of my business partners."

A man from Enoba Company—he seemed to be a head clerk—traveled all the way to Vanel to meet with Mitsuha at her commodity shop. He'd asked several long-time Vanelian tradesmen to mediate, but they all turned him down. None of them wanted to risk associating with his company and getting cut off by Lephilia Trading.

The next name the clerk sought was Lephilia Trading. It was well known that Mitsuha prohibited her distributors from selling

Yamano County goods across borders, but that wasn't Lephilia Trading's only selection. She handled an array of other products, and she used Yamano County goods to bolster their sales. Because of that, it wasn't unusual for foreign merchants to approach her with business proposals.

The members of the Entrepreneur Girl International Network were making quite a profit by trading their local specialties between each other. They traded with companies outside of their network too, of course, but they all looked out for one another. If you were going to pay for a caravan, you might as well load it with as much cargo as you could to efficiently make a profit.

When the clerk from Enoba asked Lephilia to arrange a meeting with Mitsuha, she refused him, naturally. "I don't have the authority to do that. You'll have to go through the Yamano County distributor in your own country, which is Larusia Trading," she said, exactly as Mitsuha instructed. Not that any of girls in the network would've arranged a meeting with a man from such a foul company anyway. Mitsuha wouldn't have chosen anyone that stupid to join her network.

The head clerk's last resort was to reach out to a local noble who had connections in Vanel. The nobles in Vanel hadn't heard of the incident in Voftress, and Mitsuha and Larusia hadn't sent any letters to them, so they likely didn't know anything. A noble would have nothing to lose by introducing him to Viscountess Yamano, especially if the clerk paid him for it.

Mitsuha didn’t feel any animosity toward the noble for introducing the clerk to her, nor was she going to have Lephilia blacklist them. She decided to agree to the meeting out of courtesy toward the noble. Which was exactly what the head clerk was counting on.

Mitsuha and the clerk had just exchanged introductions, and she was in the middle of turning down his proposition.

As I should. I am *the mastermind behind why he’s here, after all.*

The head clerk opened his mouth to protest.

“Never mind that,” she cut him off to deliver the finishing blow. “The nerve your company’s owner has to send a clerk to meet with a viscountess of a foreign land instead of making the trip himself… Does he think of himself above me despite his humble status? That’s outrageous! The Yamano family will never—ever—do business with Enoba Company. Off with you!”

The head clerk was the second highest in authority behind only the company owner. He had much more command than an ordinary clerk, but from a noble’s perspective, it wasn’t wrong to interpret the act as the owner sending a regular employee to meet with a noble instead of going himself.

“Wh…?” the clerk choked.

Huh? He looks sick. I understand if he’s panicking because his mission is about to end in failure. But his face says that’s not all…

Oh! Did he not know that I’m the one with the peerage? Does the company owner think I’m nothing more than an illegitimate

daughter of a viscount? And that's why he figured sending his head clerk to negotiate was sufficient?

The nobles and merchants of Vanel think I'm the daughter of a king or a powerful noble from another country, and that I received one of my parents' peerages. Enoba Company's owner might've heard about me as a "high-born girl" and assumed the peerage belongs to my father, and not me. That'd be a reasonable misunderstanding.

The nobles and merchants of this country want to keep me here, so they wouldn't volunteer details about me to a foreigner. If anything, the noble who set us up was probably hoping the head clerk would slip up and say something rude out of ignorance. Acting on misinformation and wrong assumptions is lethal, especially in business and when dealing with nobility.

To be fair, a noblewoman leasing a small shop in a foreign country and living there by herself isn't exactly a predictable situation…

"I have nothing more to say. Please leave," Mitsuha urged.

The head clerk and his two attendants—he didn't introduce them, but they were probably store clerks—didn't budge. She glanced at the three men standing behind them, who responded by grabbing the three clerks' arms and leading them out of the shop.

The three men standing were sent by the Vanelian noble who arranged the meeting. One looked like a butler and the other two looked like guards. It was well known that Mitsuha lived alone in

her commodity shop, so the noble couldn't risk sending three foreign men unattended. He'd ordered his own staff to accompany them and report back on any scoop. If the visitors got violent, it would've ended up being his responsibility.

So the guards were sent to protect me, not to escort the visitors.

Mitsuha had arranged her own security personnel too; four out of the six men at the guard station next door were lined up behind her. Her regular visits and small gifts paid off at times like this. When she told them that foreign merchants were visiting her for "a talk," they volunteered to stand in, assuming the lone girl was feeling uneasy about the meeting.

Concern for the young viscountess probably wasn't their only reason for doing that; it'd be an embarrassment for the city guards if a young foreign noblewoman living next door to a guard station was pressured, threatened, or even attacked by foreign men. The guards couldn't ignore that possibility.

And thus, the three Enoba employees the owner sent as a Hail Mary to save his business had to trudge back home having accomplished nothing. Meanwhile, the rumor that "Enoba Company screwed up big time" continued to spread across their city among the merchants and commoners alike.

I know that because I've been jumping back to Voftress every day to eavesdrop on gossiping older women, listen in at diners that serve alcohol while I eat my meal very *slowly… If the commonfolk are talking, it obviously means the news reached high society too.*

It's only a matter of time now…

"The clerks probably won't be back for a few more days… I hope they were able to negotiate with someone from the Yamano family," Bartaad mumbled.

He'd heard that the representative of the Yamano name residing in Vanel was a young girl. Naturally, he assumed it meant she was a daughter or something of the head of the family, and that she was sent abroad alone because the family considered her to be a disposable pawn who wouldn't be missed if anything happened to her.

It was apparent that she'd been granted quite a lot of discretion regarding trade, but he didn't think that necessarily had anything to do with her prowess or importance to the family. He was certain his employees could win her over.

"In any case, thanks to that wretched Larusia Trading girl's cheap trick, rumors are spreading. And they're painting me as the criminal behind the attacks! I don't care what the common riffraff believes, but I can't let word of this reach the upper class."

Bartaad wasn't being painted as the criminal; he *was* the criminal. His habit of calling commoners "riffraff" despite being a commoner himself gave you a glimpse of his arrogance.

Perhaps he was intending to buy his way into the nobility eventually. It was possible that in his mind, he already considered himself nobility.

With enough money, joining the elite wasn't impossible. There were plenty of methods of doing so. For example, he could find a lower-ranking noble drowning in debt and bribe them into adopting him as their heir in exchange for paying off their debt and offering enough money to live comfortably.

"Maybe I should use the city guards… It's exactly for times like these that I've been regularly slipping them cash under the table. It'd be a waste not to use the tools I've been polishing."

"Are you the owner of Larusia Trading?!"

"Uh, no. I'm not."

