
story
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art
Nekobyou Neko
To Another World... with LAND MINES!
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WITH LAND MINES!

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Prologue

"Hey! I'm an evil god, but I'm not *actually* evil!"

What? If I had to describe how I felt at that moment with one word, that would be it. In front of me was a young boy, chilling with his hands behind his head. He looked like a kid who had just started elementary school. My surroundings were pitch-black, so the only things I could see were him and a vast number of floating souls. *Hold on, floating souls?!*

"Ah ha ha, it looks like you're all very confused," the young boy said with a laugh. "Of course, of course. After all, you *are* humans! Or perhaps I should say...*were* humans!" No sooner had he finished his sentence than the young boy burst out laughing again.

What's so funny?! I'd like an explanation here!

"Don't worry, I prepared some slides to explain things to you guys! Look over here!"

I looked at where the boy pointed, and a white display screen came up in the air.

Nice. He sure is well prepared.

The first slide appeared, and the screen displayed the words:

- School field trip

Oh, yeah. We had been in the middle of a school field trip. Specifically, we had been on a bus on the way to the airport.

The memory had just come back to me when the screen continued to the next slide:

- Bus accident

- Everyone died
- BAD ENDING

Only four slides?! And no pictures at all?!

I was fairly sure the floating souls here—most likely my classmates—were all thinking the same thing: *WHAT THE HELL?!*

“Yep, quite easy to understand, if I do say so myself!” the boy continued. “Huh? Give more details? Show a video? Nah, no can do. That’s some R-18 material right there. I’d get in trouble with the Film Classification and Rating Organization if I showed it. Besides, the content’s blurred out completely, so, y’know?”

Why is the FRO involved?! Wait, no, hold on. If the video footage was R-18 and needed to be blurred, then that meant everyone’s deaths were very gruesome. Everyone...

How did we all die, then? A normal traffic accident shouldn’t have been that gruesome.

“Hmm? Don’t remember what happened when you guys died? Yeah, I erased those memories. There’s no point in reliving pain and suffering. And, well, I doubt you guys would be in any shape to talk if you did remember.”

Ah, yeah, true. Maybe we burned to death or something similarly painful.

That aside, was this person really an evil god? All he had done so far was answer questions, but I hadn’t heard any voices other than his, not even my own.

“Why am I called an evil god? I’m not too sure. All I’ve ever done is offer a new career path to people who die young, whenever I feel like doing it, but I guess that rubs some people the wrong way.”

Career path?

“Yeah, a new life in a different world for people who die young. Oh, your teacher and the bus driver already lived good, long lives, so I returned them to the cycle of rebirth. So yeah, all the souls here are just students.”

I looked (?) around and counted the floating souls. There were a total of thirty-two. If I remembered correctly, my class was evenly divided between sixteen boys and sixteen girls, so the number definitely matched. That meant my childhood friends Haruka and Tomoya were probably here as well. It was impossible to tell which souls they were, though.

"Yep! This is exactly what one fourth of you think it is! Your entire class is getting transported to another world! There are things like stats and level ups in the new world you're going to, so it's kind of like a game world! Congrats!"

"Congrats"?! You sure are lighthearted for an evil god! I mean, if you're transporting people over from another world, then it's no wonder some people might consider you evil! Also, I'm really surprised to find out that so many people in my class enjoy light novels! I'm one of them, but still!

"You're not being reincarnated, so you'll be the same age you are now. You're not being summoned either, so you won't have to complete some impossible task or be enslaved all of a sudden! Congrats!"

Ah, yeah. There are definitely some light novels like that where the characters get summoned against their will, get the title of Hero thrust upon them, and then get forced to kill other people. What are those characters thinking, just blindly trusting the words of their summoners and going to war based on nothing more than that? Well, I guess there are some variations where the characters have no choice but to fight in order to survive...

"What about an otome game world? Nah, no can do! Those aren't real games, so there's no plot to follow! But hey, it's possible to create a similar situation with your own charms! Don't worry, the difficulty is about the same as it was back in your original world! Congrats!"

Yeah, uh, that's impossible, then. It's definitely not happening if it's about the same difficulty. I mean, none of the girls in my class are stunners, and they definitely don't have the finesse or charm they'd need to play handsome men like a fiddle.

"Harem? Same as the previous question! It's possible if you're attractive enough and have money!"

Again, not happening.

“Any cheat skills? Nope, none at all! I’m only transporting you on a whim, and that’s it! Oh, but don’t worry, I made sure that you’ll all be able to read, write, and communicate in the new world! Consider it a huge freebie from me! All right, is that it for questions? Let’s get started with the transportation process, then!”

The boy waved his hand, and something that looked like an interface window popped up. At the very top was a line of text which said 150 Points, and below that was a table of skills and races, each listed with the number of points required to purchase it.

“It’s a completely different world, so it’d be almost impossible for you to adjust if I transported you just as you were before. This is another freebie from me. On top are the points you guys have to spend. They’re more or less the same for all of you. Some of you might have a different amount depending on your attributes and actions before you died, but it’s just differences like whether or not you worked out or studied hard. Effort will never betray you. Good advice!”

Hmm. I can’t tell if 150 Points is a lot or very little, since there seems to be no way to talk with my classmates to compare. My grades weren’t that bad. I wasn’t bad at sports either, but I had no idea if those mattered for the evil god’s criteria. I didn’t care about where I ranked relative to my classmates, but I would be happy if I had more points than the average person from our old world. *Social welfare probably doesn’t exist, so I’ll need all the advantages I can get to survive in a completely new world.*

“Hmm. Well, even the person who has the fewest points of anyone here has more than an average person from your old world, so I’m sure things will work out if you put your heart into it!”

Put our hearts into it, huh? We weren’t getting any cheat skills, so it would probably be impossible to live a chill and easy life. *I should keep that in mind while deciding what skills to get.*

“You want skills that aren’t in the list? Hmm, all right. Go ahead and tell me what you want. I’ll add them to the list if they’re reasonable. Plunder? Sure, I guess! Copy? Sure! A 2x EXP skill? I’ll add in a 4x and 10x variant as well! Skin

Lightening? Really? Well, okay. Heroic Aptitude? What, do you want to become a hero?"

Well then, it seems like everyone's just throwing out all kinds of requests without holding back at all. I was just about to request some safe and sensible skills, but I guess I lost my chance...

The evil god (at least, that was what he called himself) didn't reject many of the requests, and a lot of new skills were added to the list in the interface window. The skills that seemed useful required a lot of points to obtain, and the ones that didn't required very few. *These skills look fair and balanced at first glance, but I wonder...*

"Oh, yeah, one more thing—If you don't have enough points to obtain a certain skill, then that skill won't be displayed for you. If you don't see the skill that you requested, then there's your answer!"

Based on what he said just now, a lot of skills were added, and I'm assuming that a decent percentage of them require more than 150 Points. What I really need right now, though, is some sort of tutorial or help guide. The descriptions for these skills are too brief.

"Ah yeah, I guess not all of you are familiar with this process—especially girls who don't play real video games. I'll add a help guide."

Oh, that's convenient. Let's see—20 Points required? Wait, what? Do I need to spend points to unlock the guide? Isn't that also kind of expensive? Wait, is this a onetime thing?

"That should be all, right? Take your time and choose the skills you want. You have about an hour to choose. There are no cheat skills on this list, so choose carefully!"

The number of skills that were listed in my window had more than doubled as a result of all the skills that the boy added from my classmates' requests. *Are there really no cheat skills here? Some of these seem ridiculous. There are definitely some skills that seem like they could be overpowered if used properly. One skill that stands out to me is the Copy Skill, which requires 100 Points to get. Again, is this really balanced?*

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All right, what skill should I get first? The Help Guide seems like a good choice.

The description for the Help Guide was this:

Detailed explanations and advice will be displayed. Cannot be removed after purchase.

Yeah, it makes sense that you can't remove the Help Guide after obtaining it. The price would be pointless, since you could just get a refund after getting the information you wanted. Should I get this?

Yeah, of course. Sure, 20 Points is expensive, but it's definitely worth the cost. I mean, it's better than blindly grabbing skills without any advice or any foreknowledge of the world I'm getting transported to and then ending up with an awful, gimmicky character build.

It would be especially bad if I chose a race that was oppressed in the new world. I could also say the same for traits and skills that were easy targets for persecution. *Common sense from the old world won't apply here at all, so nobody's going to save me even if I yell "Hey, that's racist!" or "I'm being discriminated against!"*

I told myself that this was a necessary expense to guarantee my own safety and obtained the Help Guide before I hesitated any further.

Oh, the display changed.

The skills that I no longer had enough points to buy disappeared, and more text was added to the description of the Help Guide. The new description text appeared within parentheses:

Detailed explanations and advice will be displayed. Cannot be removed after purchase.

(Some explanations and advice will remain accessible for browsing after transport.)

Oh, that's convenient if I can still use this even after being transported. I guess this was a good deal after all. All right, next up is to pick my race. It looks like the Human race doesn't require any points to choose.

A race with average potential and abilities.

(Cannot use magic if not born with magical aptitude.)

The Elf race looked like an attractive choice. It cost 20 points.

A race highly adept at magic, with a life span twice that of the average Human.

(Can learn and use magic without expending additional points on magical aptitude, but has less physical strength than a Human.)

Next up was the Dhamphir race. The name alone really appealed to my inner middle school fantasies. It cost 50 Points.

A race of half-vampires endowed with strong and resilient bodies as well as an aptitude for magic. They possess an innate resistance towards light due to being half human.

(Their lust for blood is stronger than that of pure-blooded vampires, and they thus require a daily sustenance of Human blood amounting to at least 400 cc. Most are unable to control their urges and end up draining the blood of their victims to the last drop. They are hunted down on sight due to the nature of their race.)

Yeah, no. This is definitely way too gimmicky. I'm glad I decided to get the Help Guide!

As I read through the Help Guide for more information, I learned that almost every race that was special in some way also had some weaknesses written in the additional information. *This Dhamphir race definitely seemed like a good choice just based on the initial information given, but knowing their weaknesses changes that completely.* Those 20 Points I spent on the Help Guide had definitely been worth it. *Why's important information like this hidden in the Help Guide, though? Is it because that boy is actually an evil god, or is there another reason?*

Let's see, are there any other safe choices here? Choosing the Dwarf race would make me short and stout and give me a thick beard. Choosing the

Halfling race would make me really short, all the way under 120 centimeters. I wouldn't mind if this was just a game, but this is real life, so I think I'll pass on these choices. I do like animal ears, but I'd rather be the one petting them than put a pair on my own head. Well, I'll go with the Elf race after all.

I now had 110 Points left to use, and next up were skills. A lot of skills had been added, so it was going to take some time.

Plunder (80 Points required)

Steal target's skills. The levels of the stolen skills will remain the same they were originally. You do not need to designate which skill you want to steal. The stolen skill will be returned to its original owner upon the death of the user.

(The user's life span will be reduced by 4% x the level of the stolen skills, and that total amount will be transferred to the target. This formula treats skills without levels as Level 5.)

This skill definitely seemed like a cheat skill at first glance, but it had a ridiculous drawback tagged on. *Well, you are stealing the product of someone else's hard work and time with this, so I guess it's kind of fair that you have to give up your own "time" in exchange?*

Copy (100 Points required)

Copy a skill from the target. Does not affect the target's skills. However, you must know both the name and level of the skill you want to copy.

(The copied skill will be reduced to Level 1 and its status will be changed to Sealed. The status effect will be removed upon learning how to use the copied skill from its original user. Cannot copy skills that don't have a level.)

There were no drawbacks for the copy target, so it made sense that the drawback for the user was not that severe either. You could use a copied skill at Level 1 right away if you actually got permission from the original owner. *This*

might actually be a pretty decent skill.

2x EXP (50 Points required)

Experience gained from combat and training is doubled.

(The number of Experience Points required to level up will be increased tenfold.)

10x EXP (120 Points required)

Experience gained from combat and training is increased tenfold.

(The number of Experience Points required to level up will be increased tenfold.)

Heroic Aptitude (80 Points required)

Grants you the innate aptitude to become a Hero through training and effort.

(Your chances of getting involved in trouble are increased, and you will often end up in life-threatening situations.)

Magic Aptitude: Omni (80 Points required)

Grants you innate aptitude for learning all kinds and types of magic.

(The difficulty of learning any and all magic will be greatly increased.)

Mana Capacity: Ultimate (80 Points required)

Grants you an overwhelming amount of mana.

(Your physical strength and endurance will be greatly reduced. Controlling your mana will also become very difficult.)

Charm (50 Points required)

You become very alluring to the opposite sex and

mesmerize them. Your outward appearance will not change.

(Targets under the influence of Charm will become very controlling and possessive and will want to keep you to themselves. You are unable to designate a target for this skill.)

Extremely Attractive Appearance (30 Points required)

You become the very description of perfect beauty. No one can resist your looks, including both the same and the opposite sex.

(Useful for those pursuing a same-sex relationship. This skill is extremely dangerous if chosen by an Elf, however, due to their natural beauty, so it is recommended that you avoid this skill if you are an Elf.)

Ack! Based on the extra info, almost all of these skills are traps! Now that's more like it for an evil god! I mean, okay, he did say there weren't any cheat skills, and it was kind of suspicious that he casually added most of the requests, but still! I bet the guys that didn't get the Help Guide probably think some of these skills will make them invincible, but they're just gonna die, aren't they? Well, actually, I guess that only applies to the idiots that choose Plunder without thinking.

All it would take for Plunder to kill the user instantly was for their target to have a combination of skills with levels that added up to at least 25. Each of the other skills was risky in its own way, but none of them could kill the user immediately. I didn't see any point in choosing the EXP skills, but given that they did cost points, perhaps there was some kind of secret gimmick behind them. *All right, what about the skills that were already in here before the requests?*

Robust (10 Points required)

Your body becomes much more resilient and durable.

(You will become resistant to injury and diseases. However, this is a different world, so there may be

pathogens that didn’t exist in your previous world.)

Magic Aptitude: Fire (10 Points required)

You become able to learn Fire magic.

(Humans cannot learn Fire magic without this skill. Elves can learn Fire magic even without this skill, but acquiring this skill will allow them to use stronger magic.)

Attractive Appearance (10 Points required)

You gain a very attractive outward appearance.

(Not recommended for Elves due to their natural beauty. Humans who are allured by appearance alone may cause trouble.)

Weapon Proficiency: Swords (10 Points required)

You have much more innate talent for wielding swords than the average person.

(Training is required to make use of the potential granted by this skill. Make sure not to be overconfident.)

Oh, these skills were actually normal! The advice inside the parentheses was actually useful too! I mean, the advice for the additional skills was important too, but that advice only explained how gimmicky each skill was. *Wait, are all of the new skills gimmicky?*

Skin Lightening (5 Points required)

Your skin will become much lighter than the average person’s and remain lighter regardless of sun exposure. You will also become more resistant to sunburns.

(Due to a lack of skin pigment, you will become more vulnerable to UV damage even if you don’t tan or burn visibly. Take care of your skin to avoid skin cancer.)

Drunkard (5 Points required)

You will find it difficult to become drunk.

(This doesn’t affect the properties of the alcohol that you consume, so the effects of alcohol on your body remain the same. In fact, it’s possible that you won’t know when to stop because of this trait, so be careful of alcoholism and alcohol poisoning.)

Swindle (10 Points required)

You become a smooth talker and have a good chance at deceiving people with words alone.

(All talk and no action will make others distrust you. If you want to establish long-term friendships, you will have to prove it with your actions.)

These skills sound fairly reasonable, and the advice is sensible too. Actually, it’s more like the other additional skills were straight-up awful. I’ll just avoid the additional skills for the most part. Apart from the Help Guide, I think choosing the skills that were in this list from the beginning is the way to go. I hope I’m right...

These were the skills that I chose after an hour of thinking.

Help Guide (20 Points required)

Weapon Proficiency: Spears (10 Points required)

Magic Aptitude: Time (15 Points required)

Level 2 Spearmanship (10 Points required)

Level 1 Evasion (5 Points required)

Level 2 Robust (15 Points required)

Level 1 Hawk’s Eye (5 Points required)

Level 1 Stealth (5 Points required)

Level 1 Traps and Snares 101 (5 Points required)

Level 1 Scout (10 Points required)

Level 2 Third Eye (10 Points required)

Level 1 Fire Magic (10 Points required)

Level 2 Time Magic (10 Points required)

My race cost 20 Points. I spent the remaining 130 Points on skills, including 20 Points on the Help Guide. I chose skills based on what I thought would fit in the normal character creation process for a game, and I didn't take any skills that seemed like they were cheat skills. It was a cautious plan, but I was fairly sure that playing it safe was best. There was no way I would be willing to try out some of the gimmicky additional skills after I saw how risky they were. My very life was on the line here, so I would rather play it safe. I hoped Haruka and Tomoya would also make safe and sensible choices for their race and skills. *I can probably trust Haruka, but I'm not too sure about Tomoya. There's a good chance he'll choose based on his fetishes...*

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"Well then, are you all done? It's about time for your transportation!" the young boy announced. "I'll use any leftover points on random skills after this, so keep that in mind!"

Wait, random?! What if you got stuck with one of the gimmicky additional skills?! Then again, everyone probably used up all of their points, so it was probably fine, but still!

"Oh yeah, the souls closest to you right now will also get transported to the same place in the other world. It might be a good idea to stay near people you know—if you can tell each other apart!"

Whoa, hold up! You can't just drop important information like that at the last minute! How are we supposed to tell each other apart in soul form?!

Just as I was thinking those words, two souls approached me and hovered close by. I felt a nostalgic bond between us. *Wait, Haruka and Tomoya? Is it you two? Hold on, am I the only one who can't tell everyone apart? Am I actually an extremely heartless person?*

While I was in shock, the young boy carried on with a smile on his face and waved his hand.

"All right, I hope you all enjoy your second life!"

As soon as I heard those words, I was engulfed in a bright light.

Chapter 1—We're Finally Here in Another World!

Once the light faded away and I could see again, I found myself in the middle of a grassy plain. I looked down and noticed that my hands looked more delicate than they had been before. When I looked to my right, there was another good-looking elf who was also inspecting her own body. She was a beautiful girl with long blonde hair, and her face reminded me of someone I knew.

"Um, you're Haruka, right?" I asked.

"You're Nao, then?"

"Yeah," I said with a nod. After a closer look, I found some resemblance to the Haruka I remembered, despite the different appearance she had now. She looked shorter than she had been before. Haruka's height had been around the high end of the 160-centimeter range, and she had been quite voluptuous too, but the elf that was in front of me right now was definitely shorter than 160 centimeters, and as for the rest of her body—well, she was a lot more slender now.

"What? Do you have something to say?" Haruka glared at me after she noticed where I was looking.

She sounds kind of scary right now! "Oh, well, uh, I was just thinking that you've become really beautiful! As you'd expect of an elf!" I shook my head in a panic and did my best to change the subject. Haruka had already been pretty before, so the difference now didn't feel off or weird, but she was inhumanly beautiful now. *Well, she's an elf now, so I guess she is literally inhuman.*

"Hmph. Didn't you choose the elf race too, Nao? I knew you would." Haruka looked away from me right after she finished her sentence. I saw a little bit of a blush on her face, so maybe she felt embarrassed. *Yeah, I never called her beautiful on a regular basis before, so that makes sense.*

"Hey now, I know you two get along quite well, but I wish you'd notice me

too!”

I heard a voice from behind me, and when I spun around, I saw a beastman. He had animal ears that resembled a dog’s on top of his head and a fluffy tail protruding from his butt. As for his face—*Oh, I recognize this face*. It was definitely Tomoya. His eyes looked a bit sharper than before, but otherwise, his face looked more or less the same.

“Ah, Tomoya,” I said. “What did you choose? You look like a dog.”

“I’m a wolf, not a dog!” Tomoya replied. “Every fiber of my being told me to go for a beastman!”

Tomoya happily wiggled his ears and wagged his tail. He seemed very proud of them. *Oh, right, I knew he’d make decisions based on his fetishes, but I forgot that this was the main one.*

“Honestly though, what’s the point of a male beastman? Did you ever stop to think about that?” I asked.

“True, I don’t care for male beastmen at all,” Tomoya agreed emphatically. “However, think about this! What if the beastmen in this world have a tradition where marriage with other races is forbidden?! Would I give up?! No, never! I couldn’t let my only chance of marrying a girl with animal ears slip away from me!”

Thus Tomoya firmly declared his reasoning for picking a male beastman as his race. It seemed like he had actually thought through his choice carefully. I wasn’t sure if it was really a good use of brainpower, though. *Well, I feel you, bro! I wouldn’t exactly say no to a wife with animal ears!*

“Hmm, Tomoya, you’re here too, eh?” Examining Tomoya’s body, Haruka nodded to herself.

“Wh-What, did I interrupt something?”

“I never said anything like that. But anyway, you’ll be useful as a meat shield.”

“Wait, what did you just say?! Did you just call me a meat shield?!”

“Oho ho ho, of course not!” said Haruka. “Believe me, I’m counting on you to be our frontline fighter!”

Tomoya was shocked and objected to Haruka calling him a meat shield, but Haruka smiled with grace and dodged the subject. *I'm pretty sure I heard something about a meat shield too, but Haruka was probably just trying to put Tomoya at ease with a joke, right?*

"That reminds me... As childhood friends, we have a really strong bond," said Haruka. "We could tell each other apart even in soul form."

"Yeah, I had a feeling it was you two!" replied Tomoya.

"Y-Yep!" I chimed in hastily. "N-Nothing beats the bond we forged over the years!" I was panicking and doing my best to play along with what Haruka and Tomoya were saying. *There's no way I can admit that I didn't notice at all!*

"Hm? Yeah, of course. It looks like none of our classmates are nearby, so I'm glad we were able to group up here."

Haruka might have been a bit suspicious of my behavior, but she seemed to decide to ignore it. She then turned to examine our surroundings. Tomoya and I looked around as well, but there were no signs of anyone at all. I could see much farther than before thanks to my Hawk's Eye skill, but all I saw was more of the grassy plains we were in and a forest. There were also some wild birds, but that was it.

"Well, we've really gotten ourselves into a crazy situation," I said with a sigh. "Is this misfortune? Or are we really lucky?"

"Let's just say it could've been worse," said Haruka. "There's no changing the fact that we got into a bus accident, so we might as well try to stay optimistic instead of the opposite."

"This might be a lucky situation for me!" Tomoya chuckled. "Now I actually have a chance to find a wife with animal ears!"

Haruka responded to my sigh with a shrug and a wry smile. Tomoya was upbeat about the situation due to being an optimistic guy, but I was a bit worried about my parents. *Well, even if I hadn't ended up in this world, it wouldn't change the fact that I died. I may as well accept that it could've been worse, like Haruka said.*

"Ignore Tomoya's delusional dreams. There are more important things to

discuss," said Haruka. "Right now, let's decide on a course of action. We all need to agree before we can do anything together."

"Y-Yeah, that's true," said Tomoya.

I had already been thinking we should do things together as a group of childhood friends, but Haruka was being more serious and pragmatic about it. *She's got a good point, though, since our lives are actually on the line in this world.*

"Let's start. Prioritize self-care!" Haruka declared. "Okay, repeat after me now!" Haruka pointed at Tomoya and me. She seemed determined to make both of us follow along.

"What?" we exclaimed. *Weren't we going to discuss our course of action together?*

Haruka ignored our confusion and repeated the same statement again.

"Prioritize self-care!" said Haruka.

"P-Prioritize self-care?" we repeated.

"Don't aim to become a hero!"

"Don't aim to become a hero!"

"Slow and steady wins the race!"

"Slow and steady wins the race!"

"Obey all of Haruka-sama's orders!"

"Obey all of—wait a minute!" I stopped myself before I could finish those words.

"Tsk!"

I had almost blurted out some dangerous words without careful thought. *Did you just click your tongue at me, Haruka?*

Tomoya, on the other hand, had eluded danger by shutting his mouth at the last moment. *He ditched me!*

"So yeah, those will be our main rules. Agreed?"

It seemed like I wasn't allowed to complain. *Well, it's always been like this. I guess this is just what my everyday life was and still is.*

"Sure, I don't mind. Anything works for me as long as I can eventually settle down and enjoy a peaceful life with a wife who has animal ears!"

"Yeah, I'm fine with those rules too. Or rather, the idea of going off by myself never even crossed my mind." *It'd be too lonely to explore this world alone, given that I know nothing about it.*

Haruka nodded in response to our answers, as if satisfied, and then crossed her arms confidently. "I see! That's good! All right, next up is to check out what skills we have. We'll have to work together to ensure our safety in this new world."

"Yeah," I replied. "Uh, let's see if saying 'Status' out loud works."

Oh, it worked! A display screen appeared. It looked like that was a common trope for these kinds of worlds.

Name: Naofumi

Race: Elf (Age: 17)

Condition: Healthy

Skills: Help Guide, Weapon Proficiency: Spears, Magic Aptitude: Time

Level 2 Spearmanship, Level 1 Evasion, Level 2 Robust

Level 1 Hawk's Eye, Level 1 Stealth, Level 1 Scout

Level 2 Third Eye, Level 1 Traps and Snares 101

Level 2 Time Magic, Level 1 Fire Magic

Oh, it only shows my first name. It seemed like there was no way to change the display screen. I looked around for a page that would show my stats, but there didn't seem to be one.

"Looks like there's no HP or MP bar in here, or stats like Strength or Dexterity," said Tomoya. "There's also nothing to indicate our own level or anything like that either."

“Yes, so it appears,” said Haruka. “At least we can check our current condition and our skills, though.”

Tomoya and Haruka nodded together while we all looked at our own display screens floating in the air in front of us. *So, my current condition is Healthy? If this display actually shows status effects like Poisoned or Cursed, it might be quite useful. I’ll be able to figure out what status effect I need to cure right away. As a side note, Haruka never really played video games that often, but she did sometimes play with Tomoya and me, so she does have some knowledge of common game tropes and systems. This kind of display screen is probably familiar to her as well.*

“The most important thing here is the list of skills,” said Haruka. “Especially this one, the Help Guide skill. You have this, right?”

“Of course,” I replied. I’d known that Haruka would get this skill too. If the Help Guide had only cost, like, 5 Points, then maybe not, but the fact that it cost 20 Points was a clear sign that it was important. *It took me a while to decide because of the cost, though.*

“What? You two got that skill? Why? It wasn’t necessary at all for the character creation process.”

What?

“Did you not get it?!” we exclaimed.

Haruka and I both got up in Tomoya’s face, but he clearly had no idea about what he had done wrong. *Oh no, this is bad! I hope he didn’t make some really risky choices!*

“Tomoya! Tell us all of your skills, now!” yelled Haruka.

“U-Um, okay...” Overwhelmed by Haruka’s threatening tone, Tomoya hastily listed his skills.

Weapon Proficiency: Swords, Level 3 Swordsmanship, Level 1 Charge

Level 1 Roar, Level 2 Evasion, Level 4 Robust

Level 2 Fleetness, Level 2 Appraisal, Level 1

Blacksmithing

Whew, none of them were gimmicky skills! Haruka and I looked at each other. We both let out a sigh of relief.

“Man, I really wanted to get the EXP skills, but I ran out of points while picking skills that I absolutely needed for my badass beastman character. I had no choice but to give up on the EXP skills and prioritize my initial build concept.”

“Believe us, you made the right choice!” I said.

“Yeah!” said Haruka. “Your weird obsession with animal ears was actually useful for once!”

That was a close call! The EXP skills aren’t life-threatening, but they would’ve definitely made your life hell, Tomoya!

“Huh, really? Aren’t skills like that the kind that make a huge difference later on? It’s not like it’s a competition or anything, but still.”

“No, those skills are traps!” I said. “In fact, they would’ve ruined your life!”

Haruka and I took turns explaining how bad and gimmicky the additional skills were, and Tomoya’s face gradually turned pale as he learned more.



“ARE YOU SERIOUS?!” Tomoya yelled at the top of his lungs. His face looked just like that famous painting *The Scream.* “Wait, hold on, doesn’t that mean if you made bad choices with your skills, you’d pretty much be screwed for life?!”