"Huh?"

Six men who looked like soldiers were standing in the office of Larusia Trading. The namesake owner happened to be out at the moment. The men had forced their way past the employees into the back of the store, found Mitsuha—the only one dressed like a non-employee—lounging in the room with a cup of tea, and assumed she was Larusia. They must've heard that the owner was a young woman.

Even though I look around twelve years old to the people around here… That seems a little too young, no?

"Well, who's the owner then?!" the same man barked. He was likely the officer in charge of the squad.

"She's not here," Mitsuha answered.

"Where did she go?! And when will she get back?!"

"How should I know? I can't read minds."

There was no need to inform such rude people that Larusia was going to be back soon.

“Wh?! Watch your tone, you damn brat! Don’t you know the consequences of antagonizing the city guards?!”

“Such harsh language… You’re a public servant. You should act more like one.”

“How dare you… You’re gonna regret that snooty atti—”

“Let me ask you this: do *you* know the consequences of antagonizing a foreign noble?”

“Huh…?”

The officer froze and went pale at the words “foreign noble.” No matter what his authority, he could get into big trouble for insulting and picking a fight with the daughter of a foreign noble. He could even be terminated to take full blame for the incident.

His hand was inches from her collar. *You’re lucky you stopped right there. You were this close to laying a hand on me.*

“M-My apologies,” he sputtered before rushing out of the store with his subordinates.

Fleeing was the right decision; he hadn’t given her his name yet, so there was a chance she wouldn’t be able to report him to his superiors. He also had little reason to doubt Mitsuha’s claim; the consequence of feigning noble status was decapitation, and her attitude, clothing, and exotic features lent credibility. Accusing her of lying would’ve been too big a risk.

Those guards are probably the ones who were bribed by Enoba Company. They’re gone now… But that’s only because I happened to

be here this time. There's no telling what they'll do to Larusia if they come back when I'm not around.

"I'm interpreting those words as a declaration of war. Everyone, prepare for battle!" Mitsuha avowed.

"…Huh? Is something wrong, Lady Mitsuha?" Larusia overhead her proclamation just as she returned to her office.

Well, the war started a while ago. Their assault on Larusia Trading was a surprise attack without a formal declaration. Wrecking the sales floors of the six companies was my counterattack.

That was when the fight began, technically. And now we're officially at war. Larusia Trading's first formal strike was cutting off Enoba's supply routes and ruining their ability to trade. Enoba then tried to retaliate by storming in on Larusia Trading's front line (the store) but I repelled them.

Mitsuha was here because she knew that the city guards were coming to the store today. Larusia being out of the office when they arrived was a pure coincidence.

How did she learn about this plan? With the spy recorders, of course. She was a little worried the city guards' headquarters would be on high alert for intruders, but it'd been days since the monster-spotting incident.

It was a matter of time before the low-ranking guards who'd had to pull consecutive graveyard shifts started to complain. Had they been on an actual battlefield, they would've felt purpose in their all-nighters, but a childish claim of a monster in the hallway

was bound to lower morale. Mitsuha figured the city guards relaxed their security by now.

I didn't wander around the building like last time. I narrowed the hiding spots down to three locations where I previously caught gossip, jumped there, and immediately retreated after planting the devices. Each one only took 0.2 seconds, so there was very little chance of anyone seeing me. If they did, they would've just thought their eyes were deceiving them in the dark. I knew exactly where I was setting the recorders before I jumped, so there was almost no danger.

For good measure, I hid under a black cardboard box as I jumped and reached out from underneath to set the recorders. It would've been impossible for anyone to see me. Perfectamundo!

So yeah, I heard all the sinister plans they discussed at the headquarters. I'm also regularly swapping out the voice recorders at Enoba and listening to them for information. Those who control information control the world!

Mitsuha explained to Larusia that the enemy had panicked and sent the city guards for a direct attack. The girl wasn't fazed, though; she'd already suffered a barbaric assault unbecoming of a merchant. Multiple employees were injured, and a security staff was even killed. Her workers were doing all they could to help her achieve her dreams, and she cared deeply about them. Her heart especially ached for the guard who left behind a family. That kind of experience hardened a person.

"Goddess of revenge, give us your blessing," Larusia prayed.

I didn't recruit a harmless little kitty. I recruited a wolf pup and she's now starting to bare her fangs.

"We're from the city guards. You're coming with us to our headquarters."

The very next day, the same group of men came back to Larusia Trading and confronted the young storeowner while she was working outside the shop's entrance. They'd sent in a scout in plain clothes to confirm that the noble girl wasn't around.

Larusia said, "If this is about the thugs who broke in and attacked us, I've already shared everything I know. I'm currently very busy dealing with the damage from that incident, so if you have any additional questions, I'd be happy to answer them here."

"We're not here for that! You're under suspicion of sabotaging Enoba Company's business. We're bringing you in for questioning!"

The noble girl wasn't here today, which let him assume his usual intimidating attitude to strong-arm the girl into obeying him. But Larusia wasn't about to comply.

"Huh? I haven't done anything…" she said. "What exactly happened? Is it something related to our business or are you saying I've committed an actual crime? Do you have proof? Is there a reason I am being suspected? Does the victim believe that I resent them for something?

“The only people I bear a grudge against are the brigands who attacked my store. If Enoba Company believes that I have reason to resent them, does that mean they were behind the attack? And does the fact that you’re here running errands for them mean they have accomplices among the city guards?”

“Wha…?” the officer hesitated.

She was in front of the store talking loudly. And *very* clearly.

“Someone, please! Contact the royal palace!” she yelled. “We must tell the nobles in charge of the city guards and the leaders of the capital army about this right away!”

Her efforts paid off as a crowd of people gathered around the store. Their chattering grew louder and louder.

All nobles had political rivals. Families could end up opposing each other because of factional disputes, competition from selling similar local specialties, or long-held grudges. As a result, rumors of ineptitude or a scandal under a noble’s jurisdiction could spell trouble even if the rumors were untrue.

It would be especially disastrous for them if an official complaint was filed by the country’s sole distributor of particular luxuries that were favored among the upper class.

The noble and royal lords had a weakness for alcohol and delicacies. The men were also constantly under pressure from their wives and daughters to procure some of the rare Yamano County cosmetics and jewelry. Would they dare antagonize Larusia Trading?

Normally, a noble had no qualms about silencing a troublemaker, but this was different.

Because of the special circumstances, they were much more likely to silence the people who caused the problem rather than the person who complained about it.

“Huh…?” The officer was paralyzed by Larusia’s outrageous claim.

As he stood frozen fumbling for words, her employees began darting out of the store and racing in all directions. They were headed for the royal palace, just as Larusia commanded.

“Hey! S-Stop! I order you to stop!” the officer yelled frantically, but of course, no one listened. He turned to his subordinates. “Seize those people! Now!”

But it was too late. The employees had already sprinted down different routes leading to the royal palace. They were in better shape than one might expect; unloading cargo and carrying them to the storehouse every day was strenuous work. The city guards couldn’t possibly catch up strapped in their heavy armors and weapons.

And thus, none of them tried. They also knew that following his orders and detaining innocent civilians could get them punished. They had no desire to throw their lives away for a disreputable officer whose days were numbered.

The guards were all thinking the same thing:

Too late for that!

Larusia continued to shout her accusations against the city guards as if they were established facts. She didn't even pause to let them have a word in.

This is a mess, sweated the officer.

This guy is finished… thought the other guards.

The officer's act today was problematic. The misdeeds that were about to be exposed after the inevitable investigation were going to be fatal.

Meanwhile, the other guards hadn't done or said anything since they arrived at the shop. They accompanied their superior, but they objected to his clearly illegal commands. *We refused to comply with his orders at the risk of being punished for disobedience. This would demonstrate our morals as city guards. Our superior officer would be convicted for his crimes while we'd be exonerated*, they all hoped.

The guards weren't exactly thrilled about being dragged into the unsavory job of arresting innocent victims. Now that they suddenly gained evidence that they'd resisted, they were relieved.

Just according to plan, Mitsuha thought, hiding among a group of employees in the corner.

She'd put on a colored wig, used makeup to slightly change her skin tone, and dressed like an employee so she would blend in. If necessary, she was ready to leap out and cry, "Hold it right there!" to defend Larusia.

If the officer questioned why a noble girl was dressed in an employee's uniform, she could say she wanted to try working because it sounded fun. It was common for young noble girls to impose on commoners and wreak havoc as a pastime. The excuse was perfectly believable.

If he asked her to prove she was a noble, she could tell him that her country was far away and that he'd have to check with the Vanelian royal palace or upper nobility to confirm. Larusia's words should've been enough, though. As the country's sole distributor of the popular Yamano County goods, there was no reason to doubt her. After all, falsely claiming noble status could get a commoner beheaded. The offender's cohorts and their family would be dissolved, and their fortune would be seized.

Not even a noble would escape punishment if they took part in falsifying someone's peerage.

By the same token, the officer understood what would happen to him if he accused Mitsuha and Larusia of lying about her peerage knowing how unlikely they were to do so. The former was a foreign noblewoman, and the latter was the supplier of the highly coveted Yamano County goods, respectively. No one would accuse Mitsuha of lying about her identity unless they were an idiot or suicidal.

In the end, Larusia's employees couldn't be stopped, the officer's subordinates weren't following his orders, and the crowd of witnesses had seen it all. The horde of spectators grew in number as they glared at the officer. If he managed to arrest

Larusia under those circumstances, it would've been impressive. Not just because of his courage, but also because of his stupidity.

And of course, as the officer was neither brave nor an idiot, he fled and commanded his subordinates to follow. Now *that* order, they obeyed.

Larusia Company employees piling into the royal palace were unlikely to be detained. Larusia had given them detailed instructions on what to do after she shouted the keyword, "Contact the royal palace"—like how to explain themselves if the gatekeepers didn't let them through, how loudly they should yell, and what to say when other soldiers or civil officials approached them.

The employees had split up and taken different routes to the royal palace exactly as planned; they couldn't have made such a spontaneous decision on the spot.

Just in case, Mitsuha and Larusia had informed the royal palace beforehand, which might've been unnecessary. Larusia Trading's name was well known enough to let the employees pass if the message was that their boss was in danger. The royal palace also would've sent their soldiers to investigate after hearing that the city guards were breaking the law in full view of the public. Such an incident could harm the city guards' credibility. They existed to protect peace in the capital, and a scandal could have unsavory consequences.

That was to say nothing of the sense of rivalry between the city guards, the capital army, and the royal guard. The three

organizations didn't get along and tended to dispute over anything from jurisdictional boundaries to girls at bars. That was common for professions that shared similar duties, and it was further complicated by the expectations and interests of the nobles who led them.

Because of that, the royal guards were unlikely to ignore Larusia Trading's employees when they came knocking for help—whether Mitsuha and Larusia made prior arrangements or not.

But make prior arrangements they did. They'd spoken with nobles, royal guard officers, and capital army officers who were at odds with the leaders of the city guards. Who would refuse a meeting with the young owner of Larusia Trading—the company that had a monopoly over the limited imports of the luxurious alcohol, food, and cosmetics—and the foreign viscountess who supplied said imports? Especially if they arrived with insider info and gifts in hand.

Thus, the two girls were able to speak with many nobles, government officials, high-ranking military officers, and even a few royals (though not anyone as high as the king or his children).

Who knew meeting with a noble or royal would be as easy as going to an idol meet-and-greet?

Mitsuha and Larusia's efforts ensured that if one of their employees was causing a racket at the royal palace gates,

someone under the patronage of one of those nobles and royals would immediately attend to them.

The best way to deal with a small man abusing borrowed authority is to strike him with greater authority. People like him think they can get away with anything, but if you single them out in public, they'll grasp that all responsibility will fall on them. That should put them in their place. Though at that point, it's too late…

Then you tell their boss exactly what they did. If their boss was in on it, then you go to their boss. If that person is rotten too, then you find their *boss. If you keep going up the chain, you're bound to find a boss who's decent.*

If you don't, then you bring it up with someone in the opposing faction. They're likely to help…especially if you dangle the privilege of first dibs on Yamano County goods.

Mitsuha elected against meeting any city guard leaders, as that risked compromising the operation. She didn't know how many of the apples in the barrel were rotten. There was a chance that the corruption went all the way to the top or to the nobles involved. She wanted to decide what to do after observing the city guards' reaction.

I'm sure this will all work out!

The situation progressed over the next few days.

The employees of Larusia Trading who rushed to the royal palace that day were, as expected, restrained by the gatekeepers. They yelled for help at the top of their lungs and caused quite a

commotion. The subordinates of the people who met with Mitsuha and Larusia acted quickly to let them through.

It all happened in a flash after that. A squad of soldiers immediately paid a visit to Larusia Trading, while others went to report to their respective bosses. By the time the soldiers arrived at Larusia's store, the city guards had fled, but they took testimonies from the young owner, her employees, and the remainder of the crowd on the street. They even asked questions about the initial attack on Larusia Trading from weeks ago. The city guards had apparently never disclosed any reports on the incident. There was going to be heavy investigation into that as well.