“Yes, anyone who chose Plunder as one of their skills is probably dead by now,” said Haruka.

“Yeah, that’s the only one with a good chance to kill its user right away,” I said. “I don’t know what the typical skills and levels are for an average person in this world, but anyone who uses Plunder against *me* is definitely dead instantly.”

I would get my stolen skills back too, so I’d basically be getting extra life span for free. I sense a bit of malice behind Plunder’s skill description, though, considering that on the surface it says it’ll steal all of a target’s skills. Sure, it’s the user’s fault if they get punished for stealing someone else’s hard-earned skills, but the skill description is still bait...

“Yikes! Super yikes! Now that’s more like what you’d expect from an evil god!” Tomoya continued to yell. All the while, his face still looked like *The Scream.*

Yeah, I feel you, Tomoya. I screamed those exact same words internally when I obtained the Help Guide and saw the hidden text.

“Actually, I think that evil god was quite kind and helpful, since the advice in the Help Guide is specific and useful, and he also emphasized that there were no cheat skills before we got to start choosing our skills,” said Haruka. “If you still chose something that seemed like a cheat skill, then I guess you’ll get what you deserve.”

“Well, yeah, but aren’t the EXP skills just outright torture?” Tomoya replied. “There’s no real benefit to any of them.”

Oh yeah, that’s true. The other skills at least had some kind of benefit. The EXP skills were the only ones where the drawbacks rendered them completely useless. Maybe they needed to be combined with other skills in order to be useful. *I remember playing a few games like that, where there were skills that were pretty much useless on their own, but extremely useful when combined*

with another specific skill for synergy.

"Hmm, I'm not too sure about that, but he did also say 'Effort will never betray you,' so maybe he doesn't like people who want an easy way out?" said Haruka. "Besides, if you really wanted to make use of the EXP skills, then you'd just have to work harder than normal to compensate for the drawbacks, so it's not like some of the other ones that you can't do anything about."

Oh yeah, that was kind of weird for an evil god to say. I guess he has a harsh side, since he's forcing people who search for an easy way out to work much harder than they'd have to otherwise. You also wouldn't be able to get that many skills if you only chose from the additional skills.

"On the other hand, the skills that were available from the beginning are quite fair," I said. "Or rather, they're all very useful, though Robust seemed like an essential skill."

"Mm, resistance to diseases is quite important," Haruka agreed. "A disease that people don't have resistance to tends to be a common device to explain near extinction in science fiction."

"Huh? Wait, is Robust that important of a skill?"

Oh yeah, Tomoya doesn't have the Help Guide, so he doesn't know. He was lucky that he had picked a good skill like Robust. Or rather, it must have required insane luck to completely dodge the gimmicky additional skills without any extra knowledge.

"The extra description for Robust mentioned that there might be some unfamiliar diseases in this world," I said. "I decided to get it after I saw that text."

"It's possible that we might naturally develop resistance to those diseases over time, but it's better to be safe than sorry," said Haruka. "Things like unemployment insurance probably don't exist in this world."

Yep, and there's probably nothing like national health insurance or life insurance either. We might end up dead if we find ourselves in a situation where we can't work for a while. There are no adults for us to rely on in this world, so we have to look out for each other.

“Oh, that makes sense! I’m glad I decided to get the Robust skill, then!” Tomoya sighed in relief. He probably hadn’t been thinking about diseases when he picked Robust, but Level 4 would most likely be more than enough for most diseases.

“All right, next up are my skills,” said Haruka. “These are the ones I decided to get.”

Help Guide, Weapon Proficiency: Bows, Craft Aptitude: Alchemy

Magic Aptitude: Light, Magic Aptitude: Wind, Magic Aptitude: Water

Enhanced Mana Capacity, General Knowledge, Level 2 Archery

Level 2 Robust, Level 1 Throw, Level 2 Third Eye

Level 1 Disassemble, Level 3 Light Magic, Level 1 Wind Magic

Level 1 Water Magic, Level 1 Swiftcast, Level 1 Alchemy

Level 1 Sewing, Level 1 Cooking

“Huh? Wait, why do you have way more skills than I do?” asked Tomoya.

“Yeah, you have way more than me as well, Haruka,” I said. “How many Points did you start with?”

Tomoya and I were both confused by the number of skills Haruka had. She had way more skills than either of us. *I don’t exactly remember how many Points each skill cost, but I’m pretty sure 150 Points wouldn’t be enough for all this.*

“I had 200 Points. What about it?” Haruka answered nonchalantly.

What? She had 200 Points?

“Huh?! I only had 120 Points!”

“I had 150 Points. Was there really that much of a difference between Haruka and me in terms of human worth...?”

“Dude, I have it worse than you! She has almost double what I do!”

It’s true that her grades were better than mine, and she beat me in the looks department as well. On top of that, she was good at sports and very sociable too. But still, this reality check via numbers is kind of depressing...

“W-Well, these points are just the biased opinion of that evil god!” Haruka exclaimed. “It doesn’t mean you two are worth less than me as human beings or anything like that!”

“My worth as a human being...” I muttered.

“Almost half...” Tomoya muttered.

Haruka tried to cheer us up when she saw our depressed reactions, but her words were the final nail in the coffin. *Tomoya looks like he could vanish at any moment right now.*

“D-Don’t worry about it! You can just level up your skills!” Haruka insisted. “Okay, Nao, you’re up next!”

She seemed to have realized her poor choice of words, and she slapped my back to cue me, no doubt so we could change the subject.

“A-All right, these are my skills.”

I didn’t like the way Haruka was trying to get me to hurry along, but I still decided to do what she told me and list my skills.

Help Guide, Weapon Proficiency: Spears, Magic Aptitude: Time

Level 2 Spearmanship, Level 1 Evasion, Level 2 Robust

Level 1 Hawk’s Eye, Level 1 Stealth, Level 1 Scout

Level 2 Third Eye, Level 1 Traps and Snares 101, Level 2 Time Magic

Level 1 Fire Magic

I thought I’d come up with a pretty good skill build, but I’m not so confident anymore after seeing Haruka’s skills. I want to believe that mine is decent, and that Haruka’s build is just much better. Mine is decent compared to my

classmates', right? I hope so. I had more skills than Tomoya did, but we had more or less the same number of Points to work with if I didn't include the cost of the Help Guide.

"Hm, so you chose a skill build for a center position in battle?" said Haruka. "I guess that matches what I thought you would get."

"Wait, really? Did you both plan out your skill build?" Tomoya asked.

"Of course," Haruka replied. "You're the type to charge in brainlessly, Tomoya, and I was fairly sure Nao would end up being a jack of all trades but master of none, so I grabbed support skills to balance things out."

Ack! I mean, you guessed right, but I wish you could've at least described me as, like, "capable of fighting on the frontline if needed" and had just left out that "master of none" part. I couldn't really complain, though, since I wasn't really thinking *that* thoroughly when I chose my skills.

"Well, we ended up with a frontline, center, and backline fighter, so things worked out well. Okay, now let's hurry and find a town."

"Oh yeah, Haruka, you chose a skill called General Knowledge, right?" I asked. "Did that skill tell you a reason for hurrying?"

"The skill said that this area isn't that dangerous...as long as we're near a town."

"So you're saying that it's dangerous to be far away from town?"

"Yes, but even if we're near a town, something like a wild boar could easily kill us," said Haruka. "We do have new skills, but we should test them out in a safe place before we use them in combat."

"Oh yeah, even in our old world, I remember occasionally seeing news about people who died after being mauled by boars," I said.

"Did you two know that when cats mean business, people are no match for them?" said Tomoya. "Well, at least, that's what I heard."

What Tomoya said actually made some sense. *He has a point, since it's quite hard to catch a cat that's running away.* Anyway, even though we did have skills, we were completely unarmed. Our clothes looked like they probably fit

this world, at the very least.

“Enough talking. Let’s get going!” said Haruka. “You have the Hawk’s Eye skill, right, Nao? Do you see a town anywhere?”

I looked around again with Hawk’s Eye, but I saw only the same grassy plains and forest I had before. There were no signs of a town anywhere. The farthest thing I could see was a mountain. *Wait, is that a road?*

“I didn’t see a town, but I saw a road in that direction.”

“You didn’t see a town? Oh well, at least there’s a road we can follow,” said Haruka. “Let’s aim for that road for now.”

“Roger,” said Tomoya.

We walked for about ten minutes in the direction I’d pointed out. When we reached the road, it turned out to be about three meters wide. It was just a simple road of packed soil, slightly elevated, but that clearly meant it was man-made.

“Yeah, this is definitely a highway,” said Haruka. She looked around to her left and right before asking us, “Now we need to decide which way to go from here—any preferences?”

I had no idea at all. “I don’t see any signs of a town in either direction,” I replied. “Maybe I could make something out from a higher vantage point, but there are no trees nearby.”

The plains we were walking through looked mostly flat all the way to the horizon. *Oh yeah, speaking of the horizon, it seems like it should be far away, but it actually isn’t. It wouldn’t even be five kilometers back on Earth. The distance depends on the size of the planet, so maybe it’s different here.*

While I was lost in thought, Tomoya suddenly grinned and said, “Hey, Nao, it’s time to do the thing, you know?”

“What do you mean, the thing?”

“Oh, you know, the thing where I cross my arms, and you stand on my arms, and then I toss you in the air! We couldn’t do it before, but we’re probably strong enough to do it now, what with our new bodies, right?”

Oh yeah, I remember seeing characters in manga get over walls that way. I'm lighter than I was before, and Tomoya's probably stronger now as well due to Beastman muscles. However...

"Hold on, what if you mess up and end up doing a weird German Suplex on me instead? We've never done this before, so are you sure you can do it correctly?"

"Relax, I'm sure it'll be fine—"

"Stop," said Haruka. "What if you two get injured?"

Tomoya cocked his head in thought while he stretched his arms to warm up for the toss, but Haruka stopped him with a slap to the forehead.

"Try climbing on Tomoya's shoulders first," said Haruka. "With your skill, that should be enough to see a few kilometers ahead."

"Yeah, I don't want to risk getting injured right away," I said.

"Oh, come on! I wanted to try it at least once." Tomoya grumbled a little, but when Haruka glared at him, he hastily forced a smile of agreement, planted his feet solidly on the ground, and beckoned me over.

"Upsy daisy." I stepped up on Tomoya's joined hands and got on top of his shoulders. Tomoya's body was sturdier than I'd thought at a glance, and it seemed like I also had improved physical abilities, so I managed to stand up without difficulty.

"Do you see anything?"

Looks like there's nothing in front. Let's see, what about behind? Hmm, a wall?

"How did it go?" asked Haruka.

I hopped off Tomoya's shoulders and pointed in the direction where I had seen the wall. "I saw something that looked like a wall in this direction. By the way, thanks for the ride, Tomoya. You okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. It felt like a massage, so my physical abilities must have improved a ton," Tomoya replied, dusting off his shoulders.

“You too, Tomoya? It felt pretty different for me as well. We should probably test our abilities the first chance we get.”

“Yes, we definitely should, but let’s get to town first,” said Haruka. “We can discuss things on the way, and besides, do you want to sleep in the open with no roof?”

“Mm, let’s not,” I said. “We also don’t have any food right now.”

Having agreed to Haruka’s suggestion, we resumed our journey with Tomoya marching out in the front. Haruka had said that a highway near a town wasn’t especially dangerous, but we decided to play it safe and have our toughest member, Tomoya, lead the way. I was in the middle and Haruka brought up the rear, since she could use healing magic. *Well, she should be able to, anyway.*

“Since Nao saw that wall from on top of your shoulders, Tomoya, that means it’s somewhere between five to seven and a half kilometers from here. At least, that’s what it would be back on Earth.”

“Really? You’re as smart as always, Haruka! I don’t get what you’re saying at all!” Tomoya chuckled.

Haruka sighed at his reply. “Tomoya, don’t be so quick to brag about your ignorance! Besides, it’s not like I know the exact formula. I just remember that you can see about five kilometers under normal circumstances, and even if you doubled your height, you’ll only be able to see half again what you could before.”

It was basically trivia, but it still amazed me that she remembered something like that. *She’s definitely built differently. It must be those 200 Points. Not that I’m jealous or anything...*

“So that means we should get to our destination within two hours, right?” I asked.

“Yeah,” replied Haruka. “By the way, do you two have anything on you?”

“Hm? As you can see, nothing at all. What about it?”

“Yeah, same here.” I turned around and held out my arms in front of me. All I had on me were some normal clothes (they were a little thick and felt

handmade) and that was it. I had no other belongings.

“Oh, are you thinking we might have an Inventory that we haven’t checked yet?” Tomoya asked. He sounded excited about the possibility of a menu we hadn’t found earlier, but Haruka shook her head.

“No, the General Knowledge skill says nothing about that, although expensive magical satchels and bags apparently do exist. For right now, forget about that and check the pockets of your new clothes.”

I followed Haruka’s orders and checked my clothes. I did indeed have pockets, and when I thrust my hands in, I felt a few coins. They were about the same size as a one hundred yen coin. “This is money, right? Let’s see, it looks like there are ten coins here.”

“Oh, same here!” Tomoya took the same number of coins out of his pocket and held them up in his palm like I had.

Haruka inspected our coins and nodded. “Yeah, I have the same amount as well,” she said. “They’re large silver coins. Each one is worth the equivalent of about one thousand yen, although it varies a bit. As for the currency in this world, one large silver coin is worth one hundred Rea.”

I see... So these ten coins altogether are worth roughly ten thousand yen.

“Was it the evil god who gave us these clothes and money? It’s definitely pretty evil to abandon us here with just clothes and about ten thousand yen each,” said Tomoya. “Most of the additional skills were horrible too.”

Those horrible drawbacks were probably the fault of our classmates who had wished for skills they didn’t deserve, but at the same time, the fact that the god had booby-trapped the skills was super malicious.

“Really? I don’t think he was that evil. As I mentioned earlier, I believe he was actually rather kind,” said Haruka. “He gave us clothes that fit this world and enough money to both buy necessities and stay at an inn for one night. He gave the same to everyone in our class, as well, so that’s thirty-two people. Would you give a total of 320,000 yen to people you were meeting for the first time, Tomoya, and prepare clothes for them too?”

Well, when you put it that way, that evil god does sound pretty generous. He

did bring us back from the dead too.

"I mean, sure, that's one way to look at it," I said. "But isn't he a god? If he was actually a nice god, he wouldn't have booby-trapped those additional skills."

"Why would you ever depend completely upon the mercy of a god? Most of the gods in ancient mythology from around the world are totally egocentric. Take, for example, the supreme deity of the Greek Pantheon. Anyone who tried to emulate him would be nothing more than a disgusting sexual predator."

Ah, yeah, there are a lot of spicy stories in Greek mythology. There were very few gods in that pantheon who could even be considered sane. I guess these gimmicky additional skills could be considered just pranks compared to the irrational things the Greek gods did all the time. I don't know if it's okay to call something that can kill you a prank, but what can you do against a god?

"Also, if you ignore the absurd ones, there are actually some useful powers among the additional skills," said Haruka.

"Really?" said Tomoya. "Do you mean aside from the Help Guide?"

"Yes, my General Knowledge skill was an additional skill."

"Oh yeah, I was going to ask about that," I said. "Was that skill actually on the list? I didn't notice it at all." I was fairly sure that I had looked through everything at the beginning.

"I requested it during my character creation process, so that's probably why you didn't notice."

"That makes sense. I didn't search much further after I got the Help Guide and noticed the gimmicks in the first few skills I looked at."

"This General Knowledge skill is most likely a very valuable and important one," said Haruka. "Make sure you two ask me before you try to do anything. You wouldn't want to stick out like a sore thumb, would you?"

That made sense. We wouldn't have known how much these coins were worth without Haruka's information. It would be a bit awkward to go up to some stranger and ask them about something that ought to be general

knowledge or common sense in this world. Back in Japan, if someone had approached us to ask about the value of currency or about the amount they had in their pockets, we would probably guide them to a police station in case they needed to be taken to a hospital. That would seem like common sense to us.

"Okay, I'll keep that in mind," I said. "Also, I just thought of a question. Will we be able to enter a town right away when we get to one?"

"No, we'll have to pay an entry toll for towns that are surrounded by walls. The rates vary from town to town, but they tend to be in the ballpark of one hundred Rea. However, if you live in a particular town, or if you're registered as an adventurer at the Adventurers' Guild, then you don't need to pay the fee."

"Oh, so there's an Adventurers' Guild!" Tomoya turned around when he heard Haruka say those two words and repeated them in a joyful tone.

"Yes, there is. That's a trope one can take for granted in this kind of fantasy world. However, don't get into a fight with other adventurers, understood? It's strictly forbidden! You'll get arrested and dragged off to a dungeon, regardless of who you got into a fight with. In fact, I would say the rules for adventurers are even stricter than the rules that apply to scuffles between ordinary citizens."

Oh, so I guess the Adventurers' Guild in this world isn't hands-off when it comes to fights and conflicts between adventurers.

"That makes sense, considering that most adventurers will probably be armed," I said. "Back in Japan, I remember hearing about how you'd get a heavier punishment for public brawling if you practiced martial arts."

"Is that how it works?" Tomoya asked with a sigh. "Oh well, I guess that means we'll miss out on the trope of getting bullied while we're registering as adventurers."

Why do you sound disappointed, Tomoya?

"Okay, so our goal for now is to work hard towards a stable and sustainable life without drawing attention to ourselves, right?"

"Yes, and don't forget the rules that you repeated earlier!" Haruka said.

“Roger. Well, I’ll eventually find a wife with animal ears!”

“Uh, yeah, good luck with that,” I said.

Haruka and I both let out a dry laugh at Tomoya’s resolve.

Chapter 2—We've Arrived at Town

On the way to our destination, Haruka taught Tomoya and me some common knowledge about this world. After about an hour, we arrived at the gate of a walled town. The walls looked like they were about three meters high; they were composed of brick slabs with plaster filling the crevices. When I looked to my left and right, I could see that the walls continued to curve far into the distance, so I assumed that it was a fairly large town. The gate was wide open; it looked like it was a double door made of sturdy wood, wide enough for two horse-drawn carriages to pass through. There weren't that many people in line at the moment, so it seemed like we wouldn't have to wait too long.

Standing right in front of the gates were a couple of guards. They were armed with spears that were slightly taller than their heads and had swords in their belts.

"All right, let's go," said Haruka. "I'll handle talking to the guards. As for you two, just stand behind me and keep quiet, since you don't know anything."

"Okay..." we replied.

I mean, yeah, we don't have the General Knowledge skill, but the way you put it makes it sound like we're stupid or something. I didn't say anything, though, since it was better to rely on her for things like this.

"Hello!"

The guard that Haruka had chosen to talk to was a young man who looked a bit older than us. *Poor guy.* She put on a perfectly businesslike smile, and the guard beamed in response. *She may be more slender now, but she's also way more beautiful! I would've probably been deceived by that fake smile too, if I hadn't known her since childhood.*

"Hello. Uh, are the three of you adventurers?" The guard examined us, but he seemed unsure what to make of us.

"No, but we plan on registering to become adventurers."

“Is that so? You don’t seem to have any weapons, though.”

“Well, actually, we lost our purses in the previous town we visited, so we had no choice but to sell our weapons for money. Then we decided to come to this town. Even unarmed, we can handle ourselves just fine with our magic, since it’s not that dangerous around here.”

“Hmm, I guess that makes sense given that two of you are elves. But can you afford the entry toll? It’s one large silver coin per person. The rules here dictate that you can’t pay later, so...”

The guard must have found Haruka convincing, but he was apparently still wary of us—or rather, of Haruka; he was completely ignoring Tomoya and me. It annoyed me a bit, but on the other hand, it was convenient for us, so I decided to hold my tongue.

“Yes, we have enough to spare,” Haruka answered. She handed the guard three silver coins.

After the guard counted the coins, he nodded with a smile and stepped aside to make way for us. “Okay, you’ll probably be fine, since you can use magic, but do take care. There are a lot of dangerous quests out there for adventurers.”

“Thank you very much.” Haruka smiled and bowed to the guard, so Tomoya and I followed suit as we passed through the gate.

“Oh, wait a moment!”

We stopped dead in our tracks when we heard the guard call after us. Haruka forced a smile again and then turned around to face the guard.

“Um, is there something we forgot?”

“Oh, it just came to me that you probably haven’t decided on an inn to stay at, right? I recommend an inn called The Slumbering Bear! It’s located on the right side of the plaza inside the gate. Also, my name’s Cass. Feel free to ask me questions if you have any!” He seemed happy to offer advice. He was probably just trying to help us out of the goodness of his heart.

But come to think of it, his kindness probably had a lot to do with being struck by Haruka’s beauty. After all, his eyes had been on her the whole time. *I’m too*

chicken to try and do anything about it right now, though.

"Thank you very much! We'll keep that in mind!" Haruka's reply was smooth and amicable, but Tomoya and I struggled to maintain our smiles. We were extremely nervous.

None of us said a word once we started to walk again. When we got decently far away from the gate, we looked at each other and all sighed a breath of relief.

"Whew!" I exhaled. "I got really nervous even though I didn't say anything!"

"Yup, same!" said Tomoya. "Man, we would've seemed suspicious if Haruka hadn't been with us!"

We had been the only ones at the gate whose clothes were made of plain cloth—and also the only ones who hadn't been carrying any belongings. Even the people who were clad in light clothes had clothes made of leather. They also had small satchels with them along with knives in their belts. That was enough information for us to figure out that it was quite suspicious to walk around unarmed outside town.

"I'm glad that things went well. The excuse I gave wasn't exactly a good one, but I think we'll be fine as long as we don't cause any problems and can be good, hardworking adventurers."

"Oh yeah, is it possible to end up being unable to enter town?"

"Of course it is. You can enter town as long as you're not a criminal and pay the toll, but it's possible to end up in a hassle like being interrogated for a long time or being asked to name the place you're staying at. Feel free to praise me for skillfully dodging those troubles."

"You're amazing, Haruka-san!"

"That was so cool, Haruka-san!"

Haruka held her head up high while Tomoya and I played along and praised her. We looked at each other and chuckled. We could relax now that we had found our way to a safe place and—*did someone's stomach just growl?*

"Oh, ha ha, I'm hungry!"

It was Tomoya's stomach that had growled. He seemed slightly embarrassed by it; he laughed awkwardly and scratched his head.

"It seems to be noon right now, so that's actually good timing. Let's buy some food on our way to the inn that the guard recommended," Haruka suggested.

Oh yeah, I feel quite hungry as well. Uh, when was the last time I ate something? I remember eating breakfast before getting on the bus, but I don't remember having lunch. Well, maybe it doesn't matter, since this is a completely new body.

"It's normal to eat at noon in this world, right?" I asked.

"Yes, it is, but it seems like most ordinary citizens make do with a snack from the food stalls," replied Haruka.

"That's still better than going on just two meals per day. It'd be hard to adjust to this world's norms right away and start eating less. Now then, I wonder what the food tastes like in this world!"

"I wouldn't expect too much if I were you, Tomoya..." Haruka muttered darkly while Tomoya happily looked around for somewhere to get food.

"Yo, that place is cheap! It's only thirty Rea for bread and soup! Let's check it out!"

Tomoya didn't seem to have heard Haruka's words and was pointing excitedly at a food stall. At the front of the stall was a huge pot full of soup with a pile of rolls sitting beside it. Each roll was a bit larger than the palm of my hand and had a dark crust. *Is that the famous brown bread that often shows up in fantasy settings? I've had bread that was partially made with rye grain, but never real rye bread. I'm actually kind of looking forward to this.*

"We don't have much money, so I guess we have no choice." Haruka didn't seem too excited, but she agreed in the end, and we bought some soup and bread.

Tomoya and I had planned to dig in on the spot, but Haruka raised her hand to halt us. She led us to a place a bit farther away. "Okay, listen up. Dip the bread in the soup to soften it before you take a bite. And leave some bread for scraping the bottom of the bowl at the end. We need to return these bowls

after we finish eating, okay?”

“Roger. This bread does seem quite hard.”

I nodded along with Tomoya. Rye bread was well known for being tough to chew. *All right, let’s dip it in some soup and see what it tastes like...*

“Ack! Huh? This is harder than I thought it would be! It also doesn’t taste very good...”

“It tastes sour! The soup isn’t very good either. It’s just kind of salty and that’s it.”

After I heard Tomoya’s reaction, I decided to try out the soup myself. There really was nothing more to it than a slight salty flavor. There were some bits floating in the soup that looked like scraps of vegetable and meat, but they were completely flavorless.

While Tomoya and I were complaining about the food, Haruka continued to eat quietly without any visible distress or audible complaints.

“Um, Haruka, do you actually think this tastes good?”

I thought maybe it was our taste buds that were weird, so I asked Haruka to confirm, but she shook her head.

“Of course not. I was just prepared in advance, since I knew it would taste bad.”

Oh yeah, she did tell Tomoya not to expect much. I was looking forward to trying out rye bread, since it was a staple food for fantasy worlds, but sadly, I guess an ordinary Japanese person wouldn’t enjoy the taste.

“For real? I thought this would taste much better back when I read scenes like this in light novels...” Tomoya must have had a similar train of thought. He sighed and cast a gloomy look at the rye bread.

“Well, there is one use for rye bread,” said Haruka. “It lasts for quite a long time before going stale, so it’s a good choice for nonperishable food. That’s about all it’s good for, but still...”

“Wouldn’t rice be a better choice for nonperishable food?” Tomoya asked. “It lasts a long time too, but more importantly, you can easily turn it into a

delicious meal even if all you have is a mess tin and a bonfire."

"Do you mean like the dried and boiled rice people used to eat as rations in the distant past?" I asked.

"Oh yeah, I remember reading about something like that from classical texts back in literature class!"

"Mm," I said. "If you want, you can eat it as is, or you can just pour some hot water over it and it'll be ready."

"Yeah, and the modern-day version of that is instant rice," said Haruka.

"Wait, really?! I've had that before! All I had to do was pour some hot water over it and it tasted almost exactly like regular rice!"

I had also tried instant rice before; it had been labeled for use during emergencies and disasters, but it had actually been quite delicious—a bit different from regular rice, but it was a taste I wouldn't mind on a regular basis.

"That taste's mostly thanks to modern technology, though. Regardless, according to the General Knowledge skill, rice doesn't exist in this world!"

"So you're saying that we have to get used to this type of bread if we want to become adventurers?" I asked Haruka.

She nodded solemnly in response. "Other nonperishable foods do exist, but apparently they taste just as bad."

"Hmm, hopefully we can find a solution to this problem when we have some spare time to experiment with cooking."

"Agreed. It's not as though I enjoy the taste of this bread either, so I'll do my best to help when we have the time."

Having been slapped in the face by reality, Tomoya and I resumed our meals quietly. We finished eating without further conversation.

Haruka retrieved the empty bowls from us and went to return them to the owner of the food stall. She asked him some questions while she was at it. "Sir, we're looking for an inn to stay at. Do you know any good places? A place with single rooms available would be ideal."

“Well, it depends on your budget, so...” He stared at our clothes while he thought. *Yeah, we don’t look rich at all.*

“We were recommended a place called The Slumbering Bear. Have you heard of it before?”

“The Slumbering Bear? Oh, that place. Come to think of it, they also offer inn services. It’s not a bad choice, but the owner’s unsociable. It’s located in an alley that’s a bit hard to find, so head for the plaza and walk further down the main street on the first right, then ask someone for directions.”

He retrieved the bowls from Haruka and pointed down the road. There was an open area a few hundred meters in that direction.

“Thank you very much! We’ll come back again in the future!”

Haruka smiled and waved goodbye, then led us back to the main road.

I hurriedly caught up to her to ask about our future plans. “Are we actually going to come back here to eat?”

Haruka shook her head with a bitter smile. “Probably not. Well, not unless we’re close to running out of money.”

“I’m glad!” I said. “The bread and soup were, well, you know...”

“Mm. It really made me appreciate how well-crafted instant food was back in Japan. Even something basic like consommé, which only requires hot water, would be very difficult to make from scratch here. I’m not too confident about whether or not I could make a delicious soup with just salt.”