Mitsuha also divulged the previous day's incident of how a city guards officer threatened and nearly got violent with her, emphasizing that she was a young lady of nobility from another country. She'd changed into her more upscale clothes, obviously. The two girls had already told the nobles but there was meaning in having the soldiers at the scene take down the information.

It wasn't long before the culprits started facing backlash from various sides: nobles who were rivals of those associated with city guards, capital army soldiers and royal guards who were disgruntled by the unethical behavior of an organization that was supposed to defend peace in the city, and the upright city guards who were livid about their superiors' outrageous behavior.

The first order of business was to conduct a surprise investigation into the city guards' headquarters. It was led by the internal affairs inspectors and field auditors. With the number of soldiers that were sent in, there was no time to hide any documents or obstruct the raid.

A city guards officer tried to get in an inspector's way, but he was swiftly blocked by a soldier who drew a sword to his neck. Before he could lift a finger, he was tied up and led away. The other city guards meekly fell in line at the soldiers' aggressive manner.

The atmosphere was so tense that the city guards feared they could get killed on the spot for treason. They were terrified of being punished as criminals who willingly followed their corrupt superiors' commands.

For some reason, the inspectors were able to find evidence after evidence indicating malpractice. They knew exactly where to look for the bribe money. Secret ledgers and documents detailing illegal acts were discovered in the most obvious places like desk drawers and cabinets. A painting on one of the walls was crooked, exposing a hidden safe. And somehow, only the staff who were involved in the crimes were questioned and the innocent ones were skipped over. That kind of accuracy should not have been possible.

Normally when people committed crimes, they acted alone or had two or three agents they knew they could trust. Any more than that and betrayal became inevitable. Anyone backed into a

corner was bound to confess in the hope of lightening their sentence.

There was a system like that on Earth called plea-bargaining. *I suppose it's one way to solve crime…*

Anyway, the inspectors—who had an inexplicable knack for casing the building—uncovered all the city guards' corruption.

That's what I heard, at least. I don't actually know anything for a fact. Besides, none of this has anything to do with me.

There'd been bad rumors about the city guards for a long time but forcing an investigation without evidence would've had dire consequences if they failed to expose anything. No one had been willing to try them. After all, erasing evidence and witnesses was a cakewalk.

This time, however, the investigators had received a tip. They were told specifically where all the evidence was hidden in the building. Additionally, several pieces of evidence had been submitted before the investigation just in case nothing was found. The tipper was someone who couldn't be intimidated into retracting their testimony or die without warning.

They couldn't possibly pass up this chance.

"What?! There was a raid at the city guards' headquarters, the friends we've been greasing the hands of were arrested?!" Bartaad was enraged.

"Yes, sir. Even worse, the replacements who were promoted and transferred from other departments to fill their positions are

all very strait-laced folk," said the clerk who'd been responsible for maintaining relations with the city guards. His face grew increasingly pale as he spoke but the problems didn't end there. "I also heard that the internal investigators seized countless evidence documents, some of which prove their connection to our company…"

"That's absurd! I never created such documents! That's way too dangerous!"

"I, uh, heard that the documents are minutes they recorded for our meetings," the clerk gulped.

"How could that be?! That's one of the most idiotic things I've ever heard! No one would keep minutes for conversations that you wouldn't want the public to hear about! Damn it. Either the city guards wrote them after our meetings to threaten us with or the investigators forged and planted them in a stack of papers they confiscated… If they were forged, there should be some inconsistencies to prove it. That could save us."

Little did he know, the minutes were actually written by Mitsuha using what she heard from the voice recorders, so the information was highly accurate. She slipped them among the city guards' documents herself, making sure they were easy to find. Further investigation would prove the documents to be believable evidence.

"Anyway, those weren't the only suspicious papers that were seized. There's even a chance that other stores with ties to the city guards will be investigated next…"

Now *that* could spell catastrophe.

Bartaad said, “Well, we haven’t created any incriminating documents, let alone hand them to the city guards. I’m sure that’s true of the other companies too. They’re not stupid. Our ‘friends’ at the city guards must’ve forged them in the hope of blackmailing us for more money in the future. Those fools… But the records will only have the handwriting and signatures of people in the city guards. All we have to do is say that they were fabricated to extort us.”

The situation was bad, but not one they couldn’t recover from, Bartaad believed. He’d need to throw around a lot of money at people in power, but with enough wealth, erasing the testimony of commoners—and even the commoners themselves—was easy enough.

He seethed, “The investigators forced their way into the city guards’ headquarters, but they can’t do the same to privately owned companies without evidence, especially when said companies have friends in the nobility and other elites. Worst case, the internal investigators could end up making an enemy of the merchants’ guild. Not even a noble could survive that unscathed. It’s not time to panic yet.”

Bartaad had no idea how high up the chain of command Mitsuha’s and Larusia’s influence extended. Nor did he know about the documents of mysterious origin that had been slipped into his own store as well as others…

“Mitsuha, why are you going through all this trouble? You could’ve just taken everything from their storehouse like you did last time,” asked Colette.

I know where she’s coming from, but I’ve got my own policies that I refuse to bend, Mitsuha thought. *When Lephilia Trading was attacked, the culprit stole everything in her storehouse. That’s why I retaliated by taking everything inside* their *storehouse. I didn’t do anything else that violated local law.*

This time, though, the criminal didn’t steal anything. He just ruined a large quantity of Larusia’s goods, so I returned the favor by wrecking his sales floor. Without taking anything.

There are plenty of other ways I could’ve punished him and his accomplices. Like leaving them stranded on a deserted island or physically demolishing their stores. But that wouldn’t serve my purposes.

I wanted the criminals to know that they were a clear target to someone *and know who that someone was. And at the same time, corner them until they were helpless to do anything about it; they had no proof, nor could they tell anyone why they were being targeted. I wanted their cohorts to know that there was someone out there they shouldn’t be messing with and to fear their presence. I also wanted the law-abiding merchants and the citizens to know that Larusia and I are upstanding business partners who’d never engage in criminal activity.*

As a bonus, I wanted to show everyone—both domestically and abroad—what the consequences would be when you make an

enemy of a partner store in the Entrepreneur Girl International Network.

If our enemy wants to fight using their connections, we'll use ours. Authority can be met with greater authority. Never brandish your weapons unless you're ready to deal with ours…

"Lady Mitsuha, Enoba Company went under audit!" Larusia reported.

"So it did…"

It's just about time, Mitsuha thought.

"The auditors were from the royal palace instead of the city guards themselves. It's very rare for the royal palace to audit a privately owned company unless they did something illegal in an international transaction. I also heard that leaders from the merchants' guild accompanied the auditors. They usually vehemently protest any attempt by the government to interfere with merchants…

"I mean, I'm sure the merchants' guild is helping because the owner of Enoba is one of the guild's chairmen. They're afraid the investigation will end up harming them too. It could even spark investigations into the guild itself or other businesses in the guild, so they're trying as hard as they can to stomp out Enoba Company and keep the fire from spreading."