“Really? But aren’t you quite good at cooking?”

It wasn’t a regular thing, but as Haruka’s childhood friend, I had had some opportunities to eat her homemade food. *I don’t know how good the average high school girl is at cooking, but one thing I do know is that Haruka’s cooking was great.*

“Thanks for the compliment, but it’s hard to make a flavorful dish without any seasoning. I hope there’s a good variety of dried food available here.”

Dried food is stuff like bonito flakes and kombu or kelp, right? There are also dried shiitake mushrooms and dried sardines... Oh yeah, now that I think about

it, dried food is quite important for making broth. I was always lazy and just used broth powder whenever I cooked, but I remember seeing the contestants use bonito flakes a lot on cooking shows. If that's what you need to create good broth, then maybe it's actually a luxury we can't afford.

Hmm, suddenly I'm not too sure if we can make it here in this world. Guess I'll have to hope Haruka can use her excellent cooking skills to whip up tasty meals with cheap ingredients...

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The Slumbering Bear was indeed quite hard to find, as we had been told. We asked people along the way for directions multiple times, and eventually we found ourselves in an alley that was far away from the center of town. The building in front of us looked somewhat old, but it was at least clean, which made a good first impression.

"All right, let's go in. Leave all the talking to me again, okay?"

Tomoya and I nodded in approval. I felt somewhat ashamed of myself, but the difference in our knowledge of this world was a very big factor. Haruka opened the door and went in first, and we followed after her. Inside, the first thing that caught my eye was a group of tables laid out in rows. It looked like a dining hall. *This isn't a hotel, so I guess it's obvious that there's no front lobby.* There were ten tables, each round and large enough to seat up to five people. There was also a decent amount of space between them; the dining hall was quite large. To the right of the room was a long counter, and in the center was a middle-aged man who must have been the owner of this inn. He was quite tall, bulky, and had a beard. Behind the counter were some stairs, which presumably led to the rooms for travelers.

"Hello, we'd like to stay at this inn. Is there a room for three people available?"

"It'll be five hundred Rea per night for one room. Breakfast and dinner will be an extra eighty Rea per person. Water is available from the well in the backyard. If you need it, a bucket of hot water will be fifty Rea."

Oh yeah, this guy's definitely unsociable. He said everything we needed to know, but still.

“Okay, we’ll stay for one night, with breakfast and dinner included, please.”

“Seven hundred and forty Rea.”

“This should be it. Here you go.”

Haruka didn’t seem to mind how unsociable the innkeeper was. She stuck her hand in my pocket, drew out one large silver coin, and mixed it with her own coins to pay. *Oh yeah, she paid the toll at the gate for all three of us. That means she has almost no money left. That’s rough.*

“Your room is up the stairs and on the right at the very end of the hall.” That was the last piece of information he murmured after taking our coins and handing Haruka a key. *This guy really is unsociable. Well, I guess it’s better than being asked all sorts of questions. I’d rather stay inconspicuous.*

“Okay, thank you,” said Haruka. “Let’s get going.”

“Roger,” said Tomoya.

Haruka started to climb up the stairs, and we followed suit. We walked down a dim corridor towards our room.

The room was much brighter than the corridor. There were four beds, a small table, a wooden chest to store belongings, and a large window that looked out on the road below.

“Hmm, this isn’t too bad. In fact, I think this might be better than some of the cheap inns I stayed at in the suburbs back in Japan.” Tomoya nodded in satisfaction as he glanced around at the room and the bedsheets.

Cheap inns back in Japan?

“You’ve stayed at those kinds of places before, Tomoya?”

“Yeah, a few times when I went on trips. Some of the rooms I stayed in didn’t have any proper windows, and there was just one futon to sleep on. I definitely prefer the look and feel of this room. Only downside is that there’s no air conditioning here.”

Wow. I’ve never even stayed at a capsule hotel before.

Haruka seemed surprised as well, and she turned to Tomoya to ask him more.

“I’ve only stayed at regular hotels and traditional Japanese inns myself, so I’m curious—what were those cheap inns like?”

“I mean, they were decent enough to sleep in and that’s about it. The rooms had television and air conditioning, but the shower room was shared. It was cheaper than other options, though, so they can be a convenient place to stay depending on what you’re traveling for. However, I wouldn’t recommend them to women. I gotta say, though, I feel way more tired than I thought I would.”

Tomoya collapsed face first onto a bed and let out an exhausted sigh. His tail was visible, wagging a little.

“U-Um, Tomoya, can I touch your tail?” I asked.

“Uh, I’m not really into that kind of stuff from another guy. But, well, I do understand the allure of a fluffy tail, so sure, I guess?”

“Thanks, dude!”

Tomoya squirmed a bit at first from that idea, but he said okay in the end, so I went ahead and touched his tail. *Wow! This is really fluffy! I thought it would be a bit stiff, but I was wrong.* I continued to pet it for a while.

“AAAGGGHHH!”

Tomoya jumped up from the bed all of a sudden.

“Huh?! Don’t suddenly scream like that, Tomoya!”

“It’s your fault for touching me weirdly! That’s enough! Don’t touch my tail anymore!”

“Oh, come on!” I made a stroking motion with my hands to indicate that I wasn’t done yet, but Tomoya firmly refused further contact.

After a moment of thought, he found the words to describe how it felt: “It felt really weird! Like, uh, it felt somewhat similar to the kind of shivers you get from being poked in the back, and I can’t stand that!”

“Ah, yeah, that’s not a pleasant feeling.”

Wait, if this is how Tomoya reacted, then other beastmen probably won’t let me pet them either. Does that mean I won’t ever get a chance to touch animal

ears or tails? What a shame. That was one of the things I was looking forward to the most in this world. Oh well. I reluctantly gave up on my dream, but my eyes lingered on Tomoya's tail for a while.

Haruka gave me a disappointed look and sighed. "All right, you two, stop playing around. Let's go out to buy some goods that we need."

"Eh? Why don't we just call it a day for now? Aren't you two tired as well? I'm really tired mentally." Even as Haruka was urging us to go outside again, Tomoya had gotten back on a bed and was rolling around while he complained.

Haruka sighed for a moment and then lightly swatted Tomoya on the head.

"I'm tired as well, but we don't have the luxury of resting right away. Tomoya, how much money do you have left?"

"Uh, let me count—it looks like I have 970 Rea."

"Okay, I'll be taking that."

Haruka snatched the coins out of Tomoya's hand the moment he was done counting them.

"Huh?" said Tomoya.

Haruka held her hand out in my direction. "Give me your coins as well, Nao. We don't have enough money at the moment to split it equally."

"Okay." I knew from experience that it would be a bad idea to say no to Haruka when she was like this, so I obeyed and surrendered all the coins I had in my pocket. *It's not like she'll run away with the money, and it's better for one person to manage it all for now.*

"All of this adds up to 1,870 Rea. We'll have to make do with this amount for all the goods and items we need to start as adventurers. Any thoughts?"

"Yeah, this isn't much money at all." I didn't know how much things cost in this world, but I knew for a fact that we didn't have much leeway. The amount of money we had left was only enough to stay at the inn for two more nights, so we didn't have the luxury of rest while it was still early in the day.

"Uh, I have a question," I said. "What are we going to do for a job? Are we going to take on quests as adventurers? That's the standard choice for this kind

of world.”

“It’s more like our only choice,” replied Haruka.

Haruka explained to Tomoya and me what kind of work was available in this world. She told us that there was day labor that counted as work for adventurers too, so we could get those kinds of jobs through the Adventurers’ Guild. For women, there was the option of waitress work at a tavern, but the pay was quite low. Even if you got hired as a live-in waitress, most of your wages would go towards accommodation fees. If you wanted to save up money, you would have to turn to prostitution. As for other examples, artisans had an apprenticeship system set up, so it was impossible to get work in that kind of field without connections. You also needed connections to enlist in the military, which would be extra difficult without much knowledge about this world.

“This is why becoming adventurers is our only realistic choice.” Haruka shrugged and sighed at our predicament.

Oh yeah, I remember needing a resume for any kind of work back in Japan, even part-time work. With that in mind, I guess registering as adventurers really is our only realistic choice.

“Any other questions?” Haruka asked. Tomoya raised his hand while still lying on a bed, so Haruka pointed at him. “Yes, Tomoya?”

“Registering as adventurers sounds fine to me, but can we actually afford to right now? We have like, what, the equivalent of less than twenty thousand yen, right? Surely that’s not enough to buy proper adventurer clothes for three people.”

Back in Japan, that amount of money would only be enough to buy some underwear from a 100-yen shop and some clothes from a Shimamura store. Cheap mass-produced clothes like that don’t exist in this world, though, so it’s not that easy.

“Yeah, we’re in a tough situation,” said Haruka. “I’m not saying we should start working today, but if we aren’t prepared to work tomorrow, we’ll have to sleep outside to save money.”

“That would be horrible!” said Tomoya. He jumped up from the bed to beg

Haruka for help. “Okay, so what do we actually need? Since you actually know a bit about this world, can you list some things for us to discuss, Haruka?”

Haruka paused in thought for a moment. “Well, we’ll definitely need things like a satchel to carry our belongings, waterskins, cloth bags for gathering materials, and leather bags for carrying meat and fur. Those are the general goods we’ll need. We’ll also need weapons and armor, but...”

“Will we have enough for those last two?” I asked.

“Probably not,” Haruka replied.

I asked Haruka about the market price for the things we needed, and apparently we had just about enough for the general goods, but that was it. That sounded like an extremely tight budget, so we discussed further and trimmed it down. Water was important, so we had to buy three waterskins, but we would have to make do with one shared bag for belongings and one or two less for the other bags. As for underwear, only Haruka would buy a new pair. We would spend the rest of the money on a weapon for Tomoya. That was the best we could do with what we had. Haruka and I would go without weapons for now, and all of us would go without armor.

“Hmm, even with this extra money set aside, I’m not sure if we can afford a decent weapon...” said Haruka.

“It’s not like there’s anything we can do about it,” I said. “Weapons are expensive, and even a mass-produced knife back in Japan would cost a few thousand yen. Tomoya, be ready to use a staff or club if it comes down to it.”

“Roger,” said Tomoya. “A cypress staff is a standard starting weapon for an adventurer, after all!”

“That’s more like a starting weapon for a Hero!” I exclaimed.

“If we ignore how other people might look at us, then an iron club would be just fine,” said Haruka. “Let’s go see what we can buy first.”

This isn’t exactly how I imagined our lives as adventurers would begin. Haruka laughed dryly at our efforts to keep our spirits up.

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The first place we headed for was the general store. We asked the taciturn innkeeper if there was a specific store he would recommend; although he didn't say much, he did give us an answer, so we knew where to go. Haruka was once again in charge of deciding what to buy. She managed to haggle and obtain goods much more cheaply than the original price.

Tomoya and I stood behind her and looked around at the goods available. We didn't participate in the price negotiations.

"Uh, Nao, aren't we useless?"

There wasn't even much for Tomoya and me to carry, since we couldn't afford to buy a lot.

"Don't worry about it. We're useful as bodyguards so random guys don't hit on Haruka. That's always been our role in these situations. Besides, a pretty girl is more likely to get a better deal haggling."

"I mean, yeah, I guess. But with your looks, wouldn't you also be up to the task as long as the person you're haggling with was a woman?"

"I'm not any better at haggling than I was before, but maybe I'll give it a shot some other time."

I'm more handsome now than I was before, right? I can't tell. I wish I had a mirror.

Haruka came back from haggling and rolled her eyes at what Tomoya and I were talking about. "Instead of thinking about stupid things like that, think about ways for us to earn loads of money so that we don't need to haggle in the first place. Let's move on to the weapon shop and not waste time. We still have to go to the Adventurers' Guild afterwards."

She went on ahead of us, and we followed right behind. After a few minutes of walking, she stopped in front of a shop with a sword and shield painted on its signboard—presumably the weapon shop. We were greeted by yet another middle-aged man. He glanced at us but didn't say a single word of welcome. *Do cute salesgirls not exist in this world? Aside from the guards at the gate, all the people we've met so far have been middle-aged men. Well, the guard was a guy as well, and I guess that makes sense. Cute female guards and soldiers are*

probably quite rare.

"We do have thirteen hundred Rea left, but that's not enough for a sword..."

There were swords and spears lined up against one wall. On the opposite wall was gear like shields and maces. There was no armor on display, but there was a wooden board that listed the estimated price for the other gear.

"Hmm, it looks like the cheapest swords available cost at least four thousand Rea."

I grabbed the cheapest sword to see how it felt in my hands. It was more like a blunt object in the shape of a sword. *Wouldn't an iron club be better than this? You could just flail around with a club and that would work fine, but that wouldn't do for a sword. What else is cheap here? It looks like there are spears, wands, and knives...*

"What's the plan, Haruka?" I asked. "We can just barely afford a spear, if that's an option."

"Hmm, come to think of it, we definitely need a knife. Without a knife, it'd be hard to harvest materials and parts from whatever animals we hunt down."

Oh yeah, Haruka does have the Disassemble skill. Are we really going to do that ourselves? For real? I don't think I can dress or gut a mammal at all. I can clean fish, though, and maybe reptiles too, if I try my hardest not to get grossed out...

"There's also a registration fee we need to pay to become adventurers, so we need to set aside some money for that too."

Ugh, we need money just to register? I asked Haruka about the amount we needed. Apparently it would be a total of nine hundred Rea for three people. *Well then, I guess we have no choice. Where are the cypress sticks?*

"Yo, check this out! I found something good!"

Haruka and I were still fretting over our budget when we heard Tomoya's voice. He sounded very happy as he came back and showed us what he had found. It was a sword that looked like it was carved from sturdy wood. There was a plain cloth wrapped around the hilt to give a better grip. The sword

seemed slightly better suited for actual combat than the wooden swords in a Kyoto souvenir shop. *It's still made of wood, though. Is it actually useful?*

"What's the price? Only 150 Rea? Yeah, we can afford this plus a knife," said Haruka. "Okay, this sword will be your weapon, Tomoya. Nao and I can use magic, so we'll be fine without one. Probably."

That was wishful thinking, since neither of us had actually used magic yet. *Oh well, we can't spend what we don't have, so we'll have to make do without weapons.* We bought just the wooden sword and a knife and then hurried out of the shop. I felt like the shop owner was calling us cheapskates the way he looked at us when we left, but I was probably just imagining things. *Surely he didn't expect much from people who don't even look like adventurers, right?*

"Okay, we'll be heading to the Adventurers' Guild next, but let's decide on what names to register under," said Haruka. "My name isn't that common here, but I think it'll be fine. Naofumi, on the other hand, is obviously a Japanese name, so go with something else. Also, we don't need a surname to register."

This was apparently advice based on the General Knowledge skill. None of us had any desire to become famous, so there was no reason to make ourselves stand out in the wrong way.

"Yeah, let's try to avoid trouble wherever we can. Should I just go with Nao as my name?"

"That should be fine. We're used to calling you by that name, anyway. What about you, Tomoya?"

"How does Touya sound? It's close enough to Tomoya, so if you guys call me Tomoya, you can just pretend you pronounced it wrong. It'll also be easier for me to remember to respond to a name that sounds like my real name."

"Sure. Okay, let's stick with those names from now on."

"Yep. Well, we've called Naofumi Nao for a long time, so I'm the only one with a name change."

Tomoya, you already messed up and called me Naofumi! Well, at least I don't have to worry about him messing it up again. I won't point it out, though, in case that makes him do it again.

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The Adventurers' Guild was located near a gate in a different part of town than the gate we'd entered through. Based on the position of the sun, the gate we had entered through faced east, so the gate near the Adventurers' Guild faced south. According to Haruka, the sun also rose in the east and set in the west in this world.

The guild building was unremarkable, but it was about two times larger than the inn we were staying at. The sign above the front door had words written on it instead of symbols. Haruka confidently led the way in, so Touya and I obediently followed her. When I asked her why she didn't hesitate at all, she told me that she had confirmed the location back at the general store. *Mm, Haruka's really reliable.* When I praised her by saying "Good thing you have the General Knowledge skill!" she shot back with "These are things you should know too!"

I got scolded. *Mm, yeah, Touya and I really have been relying on Haruka too much.* When that thought occurred to me, I cast a sidelong glance at Touya and found him looking back at me. We stared at each other for a moment and then nodded together.

"All right, leave it to us this time, Haruka!" I said.

"Yeah, even we can handle registration!" said Touya. "It might even be better for us guys to do it so that there's a lower chance of us being looked down upon!"

"Stop! Stop right there!"

Haruka grabbed us by our hands and stopped us short just as we were about to stride ahead.

"It's fine! Just let me handle the talking for now! You two have other responsibilities, okay?" Haruka pointed at the bag that Touya was carrying. *So we're only useful for manual labor...?* "Besides, you two are useful enough just standing behind me. I mean, just look at me. I look like a frail and beautiful elf, right? I haven't checked how I look in a mirror yet, though."

"Yeah, true," said Touya. "You do like you would be easy to kidnap. Well, on

the outside, that is."

"A frail and beautiful elf? I guess," I said. "On the outside, that is."

"What? Do you two have something more to say?" Haruka seemed somewhat unhappy. She glared at us, but we both shrugged and laughed off her question.

"Nah, it's just that you're not weak at all, Haruka," said Touya. "You weren't weak back in Japan, and now you have all sorts of skills here too."

"Yeah, I wouldn't go as far as to say you're masculine or anything," I said, "but at the same time, you don't really fit the description of a frail girl either."

I mean, she learned aikido in the past for self-defense. She's very plucky and strong-willed too, and I remember hearing about many heroic episodes where she saved underclassmen girls from obnoxious guys who were hitting on them.

"Ugh, okay, you got me! Wait, no, that's not the point here. It's how I appear to others that matters, okay? I'm counting on you two as bodyguards."

"All right, we'll do our best to be useful. We're just standing behind you, though."

In the end, Haruka was the one who led the way into the guild, but what I saw inside led me to wonder if we actually needed to be on guard at all. The room we entered was a large hall. About two-thirds of the hall was occupied by reception desks. At first glance, it could have been a public office. The other third looked like a dining hall. There were people who looked like adventurers gathered around tables. They were chatting with each other while enjoying food and alcoholic beverages.

Surprisingly, nobody seemed drunk at all, contrary to my expectation that adventurers would be rowdy and disorderly. I asked Haruka about this later on, and apparently adventurers who caused a fuss or a ruckus would get demoted in rank without mercy. The ones who got in big trouble would get kicked out of the guild and blacklisted, so almost nobody dared to cause trouble inside the guild building, since there were a lot of staff members around. *I guess it's kind of similar to getting wasted in front of your boss and doing something really stupid. Well, if they wanted to get wasted, they could always just go to an actual tavern.*

“Hello. Can I register as an adventurer here?” Haruka had approached one of the reception desks to ask the staff member seated there about registration.

The staff member was a young lady who seemed bright and cheerful. She wasn’t exactly a stunning beauty, but she gave off a warm and welcoming aura. “Of course. Do the two behind you want to register as well? It’ll be a total of nine hundred Rea for three people. Do you have enough?”

“Yes, here you go.” Haruka handed over nine large silver coins, and the lady handed over three pieces of paper in exchange.

“Please fill out these forms and turn them in when you’re done. Do you need any further explanation?”

“No, thank you.”

There was only one pen, so I had to wait for Haruka to fill out her form before I began mine. I only wrote my name, race, and a simple introduction. Haruka wrote that she could use a bow and some magic in her introduction, so I followed her example and wrote that I could use a spear and some magic. Touya wrote swordsmanship in his. *It feels kinda weird how I can write the words of this world’s language just as easily as Japanese. That god must have been powerful to grant us abilities like this. Apparently, most people can speak just fine in this world, but very few can actually write, so I guess giving us the ability to write really was a huge freebie.*

“All right, thank you very much. Please wait here for a while.” The staff lady took three cards out of a drawer and laid them on the desk in front of her. While she was working on the cards, she asked, “Oh, I have a question for each of you. Are you healthy?”

We were all very confused by the sudden question.

“Uh, yes, we are. Why do you ask?”

“Oh, well, it’s just that there have been multiple strange incidents today where people around your age suddenly dropped dead. Two people died all of a sudden right here in this guild building. It caused a real commotion.”



People around our age suddenly dying? Oh boy, I bet I know why...

"W-Well, that's kind of scary. Is there any information about how or why this happened?"

Haruka averted her gaze somewhat while she inquired about further details. Her poker face had crumbled a bit, but the staff lady had her eyes down on the desk and didn't notice, and she answered Haruka's question while she continued filling out the cards.

"Unfortunately, nothing at all. In the first incident, the person suddenly collapsed on a table and died. As for the second incident, the person entered and looked around the guild, and then suddenly collapsed to the floor. Neither of them had any visible external injuries, so people panicked about it being poisoning or a plague, but there were no signs of those causes either."

The staff lady sighed and handed over the completed cards to us. They were made of metal and were roughly as thick as a regular debit card. Our names were engraved on our respective cards. Each was lightly decorated and also displayed the words "Issued at Laffan Adventurers' Guild," but apart from that, it looked like a normal metal card.

"All right, your registration is complete. It appears that similar incidents have occurred in other places in town as well, so please take care."

"Thank you very much. What should we watch out for, though? We have no idea what to expect."

"Good point. I'm not too sure. I guess taking care of your health would be a good start?"

"Indeed. Thank you again."

The staff lady inclined her head slightly as she gave us advice, and Haruka forced a smile when she said thanks.

Haruka suddenly asked one more question, as if it had suddenly occurred to her: "Oh yes, does this town's guild offer herb-gathering quests?"

"Yes, it does. The herb-gathering locations near this town are in the forests south and east of here. The eastern forest is a bit farther away, but I would

recommend it for beginners because there are very few monsters there. Well, you'll probably be just fine, since two of you are elves."

While she was describing the eastern forest to us, the staff lady gestured in the direction of the gate we had entered this town through. *Yeah, there was a forest in that direction, but I think it was way more than just a bit farther away.*

"Thank you very much for the advice," said Haruka. "We want to be as cautious as we can in the beginning, so information like that is very useful."

"Is that so?" said the staff lady. "I'm glad to be of help, then. Good luck."

"Thank you," said Haruka.

Touya and I joined in and said, "Thank you very much!"

She sent us off with a smile. *Oh yeah, although she wasn't a stunning beauty, that staff lady was still the first woman I've had a conversation with since I arrived in this world. Well, just because this is a different world, that doesn't mean that I'll meet beautiful girls and women all the time. It's not like I'm the protagonist of a harem light novel series.*

"Okay, I'll explain a bit about the Adventurers' Guild on our way back to the inn," said Haruka. "But it's not that different from what you two think it's like, so it'll be a simple enough explanation."

Haruka stopped in her tracks on the side of a road slightly away from the guild and took out the cards we had received earlier.

"This is an adventurer card. It seems to be made from a durable alloy, but it doesn't have any special functions. It's just an identification card engraved with our names and the guild where the card was issued. There's nothing written on the back at the moment, but as we complete quests from the guild and gain more trust, we can get something like a seal engraved here. The guild will offer us more perks and benefits based on the number of seals we have, and more types of quests will become available to us."

Hmm, so it's exactly what it looks like. I didn't know there was a separate use for the back of the card, though.

"Are there no high-tech features like a system to prevent other people from

using your card, or a system that displays your stats or status screen?" Touya asked.

"Nope. Just think about it: how could a card that only costs the equivalent of about three thousand yen have such advanced features? Anyone can register and get this card, so it wouldn't be logical."

Haruka had swiftly shot down Touya's question. *Another classic light novel trope out the window. Well, even if it was possible to implement those kinds of features, it would probably be very expensive.*

"We can obtain up to ten seals. Those indicate our adventurer rank. We don't have any yet, so we're Rank 0 newbies right now. Seals can't be removed, so if you start or get in trouble, a cross mark will be engraved on top of a seal to indicate a rank demotion. It's possible to raise your rank again, but the seals with cross marks will remain forever, so you'll inspire less confidence and trust than others with the same rank."

"So it's basically like a criminal record. The fact that we can't get rid of it is kinda scary. We should be careful about it."

In a way, it was a well-designed system. Anyone could register to become an adventurer without qualifications or a recommendation, but troublemakers would get kicked out of the guild.

"Well, apparently, you'll get a few warnings before you get a cross mark as long as it's not a serious infraction, so it's fairly rare to get demoted in rank. Any other questions?"

It sounded like the adventurer system in this world was pretty much what you'd expect in a normal fantasy setting. *Well, it's lacking in gamelike elements, but other than that, yeah.*

"Oh yeah, you asked about herbs earlier, right?" I asked. "Does that mean there are the standard herb-gathering quests in this world?"

"Yes. Most towns will buy gathered herbs. You don't even need to be an adventurer to turn in herbs. However, there are no convenient gathering spots near towns. After all, nobody would pay for herbs if they were that easy to gather."

Yeah, that makes sense. If herbs were close enough that even children could go out and gather them easily, then the reward would probably be the equivalent of a child's allowance.

"What's the average reward for turning in herbs? Is it enough to make a living?"

"Well, that depends on how useful your Hawk's Eye and Touya's Appraisal skills turn out to be. If we can successfully hunt animals that have marketable parts, then I can put my Disassemble to use and we can slowly save up money over time."

Haruka had paused for a bit before she answered. Based on how she'd chosen her phrasing, we would have to work very hard if we wanted to make a decent living. Income for work that anyone could do was low in this world, just like how it was in our previous world. The other thing we needed to decide on was how many hours we would spend each day trying to earn money. *Hopefully we can earn enough that Haruka doesn't have to hesitate when it comes to buying new clothes. I'd like to be able to buy new clothes myself if possible, and I'm sure Touya feels the same way.*

"So even if we do all that, we'll only be able to save up money slowly? What about manual labor?" Touya asked. "There's some available through the guild, right?"

"Well, you might be able to earn some money from that kind of work, but Nao and I wouldn't, since it requires physical strength."

Yeah, elves aren't very well suited to manual labor.

"We could arrange it so that Touya does manual labor while Nao and I gather herbs, but none of us want to split up like that, right? Besides, I think it's better to stick together for leveling purposes."

"Oh yeah, that evil god did mention something about level ups back then. Does that only apply to the skills?"

Some of the skills that we could browse via our status screens didn't have a level number next to them.

"Well, the very existence of skills isn't common knowledge in this world, since

there's no way for ordinary people to check if they even have skills."

So it was all thanks to the evil god that we could obtain skills and check them out via our status display screens? *Well then, I might actually be willing to pray to him now.*

"However, it is common knowledge that you can become stronger if you work out or defeat monsters."

Yeah, that made sense. The first half of that statement applied in the previous world too. The key question here was about whether or not the upward curve of improvement was steeper than we thought, but that was something we would have to test out for ourselves.

"Also, that staff lady mentioned something about monsters earlier, but what are monsters in this world actually like?"

"Monsters are creatures that have something called a magicite inside their bodies. Most of them act based on pure instinct and have no intelligence, so it's recommended to slay them on sight. It's possible to obtain monetary rewards for defeating monsters, but you'll have to turn in proof of the kill. On that note, monsters don't just vanish into thin air once you defeat them, so we'll have to gut them ourselves for the materials and magicite inside."

"Ugh, I'm not good with disgusting stuff like that..." said Touya.

"Same here..." I said.

"I've only cleaned fish myself, so I don't have that much experience either," said Haruka. "But we have no choice! I'll handle this for now, so you two better learn and get used to it eventually!"

Yeah, this was new to her as well. We had grown up together as childhood friends in the same environment, so I would've been very surprised if she told us that she had experience with hunting and gutting prey. *Even though we're not good with disgusting stuff and Haruka's the only one with the Disassemble skill, it'd be pretty deplorable of us boys to leave all the hard work to a girl...*

"Okay..."

"We'll do our best..."

Haruka responded with a “Hmph!” We boys could only nod dejectedly to show our submission.

After we finished our business at the Adventurers’ Guild, we returned to the inn and relaxed for a bit on separate beds. For now, we’d settled on a rough plan for work tomorrow. Things wouldn’t be easy, but at least we knew that as long as we worked hard every day, we wouldn’t have to sleep outside without a roof to save money on living expenses. However, it was possible that we wouldn’t be able to work some days if we got sick, so we had to find a way to somehow increase our earnings over time.

“Oh yeah, are you actually okay with sharing a room with us, Haruka?”

“Huh? What, are you going to make a move on me or something, Touya?”

Touya had said it totally out of the blue, as if it had just crossed his mind. Haruka gave him a look of disdain and disbelief. Well, she was actually grinning, so it was just a joke on her part. Touya knew it too, and responded with a lopsided smile.

“Nah, that’s not what I mean. We’re childhood friends, yeah, but we all have our own needs, right?”

“Well, it’s not like we have the money for separate rooms, so it is what it is. We’ll just have to put up with the way things are and try to be considerate of each other. Oh, yeah, um...” Haruka shrugged at first, but her words trailed off at the end, and she looked away from us.

“Hm? What’s up? Feel free to say what you want.”

On top of having been thrown into another world, we were in dire and stressful circumstances. It would be better to discuss problems right away, no matter how awkward they were, instead of letting unspoken complaints build up over time until we suddenly exploded from stress.

“Well, uh, try to hold back from masturbating if you can, okay?”

“Masturbation...? Wait, what?!”

This was way more awkward than what I had in mind!

“I mean, like, the urge to do so builds up over time, right? It’d be awkward if

you two ended up in, well, accidents because of it, so if you just let me know when, then I can go outside and leave you two alone for a bit...”

Haruka blushed as she told us that. She was still looking away from us. *That understanding actually makes it awkward for us!* Even as childhood friends, there was no way we could possibly ask her to leave us alone for a bit because we wanted to let one out. Touya and I gave each other awkward looks and coughed deliberately.

“Well, about that, we would appreciate it if you just pretended not to notice, you know?” I said. It was a delicate subject for us boys.

“Y-Yeah, okay! I’ll just act normally!”

Haruka sounded a bit flustered when she said that, so it was probably a lost cause. *I mean, it’s Haruka, so...*

“Oh yeah, there’s one thing I want you two to keep in mind! Don’t go to *those* places, okay?! Diseases are very dangerous!”

“Ah, yeah, sexually transmitted diseases are dangerous indeed. There have been plenty of different ones throughout the history of mankind.”

Syphilis was one of them. Europeans had worked quite hard to spread it across the world during the Age of Discovery. They’d even brought it into Japan. It was possible that it didn’t exist in this world, but there was still the risk that there were other sexually transmitted diseases here. We couldn’t rely on the Robust skill to protect us from them completely.

“Especially you, Touya! Don’t get baited by a cute animal-ears lady!”

“I won’t go! I want a cute wife—and that doesn’t mean for lust only!”

“Is that so? All right, then. Oh yeah, beastmen don’t have a mating season, so that’s good news for you.”

“I-I see...”

Touya seemed a bit daunted and disappointed as he nodded in response to Haruka’s frank words. *Yeah, uh, it’s kind of awkward to talk about these kinds of things with the opposite sex. I better try to change the subject.*

“Oh yeah, what do you guys think of the incidents we heard about back at the

guild?”

We hadn’t talked about it on our way back, since other people could listen in, but it had been at the back of my mind the entire time. This was a forceful way to change the subject, but Haruka and Touya didn’t seem interested in continuing with the previous one, so they went along with it.

“You mean the incidents of people dying all of a sudden? Hmm, was it poisoning? Wait, there were no traces of that, right? What about magic being the cause given that we’re in another world?”

Touya did his best to put on a serious face while he threw out ideas, but he was completely off the mark. *Did you already forget what Haruka and I told you in the beginning, Touya?*

“No, it’s obviously our classmates,” I said. “I think the people who died probably killed themselves by using up all of their life span with the Plunder skill.”

“Oh yeah, there was a gimmicky skill like that, huh? I’m glad I didn’t get that skill! I would’ve probably gotten it if I had, like, 200 Points or so.”

Touya clasped his hands together and continued to say dumb things. *Yeah, he definitely forgot everything. It’s very important information. Did he forget because he can’t see the additional information?*

“Based on the information we got from the staff lady, it’s likely that about four or five people have died from this,” I said.

“She didn’t mention an exact number, but that sounds about right,” said Haruka. “How many people do you think chose to get the Plunder skill?”

Plunder and the EXP skills were the two big ones that had seemed like cheat skills. The number of Points required to get Plunder was 80, and the number of Points we’d each had in the beginning was 120, 150, and 200, respectively. If the amount the evil god had granted us at the beginning was based on our athletic abilities and our grades, then—although this would be self-praise—the three of us probably had more points than average. But even with that in mind, everyone in our class had probably started with at least 80 Points, which would mean that everyone could have gotten the Plunder skill if they had wanted to.

“Well, I bet half of our class probably chose to get it,” said Touya. “It looks and sounds like a cheat skill, and it’s something the other boys in class would find attractive.”

Hmm, Touya thinks it’s half? I think it’s a bit less than that.

“There was the Copy skill too, remember? Wouldn’t some people with more points choose to get that instead? Especially people who don’t want to stand out or cause trouble for others.”

“Yeah, that’s true. There were also other expensive skills that looked and sounded good based on their names, like Charm, Heroic Aptitude, and Heroine Aptitude, so maybe not that many people chose to get Plunder.”

Another factor worth considering was how many of our classmates were smart and careful. Based on what the evil god had said, one fourth of our class was already familiar with the “entire class getting transported to another world” trope. That would mean that the same one fourth had probably read light novels and knew about Plunder and EXP skills being cheat skills in similar settings and situations. It all depended on whether or not they were suspicious of the evil god’s words or the cost of certain skills—and on whether or not they had decided to get the Help Guide. There were also people in our class who had no knowledge of light novels or games and thus probably had no idea about the right way to approach the character creation process. It was still possible that some of them had passed over the Help Guide in spite of not knowing anything about games.

“At first glance, Plunder looks advantageous in the short run and the EXP skills look advantageous in the long run, right?” Touya said. “They’re both traps, though. What about the other additional skills? There are plenty of yikes choices out there, even if they’re not lethal like Plunder is, right?”

“If anyone chose the Heroic Aptitude or Heroine Aptitude skills, then they’re just asking for trouble,” I said. “Those will just make you unlucky the entire time if you don’t have the ability to surpass the trials that come your way.”

“Hmm, what about the Charm skill? Will it work on us? That sounds annoying to deal with.”

There were some gimmicky skills that not only affected their owners but also

everyone around them. *I'd prefer not to get anywhere close to those people.*

Haruka seemed to feel the same way. "This might sound cold and heartless, but we should do our best to avoid our classmates, regardless of whether or not they have skills like Heroic Aptitude, Heroine Aptitude, and Charm. I'm fairly sure we'll end up in bad situations if we do."

"You sure? What about your friends, Haruka?" I asked.

"I'm a bit worried about Yuki and Natsuki, but we weren't able to meet up with them, so let's worry about ourselves for now. Besides, I want to believe my friends wouldn't choose to get the Charm skill. I bet whoever requested that skill was the same one who wanted to go to an otome game world." Haruka shook her head, shrugged, and sighed.

I was friends with Yuki and Natsuki through Haruka, so I was concerned about them too, but we didn't have the luxury of searching for them at the moment. Before anything else, we had to learn how to survive.

"Some of the boys might have gotten the Charm skill to fulfill their harem dreams," said Haruka. "They'll probably just end up being stalked by yanderes, though, based on the skill's description."

A small part of me wanted to be popular with girls, but I had thrown out that idea as soon as I'd seen the description. I wouldn't want it even if it was free.

"Yeah, even back in a safe country like Japan, a stalker was dangerous enough, but it would be way too scary here in this world," I said. "It would be very easy to get kidnapped and locked up somewhere."

"Kidnapping is illegal, but it's likely that nobody will notice if we get kidnapped and disappear, since we're suspicious and don't have anyone to vouch for us."

So it's not a crime if nobody finds out? I guess that makes sense, since we don't know anyone who would ask the authorities to look for us if we disappeared.

"I wouldn't mind playing around with gimmicky skills or classes in games, but it's a different story in real life..."

“In a way, our classmates are actual human land mines that can explode at any moment, right?” said Touya. “We don’t know what skills they have, so we don’t know if they’re dangerous to us or not, and we might unwittingly suffer if we’re near them when they self-destruct.”

“That’s a good way to put it, although it’s not nice to say, Touya,” I said.

“You agree with me, though, right? The Heroic Aptitude skill is like the very definition of a danger sign over a buried mine.”

“Yeah, I’m not willing to put my life on the line for classmates we don’t know well just because we happen to be from the same home world,” said Haruka. “Let’s just pray they can find their own happiness somewhere far away from us.”

Haruka’s words were quite harsh, but I agreed with her. Touya and I both nodded in approval. We weren’t selfless enough to help others for no reason.

“How long do you think our classmates will survive, Haruka?”

“I have no idea. I think half of them will still be alive after a month, though it depends on where in this world they got transported to. It’s possible that some of them got transported far away from this town. There are also gimmicky races on top of the gimmicky skills, so the ones who chose both without thinking probably won’t do so well.”

Hmm. I had a decent number of friends among my classmates, but a lot of them were probably going to die. It didn’t feel real to me at all. Maybe I would be shocked and disturbed if they died right in front of me, but otherwise...

“Well, the careful people who got the Help Guide and the honest people who ignored the cheat skills will probably survive, so we’ll get chances to meet up with them eventually,” said Haruka.

“So we’re not gonna go find them and save them?” I asked.

“We can’t afford to try to ‘save’ others right now, remember?”

Yeah, we would also appreciate some help and protection, since we were in a dire situation ourselves. The only proper weapon we had was a wooden “sword”—more accurately, a wooden club. We couldn’t even afford to pay for

separate rooms at an inn. I could relax somewhat around my childhood friends, but I would've been even more stressed out if I had ended up with other classmates who I wasn't as close to.

"Oh yeah, are there slaves in this world?" I asked

"I'm not sure how to put it. It seems like slavery is generally prohibited in this country."

"Generally?"

That made it sound like there was more to it. I frowned at what I heard, but Haruka waved her hands in denial.

"What I mean is that there are no slave traders in this country, since it's illegal. Well, it's illegal if they get caught. However, there are some working conditions that basically amount to slavery."

Back on Earth, there had been many different forms of slavery throughout history. Some conditions weren't all that different from a normal job, but there were some cases where slaves weren't treated as human beings at all.

"Mm, if you look at what things were like back in Japan a hundred years ago, there were tenant farmers, and village girls were sold to pimps as well."

It was sadly true historically that people had been sold into slavery during destitute times to reduce the number of mouths a family needed to feed.

"Oh yeah, that's true," said Touya. "European colonies before the World Wars were basically slave plantations, right?"

"It's easy just to cry for the abolition of all slavery, but you at least have to make sure there's some sort of social security system in place first, along with concrete safeguards against poverty," said Haruka.

It was absolutely wrong to capture people and force them into slavery, of course, but there were instances in history in which slavery was basically the social security system for some societies. For a lot of people, the only choices were starving to death, turning to a life of crime, or becoming a slave. That was what it meant to have no social security system.

"What are the chances of us becoming slaves?" I asked.

“We’ll be fine as long as we don’t end up deep in debt or commit any crimes.”

“That’s good to know, since we’re model citizens!” said Touya.

“That doesn’t matter if you get tricked. You two don’t have any idea about common sense in this world, so be very careful. It’s possible you might even commit a crime without knowing. Especially you, Touya!”

“Huh? Come on, I’m the very definition of careful!”

Touya seemed unhappy that Haruka had singled him out, but in this case, he had no right to object. I already felt like I had a little less confidence in him based on his offended reaction. He had already been uncontrollably wild at times back on Earth, and he had only gotten worse since coming to this world. We had passed by beastmen two times while we were walking through town, and both times he had stared at them openly. *I saw you do it, Touya. One of them was a guy too, which makes me have a lot less faith in you.*

“You might lose yourself and say ‘Animal ears!’ or something like that at any time.”

“Ugh, I can’t deny that...!”

I figured Haruka had the same opinion of Touya that I did. Touya himself also seemed to be somewhat self-aware.

“Reporting, contacting, consulting! Keep those three words in mind! At the very least, remember to report to me first before doing anything!”

Haruka emphasized her words with a serious expression and tone, and we nodded in agreement.

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“Okay, let’s go eat dinner.”

A while after we returned to the inn, we started hearing some lively voices from the corridor, so Haruka suggested our next course of action. Touya and I looked at each other. We both grimaced at the idea. Meals far away from home during a “trip” were usually a very enjoyable event. The innkeeper had told us that we could eat in the dining hall whenever it was open, but...

“Ugh, will we have to eat that brown bread again?” Touya asked.

That was the source of our worries. I was quite hungry by then, so I would be able to put up with food that was moderately bad, but that brown bread had been way beyond bad.

“It’s eighty Rea for two meals, so it’s possible that brown bread’s part of the meal.”

“For real? I’m not really picky when it comes to food, but that brown bread’s a bit too much for me,” I said.

“Well, if we’re lucky, then maybe we’ll get to eat white bread or something similar to mashed potatoes.”

“Something similar to mashed potatoes?”

“That’s a staple food in this world. It probably doesn’t taste that good, though.”

“As long as it’s easy to eat, then I don’t really mind if it doesn’t taste good. But sour bread would be hard to force down my throat,” Touya said.

“Um, Haruka, can you cook our meals instead?” I asked.

Things here were probably different from back on Earth, but surely someone like Haruka who was decently skilled at cooking would be able to come up with a meal that didn’t taste awful. I had high hopes when I brought up the idea, but Haruka responded with a bitter smile and shook her head.

“First, we’ll have to earn enough money to rent a room with a kitchen.”

“Oh, yeah, that’s true,” I said. “It won’t be possible while we’re staying at inns.”

Haruka had the Cooking skill, but that skill couldn’t create food out of thin air.

“Well, at least now we have a good reason for working hard!” said Touya.

“It’s not exactly a strong motive, but yeah, I guess.”

It was more like a desire to avoid bad food rather than a desire to eat delicious meals. Regardless, we needed to eat to be able to work. We walked towards the dining hall on the first floor in low spirits. When we were about to pass the counter, the innkeeper stopped us for a moment.

“Here, take this. There’s an additional fee for extra food or alcohol.”

There were no waitresses at all in the dining hall, so apparently we had to go fetch our meals ourselves. There were three large plates, three soup bowls, and three flasks lined up on the counter. The soup was clear and slightly brown, and there were a few different kinds of vegetables floating in it. The main dish was two pieces of meat that were each about the size of our palms and more than a centimeter thick. They looked very juicy. To the side was something that looked like mashed potatoes on a bed of leafy greens.

“Whoa, it’s not rye bread!”

Woohoo! We didn’t know if it tasted good or not, but Touya and I were excited to be able to try anything other than brown bread.

“Did you want rye bread instead? Then—”

“No, not at all! We’re fine with this! Or rather, we absolutely prefer this!”

We rushed to sit down at a table with our food before anyone could swap it out with brown bread.

“Uh, does this actually taste good?”

Our meat looked just as good as what you would get from a decent steakhouse. The only problem was that we didn’t know what kind of meat it was.

“Damn, this tastes delicious!” Touya had taken a bite of meat while I was still considering the food.

“You already started eating?!”

“Just take a bite! It’s super delicious! I’ve never had meat this good in my whole life!”

Touya was excitedly praising the meat even as he forked it into his mouth. It was bad table manners, but the only utensil available was a fork, so it was better than him using his hands. Haruka and I looked at each other for a moment, and then we both stabbed our meat with our forks and raised it to our mouths. As soon as I started chewing, the juice from the tender meat flooded my mouth. It wasn’t soft to the point that you could easily slice through it, but it

also wasn't hard to the point that it was difficult to chew. It didn't have the rich fat and flavor of Wagyu beef, but it tasted like a lean tenderloin steak. Eighty Rea for this was super cheap, even if the breakfast included turned out to be crude and nasty. If there had been a place near where I lived back on Earth that had offered meat like this, I would've gone there three times a week.

"Hmm, I wonder what kind of meat this is," said Haruka. "The meat itself is decent, and it seems like it was properly prepared too, since it's quite soft."

While Touya was basically shoving the meat into his mouth, Haruka was tasting it calmly and carefully. I followed Haruka's example and calmed myself down so I would eat more slowly.

"Mm. The seasoning tastes like salt and some herbs. I don't taste any pepper," said Haruka. "It's still quite delicious, though."

Next, I scooped some of the dish that looked like mashed potatoes into my mouth. It was light and a bit moist as well. On Earth, the closest taste to this would be something like a slightly watery pumpkin. It didn't really have a potato flavor at all. There wasn't any foam in it, though, so it was easy to eat and went well with the rich flavor of the meat. The soup wasn't as good as consommé, but it was way better than the salty water "soup" I had had earlier for lunch, so it was fine as far as I was concerned. *Well, actually, now that I've got something in my belly, it's just okay, I think. The mashed potatoes aren't as good as normal bread, and consommé is better than this soup. The meat's not bad, but the seasoning's plain. The sauce also isn't as good as the steak sauces at diners back in Japan.*

I take back what I said earlier about coming back for this food if it was available back on Earth. The food only tasted good because I hadn't had any expectations at all, so I would only go once a week if it cost less than five hundred yen. It was a filling meal, yes, but that alone wasn't enough to make me wish for it on a regular basis back on Earth.

"This probably counts as a decent meal in this world, though. I'm a bit angry at the stall owner from earlier for selling us nasty food, but I'm glad he didn't recommend a different inn to us," said Haruka.

Actually, it was the guard at the gate who had recommended this place to us.

He had ogled Haruka a bit, but I could forgive him now thanks to this meal. This food was decent enough to eat, after all!

“Well, in a way, this meal tasted way better now that we know what counts as a nasty meal.”

“Is that really something to thank that stall owner for, Haruka? Or rather, what does the average meal taste like in this world?” Touya asked.

“The General Knowledge skill didn’t tell me anything about how food tastes, but based on the fact that brown bread is common and salt is the most basic seasoning, the food at that stall probably counts as average.”

“Ugh, really? Maybe I should mainly eat meat from now on. I’m a beastman, so surely I’ll be fine, right?”

Touya had grimaced when he heard what Haruka said and brought up an alternative. He had said that he had never had meat this good before in his life, but this meat wasn’t great or anything. Was it because he had become a beastman, or was it because it tasted way better than the nasty meal we had had earlier for lunch? *Hold on, isn’t it the innards of herbivores that help carnivores stay healthy eating nothing but meat?* Prepared and cooked meat was a bit different from that.

“If you’re okay with eating raw meat along with the blood, then maybe,” said Haruka. “Are you going to do it?”

“Oh yeah, breast milk doesn’t have any hemoglobin in it. You should be fine as far as nutrition goes as long as you drink blood as well,” I said. “I’ve heard stories of tribes that subsist on cow milk.”

“Uh, that’s not quite what I had in mind...” Touya’s face twitched in discomfort when he heard about raw meat and blood, and he shook his head.

In terms of blood, I was okay with stuff like rare meat, but I wouldn’t ever want to drink blood unless I was in an extremely dire situation with no other choice. It would also be dangerous to eat raw food in this world because of parasites. Raw eggs and sashimi were completely out of the question.

“Oh yeah, speaking of liquids, what do you two think this is?” Touya tried to change the subject and pointed at the drinks that came with the food. The

liquid inside the wooden cups looked brownish, and it had a sour smell when I sniffed it.

“This is ale, isn’t it?” said Haruka.

“Oh, the famous drink?” It was a standard beverage in fantasy settings. With most food and drink, Touya would dive in right away, but he seemed to be cautious because of how the brown bread had turned out, and he sniffed the ale first. “This is alcohol, right?”

“Yeah, it counts as alcohol, but it’s probably much less by volume than beer,” said Haruka. “I’m fairly sure one cup won’t be enough to get drunk off of, but let’s make sure of something first. Do either of you have extremely low alcohol tolerance?”

“I have no idea—our bodies are different, right?” I said.

“True, that does change things.”

I was a minor, so I had only had a bit of alcohol on New Year’s, but I had been just fine back then. *What about in this body, though?*

“Well, let’s be careful and take some sips.”

“Okay.”

Haruka and I both raised our cups and looked at each other, then looked at Touya. Touya didn’t notice us at all; he was taking a slow sip from his cup. Right away, he grimaced a little.

“Uh, I’m not sure how to describe this. It’s like a low-quality drink that tastes somewhat like beer, and—wait, you two haven’t tried it yet?!”

“I see, so it’s not that bad.”

“Thanks, Touya.”

I thanked Touya for testing the drink for us and then took a sip myself. *Hmm, yeah, this doesn’t really taste like alcohol. It’s warm, sour, and it doesn’t taste good. I would prefer water over this.* Haruka probably felt the same way I did, since she grimaced after taking a sip from her cup.

“Water from a well would be better than paying money for a drink like this,”

said Haruka.

“Is it safe to drink water?” I asked.

“It should be safe if it’s from a well. Our new bodies are suited for this world, and all of us have the Robust skill too.”

“Oh yeah, that’s true.” *I’m glad I chose to get that skill. It would be very hard to live in a world where I couldn’t even drink water safely.*

“I’ll go ask for water.”

“Get some for us as well, Touya,” said Haruka.

Luckily, we didn’t have to pay extra for water. It most likely wasn’t as readily available as it was back in Japan, but maybe it was relatively easy to obtain water that was safe to drink in this area.

“Man, though, I can’t believe the ale in this world tastes that bad,” said Touya. “That and the brown bread really destroyed my dreams about fantasy worlds.”

It would be an outright punishment to have a drinking party with this ale.

“Wait, what about wine?” I asked. “Surely wine in fantasy worlds can’t go—”

“I wouldn’t expect much from that either. I’m fairly sure the wine back on Earth tastes better. Besides, do you two actually like the taste of wine?”

Haruka had once again crushed our dreams. *I mean, yeah, I didn’t really like the expensive wine that I got a chance to try out before, but still.* Touya seemed like he felt the same way, since he was at a loss for words for a bit.

“Nah, the wine I had before just tasted rough to me,” Touya said after a moment.

“Then don’t force yourself to drink alcohol. Besides, do you think it’s actually safe to get drunk in this world?” Haruka asked.

“That’s a good point,” I said.

It wasn’t that dangerous to get drunk and sleep beside the road back in Japan, but it was different here.

“No alcohol until we get used to this world and can ensure our own safety,

okay?” said Haruka.

“Okay,” we replied.

That was the end of that.

Chapter 3—Our First Job

We woke up around sunrise the next day and ate breakfast. There wasn't a clock anywhere, so we couldn't tell exactly what time it was, but we would've probably still been asleep back on Earth. *Well, we woke up early because we also went to bed early yesterday.* We had been too tired to stay up due to an exhausting first day in this world, and there hadn't been any bright lights to keep us awake, so we had just gone to bed right away after we finished dinner. If we had wanted candles for light, we would've had to pay for them. It was a luxury that we couldn't afford. We had discussed using magic in place of candles, but we came to the conclusion that it would be dangerous to test our magic indoors the first time we used it, so we scrapped that idea.

On a side note, I had thought I'd woken up early, but by the time I woke up, Haruka was already up and had washed her face and finished preparing for the day. Touya, on the other hand, was still asleep by the time I came back from washing my face at the well. I woke him up right away by playing with his ears. *In a way, this was a nice reward for waking up earlier. I mean, sure, they were Touya's ears, not a cute beastgirl's, but the feel of them was quite pleasant, yeah.*

The breakfast that the unsociable inn owner provided was soup with meat simmered in it, plus some white bread that seemed to contain a lot of rye flour. It looked like some of the breads commonly sold back in Japan. It wasn't very puffy and was a bit hard, but it tasted decent enough, since it was freshly baked. I could soften the bread by dipping it in the soup, so it was better than sour bread. Touya muttered that he wasn't sure he could live in this world if this was the kind of bread we had to eat, so he was probably still disgusted by the brown bread we had forced down our throats yesterday. We were able to ask for and get more servings of this white bread for free. The bread was quite thick, though, so just two slices were enough for me. Touya only ate about three to four slices, so he probably felt the same way I did.

"Oh yeah, Touya, Nao, we might not be able to have lunch today, since we

don’t have much money.”

Never mind, I’m going to eat as much as I can. Touya and I looked at each other and then started to stuff more bread into our mouths. Haruka was quietly eating extra bread as well.

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After we were done with our “satisfying” breakfast, we headed for the east gate that we had entered this town through. It was early in the morning, so there weren’t many people on the streets. I had already forgotten the name of the guard from yesterday, and he wasn’t at the gate today. It seemed like there were no regulations about inspecting people who were exiting town, so we passed by the guards who were standing at the gate and followed the highway east.

After we had walked for a while, we turned and looked south and saw a forest ahead of us. That was probably the south forest that the guild staff lady had told us about yesterday. It looked closer than the east forest, which required a few more hours of walking to reach.

“Nao, we’re going to the east forest today, okay?”

“Yeah, I know. Safety first, after all.”

Haruka reminded me of our destination when she noticed that I was looking towards the south forest, but I didn’t really need the reminder. I wasn’t reckless enough to dash towards a dangerous-looking forest when the only one among us who had a weapon was Touya.

“Will we get to the east forest if we keep walking along this highway?”

“Yeah. It’ll take about two hours of walking, so it is a bit far, but it’s relatively safe compared to other paths, since we’re walking along a highway.”

It had taken us about an hour to reach town from where we started yesterday, so the forest we were heading towards was about one hour away from that same starting point. That forest was probably the one I had seen yesterday when I first used my Hawk’s Eye skill. *Had the evil god actually been kind enough to drop us somewhere relatively safe to start with?*

“This trip will take us a total of four hours, since we need to spend another two going back to town, and if we include the time for actually gathering the herbs, then this’ll basically be a day’s work. How much can we actually earn from this, Haruka?” I asked.

“If things go well, then we can probably return by noon. As for how much we can earn, it’s about the equivalent of an ordinary citizen’s daily wage, plus hazard pay. It’s possible to earn a decent amount if you’re good at finding herbs and can search for them in dangerous areas, but normally it’s not easy to earn large amounts of money from herb gathering.”

“That makes sense. If it was possible to get rich from herb gathering, then everyone would become adventurers.”

“Yeah, there’s no such thing as a job that’s both easy and high paying.”

Haruka shrugged with a bitter smile at reality. In a way, it was only natural that something anyone could gather, like herbs, would have a market price that matched the difficulty of gathering them. Nobody would gather herbs if the price was too low, but if the price was too high, more people would gather herbs and eventually drive the price down. The price would even out at the level of an ordinary person’s hourly wage, plus a little extra depending on the person’s skills. It was the same here in this world as it was back on Earth. That was just how the principles of economics worked.

“Things were basically the same for people without special skills or qualifications back on Earth, and I guess it’s no different here in this world,” I said.

“Luckily, we were granted the equivalent of special skills, so let’s get better at using them so that we can earn money more easily in the future,” said Haruka.

“Sounds good to me,” Touya agreed. “I’m not asking for much, but I hope we can eventually earn enough to be able to eat delicious food every day!”

“Yeah, at the very least, we should aim to earn enough that we can keep staying at the inn we’re at,” said Haruka. “I’d also like to avoid having to go back to that stall for food.”

“Definitely. I hope we never have to eat brown bread again. Also, I hope we

end up with enough spare money for hot water."

Yesterday, we had used the water from the well to wash ourselves instead of hot water, since we needed to save money. With the current weather, that was fine, but ideally, we would want to be able to afford hot water during the cold seasons. A bath or shower was out of reach for us and probably a luxury. *Well, I do want access to both a bath and a shower in the long term. After all, I am Japanese. It's probably impossible until we can afford to buy a house, though.*

"Oh yeah, are we going to head straight towards the east forest?"

"No, there's something I want to check first. We're far enough away that we can't see the town gate anymore, so right here should be fine. Let's test out our skills around here before we go any farther."

Haruka looked back and double-checked how far we were from town, then led us away from the highway into the grassy plains.

"Oh, are you two going to test out your magic?! I wanted to get magic skills too, but I gave up on them, since I didn't have enough points..."