"That's one way of putting out a fire…" Mitsuha said.

Destroying neighboring buildings to contain a conflagration was a firefighting method in Edo-period Japan. The guild was

likely trying to prevent the flames from spreading by eliminating the source of the fire. In other words, the merchants' guild was abandoning Enoba Company.

Not that there was any other choice. Rumors that Enoba Company was behind a violent crime was circulating the entire country.

The nobles who once supported the company wouldn't defend them either. Any attempt would be used as grounds to condemn them by rivaling factions. No noble would risk their position just to protect a commoner merchant. They'd much sooner choose a different shop to do business with.

That's what happens when relationships are based on money and personal interests instead of friendship and loyalty.

Mitsuha said, "The company owner probably never imagined he was going to be thrown to the wolves so easily. He's almost certainly been bribing people in power for years. But why would those venal cheats feel any obligation towards him? As soon as he could no longer make them money, they were gonna drop him and move on to someone else who could. That goes for the nobles, other merchants, even the subordinates he took care of and believed he had the respect of.

"He might've been a tiger or a wolf at some point, but now he's nothing more than a pig or a dog wallowing in his own filth. He doesn't have a single ally left."

It was in times of crisis rather than prosperity when one found out who their true friends were. Even if Bartaad did have

true friends, there was nothing they could do to help after all his crimes had been exposed. The people who were supposed to protect him turned against him. All the victims he ever bullied into silence were coming forward with testimonies. Defending Enoba Company now could result in one's own destruction. Everyone valued their own lives, families, and careers too much to risk that.

"What's going on with all the other businesses that colluded with him?" Mitsuha asked.

"They're not as contemptible as Enoba Company, but they're pretty bad too," Larusia answered. "Their owners were kind of Enoba's cronies. It sounds like they didn't directly participate in any heinous crimes, but they were involved enough that they might be treated as accomplices. They're guilty of committing fraud, making verbal threats, and hiring young hoodlums for violence at the least."

When Larusia was just starting her company, she wasn't very familiar with the shady side of business practices. Her parents only allowed her to help out with the family's shop. But over time, she learned a lot from her more experienced employees and by acquiring information in exchange for money.

Larusia continued, "The other stores will almost certainly get audited too after Enoba's incriminating documents are reviewed and the employees are tortur—I mean, questioned. At best, they'll have to pay large fines and indemnities. At worst, the owners will be forced to retire and pass on their companies to one of their

children or a high-ranking and clean subordinate. They might also surrender the company to the government…or close the business permanently."

"Wow, that's harsh!" Mitsuha exclaimed. *Actually, I guess it's not. Considering how many lives those owners have ruined, that's too* light *of a punishment.*

Even if the king didn't punish the owners harshly, they were unlikely to continue their misdeeds. The bad rumors would destroy their reputation, and they'd lose customers. The strict surveillance they'd be under would make it impossible to try anything. They'd no longer have any means of making easy money through illegal activity with other unscrupulous merchants. All they'd have left would be their bad names and penalty fees. A mid-sized company had no chance of coming back from that.

Oh, I guess that's why changing the leadership and name of the business is better. The companies going bankrupt would harm the innocent employees and inconvenience the clients. It'd also weaken the country's economy and lower tax revenue. It makes sense that the government would want to keep as many of these businesses alive as possible…

"Okay, it sounds like the merchants are finished. Now we have bigger fish to fry. What to do, what to do…" Mitsuha pondered.

"Huh?" Larusia widened her eyes. "Wh-What do you mean by 'bigger fish'? Don't tell me…"

“Yep, I’m going after the nobles who used Enoba Company as their private supplier and supported its business,” Mitsuha said.



“D-D-D…”

Is she trying to cast the Diacute spell?

“D-D-Did you hit your head or something?! You can’t go after a noble! That would be suicide! We’ve accomplished enough already!”

Huh? Is it really that bad of an idea?

Larusia then carefully admonished Mitsuha in the kindest way possible. She believed that Enoba Company’s owner most likely attacked her company of his own accord, not because of any specific orders from the nobles he served. He was acting alone, hoping to obtain exclusivity over Yamano County goods. If the nobles did make a demand, it was probably nothing more than a vague request like “Acquire me a larger amount of Yamano County goods.” From there, Enoba Company’s owner came up with the idea of seizing the distribution rights and using the goods to make massive profits. That much was predictable.

It certainly wouldn’t be hard to get filthy rich after obtaining an exclusive deal over Mitsuha’s goods. She supplied her business partners with luxurious alcohol and delicacies, and limited quantities of cosmetics. The wives and daughters had been pestering their husbands and fathers to obtain the latter at all costs. Creating a monopoly over those items would put one in a position to become the primary supplier for many powerful nobles, and potentially even the royal palace. Massive profits, greater social rank, and fame would be guaranteed.

In theory, at least. I don't allow my partners to set excessively high prices, and I would never supply my goods to the merchant who attacked Larusia Trading. His plot never had any hope of succeeding.

In short, Larusia convinced her boss not to mess with the nobility. Mitsuha wasn't keen on gaining more enemies or starting more fights in this country anyway. It'd be inconvenient if the Entrepreneur Girl International Network gained a reputation for being antagonistic toward nobles.

I guess I've got no choice but to listen to her. It's one of those moments where you just have to step down and say, "That's enough chaos for today, mwahahaha!"

Nevertheless, I am gonna take one more precaution. I want to make sure no one else—whether it be the remaining accomplices at Enoba, relatives of the owner, nobles, or merchants—tries to harm Larusia or her business

That shouldn't be a challenge. All I have to do is visit the nobles who assisted us to show my appreciation and warn, "If anything happens to Larusia Trading or Larusia herself, I'll deem this country too dangerous to do business in and move out entirely. I'll also forbid my partner stores in other countries from trading with any merchants from this land." That'll be even more effective if I add, "Please share the word with all the merchants you associate with."

It's easy enough to find another merchant who sells general goods, but there's no replacement for Larusia Trading. Any

merchant who couldn't figure out which of the two is more expendable is unfit for their job.

Oh, I need to make sure enough of the indemnities are paid to the family of the deceased guard…

"Lady Mitsuha, do you want Enoba's former storefront property?" Larusia asked.

"Huh? What the heck…?"

It'd been a few days. Mitsuha was visiting Larusia Trading to let her partner know that she'd be returning to Vanel soon, figuring it was time to return to their normal working relationship. They were drinking tea when Larusia made the sudden offer.

The girl elaborated, "The individual stores of the other five companies are going to remain in business, but Enoba Company is being dissolved. They were the main culprit behind the attack, so that's not exactly surprising…

"Even if Enoba were to continue under new management, they couldn't possibly maintain a store in the same location. They wouldn't be able to attract customers. The potential buyer would have to use it for a completely different type of business or just convert it into a private home or a warehouse… Unless that buyer is someone who obviously has no friendly ties to Enoba, like a former victim of theirs. Someone like me…or you."

I see where she's going with this…

Mitsuha responded, “So what you’re saying is that no third party wants to touch that property no matter how low the price is because it’s now associated with the scandal. If the current owners do manage to sell the space, it’ll be for pennies. Their only hope of fetching a decent price is by selling it to someone who won’t be negatively affected by it. Is that right?”

“Exactly!”

I knew it…

“Buying the building would be a waste of money for me,” said Mitsuha. “To put it bluntly, my home base isn’t in this country. I’d have no use for it. If one of us is going to buy it, it’d have to be you.”

To Mitsuha, Voftress was nothing more than one of the many lands that had a partner store in the Entrepreneur Girl International Network. She only made an appearance because of the attack on Larusia Trading. She had to protect her friend and prevent similar incidents from occurring in other countries by showing that she and the girls in her network were not to be messed with. She had no attachment to this country or any reason to establish a warehouse here.

Mitsuha had told all her partner store owners that her distribution center was on an isolated island not far from the continent. There was no other way to explain how quickly she was able to deliver her goods. Besides, trade within the continent was subject to taxes.

In truth, she was sneaking in her goods to each store with her world-jumping ability. The Entrepreneur Girl International Network partner stores sold far more than just her products, however. They also sold goods from other countries in the New World, and the distribution hub for them was Lephilia Trading in Vanel. *Lephilia recently acquired a new storehouse, and she's putting it to good use.*

The general goods from this world made up most of the partner stores' stock. Yamano County goods were a limited luxury used as negotiating chips for dealing with nobles and other merchants. As a result, the partner stores received most of their goods via caravan, and only a small fraction was from the viscountess.

Mitsuha had no need for a plot of land in Voftress.

Oh, I know what she's doing!

"Larusia, are you by chance trying to get me to settle permanently here?" Mitsuha probed.

"Grk…"

I knew it… I mean, I get how she feels. If I lived here, it'd be convenient for Larusia. Plus, she'd feel safer. But I can't do that. I can't give her special treatment over the other girls in the Entrepreneur Girl International Network.

Lephilia was just lucky. Vanel was the reason I came to this continent in the first place. I made it my base out of necessity. Lephilia became my first prey—er, business partner—because she happened to be from Vanel.

And now that I have a home in Vanel, I have no need to establish another one.

"I doubt anyone is going to meddle with your company again. We can consider this case closed. I'll come running back if anything else happens, okay? So you don't need to worry," Mitsuha reassured her friend.

"O-Okay…"

Larusia didn't really think Mitsuha would move her base here. It was a long shot, but she at least had to try.

Mitsuha didn't actually spend much time in Larusia's country while working on the case. She only jumped here for a few hours whenever her presence was needed or when she had an errand to run. The rest of her days were spent in Yamano County or in the capital of Zegleus.

Larusia didn't know that, and therefore thought that Mitsuha was here the entire time for her sake. That probably got her hopes up a little that she'd stay forever. That wasn't unreasonable, given the time and money Mitsuha supposedly spent to travel and lodge until the brutes behind the attack were punished. It looked like she put herself in real danger to ensure Larusia's safety.

Larusia's young, but she's considered an adult in this country. She's also one of my hand-picked members of the Entrepreneur Girl International Network, and a fierce and independent she-wolf. She'll be fine on her own. I believe in her!

Mitsuha was certain that no one else would attack Larusia Trading. The nobles and merchants throughout the continent knew that she wasn't on good terms with the Vanelian royal family, which could be interpreted as having no special attachment to Vanel. Half of them were probably scheming to recruit her to settle in their country, while the other half was content to leave her alone, trusting that she wouldn't let Vanel hog all the benefits from her trading business.

The earnings from Mitsuha's goods were sizable for her or for a small, budding company, but they were paltry compared to a major company's sales, a noble's income, or a country's national budget. The nobility and royalty throughout the continent didn't want Yamano County goods because of their earning potential; they wanted them because they were simply hooked on the delicious alcohol and food. They were also under constant pressure from their wives and daughters to get a hold of the beauty products and sweets.

Trying to obtain exclusive distribution rights over them wasn't worth the risk of harming international relations. Aggressing a partner store could be met with a full-force counterattack; maintaining a normal, healthy business relation guaranteed the lavish goods. The partner stores were all on good terms with Mitsuha, and any merchants who tried to buy them out were sure to get burned or put out of business.