"Really? Wouldn't you have had enough points if you didn't choose to get the Blacksmithing skill?" I asked. "Besides, a Blacksmithing skill might be useful in games, but wouldn't it be hard to use in real life?"

Blacksmithing seemed like an interesting skill, but there was no way to use it without a workshop and forge. *It's likely that blacksmiths in real life won't readily let others use their workshops, and I doubt there are any shared workshops like there are in some games.* There was also no way we could afford to buy a blacksmith's workshop. We would have to succeed as adventurers first and save up money.

"Nah, it's really difficult for beastmen to learn magic. I messed around with some different builds, but the level of magic skills wouldn't go up without me taking the aptitude skill as well, and if I'd gotten the aptitude skill, then the total cost would have been too much. As for the Blacksmithing skill, well, it sounded cool!"

"Am I supposed to respect you for making skill choices based on whether they sounded cool or not thinking about the fact that your livelihood depended on

your choices, Touya...?" Haruka let out a dry laugh in response to Touya's narrative.

I butted in and stated the truth. "No, this guy's just an idiot! Touya, you should've chosen skills that would help you survive! 'Cool' skills won't help you earn anything!"

"Come on, hear me out for a second! I actually thought this through! See, I planned on doing things together with you two as a party, so I thought about the possibility of being unable to fight due to our weapons wearing out over time, so 10 Points for this skill sounded like a good idea."

"Really? My bad, then. Sorry for calling you an idiot."

It seemed like Touya had actually had a reason for his decision. I asked him for more details, and apparently beastmen needed to spend at least 30 Points to get just one magic skill to Level 1. That was way more expensive than the 10 Points that elves needed for the same result. Touya had figured that the best use of his remaining 10 Points was the Blacksmithing skill. *I guess it wasn't a bad choice, since there are games where gear has a durability stat and is destroyed if that bar is fully depleted.*

Haruka, however, had no mercy for Touya. "Isn't it pointless in real life, though? You can't fix anything without a forge. The best you could do would be sharpening blades, and that's it."

"Yeah, that's true. Well, we don't have any weapons to sharpen at the moment, nor do we have a whetstone for sharpening, but just wait until my skill becomes useful later on!"

"Mm, the only weapon we have right now is a club," I said.

"Yep. Actually, wait, no, it's a wooden sword. It is technically shaped like a sword." Touya apparently needed to consider his weapon a sword for his Weapon Proficiency: Swords skill.

"W-Well, the knife we have will probably be very useful for gutting prey, so we're relying on you to keep it sharp." Touya was looking a bit dejected based on the way his animal ears were drooping. Haruka seemed to pity him enough that she tried to cheer him up. *We need to get a whetstone first, though.*

“Okay, let’s test our physical abilities first,” said Haruka. “We don’t have a tape measure or a stopwatch, so let’s just perform some athletic tests and move our bodies around.”

“Yeah, we won’t have specific numbers, but we’ll at least get a rough idea,” I said.

We all went along with Haruka’s idea and performed tests like sprints, vertical jumps, side steps, long jumps, and throwing rocks. As a result of our tests, we found out that Touya had impressive physical abilities.

“How do you feel, Touya?” Haruka asked.

“I feel great! This body’s amazing! It’s exactly what I thought my ideal beastman should be!”

Touya hopped around in delight. His hops went higher than my chest height, so it was quite obvious that he was far more nimble than he used to be back in Japan. Haruka and I weren’t as agile as Touya, but we both could at least reach waist height with our jumps, so our bodies were definitely stronger than they had been back on Earth.

“Our bodies are also stronger than they were before,” I said. “We’re definitely slimmer as well.”

“Mm, I performed well for the athletics tests too,” said Haruka. “We’re elves, so our physical abilities probably have nothing to do with our race, and we didn’t get any skills that would increase our strength. Does that mean the evil god boosted our physical abilities?”

“Yeah, that would make sense. It would be easier to compare if we were still humans, but there’s still a significant difference.”

The description for the elf race mentioned that they had less physical strength than humans, but our new bodies were all definitely stronger than our original bodies. It was possible that the Robust skill made a difference too, but that would only be a factor if the “increased resilience” that the guide mentioned also included stamina.

“Perhaps the physical abilities of the average human in this world are significantly greater than the average back on Earth...” said Haruka.

“Does that really matter?” I asked. “All that matters is that we’re stronger instead of weaker!”

“Well, yeah, that’s true, I guess. It’s not really something for us to worry about.” Haruka seemed like she wanted to pursue that train of thought further, but she apparently decided to ignore it and suggested the next course of action: “All right, let’s try out magic next.”

“Nice, it’s time to see some cool stuff!”

“Oh, Touya, just practice swinging your sword while we do this. You can watch us practice magic if you want, but make sure you’re decently far away.”

“Oh, come on!” Touya’s voice was full of discontent, but Haruka was just giving him advice to stay safe.

“You don’t want to be burnt to a crisp, right? We don’t know if we can actually control our magic yet. Nao, let’s both move farther away and head in different directions before we start practicing.”

“Yeah, we should be careful with magic, since we’re unfamiliar with it. You’ll get plenty of chances to see us use magic in the future, Touya, so just restrain yourself for now.”

“Sure, all right. I don’t want to risk dying, so I’ll stay here.”

“Okay then, I’ll be going over here to practice,” Haruka said, then turned and walked away.

I turned my back to her and checked my skills in my status display screen. The magic skills I had were Time Magic and Fire Magic. I could only use six different spells at the moment. From Time Magic, I could use Heavy Weight, Light Weight, Accelerate Time, and Slow Time. From Fire Magic, I could use Ignite and Fire Arrow. I had learned about this at the same time I got the Time Magic and Fire Magic skills; it was nice that the system had taught me about what kind of spells they were. Based on the information I had in front of me, it seemed like you would learn two spells for every level of a specific magic skill. *That doesn’t seem like much at all. Well, I guess it’s different from some games where you’d have to spend stuff like MP to cast spells for a certain amount of damage, so it’s more flexible in a way? Let’s just test things out first.*

“Okay, let’s test Ignite first. It doesn’t seem that dangerous even if I mess up.”

I gathered mana at my fingertips. It was my first time doing it, so it was kind of weird that I knew how it worked right away. I guess it was also weird that I could communicate just fine in this world, so there was no point in overthinking it.

“*Ignite.*” I heard a crackling sound as a spark appeared at my fingertips. It vanished right away, leaving a trail of smoke in the air. I didn’t see any actual fire.

“Was that not enough mana? I’ll gather a bit more, then, and try again. *Ignite!*”

My fingertips flared up as soon as I cast the spell.

“Whoa! Yikes, that was dangerous! I almost had to say goodbye to some strands of hair on my forehead...”

I had succeeded in creating a fire, but it was stronger than I had thought it would be, and I hastily turned my face away from the heat. *This is actually kind of hard. I need to have a clearer image in my mind. Something like the gentle flow of water from my fingertips...*

“*Ignite.*”

A calm and steady flame appeared at my fingertips.

“Nice, I succeeded! Now this is more like it for a spell called Ignite!”

The closest I could get to describing it was as a candle flame at my fingertips. It wavered but continued to burn.

“Hmm, I wonder if I can mix it up for a different result. Something like a turbo lighter or blowtorch flame would be interesting.”

The flame currently burning at my fingertips seemed like it would be enough to set fire to dry leaves but not charcoal or firewood. I put out the flame and then gathered mana at my fingertips again and imagined it spraying outward.

“*Ignite!*”

Flames burst from my fingertips.

“Nice, just what I had in mind!”

They were blue flames, similar to a blowtorch. The flame burned intensely about ten centimeters from the tips of my fingers.

“This should be enough firepower for charcoal... Wait, that’s enough!”

I felt something rapidly depleting inside me, so I hastily put out the flame.

“Whew, that was close. That was mana, right? I guess that means the amount of mana required scales with how potent a spell is. That does make sense.”

There wasn’t a way for me to check exactly how much mana I had left, but that mana depletion speed felt dangerous. I would probably have run out of mana if I had kept that flame going for another minute or so.

“Oh well, I guess I’ll drop this idea. I might be able to use Ignite like this when I get better at magic, but I should probably just use a weaker flame to light fire for now.”

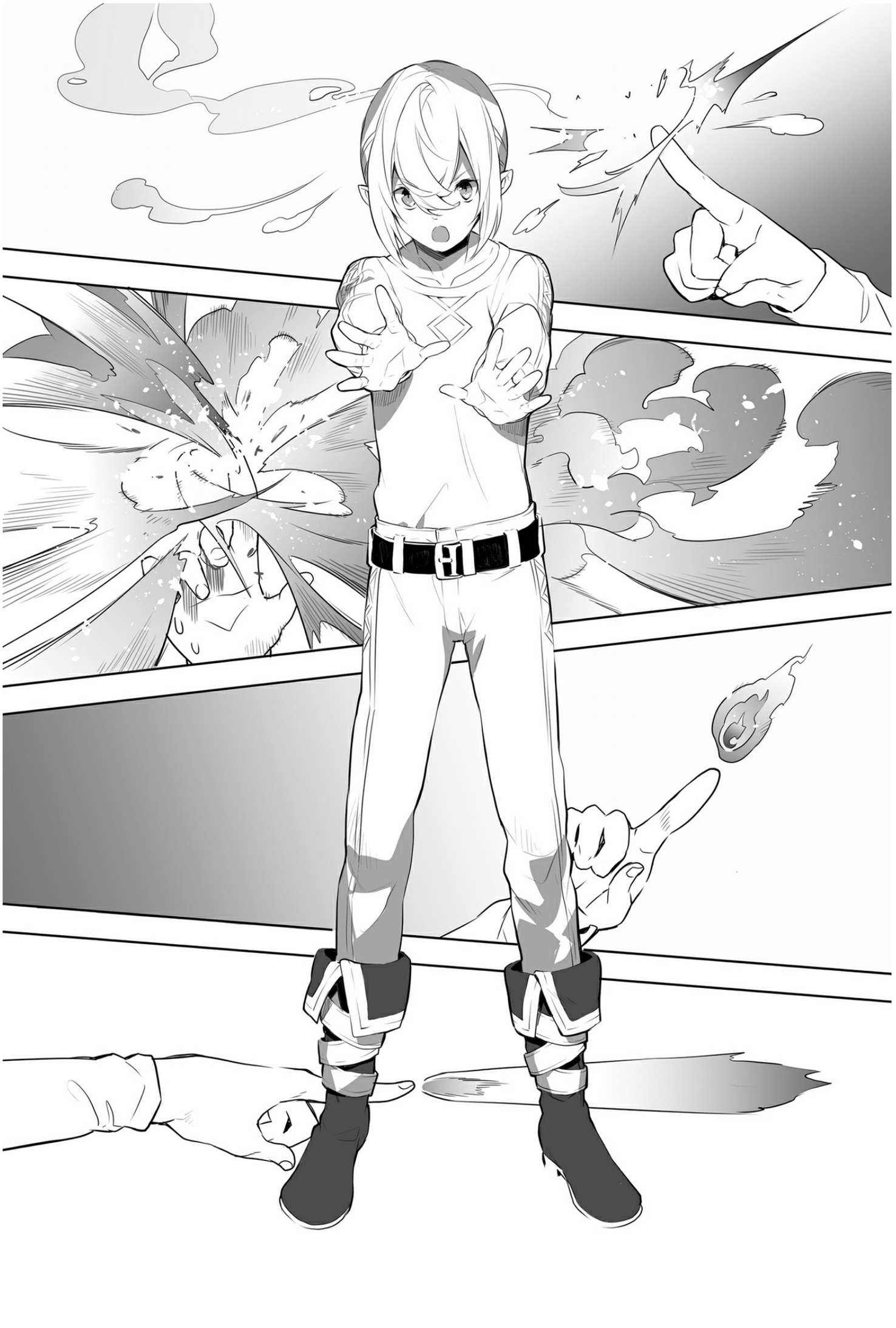
There was probably no such thing as a firelighter in this world. With that in mind, it would probably be a good idea to gather dry leaves, branches, and bark. It would be inconvenient if we couldn’t find them when we actually needed to start a bonfire.

“Okay, time to try a different spell like Fire Arrow. I’ll just aim for the ground over there.”

I walked ten steps forward and drew a circle on the ground and then returned to where I had been standing before. *How should I do it this time? The spell name has the word arrow in it, so something like a charge up and release...*

“*Fire Arrow!*”

I extended my palm out in front of me and imagined mana shooting out. Right away, I heard an explosive sound.



A fire arrow shot out from my palm and landed right next to the circle I had drawn on the ground.

“Wow, I succeeded on my first try this time! My aim was fairly accurate too, so I’ll probably be able to get good use out of this after a bit more practice.”

I fired a few more shots with differing amounts of mana to test things out. As a result, I learned how to concentrate and create fire arrows with a diameter of twenty centimeters. Soon I could accurately hit targets within a distance of ten steps. I also got the hang of adjusting the potency of my fire arrows somewhat.

“Whew. All right, all that’s left is Time Magic, but I don’t think I have much mana left...”

I only had a rough feel for how much mana I had left, but considering how much mana I had used already plus how tired I felt, I would definitely run out of mana if I practiced all of my Time Magic spells. It would be a bad idea to drain my mana completely when I still had to go gather herbs afterwards.

“I can probably just try out Heavy Weight and Light Weight for now, although I feel like it’ll be hard to tell how much of a difference they make.”

Heavy Weight made its target heavier and Light Weight made its target lighter, just as their names implied. I picked up a rock near my feet and then cast Heavy Weight on it, using only a small amount of mana.

“I guess it’s a bit heavier than it was originally...?”

I could tell a slight difference when I held the rock, but that was about it. The spell didn’t last long, so it didn’t seem very useful at all. *Maybe it could be useful for setting a trap, like one that would trigger a rock to fall on someone, and then I could cast Heavy Weight on the rock before it landed.* I tried out Light Weight too, but it was kind of useless as well. It could be useful for making boulders lighter if they were blocking a path, but that would probably require a lot of mana.

“That should be it for now.”

I felt fatigue coursing through my body after I finished testing my magic, so I was about to take a break and rest, but then...

“Are you done?”

“W-Whoa! O-Oh, it’s you?”

I suddenly heard a voice from behind me and panicked. I spun around and saw that it was Haruka. I did have the Scout skill, but it hadn’t done anything at all. It was probably either because I hadn’t been paying attention or just because it wasn’t an enemy approaching me. *I’m lucky it was Haruka this time. It would’ve been very bad if it had been an enemy that I didn’t notice. Yeah, I should stay alert when outside of town.* As for Touya, he was somewhat far away behind Haruka and was still concentrating on swinging around his wooden sword. It looked like he was performing a sword dance, though I wasn’t sure if that was the result of a skill or not. His moves didn’t seem like a beginner’s; they were fluid and masterful.

“How did it go, Nao?” Haruka asked. “Can you use offensive magic properly?”

“Well, Ignite can act like a flint for lighting a fire. As for offensive magic, Fire Arrow should be fine. I’m not sure if I can actually land it on a moving target, though. Time Magic’s not really that useful at the moment. I might be able to extend the duration of time spells and carry more materials if I have spare mana, I guess. What about you, Haruka?”

“Light Magic spells seem like they’ll be quite useful, especially since they include healing spells. I can’t heal serious injuries yet, though, so keep that in mind. My Wind and Water Magic are both only Level 1, so they’re not really usable in combat. I can create water, though, so that’ll be useful for daily life.”

“So how did the tests go as far as combat use?”

“No good results. All I can do right now is create sounds to distract enemies and splash water on enemies to surprise them. I’ll need to get my hands on a bow as soon as I can to be able to contribute to a fight.”

“Nah, the fact that you can use healing spells is more than enough contribution. Besides, Touya and I have been relying on you for everything outside of combat.”

Haruka seemed a bit troubled by the fact that she couldn’t really help with combat, but it was perfectly fine for her to leave all the fighting to us for a

while. She had always been more reliable than either of us, and now she was even more so due to her General Knowledge skill. It was very reassuring to have her help. I did feel a bit ashamed of myself as a guy for relying so much on her, though. Also, I was extremely scared of injuries. Being unable to work was a straight path to homelessness. That meant Haruka's ability to heal was extremely valuable.

"Oh yeah, I noticed that the potency of spells seems to depend on how much mana you use. Is it the same for healing spells?"

"It is, but there's more to it. Touya needs to know about this too. Touya! Stop your swinging practice for now and come over here!"

"Oh, are you two done testing your magic? How did it go?"

As soon as he heard Haruka's words, Touya stopped his practice and walked over to us, wiping sweat off his brow. I thought his moves had looked masterful earlier, and he gave off the aura of a strong and skilled swordsman already. That was weird, considering that he had never even practiced kendo back in Japan. If this was thanks to his Swordsmanship and Weapon Proficiency: Swords skills, then the effect of skills on our capabilities was probably extremely significant.

"Yeah, I found out that I can use simple offensive magic just fine," I said. "What about you, Touya? You seem quite different."

"Yeah, it's like my body just knows what to do. I'm not mentally prepared, but I'm definitely confident in my physical moves. Weapon Proficiency: Swords and Level 3 Swordsmanship turned out to be amazing!"

Touya laughed out of joy at his newfound capabilities. I had no idea whether Level 3 was considered low or high in this world, but it was definitely not the equivalent of a beginner. *I'm looking forward to seeing you in action as our frontline tank, Touya.*

"I'll be focusing on healing for now," said Haruka. "On that topic, there's something I want both of you to keep in mind. The potency of spells increases with the amount of mana spent, but it only changes the area of effect for healing spells, so be careful."

Touya gave some thought to Haruka's statement, but he couldn't figure it out, so he asked Haruka to explain further. "What do you mean?"

"For example, if you get cuts all over your body, Touya, I can heal all of your wounds at once with a Level 1 Light Cure as long as I use a lot of mana when I cast it. However, if one of your arteries or blood vessels gets injured from a deep stab wound, then I won't be able to heal it with Light Cure no matter how much mana I use. I'll have to use the higher tier spell, Cure, to be able to heal you in that case."

"So basically, I can't fight like a berserker or aim to trade wounds with my opponent, right? Instead of taking risky opportunities to deal big damage, I should slowly and carefully chip away at my opponent. Okay."

"Yeah. Also, protect your limbs above all, okay? There's almost nobody who can heal dismembered limbs, so it's basically impossible to heal. With healing magic, it's more dangerous to lose a finger than to get stabbed in the chest."

"Right, I'll be careful."

So it's more dangerous to lose a finger than to suffer a potentially fatal wound? I guess that means it's more dangerous to get stabbed in situations where Haruka can't heal us. When the time comes, I'm not sure if I can make decisions like that calmly, but I should do my best to be careful as well.

"While we're at it, I might as well also explain some common knowledge about magic."

"Wait, now? Shouldn't you have explained that before we started practicing?" I could use magic just fine now.

"There's a reason I didn't mention this earlier, of course. I'll explain that reason later. First, do you two remember what I said about how the existence of skills and levels isn't common knowledge?"

Oh yeah, she had said something about how people of this world couldn't easily check their skills and levels like we could with our status display screens. *Wait, I thought the level of your magic skills determined what spells you could use. What about the people of this world, then?*

"Nao seems to have realized what I'm getting at. The people of this world

don’t know about the existence of spells that become available at certain levels.”

The way people of this world learned magic was via grimoires or from someone who could teach them magic directly. Well, normal grimoires just contained information about the potency of certain spells and what they would do. They were basically something like general textbooks for magic. That meant that for the people of this world, the level system was just an indicator of the spells that they could use by following the directions in a grimoire, instead of a system that unlocked spells with each increased level.

“So, to put it in simpler terms, levels for magic indicate the most difficult magic you can use and not what kinds of magic you can use?”

“Yes. I didn’t mention this at first because I thought you would be able to come up with different ways to use spells. Was I right?”

“Well...”

If I had been told at first that Ignite could only conjure a candle flame at my fingertips, I would have probably have used it only for that. *I guess testing out magic on our own was the right thing to do to avoid being stuck with preconceptions about how it “should” work.*

“I still don’t really get it, but I guess it doesn’t matter?”

“Yeah, that’s fine. It’s not like we can really compare now,” Haruka said with a rueful smile.

This might be just one way of thinking about magic, but since we can’t compare the two different ways of learning magic under the same conditions, it’s hard to tell which one’s better. Well, all that mattered was that I had figured out how to use different variations of Ignite, so everything was okay.

Touya had been listening quietly as we discussed magic. He asked, “Wait, so does that mean you can create your own unique spells that aren’t listed in any grimoires?”

Haruka nodded in response.

“Yes, although it depends on how much mana you have and how much

control you have over magic.”

“Whoa, seriously?! That’s wild! Man, I kinda regret not getting magic skills now...”

“Just to be clear, it’s not normal to be able to use magic easily. Nao and I can use the spells listed under our magic skills along with different variations on those spells, but it’s probably only because the evil god designed the system this way for us.”

In order to learn magic, you would normally have to follow a fixed process like the instructions in a grimoire to cast a specific spell and then practice that process over and over until you could reliably cast that spell without any problems. In our case, we had been reincarnated into this world with a skill system that let us reliably cast spells depending on the level of our skills. That meant we could immediately use the magic that was available to us with no difficulties, and it wouldn’t be hard for us to use different variations either. *Well, that’s Haruka’s theory, at least.*

“What this means is that if we want to learn new magic, then we’ll have to practice it just like every other mage in this world.”

Haruka had tried to imagine and cast a spell that she couldn’t easily use under her highest level magic skill, Light Magic, but apparently she hadn’t gotten anywhere close to performing it successfully. *I guess it would be wishful thinking to believe that we could immediately use new spells just by leveling up our magic skills.*

“If you want to get better at using a sword, Touya, then you might need to find someone who can teach you, or just train hard by yourself,” said Haruka.

“Well, actually, Touya already has the Swordsmanship skill, so it’s not like he’s learning from scratch by himself,” I said. “It’s as if he knows the basics already. What’s it like, Touya?”

“Yeah, my body just knows how to move and what to do. I’m not sure if it’s tracing the moves of a specific sword style. All I know is that skills are awesome!”

Touya swung around his wooden sword to show off. *I have skills too, like*

Weapon Proficiency: Spears and Level 2 Spearmanship, so will I be able to move around fluidly like Touya? It doesn't feel real at all.

"Well, if we can all become that agile thanks to our skills, then we should be fine in the east forest," I said. "We spent quite some time practicing, so should we jog our way to the forest to save time?"

"Sure, I'm down," said Touya. "In a way, it's a good thing that all we have is our clothes and a wooden sword and no luggage to slow us down!"

"Yeah, we should gather as many herbs as we can, or else we might end up being unable to even stay at an inn."

"Well, I think we'll be able to earn enough to stay at an inn, but we'll have to scrape a living day by day if we don't save up money," said Haruka. "Jogging's fine with me too, but don't go so fast that we can't talk during the jog. We also need energy left after we reach the forest."

"Okay," I said. "Hopefully we can finish things and return to town quickly."

It felt like we had spent an hour here practicing. We had no food on us, so we would have to return to town in time if we wanted to eat lunch. However, if we stopped gathering herbs too early, then we could end up being unable to stay at an inn, and it would also affect our ability to pay for meals from the next day onwards. It was a predicament that provided a lot of motivation.

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We all started jogging down the road. Actually, the speed at which we "jogged" would have been considered pretty fast back on Earth. Eventually, we saw a forest in front of us and to our right. The edge of the forest was about ten meters away from the highway, and we couldn't see the other end of the forest from where we were standing. That meant the forest was quite wide and covered a few kilometers at the very least.

"Is that our destination?" I asked.

"Yeah, I think so," Haruka replied.

"Just how wide is this forest? It looks quite wide from here."

"No idea. I didn't look up that information. All we need to know is that we

won’t encounter dangerous monsters as long as we don’t go too deep into the forest, so let’s gather herbs near the highway.”

“Okay.”

We discovered old tree stumps when we got closer to the forest, so the trees bordering the highway seemed to have been cut down.

“It looks like timber was gathered from this area, since there are a lot of tree stumps left here,” I said.

“Hmm, or maybe the trees were actually cut down to make the highway safer,” said Haruka. “After all, if there were trees right next to a highway, then that would be a perfect spot for animals or bandits to hide, right?”

“Oh yeah, that makes sense.”

An open and clear roadside with nowhere to hide would definitely be safer, since there would be less risk of a sudden ambush. I gave another look at the trees that remained in the area and saw that they weren’t broadleaf trees or very thick. They would be okay for firewood, but they wouldn’t be good timber at all.

“Okay, let’s get started with gathering herbs,” said Haruka.

“Right, let’s—wait, I don’t know what herbs look like,” said Touya.

“Uh, same here,” I said.

I messed up. I should’ve asked back at the Adventurers’ Guild instead of leaving everything to Haruka.

“It’s fine, probably.”

“Oh, can you teach us about herbs, Haruka?”

“No, I only have a rough idea of what herbs look like from my General Knowledge skill. I have an idea, though. Nao, look at this grass here and say the words ‘I want to know about this’ in your head.”

“Hmm? Sure, I guess...”

Haruka pointed at a blade of grass as she gave me instructions. I was a bit confused, but I did what she told me to do, looking at the grass where she was

pointing. As soon as I did, a semitransparent tag window appeared in the air, overlaid on the grass. The word “Herb” was written in the window.

“Huh? What’s this? Did we already have access to a function window like this?”

It looked like an augmented reality display window from science fiction works. *I guess it’s not too out of place considering that we have status display windows, but still...*

“Wait, what are you talking about? I don’t see anything.”

I was pointing at the herb while I spoke to Haruka, but Touya seemed completely lost as he looked back and forth between my face and the spot I was pointing at. Haruka listened to what we both said and nodded as if she had come to a conclusion.

“Okay, so I was right. I just noticed this earlier, but this is probably a function of the Help Guide. The things you can find out with this function are more or less the same as the information from the General Knowledge skill. That’s why I didn’t notice this function existed until now, because I already know information without having to think about things actively.”

“Oh, I basically forgot about the Help Guide up until now, but I guess it really was worth the price of 20 Points. This’ll help a lot with gathering herbs. On a side note, I can’t believe I was so careless...”

I had been a bit oblivious to how serious our situation was due to having a reliable childhood friend with me who I could count on. Skills were our lifelines in this world, so I should have tested them out more thoroughly.

“Wait, so is my Appraisal skill useless, then?”

“Well, Touya, try using your Appraisal on this.”

Touya looked a bit sad, since he thought he wouldn’t be useful for gathering herbs, but Haruka showed him some herbs on her palm that looked like chives.

“Hm? Oh, a display window came up. Apparently this is an herb called Hawart, and it’s used as an ingredient in ointments?”

Touya seemed a bit confused as he described what he saw, but Haruka was

satisfied with what she heard.

“I see... So Appraisal gives more information than the Help Guide. The Help Guide’s function is just an auxiliary one—augmenting what the user knows already—while Appraisal’s function is to analyze the target, so that’s probably where the difference comes from.”

If one already knew about what one was looking for, the Help Guide’s function would easily distinguish between herbs and normal grass. On the other hand, Appraisal would analyze each plant one by one and then try to match them with the correct entry from a database or encyclopedia. That was evident from the way Touya’s Appraisal could tell which grass plants were herbs as long as he was looking at a single plant in isolation—a plant that had already been plucked. It wasn’t very useful or efficient for herb-gathering purposes, sadly.

“Yeah, it’s very important to experiment and test our skills,” I said. “The ones where I don’t know anything about how they work are Scout and Third Eye.”

Scout seems like a very important skill, so I should test it out as soon as I can. As for Third Eye, I’m pretty sure Haruka has that skill as well.

“Oh yeah, Haruka, have you already tested out your Third Eye skill?” I asked.

“Yes, of course. It’s a skill that lets me check how strong a target is—or rather, it displays their status screen for me. However, it’s not really effective against people who are very strong. When I used it on rookie adventurers, it let me see their skills, but when I used it on people who looked like veterans, the only information I got was that they were probably strong.”

Whoa, she easily surpassed my expectations. I didn’t think she had already tested it out. It was kind of inconvenient that the skill didn’t work on strong people, but it was still useful to know that it would let its user find out whether or not a target was actually stronger than them.