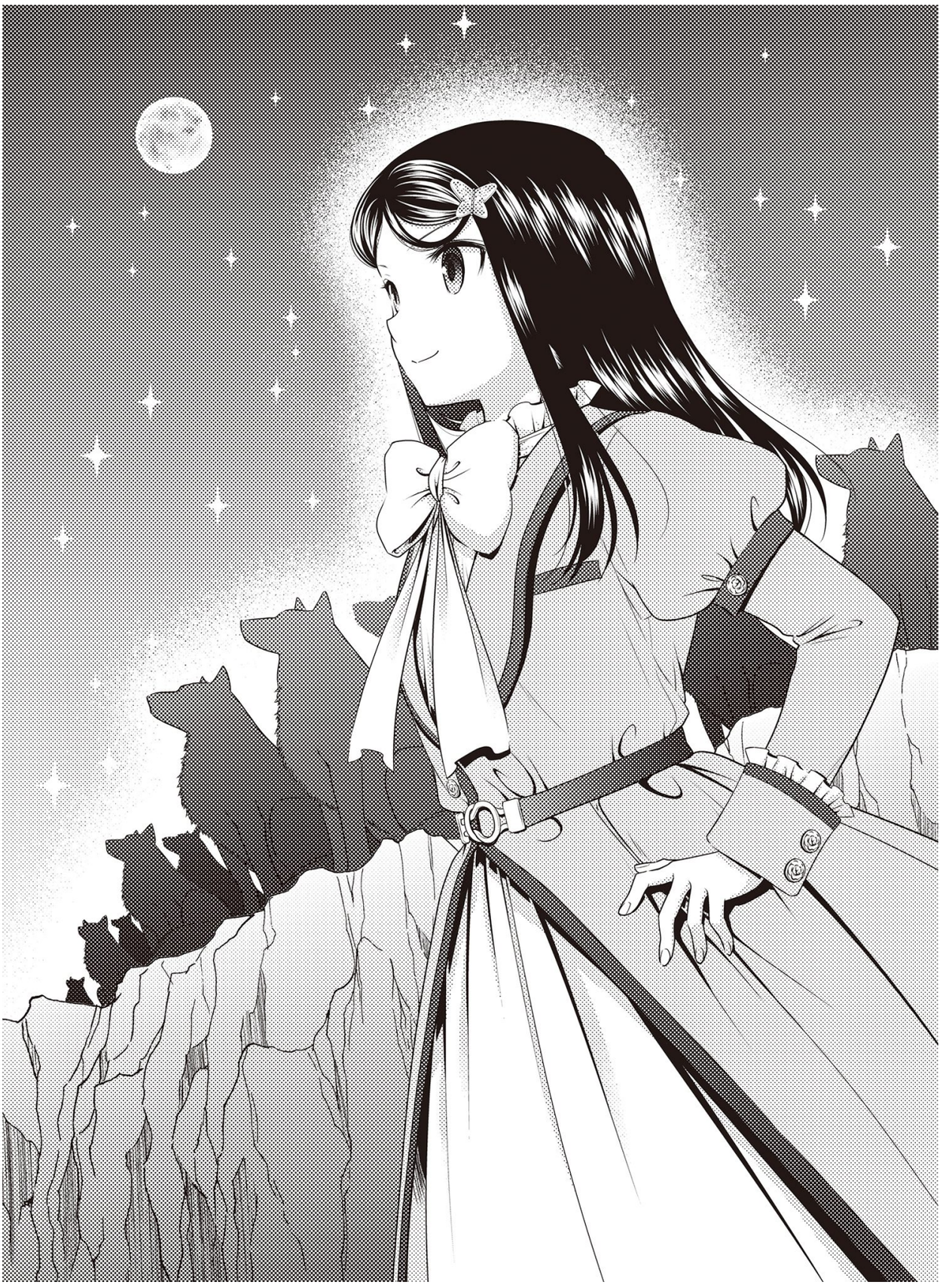
The partner stores would all become a little safer once news of this incident spread.

Larusia dropped the idea of getting Mitsuha to purchase the former Enoba property. She gazed at the viscountess and said softly, “You’re so young, yet you helped establish so many businesses all throughout the continent. You’ve created a network to connect them across borders, and you’re fearless in the face of violence and people in power… Just who are you, Lady Mitsuha?”

There’s only one way to answer a question like that. Here’s my chance!

“I’m Mitsuha von Yamano, just an ordinary viscountess! You can find me anywhere in the world!”

Whoops, that made it sound like I exist everywhere in the world at once. I’m not omnipresent—that’s Yog-Sothoth. I meant that you could find viscountesses like me anywhere in the world.



Oh, wait… I forgot that female viscounts are rare. I totally flubbed that, damn it…

"I demand my reward!"

"Yeah, yeah… Hello to you too, Sabine."

Mitsuha jumped to the third floor of her general store, found Sabine already there, and that was the first exchange they had. She was referring to the reward for helping with the audio transcription.

"I've been saying from the start that I'm going to reward you. Don't you trust me? And remember, your demand has to be within reason," said Mitsuha.

"Tch!"

"Hey, don't click your tongue! That's rude!"

Normally you'd expect a commoner like Colette to teach a princess such foul behavior, but Sabine actually taught that tongue click to Colette. I need to make sure Sabine doesn't taint Colette's pure heart with any more dirty words and bad manners…

"So, what do you demand?" Mitsuha asked.

"An auto-mo-beel!"

"Try again!"

Are you serious right now, Sabine…

Buying a used car to drive in this world wouldn't be that expensive because I wouldn't need to get it registered or insured. I could also make it safer with a little tinkering—like limiting the max speed to fifteen miles per hour and affixing cushions all

around it. That won't eliminate the possibility of an accident, but Sabine is a genius and a supergirl. She'd learn to be a better driver than me in no time.

But it's still not happening.

"Where would you get gas from? What would you do about maintenance? You're not tall enough to drive a car, anyway. Your feet wouldn't reach the pedals and you'd barely be able to see out the front window."

"Grk—oh, I know! I could sit on a cushion to make myself taller, then have Colette sit on the floor in front of me so I can press my feet onto her shoulders to signal which pedal to press," Sabine suggested.

"Have you been watching *Don Matsugoro*?! Try again!"

Bonus Chapter:
The Entrepreneur Girl International Network

“Oh my…” gasped a young storeowner as she stared at a letter in her hand. She was one of the members of the Entrepreneur Girl International Network, and the letter was from Mitsuha who was currently staying in the neighboring Kingdom of Voftress.

In the letter was the full story of how Larusia Trading—a member of the Entrepreneur Girl International Network in Voftress—was attacked. Larusia and several employees were injured, and one guard was killed. The viscountess claimed that the culprit was a merchant who was enraged that an inexperienced little girl had a monopoly over Yamano County goods and that he wanted to seize the distribution rights from her.

That could happen to any girl in the network… she thought. *Any one of us could’ve suffered an attack like that.*

I remember during one of our network girls’ meetings, Larusia was so excited to tell us about her dreams and aspirations. Her eyes were sparkling. Someone attacked and hurt her*?*

This is unforgivable!

The letter from Viscountess Yamano was not an order, but simply an invitation to join her in waging total war. Despite that, there was absolutely no way any girl from the network would’ve turned it down. Letting this incident slide was definitely going to

lead to similar attacks in other countries. Any one of their companies could be next.

The only way to prevent further acts of aggression is to make an example of that idiot merchant by crushing him underfoot and ruining his business!

“Attention everyone!” she announced to her shop. “I want all employees to gather in the yard for an emergency meeting! Put up the ‘closed’ sign, so we won’t be interrupted!”

If anyone picks a fight with me, I’m happy to accept. And if anyone picks a fight with one of my girls, we’re all happy to accept…but not without putting on our toughest gauntlets first. That’s the Entrepreneur Girl International Network way!

There was something odd about Viscountess Mitsuha’s letter. The mail arrived way too soon after the date of the attack. It should’ve taken over a week for news to reach Lephilia Trading in Vanel and then be relayed to the viscountess. And even longer for the viscountess to travel to Voftress, identify the suspect and gather evidence, and longer still for the letter to reach this store.

Did the viscountess launch multiple high-speed boats to send this single letter? She took the incident very seriously, that much was evident.

That reminds me, the new employee who received the letter said he got it from a young girl with exotic features… She must’ve been Lady Mitsuha’s right-hand girl from her home country. That’s a sign of how much she values the owners of her partner stores

regardless of our lowly social status. The only way to show our loyalty is to live up to the faith she has placed in us…

The briefing was coming to an end.