“Well, I also need to test Third Eye out on monsters to see what happens, in case there are any differences.”

“That makes sense. I guess that leaves the Scout skill, then. I’ll test it out.”

For some reason, I felt like I already knew how to use the skill, so I went ahead and set it to search around the vicinity. I thought a map screen like a

radar would pop up, but nothing like that appeared. The skill seemed like it was just able to detect roughly where other living beings were, their vital signs, and whether or not they were hostile. It didn't feel like it was expending mana like when I used magic, but I felt like I was slowly accumulating fatigue from concentrating on a delicate process, so it was probably a difficult skill to use for a long time.

"How did it go?"

"Well, it let me detect the presence of other living beings, but it didn't let me know exactly how hostile they were," I said.

"Oh, yeah, I can detect something similar as well," said Touya.

"I see—wait, you don't have the Scout skill, right?!"

"Yeah, I don't!"

"Man, does that mean my Scout skill is pointless...?"

Dude, I spent 10 Points on this skill! If something like the sixth sense of a beastman can do the same thing, then why did I bother getting this?!

"It's probably just a racial trait of beastmen, so don't worry too much about it," said Haruka. "Also, if you're already capable of that as is, Touya, then you might be able to obtain the Scout skill eventually. I can't detect anything on my end."

"Yep, sounds about right. Besides, it's not a bad thing to have more bodies for scouting, right, Nao?"

"I mean, yeah, but still..." It made sense, but it didn't sit well with me for some reason.

"Well, it's a good thing that there are no hostile beings nearby," said Haruka. "However, we'll have to hunt down some game for lunch, and monsters might approach as we're gathering herbs, so check again when you two see fit, okay?"

It sounded like we were going to hunt out here instead of skipping lunch.

"So we're going to eat wild game meat for lunch?" Touya asked.

"Yes. We could also try to eat some of the wild grasses around here, but

they're not really edible unless we can turn them into some kind of vegetable tempura."

"That makes sense, since most wild vegetables have a really bitter taste," I said. "Besides, vegetable tempura made from wild grass won't really have any flavor. It'll just taste like batter and whatever seasoning you use."

There were very few wild vegetables that were actually satisfying to the stomach. They were considered delicacies back in Japan, so they were often offered at traditional inns, but I probably wouldn't have bought them if they had been sold at supermarkets as regular vegetables. That's all there was to them.

"We can't even make tempura, since we don't have any flour or oil," said Haruka. "All we have is some salt. If we can't hunt anything down, then we'll be skipping lunch. Let's do our best, okay?"

"Okay!" we exclaimed.

It would be painful to skip lunch. Touya and I were relying on Haruka to do the gutting work, so the very least we could do was take care of the hunting.

"Yo, Touya, what should we hunt for? Or rather, does your beastman sixth sense thing tell you if there's any prey nearby?"

"Nah, I just know how big or small they are. Also, how are we going to hunt down our prey? The only weapon we have is my wooden sword, right? We don't know if your Fire Arrow is actually useful for hunting, Nao."

"Yeah, that's true. Game won't be edible if my Fire Arrow chars it to a crisp."

"Right? That means birds would be difficult to catch. Small animals like rabbits will probably manage to get away from us. That leaves things like wild boars or deer. We might get attacked back, but how does that sound?"

"Sounds good. Well, that's if those animals exist in this world."

"Yeah."

Touya and I had been engrossed in discussing our hunting plans, so Haruka clapped her hands to get our attention. "Okay, that's enough for now, you two. It's good to discuss how and what to hunt, but we need to gather herbs first.

The amount we end up gathering will decide whether or not we'll be able to sleep in a bed or on the ground tonight." She pointed at the ground. "I don't know how many types of herbs there are here, but there seem to be quite a lot, so just gather every herb you find."

"Okay. It should be easy to gather herbs now that you told me about that function of the Help Guide."

I focused and looked at the ground. The Help Guide told me which plants were herbs right away. This would save me a lot of time, since I didn't have to try to tell herbs apart from normal grass.

"Uh, what about me...?"

"You can help sort the herbs we gather based on their type, Touya. We'll also leave you the role of watching out for any approaching danger."

"Hm? Wait, is it actually necessary for me to sort herbs with my Appraisal skill? We'll be able to sell all of them if we bring them back to the guild, right?"

"Yes, but there might be some plants that are hard to distinguish. For example, there might be two that are both useful and look similar but are completely different. Also, it's good to know the effects of different herbs. I might be able to use some for my Alchemy skill if we end up with spares."

Oh yeah, there are some plants like that where it's hard to tell them apart even with an explanation.

"All right, I understand now. I'll watch out for danger, so good luck with gathering herbs, you two!"

Touya's ears perked up, and he raised his sword to show that he was on guard. However, things weren't going to be that easy for him.

"You can help gather the herbs that are easy to tell apart, Touya," I said.

"Yeah, and besides, since you have a sixth sense of a beastman, you can be on guard even while you're gathering, right?" said Haruka.

As soon as Haruka and I pointed that out, Touya's ears drooped. He bent over and silently began to separate blades of grass.

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It had been about an hour since we started gathering herbs. We had been able to gather a decent amount thanks to the Help Guide. In addition, the Appraisal skill turned out to be way more useful than we had thought it would be.

Touya pointed out midway through that it wasn't necessarily only the leaves of plants that were used for medicinal purposes. There were a surprising number of herbs whose other parts—like the roots, flowers, and seeds—were used for medicinal purposes, so it was pointless to just rip off the leaves. The leaves by themselves wouldn't even go for a single Rea. What that meant was that most of the herbs we had gathered up to that point were basically rubbish. Most of them didn't have flowers or seeds, and it was impossible to go back and dig up their roots, since we couldn't remember where exactly we had gathered all of them. Also, we didn't have a spade for digging, so even if we had remembered, we wouldn't have been able to dig them up anyway. We might have tried to dig with a small branch if they were herbs that actually sold for a lot, but there was no way herbs that anybody could easily gather here would be that valuable.

On the bright side, we had only been gathering for about five minutes when Touya noticed this issue and pointed it out. The Help Guide hadn't mentioned anything about roots and seeds, so we had been blissfully unaware that we were about to gather a bunch of rubbish and turn it in at the Adventurers' Guild before Touya caught wind of the problem. It would've been great if he had noticed from the beginning, but he had saved us from wasting any more time, since he was the only one of us with Appraisal, so that made us even. However, we told him to read everything that the Appraisal skill mentioned next time so that this wouldn't happen again.

After that, we memorized the medicinal herbs that we only needed the leaves from and focused exclusively on gathering those. As a side note, the General Knowledge skill that Haruka had didn't mention anything about this aspect of herbs either. In a way, that made sense. For example, I knew chameleon plants could be used as herbs, but I didn't know how to use them as herbs. That was probably the difference between common knowledge and specialized knowledge.

While we were silently gathering herbs, Touya suddenly lifted his head. “Nao, do you notice a signal, kind of like a ping on a radar?”

Signal?

“Oh!” *I totally forgot! Like, yeah, it was Touya’s job to be on guard, but even so, I got way too absorbed in what I was doing!* I hurriedly used my Scout skill to look for the signal Touya had found. There was indeed something approaching us. I didn’t know what it was, but it definitely wasn’t a small animal. The skill didn’t seem to identify it as hostile, but it didn’t feel like a harmless creature either.

“What should we do?” Touya asked. “Should we confront it?”

“Well, if it’s not a strange creature, then it’ll be our lunch. Haruka, can you fall back a bit towards the highway?”

“Okay. Be careful.”

Haruka stopped gathering herbs right away and took shelter atop a tree about ten meters away from us. The way she hopped up that tree with ease looked quite natural for an elf, but it still seemed kind of weird to me, since it was Haruka. She had been decently athletic before, but she had never been the type to climb trees.

“Nao, get ready. What should we do?”

“Hmm. I’ll also take shelter up a tree. Good luck, Touya!”

“Wait, you’re telling me to do this alone?!”

“I mean, I don’t have a weapon, so yeah. I’ll back you up with my Fire Arrow if things start looking bad. It doesn’t seem to be a monster, so you’ll probably be fine, right?”

Touya seemed shocked, but I ignored him, and following Haruka’s example, I climbed the tree that was closest to me. I had only climbed trees a few times in the past, but my elf body seemed to know what to do and led me to a sturdy branch. I stood on that branch and looked down. I could feel a presence approaching, but I couldn’t see what it was even from this vantage point; the forest was too dense. Just to be clear, I didn’t run away because I was scared,

nope. I had no choice, since I don't have a weapon.

"Fine, leave this to me," said Touya. "It's time for action! Oh, but make sure you help me out if things really get bad, okay?"

"Yeah, relax, I got your back. Even if you get injured, Haruka can heal you, so take it easy."

"I don't want to get injured..."

After having said that, Touya hid behind a bush. We waited for a while in silence, and eventually, something appeared on what seemed to be an animal trail. It looked like a wild boar. At least, I thought it was probably a boar. How was I supposed to know? I had only seen boars at the zoo before! They weren't interesting to look at, so back then, I'd only ever taken a glance and then ignored them. This boar was a bit less than two meters tall, and it had fifty-centimeter tusks curving upward from its jaw. *Wait, do boars have tusks that large? Oh yeah, I can check with the Help Guide. Let's see... "Animal (Edible)"...?*

What the hell?! That's way too ambiguous! I almost shouted at the top of my lungs, but I managed to restrain myself. It was a natural reaction. *Well, the Help Guide said it was edible, so at least that means it would be good for lunch.* The boar continued walking forward normally regardless of what I was thinking, but it stopped near where Touya was hiding and started to snuffle. As soon as the boar started doing that, Touya jumped out of the bush and swung his wooden sword at the boar's head. A dull *crack* vibrated through the air when the attack landed.

"Tsk!"

It looked like Touya had gotten a clean hit in, but he clicked his tongue in frustration and fell back. The boar shook its head lightly and snorted angrily, and then it glared at Touya. We probably didn't have to worry about the boar running away, but at the same time, it didn't seem like it had taken any damage. If a clean hit like that didn't do anything, then maybe this was going to go badly...?

"Touya! Do you think you'll be okay?"

"I have no idea! I'll just do my best!"

I guess that was all he could say, since it was his first time in combat. *What should I do to back him up? Heavy Weight might slow the boar down, but it also might increase the damage Touya suffers if the boar rams him. Maybe Slow Time would be a good idea. It'll be my first time using it, but thankfully, I've recovered most of my mana by now. Besides, even if I fail to use Slow Time properly, it probably won't do too much harm.*

"*Slow Time!*"

I extended my hands out towards the boar and cast the spell. The boar glowed dimly for a moment. Its movements seemed a bit slower than before—or well, I hoped that was the case.

"Touya, I think I slowed the boar down a little! Don't expect too much, though—give it everything you've got!"

"H-Huh? Well, thanks!"

Touya responded with a doubtful expression to the weird way I described it, but he still thanked me for the help. *I mean, come on, how am I supposed to tell if there's a difference when the boar hasn't actually done anything yet? It'd be easier to tell if it was in the middle of charging or something like that.*

"All right, let's give it a go! *Charge!*"

The moment Touya yelled those words, he blurred out of visibility from pure speed and then appeared in front of the boar with his sword stabbed deep in its eye.



The boar screeched in pain and writhed in agony as it collapsed to the ground. Touya pulled out his wooden sword and took a step backwards before the boar collapsed. The boar continued to writhe around for a bit, but eventually it stopped. Soon its only movements were muscle spasms. *I see. He aimed for the brain via the boar's eye sockets since its skull was too hard to break through. That's quite logical, yes, but I can't believe you managed to pull it off on your first try, Touya!*

"Is it dead?"

"Probably?"

I remained on top of the tree while I asked Touya. He didn't sound very sure. He moved closer to the boar and poked it with his wooden sword.

"Yeah, it looks dead to me."

The boar was motionless aside from the spasms in its legs, so I hopped down from the tree now that I knew it was safe.

"Well, that's our first victory," I said.

"Yeah, but like, how do I put it? I'm happy about this, but at the same time, I don't feel too good either..."

"Mm, we've never actually killed another living being with our own hands before."

It almost goes without saying, but most people who lead normal lives rarely get in situations where they have to kill another living being. If one doesn't count things like insects, then the closest thing would be killing fresh fish, but most people don't experience that either, unless they go fishing for food. Touya and I fell silent as we stood before the dead boar.

"Stop spacing out and get to work, you two. We need to drain the boar's blood."

"Oh, Haruka."

Haruka suddenly appeared right next to us. She took out a knife as she approached the boar.

“We’ve already indirectly killed animals for our meals back on Earth, remember? There’s no reason to consider that any different from this, right?” Haruka stabbed the boar in its neck and started to drain its blood as she said that. She checked the flow of blood with an expressionless face and then cut open the boar’s stomach to extract its internal organs.

“It would be easier to do this if we strung the boar up first, but oh well. You two better watch closely, okay? You both need to be able to do this eventually.”

Ugh, do I really have to do this...? An acidic taste welled up in my throat at the sight of the large puddle of spilled blood on the ground and the pungent smell of the boar’s internal organs. I glanced at Touya standing next to me, and he had gone pale at the sight. I probably looked just like him.

“Oh, I messed up. We don’t have a tool for digging a hole.” While she looked around, Haruka explained that the boar’s corpse might attract other wild animals if we didn’t bury it. Eventually, her eyes landed on Touya’s wooden sword.

“N-No, please! Not my sword!”

Touya quickly hid his sword away when he noticed Haruka’s gaze, but Haruka shrugged and shook her head.

“I would’ve snatched it right away if it was a broadsword made out of metal, but your sword isn’t much different from a stick.”

Broadswords were basically a blunt weapon, so one wouldn’t have to worry about a broadsword losing its edge even if one used it to dig holes. Japanese swords, on the other hand, wouldn’t fare so well. Touya seemed a bit unhappy that Haruka was treating his wooden sword as nothing more than a stick, but he kept quiet in case she changed her mind and decided to use it after all.

“I’ll leave the hole digging to you two while I work on this boar. As for how... Well, good luck.”

“Okay.”

It would probably be quite difficult to dig a hole large enough for the boar without a proper tool, but Haruka was doing the hard work of gutting it, so we had to contribute somehow. Touya and I gathered branches and rocks from our

surroundings and then attempted to dig a hole using those. We were in the middle of a forest, so the ground wasn't very hard to dig into, but it would take quite some time to dig regardless, since we didn't have the right tool for the job.

"If there were a river nearby, we could chill this meat, but I guess we'll have to make do with just rinsing it off instead."

While Touya and I were struggling with our assignment, Haruka continued hers smoothly. She skinned off the boar's fur, then she sliced the meat into even pieces and lined them up on the ground. After that, she rinsed the pieces of meat with water that she created via magic. By the time we were done burying the boar's entrails, Haruka had already finished stowing the fur and meat in our leather satchels.

"Um, Haruka, sorry about this," I said. "Actually, let me rephrase that. Thanks a lot."

"Yeah, we're really grateful," said Touya. "Thanks a lot."

We bowed our heads in gratitude, but Haruka shook her head with a bitter smile.

"It is what it is. We have to gut animals to survive in this world, and I'm the only one who knows how to do it right now, so yeah..."

In spite of her words, Haruka looked a bit pale. While she did have the Disassemble skill, it was her first time doing something like this, so it was only natural that she would feel queasy about it. However, she was still way more levelheaded than us. We had frozen in our tracks the moment the boar toppled over, but Haruka was different.

"Well, just try to learn and remember how to gut animals as soon as possible. We're going to be adventurers in this world, so we'll end up getting used to seeing somewhat grotesque scenes even if we don't want to. There are going to be situations that are a lot messier than this one too."

"Y-Yeah, that's true!" said Touya. "Well, in a way, we can think of this as similar to grilled offal, right? Livers, hearts, and omasum are a perfectly normal part of that kind of cuisine."

“I mean, yeah, if they’re cut up for that purpose,” I said. “Wholesale markets back on Earth also sold stuff like frozen pig feet, nose, and ears.”

Touya and I were trying to look at this from a different perspective to convince ourselves not to squirm the next time we saw something like this. However, even if the organs looked the same as they would in a market, it was still shocking to see actual blood flowing out of an animal. Regardless, we needed to get used to this somehow. There were monsters in this world too, not just regular animals, so we would be failures as adventurers if we got shocked by just the sight of blood.

“Don’t actually eat offal, okay? Especially digestive organs,” said Haruka. “It’s probably fine if you grill them first, but it’s not worth the risk.”

“Oh yeah, I remember hearing about people dying as a result of eating liver back in Japan,” said Touya. “Food poisoning in this world sounds like a scary prospect.”

“There are probably no disinfectants in this world either,” I said. “For example, alcohol wouldn’t work against norovirus, right?”

If I remember correctly, it took chlorination to kill that virus. It would have to be something with hypochlorous acid in it, like a mold killer. I guess that means something like chlorine bleach would work. But I don’t know how to make chlorine bleach, so it doesn’t matter.

“For now, we should try our best to avoid any danger or unnecessary risks until we get used to this world. This is very important,” said Haruka.

“So is grilled offal not edible in this world?”

“No, it is edible, but the meat goes bad easily, so it requires a lot of care.”

I didn’t have any qualms about eating grilled offal, but it also wasn’t something that I was dying to eat if regular meat was available. Offal would take a long time to prepare as well. It was different from buying offal at a supermarket that was ready to cook.

“Oh yeah, Touya, did you use your Appraisal on the boar?” I asked. “My Help Guide only displayed a window that said it was an edible animal.”

“Hmm, in a way, I guess that’s useful information? We can figure out whether or not animals are edible before we actually hunt them down. My Appraisal told me it was called a ‘tusk boar.’ It said that the boar’s meat was edible, and that its tusks and fur were useful materials.”

“Oh, the tusks are usable too? Let’s see...”

I picked up the tusks that Haruka had removed and left on the ground, and then I took a good look at them. They were heavier than they looked, and they seemed to be solid based on the sound they made when I tapped them. “These tusks seem to be pretty solid.”

“Solid? Are boar tusks normally hollow?” Haruka tilted her head in wonder as she asked that, and I nodded in response.

“Yeah, I remember boar tusks being hollow. These tusks also look larger than normal, right?”

“Mm, they definitely look quite large and thick. In terms of just the length, though, I remember there being some species of boars back on Earth that had tusks this long.”

According to Haruka, the tusks of Japanese boars weren’t very big, but there were other species of boar around the world that had longer tusks. Some had tusks that were too long, to the point that they could curl back and stab the boar in its own head. That seemed like a weird trait for an animal to have, but that was just one example of the different kinds of boar back on Earth. It meant that it was probably normal that a species with tusks this size would exist in this world. Besides, it was good for us that boars like this existed, since their tusks were actually usable, so we could sell them for money.

“Yo, it’s about time we got back to gathering herbs,” said Touya. “Should we move somewhere else before we resume?”

“Yeah, it would be bad if other animals got attracted by the smell of blood from the dead boar,” said Haruka. “Let’s get a bit away from here first.”

We walked through the forest for almost twenty minutes, away from the spot where we had felled the boar, and then we resumed our herb gathering until noon.

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“Okay, let’s take a break and eat lunch,” said Haruka.

I had been completely focused on gathering herbs, but I stopped and raised my head when I heard Haruka’s words. I looked up at the sky. I could see the sun through the gaps between the trees.

“Yay! It’s finally time for food!”

Touya, who was gathering herbs next to me, whooped for joy and plopped down on the ground. I rubbed my belly and exhaled a deep breath. I had been trying not to think about it, but I was quite hungry as well. We had done our best to stuff down bread earlier, but it had been quite early in the day when we had had breakfast.

“Were you that hungry? You could’ve mentioned it earlier.”

Haruka sounded a bit surprised when she said that, but Touya responded with an awkward grin. “Well, it would be kind of awkward to complain after all the hard work you did, Haruka. We’ve been relying on you so much, after all.”

“It’s not like you were slacking off, so don’t worry about it. Well, let’s all gather some firewood first and then move somewhere close to the highway. That’s probably safer than staying here.”

“Okay.”

It seemed like this wasn’t an area where people often cut firewood; there was enough that it didn’t take us very long to gather what we needed. We then moved to a spot next to the highway. I got ready to light a bonfire while Haruka began to prepare the meat.

“All right, it’s time to light things up with my Ignite spell!”

I piled up some firewood and used Ignite on it. The blowtorch flames from my fingertips lit up the twigs, and the thicker branches started to burn right away as well.

“I mean, you definitely lit things up, but is that more useful than a lighter?”

Touya didn’t look very impressed. *Oh come on, don’t be so harsh.* The cheapest tool for lighting fires that was available back at the general goods shop

was a flint. There was a magical device that could be used as a lighter too, but that one was very expensive. You'd need combustible material to serve as tinder, and the process of actually starting a fire would be a very slow and tedious one. In contrast, my Ignite could start a fire in no time, so it was quite useful!

I said essentially the same thing to Touya, but his opinion was that—although he did agree it was useful—it was lame and not very impressive for magic. Sure, flashy offensive magic was exactly what I thought magic was and should be based on fiction and games, but it was quite different if you were to use magic in real life. As far as I was concerned, practical magic like Ignite was way more important for daily life. *Besides, the total time we'll spend in combat as adventurers will be nothing more than a fraction of our whole lives. Magic that can help us survive combat is important too, but that's not the point here.*

"All right, I'm done preparing the meat. The bonfire looks like it's ready as well, right? Okay, let's all cook our own meat individually."

After we were done throwing more firewood onto the bonfire, Haruka handed us some meat on skewers. Each piece was a bit smaller than the palms of our hands and about three centimeters thick.

Haruka gave us some warnings and advice while she started to cook the meat on her own skewer. "It's up to you how you want your meat cooked. However, make sure you cook it all the way through. Don't cook it just to rare. If common sense from Earth also applies here, then you need to cook meat to seventy-five degrees Celsius for about a minute for the meat to be well done."

"What about the common sense in this world?" I asked.

"Cook thoroughly with fire. There's no science to this, but it's the same concept."

I don't have a meat thermometer, and I've never actually cooked food over a bonfire before, so maybe I should cook this for a bit longer than normal? I cooked the meat on my skewer for several minutes, flipping it periodically, and eventually juice started to ooze out. It gave off a delicious smell and a sizzling sound.

"Damn, this looks like it'll taste good! It's my first time eating meat like this!"

Touya said happily, gazing at the meat on his skewer. He seemed like he couldn't wait to dig in, since he kept flipping the meat frequently while he looked at Haruka as if waiting for her permission.

"Yeah, even for barbecues, it's normal to eat off the cast iron griddle or a grill net," I said.

Oh yeah, I've never eaten meat off a skewer at a barbecue before. You'd think that'd be the standard way to do it, but grilling meat on a barbecue net is more common. Actually, wouldn't you end up burning the food a bit if you put both meat and vegetables together on a skewer to grill? I remember that it was fairly common to see charred cabbage or crispy onions at regular barbecue joints.

"I hate to say this, but don't expect too much," said Haruka. "Our only seasoning is salt, and as far as meat goes, this is probably a cut below regular pork."

Touya and I had been a bit excited to try the meat out, but Haruka was very calm as she continued to watch it cook. *Actually, aren't pigs basically just domesticated boars? So does that mean this is a grilled pork skewer?*

"Don't worry, it's the context that matters! It's like how even watery curry tastes good if you eat it while out camping! Uh, Haruka, is the meat ready to eat yet?"

"Calm down, Touya. You're not a child; don't be so impatient. You can't just cook the outside of the meat. The inside needs to be cooked well too, or else it'll be dangerous to eat."

We continued to wait for a few more minutes, and then Haruka finally gave us permission. We dug into the meat on our skewers right away.

"It's hot! But it's also delicious!" Touya exclaimed.

"Well, this tastes better than I thought it would," I said.

The juice and fat in the meat overwhelmed us. As Haruka had said, salt was the only seasoning I could taste, so that probably meant the fat itself was tasty. The delicious smell and taste of the meat combined with the dripping fat gave it a crispy texture that I couldn't really describe well. The meat itself was a bit tough, but not too tough, so it gave me the satisfaction of really tearing into a

piece of meat.

“I thought this would be harder to eat, but it actually tastes better than I thought it would,” said Haruka. “Is it because the meat itself is high quality?”

“Back on Earth, weren’t there special breeds of pig that were fed acorns?” I asked. “With that in mind, wouldn’t wild boars that roam around eating good food end up with high-quality meat?”

“Hmm, I guess that’s one way to look at it. The taste might also depend on how you prepare a boar. If we made some incisions in this meat and soaked it with some dipping sauce, then this meat would be really delicious. Sadly, we don’t have anything like soy sauce or miso...”

Touya was completely absorbed with consuming the meat on his skewer, while Haruka just took small bites as she commented on the meat.

“Yeah, I feel the same way. I can do without rice, but soy sauce and miso are extremely important. I used one or the other for seasoning all the time. The only condiments I didn’t really use much were mayonnaise and ketchup, I think?”

As I thought of different seasonings and condiments, I tried to remember what I had had in my fridge. I especially liked using soy sauce as a dressing for salad. Things didn’t feel complete with just oil, vinegar, salt, and pepper.

“There’s also Worcestershire sauce,” said Haruka. “I personally didn’t really use it that often, but still.”

“Well, soy sauce and miso are the most important seasonings for the food I like, as well as for dipping sauce to go with grilled meat. Are there any shops that sell them in this world, Haruka?”

Dipping sauce would help me put up with meat and vegetables that didn’t taste good on their own. In fact, it would be more than enough to make any meal go down smoothly.

“I’m not sure. There might be some similar seasonings, but I doubt they’d be made from rice, wheat, or soybeans.”

“I don’t really care as long as the taste is similar. Can you make seasonings

yourself, Haruka?”

“Well, I know how to make them, since I learned from my grandma in the past. However, we were using dried koji rice at the time, so that’s a bit different.”

“Koji rice? Ugh, yeah, there’s no way a shop will have that for sale.”

I don’t remember seeing koji rice even in supermarkets back in Japan. This is a different world, so there’s no way I’ll find it here.

“Well, I do know how to inoculate koji mold, so I can try it out when we have more spare time once we don’t need to worry about money,” said Haruka. “I’m not sure if I’ll succeed, though, so you’ll have to wait a few years at the very least.”

“I see... Oh well, at least there’s some hope for the future.”

We would probably get weary of meals with just salt and culinary herbs as our only seasoning eventually, but that was a problem we could only try to solve once we had the luxuries of free time and spare cash. The meat in front of me was tasty enough anyway, and if we could somehow create something similar to Krazy Salt with just culinary herbs and salt, then I would be fine for a while.

“Whew, that was a good meal! Oh yeah, I was wondering something. You’re both elves, right? Would elves tend to dislike meat or anything like that?” As he was talking, Touya stared at the remaining meat that was sitting on the ground near Haruka.

Haruka gave him a scornful look in response. “What, do you want to eat more? There’s still meat left if you want to cook more yourself.”

“Nah, like I said, I was just wondering. But I’ll still eat some more meat!”

Despite the fact that he said no at first, Touya took the meat that Haruka handed over to him, skewered it, and started cooking it. Both pieces of meat on his two skewers looked as large as a pound of steak. *Is it because he’s a beastman? I don’t remember him eating this much before.* Touya would eat about the same amount I did back on Earth, so there was definitely a difference, especially since I had already started to feel full when I was no more than halfway done with the meat on my second skewer. As for Haruka, she seemed

to have sliced smaller portions for herself before even putting them on a skewer.

“I don’t feel any different in terms of my taste in food,” I said. “Is there a difference in taste between humans and elves, Haruka?”

“Well, common sense in this world is that elves like vegetables. It’s somewhat similar to the stereotype back on Earth that Japanese people love fish.”

“I see. In a way, that makes a lot of sense. But it’s good that we don’t have to worry about elf taste making it hard for us to find food we like.”

“Yeah. Okay, let’s head back to town once Touya’s done eating.”

“Huh? Already? The sun is still up, though!”

It had taken us some time to prepare the bonfire and to cook our food, but it wasn’t that late in the day yet. Sure, the walk back to town would take at least an hour, but it still felt a bit too early to stop here.

“Generally speaking, there are no lights in town after dark, so we need to finish our daily business while the sun is still up. That includes things like turning in our herbs, along with a lot of other stuff we have to do. It’s our first time doing all of this, so we should make sure we have some leeway with time.”

“Okay, that makes sense. Sounds good to me.”

We waited for Touya to finish eating and then took a short rest. After that, we headed back to town.

We reached town just a bit before sunset, so we rushed towards the Adventurers’ Guild to turn in the herbs we had gathered. The guild staff member who helped us was the same lady from yesterday. She seemed to remember us, since she noticed and waved at us as soon as we entered the guild. We went towards her, and Touya placed a bag on the counter. The staff lady appeared to be very surprised when she took a look inside.

“Wow, you managed to gather quite a lot of herbs! Please wait for a bit as I assess them.”

The lady took the bag with her to the backyard. After a few minutes, she returned with an empty bag. She smiled as she returned the bag to Haruka.

“Okay, the herbs were all acceptable. Please wait a bit longer for the other staff to finish calculating the total amount of money. I was actually a bit worried, since you all are rookies.”

“Oh, really?”

“Yes. The guild does offer a simple tutorial on request for people taking on herb gathering quests for the first time, but many adventurers don’t bother to listen, and they often bring back useless plants or parts as a result, such as the leaves of weedbane.”

“I-I see...”

Weedbane was the name of an herb from which only the root had medicinal value; we had found that out earlier thanks to Touya’s Appraisal skill. His skill had saved us from being labeled as rookies who didn’t ask for or listen to advice. Haruka averted her eyes slightly when she heard this from the lady, of course.

“Well, I thought it would be a good lesson, so I didn’t mention it beforehand.”

I’m glad things went well for us! We might’ve been forced to sleep outside without a roof if we hadn’t learned this lesson!

“It looks like your party managed to avoid that common mistake, though. Elf lore is quite impressive. Oh yes, now that I think about it, you didn’t gather any weedbane, did you?”

“No, we didn’t have any tools to dig up the root of weedbane, and even if we did, it would have taken a long time to do so. We’ll aim for weedbane in the future, once we’re ready.”

“I see. Perhaps you already know about this, but if you manage to gather weedbane with roots thicker than a thumb, those will go for a decent amount of money. However, if you only manage to find thin roots, then it might be a loss instead if you factor in the time required to dig for them.”

We hadn’t known about this at all. In fact, we wouldn’t even have known it was the root of weedbane we needed without the Appraisal skill.

“Thank you very much for the advice. Are there any other specific materials

that you would recommend we gather at this time of year?”

The staff lady paused in thought for a moment, and then she took out a book from below the counter. “Hmm, at this time of year? Oh, there’s a fruit called dindel that would be a good choice.” She opened the book to a page and pointed at a picture while she told us more details. “You’ll have to venture deeper into the forests around here to find dindel, so it’s not something I would recommend that rookies search for. That especially applies to people who don’t have a firm grasp of their own capabilities.”

She smiled at us as if she was saying “You understand what I mean, don’t you?” and we all nodded in response. Things had gone well for us today, but we weren’t reckless enough to venture deeper into forests the very next day. Well, as long as Haruka was in charge of things, that is. *Touya might just be reckless enough...*

“As you can see from this picture, dindels are somewhat valuable red fruits that are about the size of a fist on average. They’re edible as is and also work well as a dried fruit.”

The picture in the encyclopedia was a fruit that looked like a cross between an apple and a tomato. The text below the picture mentioned that the fruit grew on trees that were at least five meters tall. That five meters minimum wasn’t exactly a good benchmark, however, since apparently most dindel trees had a height of several dozen meters or more.

“However, as you can see from the description, dindels grow near the top of tall trees, so it’s hard for people who aren’t skilled at climbing trees to harvest this fruit. Luckily, your party has two elves in it, so this fruit will be quite profitable for you if you can climb up to harvest it. One dindel fruit goes for anywhere from one hundred to three hundred Rea.”

Wow, that’s quite a lot of money! If that was the amount we could get by selling them to the Adventurers’ Guild, then the market price could be more than five hundred Rea per dindel fruit. It looked no larger than a small apple, and yet it was worth that much! It was basically the equivalent of a high-quality mango in terms of price. If we could harvest a large number of dindel fruits in a day, we’d make more than enough profit. Perhaps it was worth a try.

“Oh, the other staff members seem to be done calculating the total payout for your herbs.” We looked up from the encyclopedia when we heard the staff lady say that. We saw another person approach from behind the counter; he handed the staff lady a tray with some coins on it.

“Let’s see, the total amount comes to 8,730 Rea. That’s impressive! It’s very rare for someone to earn this much from herb gathering alone.”

“Really?” Haruka seemed to be a bit doubtful despite the staff lady’s surprise.

The Help Guide function had been a great help to us when we gathered herbs, but it wasn’t like we were knowledgeable about herbs or their value. If rookies like us could earn this much money our first time gathering herbs, then people who had more experience would surely be able to earn way more.

“Yes. Rookies move on to other quests with better rewards by the time they get used to gathering herbs. It’s possible to earn a decent amount of income more or less safely if one aims to become a professional herb gatherer, but many young adventurers dream about striking gold as full time adventurers, unfortunately...”

From the way she described them with a bitter smile, it sounded like those kinds of adventurers were a source of problems for this staff lady, but it was thanks to them that we could earn money gathering herbs. In a way, it was a good thing for us that such adventurers were common.

“So does that mean it’s fine to turn in more herbs in the future? We gathered quite a lot today.”

“Yes, it’s fine. Most of the herbs are dried and preserved for use, so they can be stored for quite a long time. Also, as I mentioned earlier, there aren’t many adventurers who primarily focus on gathering herbs.”

“I see. We’ll give it our best tomorrow as well. Also, we managed to hunt down a tusk boar. Can we turn in some of the materials we got from the boar here?”

“Yes, you can. The guild will purchase the fangs and fur. As for the meat, you’ll get a slightly better price for it if you bring it to a butcher shop. The guild will also purchase the meat, however, if it’s more convenient for you.”

“We’ll just turn in the fangs and fur.”

“Understood. Please wait for a few minutes.”

I obeyed Haruka’s instructions and placed the bag that had the fangs and fur onto the counter. The staff lady then took the bag with her to the backyard again and returned after a bit with some money.

“Okay, the assessment is complete. The materials were of good quality and quite large, so the total amount comes to 3,500 Rea. Is that fine with you?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, here’s your money. This was very impressive indeed. How did you defeat the tusk boar?”

The staff lady seemed skeptical based on the way she looked at Touya and me as she handed over the money to Haruka. Her gaze seemed to indicate that she was impressed we had managed to defeat a tusk boar without proper equipment like an actual sword. *Yeah, we don’t look like proper adventurers at all. All we have are plain clothes, and our only weapon is Touya’s wooden sword. Well, this is basically like the starting equipment in a generic roleplaying game. Now that I think about it, it’s really weird to start off with nothing more than this, but that’s games for you.*

“Well—”

Touya suddenly butted in and showed off some moves with his wooden sword. “I stabbed the boar in its eyes like this, and then I finished it off just like that!”

Dude, why did you start speaking all of sudden? Look, the staff lady’s really surprised—we haven’t said anything at all until now, since we were leaving the talking to Haruka. Like, yeah, the staff lady is a nice and charming person, but she doesn’t have animal ears, so what gives?

“It only went well because you had Nao to back you up with his magic, remember? Oh, I apologize for not having introduced my party members yet. The person here who’s weirdly proud of having defeated a mere boar is Touya, and the elf behind me is Nao. Our party formation usually has Touya in the front, while Nao and I back him up from behind. As for me—I’m Haruka—I’ve

been and will probably continue to be in charge of negotiations for our party, so I look forward to a long and amicable partnership."

"Nice to meet you. My name is Nao."

"I'm Touya! Pleasure to meet you!"

When Haruka introduced us, I bowed and tried to put on the friendliest smile I could. As for Touya, he grinned and raised one of his hands in the air in a casual gesture. *Touya, is that the character impression you're going for? I mean, it fits you, but aren't you being a bit forward?*

Despite my doubts, the staff lady smiled at us as she bowed in response. "Thank you for taking the time to introduce yourselves. My name is Diola. I primarily work here in this guild as a receptionist, so we'll probably see each other quite often. I look forward to a long and amicable partnership as well."

She must have been an experienced receptionist, since her smile didn't falter at all despite Touya's attitude. *Touya, there's a difference between being friendly and being rude, okay? I better make it clear to him later. It'll directly affect our chances of survival in this world if we leave a bad impression on the receptionist lady due to Touya. We're clueless about this world and need all the help we can get.*

After introducing ourselves, we asked her about which butcher she would recommend. On our way back to the inn, we stopped by the butcher shop to sell the remaining tusk boar meat. The meat had been quite delicious when we'd eaten some back at the bonfire, so it was a bit sad to part with it, but we didn't have the ability to preserve the meat, so it was better than ending up with food poisoning from eating it at a later time. Haruka had dressed the meat skillfully, so we had a decent amount, and it sold for a fairly good price. The butcher even told us that he would buy more if we ended up with spare meat again in the future. We headed straight back to The Slumbering Bear as soon as we were done with that, and then we paid the fee for a few days. That meant we wouldn't have to sleep outside for that duration. It was comforting to know, and we all let out a sigh of relief once we entered our room and sat down on our respective beds. *Man, if only the evil god had given us more than just barely enough money at the beginning!*

“Now then.”

After we had rested in our room a while, Haruka took out the bag that had our money in it and held it up high, smiling.

“We managed to earn around 18,000 Rea without any mishaps! Okay, start clapping!”

Touya and I looked at the bag in Haruka’s hand and applauded loudly.

“This is proof that we can survive in this world!” I exclaimed.

“Yeah, we earned this money by ourselves!” Touya exclaimed.

We couldn’t live off of just this amount of money, of course. Regardless, it was still proof that we could earn money by ourselves, and that was very reassuring to know.

“Man, I kinda feel really happy about this. Or rather, it’s an exciting feeling. Is this how it feels to receive your first paycheck as a responsible member of society?” Touya beamed with a huge smile as he said that, and I probably had a similar expression on my face as well.

It was also the first time since we’d arrived in this world that I had seen Haruka smile from the bottom of her heart. She hugged the bag with our money in it as she voiced her thoughts. “I have no idea what it might feel like, since I’ve never had a part-time job before, but I don’t think the sense of accomplishment would come close to what we achieved here. After all, our lives are actually at stake here in this world, so surely this feels better than it would back on Earth!”

“Oh yeah, I guess this also counts as my first paycheck,” I said. “The only money I’ve earned in my life was just small amounts of allowance from my parents for helping them out with chores.”

As a general rule, we were forbidden from taking on part-time jobs as high school students, so none of us had any work experience. In a way, that meant this was the first paycheck any of us had ever gotten.

“Well, we sure earned more than I thought we would. This was like, what, the equivalent of 180,000 yen in a day’s work? Our current cost of living is roughly 1,000 Rea per day for the three of us combined, so that’s not too bad. Maybe

life in this world is easier than we thought it would be, eh?”

Touya seemed blissful as he speculated about our future prospects, but Haruka gave him a harsh look as soon as she heard his words.

“Naive! That’s naive thinking, Touya! That haphazardness of yours will make the difference between life and death!”

“R-Really?”

Touya looked a bit scared and nervous after Haruka shot down his ideas. Haruka nodded in response and then started to explain in more detail.

“First of all, there’s no social security system in this world! There’s no unemployment insurance, social insurance, health insurance, or welfare programs either! Nobody will help us if we get injured and end up being unable to work, and the same goes if we can’t work due to age. There’s no such thing as a pension in this world, so we’ll deeply regret it if we don’t plan ahead and save money for a house or land while we can still work!”

“I-I see...” Touya seemed overwhelmed by Haruka’s forceful explanation.

“I mean, I get what you’re saying, Haruka, but can’t we at least dream about our future?”

I tried to back Touya up, since I felt bad for him, but Haruka crushed my opinion as well.

“Dream? Do you really think we can survive off of dreams and hope alone? Look, I don’t want to see you two starve to death tucked away in some seedy corner of town.”

Just the two of us? I notice you didn’t include yourself, Haruka. Well, I mean, Haruka can probably take care of herself just fine. I guess it is true that women are more realistic than men.

“I’m not saying you can’t chase dreams, okay? For example, you’re free to chase your dreams of finding an animal-ears wife or even a harem of girls with animal ears, Touya. However, a safe and stable life comes first. Both of you need to keep in mind not to get ahead of yourselves, okay?!”

“Okay!” we said in unison.

It was dangerous to go against Haruka when she was like this. Touya and I exchanged a glance to communicate that thought to each other, and then we both nodded in assent to Haruka's words.

"Good! Realistically speaking, it's not possible to work as full-time adventurers for very long. Our physical energy will start to deteriorate by the time we hit our thirties, and it'll get even worse once we're in our forties. The ideal plan is to spend about twenty years as adventurers earning enough money to save up for our living expenses and medical fees for the next forty to fifty years after we retire."

Whoa, that's not what I thought our lives would be like in this world. What happened to dreams?

"Nao and I can probably continue working as adventurers for a longer period of time, but we'll also live longer, so we'll have more years of old age to save up for. If we want to be safe, then we need to earn and save plenty of money before Touya retires. You need to earn twice as much money if you plan to get married, Touya! If you want to build a harem, then you need to earn even more!"

"Now that you mention it, life does sound like it'll be a struggle. Should we also think about how to earn money after retirement...? Will I actually be able to get married...? Or rather, can I even manage to live by myself in old age...?"

The Touya I saw in front of me now was not the man who had once boasted with shining eyes about how he would get married to a girl with animal ears. What I saw was a man whose eyes were dead and empty at the thought of his future. *Is this the type of anxiety that comes with not having a steady job?* Freedom came with self-sufficiency. There was no social safety net in this world, so if you failed in life, then you would end up either in the slums, as a slave, or outright dead.

"Oh, while we're on this topic, what's it like for ordinary adventurers?"

"Huh? Ordinary adventurers? Um, do you really want to know? You might regret asking."

It was just a random thought that had come to my mind, but Haruka averted her eyes and answered hesitantly.

“The way you worded that makes me want to know even more. Go ahead and tell me, please.”

“You sure? All right, then. There’s no such thing as retirement for ordinary adventurers!”

“Huh?”

What do you mean—they never end up retiring?

“They die way before they even get close to old age!”

“Seriously...?”

“Yep, seriously.”

There seriously wasn’t any room for hope or dreams! Well, according to Haruka, adventurers who became somewhat successful led comfortable lives in old age with the money they had saved up. Some of them would buy a house and land in a village and spend the rest of their lives peacefully as farmers. Adventurers who had no talent got weeded out naturally. Some would die in the middle of quests. Others would run out of money and end up in the slums or as slaves. Clever adventurers would manage to find a steady job eventually and then retire from adventuring. Ordinary adventurers who earned enough that they didn’t have to struggle with daily life were the ones who weren’t able to find a proper time to retire. They would keep on adventuring even as their stamina deteriorated over time, and, as a result, eventually die before old age. That was the average life of an ordinary adventurer.

“So yeah, our goal is to achieve a decently successful life. If we wanted to get by like ordinary adventurers, though, we would probably be fine even if we went through life carefree—like Touya was just now, not thinking about the future.”

“I mean, I’m pretty sure people like you who plan for a safe and steady living are in the minority, Haruka,” I said.

In fact, most young people didn’t plan things out at all. If it was possible to save for retirement and also earn enough to get by in daily life just fine, then there wouldn’t be so many advertisements back on Earth for things like consumer credit and credit cards. If I ever ended up carelessly thinking that I

would be able to earn way more money in the future, then that mentality would make me the very definition of what Haruka described as an ordinary adventurer.

“So yeah, we shouldn’t spend money recklessly just because we have some on hand right now. Also, since we do have enough to survive for a while now, let’s discuss some short-term goals.”

“Huh? Goals? Isn’t the plan to save up money for retirement, Haruka?”

“That’s our long-term goal, Touya. I guess a medium-term goal for you would be to get a wife with animal ears, but the path towards achieving that isn’t exactly very clear. For example, it’s somewhat similar to someone saying that they’ll eventually become very successful in the future. That’s a long-term goal, but it’s not exactly a good one without a clear definition of exactly what counts as success.”

“Look, my goal isn’t the same as a pipe dream like that, okay?”

Touya pouted to express his discontent at the way Haruka described his goal, but it had definitely been a pipe dream a few days ago, before we got reincarnated into this world. However, that dream of his was now something that he could actually pursue. *You never know what will happen in life, I guess.*

“Well, what Haruka mentioned as an example does sound like something a NEET would say,” I said. “They might also say, ‘I’m just resting to charge up my energy for the next step!’ or something similar.”

“Yeah, for sure. A classic response to that would be like, ‘Charging for what? You haven’t used any energy yet,’” said Touya. “Why would someone possibly need to rest at full energy?”

“Mm. They might also talk like a tryhard.”

“Oh yeah, definitely! Things like ‘I’m destined to succeed—just watch me!’ or something like that.”

Of course, Touya and I were talking this way because we were completely biased against NEETs. One thing was for sure, however: how “hard” each tryhard tried would vary from person to person.

“Well, I do agree with Haruka’s opinion that we need a short-term goal. Like, yeah, I want to get a wife with animal ears, but I have absolutely no idea where to start.”

“Mm, it’s important to plan out how you’ll approach your goal, and to make sure that goal is a concrete one with a clear definition for success,” said Haruka. “To put it in tryhard terms, ‘We need to share an agenda, prioritize the tasks we need to tackle, assign resources accordingly, and then commit to the plan that best fits our goals!’”

“Ha ha ha, that definitely sounds like something a tryhard would say!” I said.

“Whoa, for sure, ha ha!” said Touya. “Those words made absolutely no sense to me, but still!”

Touya and I both started laughing uncontrollably when we heard what Haruka said. She was chuckling a bit herself. As Touya had said, it made no sense to me at all. In fact, I could probably understand a different language better than the words I’d just heard.

“In simpler terms, I guess it would be something like ‘Let’s decide on a course of action and what to do first, and then lay out goals based on what we’re capable of,’” said Haruka.

“Mm, that makes more sense,” I said. “So, is our goal going to be to save up money for living expenses to some extent?”

“Yeah. We earned a decent amount of money today, but that’ll disappear in no time if one of us gets gravely injured or can’t work due to sickness.”

If we included all of our expenses—rent at the inn, the fees for lunch and hot water, and money for consumable goods—then we would need to spend roughly 1,000 Rea per day. The amount we had earned today was enough for eighteen days. It was possible that the Robust skill wouldn’t be enough to protect us from things like diarrhea or bone fractures, so ideally we needed to save enough to live at an inn for at least two to three months without difficulties. That meant we would need to save anywhere between 60,000 to 100,000 Rea.

“We also need to buy new equipment and general goods,” said Haruka. “That

includes things like weapons, armor, clothes, and knapsacks for all of us.”

“Yeah. How much do we need for all of that?” I asked.

“Weapons are expensive, so ideally something like at least 500,000 Rea in total?”

“Ugh...”

“Life isn’t that easy for adventurers, eh?” said Touya.

Even if we managed to earn as much daily as we had today, it would take at least a month to save up that much money. However, Haruka was right about our needs.

“Well then, for the time being, let’s do our best to achieve that goal!” said Touya.

“Yeah, I want a weapon as well,” I said.

I wanted to at least look like a proper adventurer; otherwise, it wouldn’t feel like my life as an adventurer had actually started.

“Also, I’ll be in charge of our money for now,” said Haruka. “Is that fine with you two?”

“Yeah, that’s fine. I don’t mind, but it’d be nice if we could get some pocket money from time to time. Right, Nao?”

“Yeah, there’s no point in splitting our money until we have a decent buffer in terms of savings. Maybe I should think of my own life plan eventually as well.”

“Hee hee, that’s a good idea. An elf’s life plan will be quite different from a regular human’s from back on Earth, so feel free to discuss it with me if you ever feel like doing so.” Haruka smiled at me as she said that.

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“Oh yeah, by the way, is it just me, or do the Third Eye and Appraisal skills seem a bit different from other skills?”

We had eaten dinner and bathed and were chatting before bedtime when that thought suddenly hit me.

“What exactly do you mean by different?” Haruka asked.

“Well, uh, I don’t really know how to describe it...”

The other skills we had were basically numerical representations of things that one could learn through training over time, but Third Eye and Appraisal, along with the Help Guide, felt a bit different. These skills gave us information via an augmented reality display window, even though it was information that we wouldn’t know normally. Our status windows also appeared in the same way, but we’d received that information before we were reincarnated, so it made sense if it was just another freebie from the evil god; the status windows contained information we already knew.

On the other hand, the Third Eye skill could pull status information from elsewhere, just as the Appraisal skill could pull item information from elsewhere. If the evil god hadn’t been lying to us when he said this world was a gamelike one with level systems, then that wouldn’t be weird at all, but the very existence of a status system wasn’t common knowledge in this world, so ordinary people didn’t know how to check their status. It was the same for the item information window. With that in mind, these skills were unique “gifts” to us from the evil god, which felt like it went against his warning that there were no cheat skills. *I mean, if it’s only me and my classmates who have these skills in this world, then isn’t that basically cheating?*

“Well, perhaps there actually is a skill system in this world, and the residents of this world can learn the Third Eye and Appraisal skills, except that they just don’t know about all of this,” said Haruka. “Maybe augmented reality display windows are actually normal in this world too. What do you think, Nao?”

“Hmm. Oxygen already existed before man discovered it, and the Earth moved around the sun even back when the Ptolemaic model was still accepted as common sense, so yeah.” *I guess that means it’s possible to know the numerical values of one’s stats and experience points if someone discovers a way to see them in this world.* “However, that still leaves the question of where the Appraisal skill pulls information from. Is there a database like the Akashic records that the skill can access?”

“Come on now—is there any point in questioning a game system, Nao?”

“This world isn’t a game, Touya!”

Touya was acting like it was all a joke. He shrugged and shook his head, but I rebutted his words firmly. *Actually, though, would it be better to treat skills as if they were like a game system? The evil god did say that this was kind of like a game world, but I don't know how much I can trust an "evil" god's words...*

Haruka brought up an idea while I was still racking my brain. "Hmm, I think it could be an external database version of the General Knowledge skill."

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"Basically, the Appraisal skill provides you access to a certain block of information. You can then tap into that block and freely withdraw information from the database as long as the information you want is in that block, and it gets broken down to a visual medium like an augmented reality display window for easier access."

Huh?

"Sorry, I have no idea what you're talking about!"

Touya straight out admitted that he didn't understand anything, so Haruka rephrased her words after some thought.

"What I mean is that it doesn't rely on external references. To put in more practical terms, you can't level up the Appraisal skill no matter how much you use it, and you won't suddenly become able to use the skill on things you can't currently use it on. If you want to increase the number of different types of things you can use Appraisal on, then you'll have to learn and absorb new knowledge from sources like encyclopedias."

"Oh, I get it now. So what that means is that my current Appraisal level is something similar to an EIKEN Grade 2 English Proficiency qualification, and I'll have to study more if I want to achieve Grade 1, right?"

"Yeah. Also, the way you can instantly access information you know with complete accuracy is probably thanks to a function of the skill itself."

For example, once you remembered certain words from vocabulary flashcards, that information would get registered in the database, and if you came across those words again and thought to yourself that you wanted to look them up, an augmented reality window would appear with the information you

wanted. In a way, it seemed like a type of memory improvement skill. That made it sound very useful, but if Haruka's theory was correct, it didn't really seem like a cheat skill.

"What about the Third Eye skill, then, Haruka?" I asked.

That skill was different from Appraisal, since it wasn't like learning different types of herbs from an encyclopedia.

"Hmm, well, have you tried it out yourself, Nao?"

"Yeah, a few times back at the guild."

Most of the time, the skill had only told me whether or not the person I used it on was strong, but it did list skills for some targets.

"If Appraisal isn't anything like an Akashic records system, then how does Third Eye work?"

"This is just another theory, but if it works like I think Appraisal does, then it's possible that the information displayed by the Third Eye skill isn't actually accurate."

"Huh?" *What's the point, then?*

"What I mean is that the information displayed might be based on a variety of sources. For example, the skill might evaluate a person as having a Level 2 proficiency with swords and display that."

"So the information that the skill puts into words is just based on things like the user's own experience, knowledge, or intuition?"

"Yeah. It could be visual cues, like whether the person has a sword or calloused hands or whether they carry themselves in a way that makes them seem like an expert fighter. It might just be things we can judge based on our own experience that the skill puts into words."

After she finished theorizing, Haruka emphasized again that everything she said was just speculation, but I felt like her theories were actually on point.

"Hmm. The evil god said this was a gamelike world, but so far there haven't really been many gamelike elements," I said.

“Yeah, we can’t even check to see what our stats or experience points are,” said Touya. “The only time it actually felt like a game was back during the character creation process before we got reincarnated here.”

“Well, it was thanks to that character creation process that we managed to survive here,” said Haruka.

“Oh yeah, you’re right. We would’ve probably died to that boar today if we had faced it in our previous bodies.”

“Mm. In a way, maybe we should thank the evil god for what he’s done for us?”

When Haruka said that, we all looked at each other. After giving it some thought, we shared a bitter smile. *Yeah, I don’t really feel like saying thanks to the evil god since he left so many gimmicky skills as land mines in our path.*

Chapter 4—Progress?

A week passed. We used that week to work and complete quests, always keeping safety in mind as our first priority. We used the money we earned to purchase new weapons and armor.

The first thing we bought was a hoe. *Well, it's not a weapon, but...* We'd had a lot of trouble disposing of the boar's innards on our first day; that was the first reason we decided to buy a hoe. In fact, we bought it first thing the very next day. Since it was an agricultural tool, it wasn't that expensive, and in fact, that was another reason we bought it, but an even bigger reason was because of...well, toilet circumstances in forests. *I mean, nature calls eventually if you spend half a day in the woods.*

It was awkward to deal with, but it was a natural phenomenon that we couldn't avoid as living beings. However, we couldn't just leave our fine works as is on the ground. It wasn't really about our responsibility as intelligent beings; rather, it was the fact that it would be very unpleasant to accidentally step on something dirty like that, so we absolutely had to dig holes to dispose of it. Well, among the three of us, only Touya dropped a nuke into one of the holes we dug, and he only did it once. The real problem was that with Touya carrying a hoe around, it was like we were going out to work as farmers, not adventurers; it felt weird.

There was also more to this topic about nature's call. Haruka strongly suggested buying some cloth to use as blindfolds, which Touya and I agreed to right away. *I mean, there was no way we could say no.*

We also bought enough new clothes to change and rotate through, along with sturdy leather clothes to serve as armor. Or rather, we bought some pieces of actual leather armor for Touya, since he was our frontline fighter, and that helped us get through the week without any injuries. As for actual weapons, we bought a spear for me and a bow for Haruka. I was able to stab a boar to death after a bit of training, but I wasn't skilled enough to aim for the eyes of a

charging boar like Touya could, so during combat, I played a supporting role. There was also the risk of damaging the boar's fur too much with too many attacks, which would lead to us getting less money for the hide. As for Haruka's skills with the bow, let's just say that cooked birds became part of our diet as well. *Hopefully we can eventually buy a pot to make some bird stew.*

Touya was the only one who didn't have a proper weapon yet, since our plan to buy an actual sword was on hold for now; a good sword was way too expensive. However, the wooden sword had bounced off a boar's head without doing any damage on our first day, so we decided to at least buy an iron cudgel —or, well, a long iron baton. The iron baton helped us defeat boars without damaging their fur, but it meant that Touya's Swordsmanship skill didn't level up. In fact, he got a new skill called Staff Fighting out of it, which was amusing in a way; he swung the baton around in exactly the same way he used his wooden sword, so that was more evidence that this world was different from a game: skills were quite flexible and weren't set in stone.

As for me, I practiced magic every day, so I became somewhat better at casting spells. Or rather, I did get better at magic, but I still wasn't useful in combat. My Fire Arrow would burn a boar's fur, so I was forbidden from using it outside of emergencies.