"…And that's the story. This company, everyone who works here, and others in the same position as us across the land owe everything to Lady Mitsuha. Please, I ask for your help! This is a fight to ensure our own safety!" the young owner preached.

Her employees cheered.

The store primarily hired women and girls from merchant families. They all had a knack for business management but were only ever allowed to help with chores and manning the sales floor. The sole reason for that was because of their gender. The owner was a girl, and she vowed never to discriminate against an employee when it came to assigning work, evaluating performance, or giving promotions and raises because she wasn't a man. Her employees loved the company dearly for that reason and were willing to do anything to protect it.

This was the one place that would judge them fairly, and the one place they could exercise their skills to the fullest.

"The operation begins now!"

The employees split into groups and got to work. They made a list of all the companies in their country's capital that did business in Voftress and checked each one to see if they had dealings with Enoba Company. Next, they mailed out letters to the

largest companies, focusing on the ones that fit into the latter category.

The letter read, “A group of people sent brigands to attack one of our partner stores in the Entrepreneur Girl International Network. The store owner and multiple employees were injured, and one guard was killed. We are declaring total war on the offenders.” The letter also read, “Our company will no longer do business with anyone who has dealings with Enoba Company in Voftress or anyone who associates with them.”

The two statements were completely unrelated. Nowhere in the letter did they claim that Enoba was behind the attack. It simply conveyed two different messages in one note.

No one has any right to complain. My company can do business with whoever we want.

Witness the wrath of the Entrepreneur Girl International Network!

“We’ve confirmed two companies that are still associating with Enoba Company after receiving our letter: Veruk Company and Eacht Commerce. We will terminate trading with them immediately. They continued dealing with Enoba after receiving our notice, so any complaints from them will be ignored. They’ll get no more of our alcohol, food, seasonings, or cosmetics!” stated the owner.

“Yes, ma’am!—oh, we received a letter from Enoba Company asking us why we are pressuring merchants in our country to

stop doing business with them," one of the employee reported.

"Ignore that—actually… Send them a response that simply says, 'Look inward.'"

"Yes, ma'am!"

Hehehe, our plan is working…

"Now, notify all companies in the capital that we are ceasing business with Veruk Company and Eacht Commerce. Make it clear we will do the same to anyone who continues to work with those two," she ordered.

Cutting off clients like this would be death for most small new businesses. But most start-up companies didn't have the killer advantage of being an exclusive distributor for Yamano County goods. The products were limited in quantity, but as long as demand for them existed among the nobility and royalty, no merchant could afford to cease trade with them. Anyone who was a supplier for a noble or royal would lose their position immediately if they couldn't procure Yamano County goods.

Such a blunder would ruin their company's credibility. They'd tumble from their position as a first-class supplier. That wasn't something any merchant could allow.

It's time to start playing offense in this game, the owner thought.

All of the partner stores in the Entrepreneur Girl International Network were small (for now). But while each store only had the firepower of one small cannon, together they packed the force of a warship's broadside. They'd just launched from one

side of the ship, meaning the other was ready for a volley. And of course, the side that had just fired was already rushing to reload.

Even the most savage of tigers can lose to a dog or a pig after growing fat and lazy in its old age.

And this pack of young she-wolves can take down anyone.

It was a full moon tonight.

Hear me, fellow comrades throughout the continent. Look up at the sky and howl your fiercest battle cry!

Afterword

Hello, FUNA here.

Here's volume 8 of *Saving 80,000 Gold in Another World for My Retirement.* We'll be in the double digits soon!

It's been a year since the anime aired. Fortunately, we didn't fall victim to the curse of a novel's popularity peaking with the release of the anime and then making a sharp decline afterward! The light novel and manga adaptation are still doing well.

This is entirely because of readers like you. Thank you!

I Shall Survive Using Potions! is also still going strong after the first season of its anime adaptation.

As a novelist, I couldn't be happier to see all three of my series be published and receive manga adaptations that are continuing to this day. Thank you so much!

Mitsuha has finally put Beatrice's debutante ball behind her. But alas, she now has Sabine's debutante ball and Prince Leuhen's coming-of-age party on the horizon. She'll have to deal with many more events as well…

She also saved Princess Kak-Kak-Kak's kingdom and chomped down a rival merchants' network with the collaborative efforts of her pack of she-wolves.

Sabine: "Our forces are simply overwhelming!"

Colette: “Battles are won by numbers, Gihren!”

Mitsuha: “Since when were you two *Gundam* fans?!”

In the next volume, Mitsuha races down Fury Road after someone injures Colette!

This isn’t even my final form! Wait until you see my true power!

Live and Let Die!

Mitsuha also busies herself with work for Society and takes on Operation Idol.

Please look forward to the upcoming volume!

Sabine: “Mitsuha, aren’t you spreading yourself too thin?”

Colette: “Yeah, you’re way too busy. Are you getting enough sleep?”

Mitsuha: “I do feel a little sleep-deprived, yeah… But my body automatically heals itself on a cellular level, so I’m perfectly healthy.”

Sabine & Colette: “Get some rest!”

Mitsuha: “Okay, okay. I guess my workload has eased up a little.”

Colette: “Yeah, now that the anime has ended, sadly…”

Mitsuha: “I feel like I have post-holiday blues… But we could still aim for a second season. Not to mention a game adaptation, a musical, a movie, or a Hollywood live-action adaptation—”

Sabine: “Mitsuha, just how great are your ambitions?”

Mitsuha: “Limitless! There’s nowhere we can’t go!”

Check out the newest chapters on the webcomic magazine, *Suiyobi no Sirius* (http://seiga.nicovideo.jp/manga/official/w_sirius/), on the second and fourth Fridays of each month!

My sincerest thanks to my editor, the manga artist and illustrator Keisuke Motoe, the cover designer, the proofreader, the printers, publishers, distributors, sales staff, and of course, everyone who picked up this book.

Thank you so much!

I hope to see you again in the next volume…

FUNA

FUNA

Finally, it's the day of Beatrice's debutante ball…
Bring on the food stalls, the fireworks, the stage pla-a-ay!!
Armed helicopters venture into the sky of another world.
And the soundtrack to it is you-know-what.
Finally, the pack of she-wolves Mitsuha had been nurturing ravages the throats of the enemy!
…But Mitsuha, was the leotard really necessary?

Illustrator

Keisuke Motoe

I had so much fun drawing all the different kinds of scenes in this volume too.
Next up is volume 9! I am looking forward to it.
It'd be awesome if we could get a second season of the anime.
I'll be working hard on the manga as before, so please hang tight!

Saving 80,000 Gold in Another World for My Retirement 8

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