Haruka, on the other hand, was the real MVP among us. The first thing that came to mind as an example of her importance to our party was her Purification spell from Light Magic. It could cleanse all sorts of dirt and grime, so it was a very useful spell for staying clean. There wasn't a bath or shower available at the inn, so it was thanks to the Purification spell that we could lead normal lives. *All praise Haruka-sama!* Also, people who could use Purification were apparently extremely popular and sought-after among adventurers. It might seem like most adventurers wouldn't care about cleanliness, but the truth was that monsters could easily sniff you out if you were filthy and smelled bad. Thus, most adventurers tried their best to stay clean, and Purification was a very useful spell for that purpose.

In addition to that, Haruka also managed to create a completely new spell that wasn't listed in our status windows. It was a rather simple spell that just created a chunk of ice the size of a ping-pong ball, but it was thanks to that spell

that we could cool and preserve our prey to a certain extent, which meant that we didn't have to return to town right away every time we felled an animal. As for me, I still hadn't managed to create a new spell yet, nope. *It is what it is.*

One skill that ended up being more useful than we thought it would be was Haruka's Sewing skill. Haruka managed to weave a backpack based on suggestions from Touya and me. It was a meticulously crafted masterpiece that took quite some time to complete; it was based on the army-style backpacks that were common back on Earth. It was mostly made out of cloth, with some leather in important places to make it sturdier. It had pockets we could put things inside, along with parts that we could tie together with strings. It was also made so that we could discard it in an instant if we had to during combat, and we could carry it either on our backs or with our hands depending on the situation. A backpack as handy as this was probably unobtainable in or anywhere near this town.

We were originally going to just buy a proper bag, but all we found were simple knapsacks, handbags, and shoulder satchels. We couldn't find anything that looked like a backpack. Luckily, Haruka had the Sewing skill, so we just decided to craft our own backpacks, which she completed after some trial and error. The process placed an extra burden on Haruka, but it turned out to be worthwhile; it was thanks to her that we managed to obtain individual backpacks for all three of us at a fairly cheap material price. These backpacks allowed us to carry a large amount of luggage with us, which meant that we could carry back the spoils of our hunt even if we caught more game than usual in a day. However, the difference in our physical strength was significant, so the amount of luggage Touya carried was at least double the amount that I carried. Sadly, I could only carry slightly more than Haruka, which made me worry somewhat about the fact that I hadn't been very useful so far.

"Nao, can you help me out with something?"

"Hmm? Yeah, sure."

Because of my insecurities about not contributing enough to the group, I always responded with a yes right away whenever Haruka asked for my help like this.

“Just Nao? Am I not needed?” Touya asked.

“Well, I was just thinking about taking a shot at searching for Yuki and Natsuki. It would be safer to have you around, Touya, but you look more or less the same as before, right?”

“I mean, yeah, I have animal ears now, but I’m sure people I know will still recognize me.”

Yuki and Natsuki were girls who we were all good friends with. We had been worried about them this whole time, but we didn’t have the luxury of searching for them while we were still struggling to earn enough for our routine expenses, and unfortunately, we hadn’t bumped into them in the areas that we frequently visited in our daily lives. If we were to search for them now, we would have to walk around areas we hadn’t visited before, which meant that we would also run into a lot of people we hadn’t met before. It would be best to avoid trouble in case we ran into our other classmates. Haruka and I explained all of this to Touya, but he didn’t seem like he understood.

“Huh, really? I can’t tell what my own face looks like right now.”

“Yeah, we don’t have a proper mirror,” I said.

I had only seen my own reflection in water, so I couldn’t tell exactly how different I looked from before. However, if I looked roughly as different as Haruka did, then only people who knew me well would recognize me on sight if we passed each other.

“Hmm, all right. Enjoy your date!”

“It’s nothing romantic, Touya,” said Haruka.

Touya grinned as he joked with us. Haruka and I just responded with dry laughter and then left the inn. *I wish I could enjoy a date with no cares or worries about this new world, but alas...*

“First of all, let’s go buy some cloaks with hoods. Elves stand out in this town—for a different reason than usual.”

“Yeah, there are barely any elves in this town,” I said.

We had passed by a few beastmen in our time here, but we hadn’t seen any

other elves at all. Compared to beastmen, elves had an easier time hiding their ears, so maybe we just hadn't noticed, but either way, there definitely weren't many elves around. We had already been conscious of the looks we'd been getting, but we lacked spare money to buy clothes with hoods, so we went on with our business as usual. Even after we had managed to start earning a stable amount of money, we hadn't really seen a point in hiding our ears after all this time, since we never wandered far from the same places every day. However, we were now planning to visit areas that we hadn't been to before, so it was worth it to buy some cloaks if that would help us avoid troublesome situations.

We arrived at a secondhand clothes store where we had bought articles of clothing a few times before. While we were searching for cloaks that would fit us, Haruka voiced her complaints about how we weren't here for fashion. "It's a shame that we're buying clothes for practical purposes instead of fashion."

"Yeah," I said after a moment's pause. I was agreeing with her out loud, but in reality, I was only pretending. *Honestly, I'm glad I won't be forced to spend a lot of time waiting for Haruka to choose clothes. I hope she never finds out what I really think, though.*

"Hmm, these look like they'll do. They seem fairly sturdy and the quality seems okay. These aren't matching outfits, but oh well."

Haruka had chosen three cloaks after about thirty minutes of searching. They didn't have any holes in them, but they looked a bit dirty. However, her Purification could take care of that to an extent, so these were decent secondhand clothes for our purposes. I asked her why she'd picked out a cloak for Touya, and she said it was because he would need one too, with winter approaching. We purchased the cloaks, put them on over our clothes, and covered our heads with the hoods. That covered our pointed elf ears and made our faces harder to see. I was also holding out my spear to show that we were armed, so if someone still tried to pick a fight with us despite all that, then that someone would probably be a massive idiot.

"Let's start off by searching around the old town district," said Haruka.

Laffan, the city we were staying in, could be roughly divided into four main areas. There was the old town district, the commercial district where many

artisans and shops were located, the new town district that was the main residential area, and the administrative district, which had a lot of governmental facilities along with the residences of the wealthy. The Slumbering Bear was located in the new town district, but the Adventurers' Guild was located in the old town district, which was a bit more dangerous than the other parts of town. It was only natural that many cheap inns were located in the old town district near the guild, and it was common to see adventurers or ruffians around there. We had to visit the old town district every time we went to the guild, but we hadn't explored the more dangerous parts of the district. If Natsuki and Yuki had been here at some point, then it was highly probable that they were gone by now.

"Oh yeah, you asked Diola-san about Natsuki and Yuki, right?" I asked.

"Of course. I don't exactly have proof, but I'm fairly sure that Natsuki and Yuki weren't among the girls around our age who registered recently."

They might have registered under different names, or they might have looked different if, like us, they were something other than human now, but it wasn't something we could be absolutely sure about.

"However, there were some names that definitely sounded like they were our classmates."

"So just like we thought?"

"I did ask Diola-san to keep quiet about them, but I'm not sure if that'll do anything..."

"I guess it all depends on how Diola-san feels about this."

The concept of personal privacy definitely didn't exist in this world. Diola-san wasn't an information broker by any means, but information was something that one could purchase with the right amount of money.

"Well, there's no point in worrying about it, so let's just prioritize our search for Natsuki and Yuki," said Haruka.

"Mm."

The old town district was exactly what its name implied—it was the area

where people had resided back when Laffan was still just a village. Thus, there were still a lot of houses that covered large tracts of land, but most of the district was a mess of houses that had decayed over time. We looked in the cheap inns and taverns, but it was hard for us to gather information, since we had no experience doing so. All we could do was check the faces of the people inside. It was hard to tell if this was actually productive or not. We also poked around narrow alleys and looked for people who were walking around, but we didn't find anyone. There wasn't really anything else we could do, however.

"Do you really think we'll find them like this, Haruka?"

"Well, if they're in this town, then it's possible. Everyone needs to earn money to survive, after all."

"If they didn't register at the Adventurers' Guild, then their other options would be part-time work at restaurants or something similar, right?"

"Mm. Those are about the only places that'll hire people regardless of their background. Well, there are some worse 'options,' but let's not talk about those..."

Haruka looked gloomy as she cut herself off. There were many worst-case scenarios, like if Natsuki and Yuki had been captured by criminals, forced into prostitution, or were already dead, but there was no point in worrying about such things when we hadn't found any clues yet.

I wanted to cheer Haruka up and shift her focus away from dark thoughts, so I asked her a question after I took a look at our surroundings. "Oh yeah, I've been wondering about something for a while. We passed by a lot of land that looked like farms here and there. What do you know about that?"

"They're probably farms that have been here for a long time. Apparently, most of the previous residents sold their land here and moved to the new town district, but there appear to be some people who still live here."

Occasionally, we passed by farmholds that seemed to appear out of nowhere between the rows of smaller houses. Such farmholds covered a large area of land; it was as if they were crowding out the other houses. There were large houses in the middle of the farmland along with fields and gardens, and some of the houses were surrounded by groves of trees, so they stood out from their

surroundings.

“Those fields seem quite large for what look like kitchen gardens. And what about those trees?”

“Mm, the land here isn’t being put to good use at all, considering that the town’s surrounded by walls now. The lord of this town sure is kind to allow this.”

“Yeah. A person with that much power would normally confiscate the land to sell.”

It was fairly obvious that it would cost a lot of money to build walls. The currently active farms were located outside of the town’s walls, so with that in mind, the farms inside would normally be forcibly subjected to land readjustment. Perhaps the lord really was kind and considerate of the town’s residents, as Haruka had implied.

“Also, do you have any idea what those strange creatures crawling around the gardens are?”

“Oh, those things? Well...”

Haruka responded to my question with an expression of hesitation visible on her face, as if she was reluctant to describe them. I didn’t really know how to describe them myself. They sort of looked like gray reptiles. They were about the size of a small dog. The best way to describe them would be as fat lizards that had gotten shrunk down, I guess? A more exact comparison would be Godzilla with a shorter tail. *Well, they appear to be bipedal, at least*. They walked slowly through the gardens and rolled around on their backs to bathe in the sun. There were at least ten of them on each farm. Most of them seemed to live in the gardens of the larger farms.

“They’re livestock, right, Haruka?”

There was no way those creatures were wild animals. They didn’t look like they could fly, and I doubt they came in from outside the gates. My Scout skill didn’t react to them, so they probably weren’t dangerous, but there were too many of them to be considered pets, and only rich people could afford to keep pets in this world.

“Well, uh, yeah, they’re livestock.”

Haruka still sounded like she was hesitant about something, but I’d more or less expected that they were livestock.

“Hmm, I guess some reptiles are edible, such as alligators.”

“Uh, I hate to break it to you, but meat isn’t the main thing these animals produce.”

“Huh?”

“These animals are called jabbs, and it’s their eggs that are gathered for consumption.”

“The eggs?! Well then, this might be a trite thing to say, but reptile eggs gross me out a bit. I’d rather not eat that kind of thing if I can avoid it.” *Reptile eggs seem like they’d be, like, slimy or something. I mean, I haven’t actually seen one myself, but still.*

“I have bad news for you, Nao.”

“Don’t tell me...”

“You’ve already eaten those eggs before. Remember earlier this week when you ate eggs that you thought were chicken eggs? Those were actually jabb eggs.”

“Seriously?! I didn’t want to know that! I can’t believe I thought those eggs were delicious when I ate them!”

“Yeah, that’s why I didn’t say anything about it back then.”



Haruka folded her arms together and nodded, but I wasn't satisfied with her answer.

"Couldn't you have just continued to not say anything about it?"

"Well, you ended up seeing some jabbs here, so yeah. It would bother you more if I glossed over what they were after this, wouldn't it?"

"I mean, yeah, it would for sure."

I had happily eaten those eggs when I didn't know what they actually were, so it wouldn't be a problem if I just didn't think about them. *All right, once I get back, I'll tell Touya exactly what kind of eggs he ate. It's not because I want to drag him down with me or anything, nope. It's just common sense, so I wouldn't want my good friend Touya to embarrass himself at some point due to not knowing, yep.*

"Well, I'm still really surprised that those rich-tasting eggs were actually reptile eggs."

"Yeah, I didn't expect that taste either. I was hesitant to eat them at first, since I knew what they were from my General Knowledge skill, but I didn't mind once I actually ate some. Jabbs are also quite easy to raise and take care of as livestock."

According to Haruka, most jabbs were vigorous omnivores, so you could use leftovers and vegetable scraps to feed them.

They were very peaceful animals as well, and wouldn't fight over territory. They didn't screech loudly like chickens did, so it was possible to raise them even in the middle of residential areas.

"The only real downside to jabbs is that they don't lay eggs as frequently as chickens do, and they also don't sit on their eggs to help hatch them, so it takes extra effort to increase their population."

"That makes sense, since they're reptiles. Wait, wouldn't the eggs just hatch by themselves, then?"

"I'm not too sure, but that's probably what happens in the wild. Eggs from domesticated jabbs seem to be artificially incubated."

“Oh right, they’re raised as livestock. What about their meat?”

“Well, you probably won’t encounter jabb meat as part of a meal in restaurants or food stalls.”

“I see.” I wasn’t sure if I should be relieved or not. I had already eaten the eggs, so it wouldn’t really make a difference at this point to eat the meat if I somehow came across it. “Wait, if it’s possible to obtain eggs, then would it be possible to create mayonnaise?”

“Hm? Do you like mayonnaise, Nao? I don’t remember you enjoying mayonnaise a lot.”

It seemed like Haruka found it strange that I’d brought up mayonnaise, so I went ahead and explained why.

“Well, no, it’s not something I like that much, but I was just thinking that if we poured mayonnaise on things that didn’t taste too good, then it would be easier to wolf them down, right?”

I felt like a lot of people would agree with me on this. *I mean, isn’t that a common childhood memory—pouring mayonnaise on vegetables you didn’t really like so that they wouldn’t taste as bad?* It wasn’t mayonnaise itself that was important; I just wanted some kind of seasoning or dressing that we could use with food that didn’t taste too good in order to make it easier to eat.

“Okay, I understand what you mean, so I can try to make some mayonnaise later. Oh, actually, it might be best to wait until I learn the Disinfect spell, since raw eggs are an ingredient.”

“Hm? I thought mayonnaise made with raw eggs was safe because it also contained vinegar, wasn’t it?” I also remembered something about how vinegar would keep the mayonnaise from spoiling, despite raw eggs being an ingredient.

“Well, that depends on whether the problem you’re worrying about is salmonella. Raw eggs aren’t commonly consumed in this world, and it would be dangerous if there were bacteria that vinegar couldn’t kill off, right?”

“Yeah, that’s true. There are definitely bacteria that vinegar can’t kill off.”

I had seen news before about foodborne bacteria that were immune to alcohol and had to be killed with chlorine. *Now that I think about it, aren't bacteria that can be killed off by nothing more than vinegar quite weak? It's probably a bad idea to assume that these eggs are the same as chicken eggs back on Earth. Well, they're not even chicken eggs in the first place, so yeah.*

"Okay, yeah, it does sound dangerous. I guess I'll just look forward to it some day in the future."

"Mm. I'll try to create some mayonnaise when I can, so just wait patiently until then, Nao."

Our livelihood would probably be completely stable by then. At least, that was what I hoped our future would be like.

I continued to chat with Haruka as we searched far and wide throughout the old town district, but we didn't find Natsuki or Yuki. We then went to search the other three districts of the town and searched around until sunset. However, we didn't find Natsuki and Yuki, or even any clues as to where they might have gone, so we wearily headed back to our inn.

★★★★★★★★★

"Oh yeah, Touya, Nao, don't you two think it's time for a change? I think we're ready to venture deeper into the forest now."

Our daily lives had been fairly stable recently, and we had established a rough routine. We would wake up early in the morning and then head out for work. We would return to town and finish selling the day's spoils before sunset. Afterwards, we would practice our individual abilities, such as sword swinging and magic, until it was time for dinner. We also used that block of spare time to finish other business or tasks. We had searched for Natsuki and Yuki multiple times during that period, but we still hadn't found any clues. We were drawing closer to the conclusion that they weren't in this town.

After we finished dinner, Haruka would cast Purification on all of us. Some of us would then bathe ourselves in water if we felt like it that day. We would spend the remaining time before bed just chatting with each other about what we should do next. It was in the middle of one of these chats that Haruka brought up a new course of action.

“Well, yeah, we should be fine now, I think...?”

Touya didn’t sound very confident when he replied, but that was probably because of what had happened yesterday. We were able to hunt the tusk boars that appeared near the entrance of the east forest now, but we encountered a large bear instead yesterday. It was called a wipe bear, and it stood about three meters tall. That height and size had been very intimidating to us. Touya had bravely attacked the bear with his long iron baton, but the bear had barely taken any damage, and it had been hard to aim for vital spots like its eyes due to its height. I had jumped into the fray with my spear, and Haruka had backed us up with her bow, but the bear’s thick fur had blunted our attacks, so we hadn’t been able to do any real damage.

In the end, we had decided to forget trying to defeat it without damaging its fur and had gone all out. We had somehow managed to defeat it thanks to not holding back on our mana usage, along with the fact that Haruka had landed arrows in its eyes. However, it had been a close call, and it had been the first time since I’d come to this world that I had felt like my life was in danger.

On top of all that, the meat that we had fought so hard to obtain and bring back to the guild was worth even less than tusk boar meat. The reason was that although wipe bear meat was fairly rare, it didn’t taste very good, so it didn’t go for much relative to its rarity. *Tusk boar meat is definitely delicious, so I guess that makes sense.*

As for the bear’s fur, it would fetch a decent price in good condition, but the fur we brought back wasn’t in good condition at all, so we barely got anything for it. The encounter with the bear hadn’t been worth it at all relative to how dangerous it had been. On the bright side, Diola-san had told us that it was rare to come across wipe bears, so we probably wouldn’t encounter them that often in the future. We would have had to rethink our plans if such bears were actually a common encounter.

One thing that was common, however, was for rookie adventurers to get wiped out when they encountered a wipe bear. *Sure, wipe bears aren’t a common encounter, but rookies will die if they do happen to meet one, right?* We had only survived thanks to Haruka’s archery and my magic, and also thanks to Touya shielding us in his frontline role, so it made sense that most rookies

would die if they encountered a wipe bear. But at this point, we weren't really rookies anymore, either as adventurers or in terms of our skill levels.

"Well, I'm not against the idea. Is it because of dindels that you want to try going deeper into the forest?" I asked. "Do we really have to go for them?"

Dindel was the fruit that we had heard about from Diola-san on our first day. They could only be found fairly deep into the forest near this area. Each dindel could be exchanged at the guild for anywhere from one hundred to three hundred Rea, but our daily income was stable around thirty thousand to forty thousand Rea thanks to additional income from tusk boars. If we wanted to earn that much from dindels, assuming we got an average price of two hundred Rea per dindel, then we would have to bring back about two hundred dindels. *Sure, we have proper backpacks now thanks to Haruka, but can we really bring back two hundred dindels? They're each, like, the size of a small apple.*

"If we sold dindels as is, then we would only earn as much as we do now with boars, but dindel fruits can go for much more if we can process them well, so it's entirely possible to earn double our current income."

According to Haruka, the value of dindel fruits would more than double if you processed them properly and turned them into dried fruits without reducing their size. However, it was very difficult to preserve and dry a fruit that large while making sure it didn't rot and without cutting it apart, so specialized knowledge was necessary. That knowledge was the reason why they were so valuable, but Haruka said that she could deal with all of that via magic. In addition, if we dried dindels so that they would last longer before going bad, then we could sell them ourselves without having to sell them at the guild, which meant that we could get even more money per dindel.

"Well, if we spend time selling dindels ourselves, then we lose out on time we could spend gathering more dindels, so we'll have to think about whether it's worth it or not."

"Hmm, I see. Wait, did you learn another new spell, Haruka?!"

"Well, it's just a spell that lets me dry things. It's nothing special, but it's useful for drying laundry."

Oh, is that why Haruka hasn't been hanging her laundry in our room lately? I

thought she was just wearing clothes that she used Purification on like Touya and I were doing.

"You say it's nothing special, but I think that's pretty amazing," said Touya. "Oh yeah, Nao, I was wondering—how many new spells have you learned, sir?"

"Zero."

"Huh? What did you say? I didn't hear you." Touya feigned deafness and put his hands to his ears while he asked me to repeat myself.

"Zero, damn it!" *I should've expected nothing less from my childhood friend. He knows exactly how to get on my nerves!*

"Don't worry, Nao. I won't abandon you even if your talent dries up, so rest easy, okay?" Haruka smiled compassionately and spread her arms towards me when she said that, but it didn't make me happy at all.

Well, actually, I feel a bit happy, but I feel even more frustrated. "I'd rather take money than pity—I mean, can you teach me the tricks to learn new spells, Haruka?"

"Tricks, you say? Hmm, well, my best advice for you would be to picture in your mind not just the goal, but also the process leading up to that goal, I guess?"

One example that Haruka mentioned was the Dry spell that she had learned recently. The way she used this spell was by thinking about how she wanted to remove the water content inside the target of her spell instead of just thinking of the word "dry" by itself. In addition, the amount of mana required for a spell would differ depending on the steps taken towards the result, even if the result was the same for different methods. For example, one method would be to make the water molecules move faster to generate heat so they evaporated, and another method would be to squeeze the water out of the target. In this case, the second method would require less mana. The first method would still leave lingering heat even after the target was dried, so that heat would increase the amount of mana required as a result. *Well, that was Haruka's theory about how it worked.*

"I see. Thanks—I'll keep this in mind while I try things out. Wait, if that first

method counts for Water Magic, couldn't you replicate a microwave oven like that?"

Microwave ovens generated microwaves that caused water molecules to vibrate, and that produced heat. If Haruka's Dry spell actually moved water molecules around, then maybe it was possible to stop the process at the heat stage before the water evaporated. If it was possible to control the spell like that, we could use it to warm up food.

"Well, actually, I'm still testing things out, so I'm not quite there yet."

"Oh, so if things go well, then we'll be able to eat many more different sorts of foods! I'll be waiting for good news, Haruka! Well, I guess you could do it as well, Nao, but yeah..."

We'd started to take lunch from the inn every day after we had obtained a decent amount of money. Food that we hunted down and cooked ourselves was delicious, but it would take quite a lot of time to do all of that. Thus, we brought food from the inn with us to save time, but the food was cold by the time we ate it. Even though the inn's meals were decent, they didn't taste good when cold. I had tried to warm up our meals with my Ignite spell, but things hadn't gone very well, and that was why Touya was kind of making fun of me.

"Ugh! Just wash your back, Touya! I'll show you eventually and develop a useful spell myself!"

"Wash your back? What do you mean?"

"Huh? Oh, my bad, I meant to say just wait and see."

Well, I guess waiting around for somebody while naked is one way to express excitement. Wait, what am I talking about?

"Nao, developing useful spells for daily life is fine and all, but don't forget about spells for combat as well, okay?" said Haruka.

Oh, yeah, of course. I'll apply myself to developing those as well, Haruka. I had practiced my Fire Arrow spell in an attempt to compress the flames so that they wouldn't burn an animal's fur, but I hadn't had any success so far. It wasn't a new spell, so I had no problems using the spell itself, but I couldn't compress the arrow to my goal of somewhere between one to two centimeters. However,

I had managed to accomplish my other goal of being able to compress the arrows without a decrease in the potency of the spell, so that project was close to complete. *Well, I hope it is.*

"Okay, so does that mean you both agree with my idea of going further into the forest? We need to make some progress, or we might end up stuck as ordinary adventurers like this."

As in the type of ordinary adventurers who die midway through life? That's definitely bad. We needed to maintain our spirit of self-improvement. Our goal was to become *successful* adventurers.

"Well, to be honest, there is something I'm a bit worried about." I had just nodded in response to Haruka's request for confirmation, but Touya shook his head after some thought and brought up what was bothering him. "Sure, wipe bears aren't a common encounter, but my weapon did no damage to one, right? If we can buy new weapons, then I'll be down for going deeper into the forest."

It wasn't exactly like Touya had done no damage at all to the bear, but it was my spear and magic that had dealt it fatal wounds. His current strength wasn't enough to deal significant damage with a blunt weapon against a wipe bear's natural armor.

Haruka seemed to be reflecting on how things had gone against that bear as well, and she nodded after some thought. "Hmm, that's true. You do need a new weapon. We'll have to burn through a bit of our savings, but we have enough to spare right now. Are you going to use a one-handed sword?"

"It would be cool to use a two-handed sword as a beastman, but I'm our only frontline, so that's not really a good option. It would be safer to go for a more defense-oriented style with a one-handed sword along with a shield, right?"

"Yeah, that would fit our current formation and combat style better," said Haruka.

"Mm. That would be ideal," I said.

In terms of defensive capabilities, Haruka and I were outright paper—just about anything could slice through us easily. We were elves, so it was a given

that we weren't strong physically. Touya would probably survive even if he took a whack from a wipe bear, but Haruka and I would probably break if we got hit. By break, I meant physically, not mentally. I was honestly very impressed by Touya's ability to stand toe to toe against a bear like that.

"Well, we all have our own roles in combat. Oh, make sure you choose good gear, okay? It's not just my life on the line, since I'm responsible for guarding both of you!" Touya smiled as he said that.

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We spent as much as we reasonably could on Touya's new sword and shield. He was our frontline tank, after all. If enemies managed to get past him, then I probably wouldn't be able to deal with them myself, so there was no point in being stingy with these purchases.

We spent a day for Touya to get used to his new gear, and then we ventured further into the forest the next day. Compared to the outskirts of the forest, it was harder to traverse, which was probably because very few people ventured this deep. Touya led the way through, and we stepped on undergrowth as we cleared tree branches with Touya's new sword to forge our path. We weren't walking around aimlessly, of course. We had a rough idea of where to go, since we had asked Diola-san beforehand. She had requested a fee of three dindel fruits for that information, but it was definitely worth the price, since we wouldn't have to search aimlessly in the forest.

"I gotta say, though, I'm a bit sad that this is the first use of my new sword..."

"It is what it is. A proper hatchet would cost a decent amount of money, on top of being additional luggage," said Haruka. "Besides, it's not like that broadsword of yours has a really sharp edge, so it's not that much of a problem, right?"

Most swords in this world were crafted for smashing as blunt weapons instead of slashing through objects. That didn't mean they weren't forged properly, though. They were definitely sharper than long iron batons, but only expensive masterpieces would be able to slice through things like butter. Daggers and knives had proper sharp edges in this world as well, but broadswords were more useful for adventurers due to the importance of

durability. It wasn't possible to wash and sharpen weapons after each slash or cut, after all.

"What should we do about enemies that we encounter on the way, Haruka?" I asked. "Should we hunt them for materials to bring back with us?"

"No, we should avoid combat if possible. We can hunt boars on our way back if we still have time and energy, though."

"Okay."

I had gotten used to how my skills worked, so I was able to tell apart targets that I had detected with my Scout skill. I could scan quite far if I focused on using the skill, so it was fairly easy to avoid boars now if we wanted to do so.

"However, if we encounter monsters, then we should fight them. That's one of our other objectives."

We had two objectives here that Haruka had brought up, and we needed to complete both to make progress as adventurers. One of those objectives was to defeat monsters in combat. More specifically, we needed to defeat humanoid monsters in combat. It was going to be our first step towards fighting human enemies, such as bandits. There weren't that many bandits in this area, but apparently some areas in this world were rife with them, and it was more dangerous to get attacked by bandits than monsters there.

"Bandits, eh? Man, so they do exist in this world." Touya sighed as he said that, The reason this topic hadn't been discussed before was because we hadn't encountered any so far due to this area being peaceful.

"There were bandits back on Earth too, you know?" I said. "Purse snatchers are basically a type of bandit."

The difference with purse snatchers was that most didn't kill to steal. In certain countries, it was common sense not to stop while driving, even at red lights. That was because you would get attacked if you stopped in the middle of the road, and the police in those countries wouldn't do anything. They would just say it was the driver's fault for stopping, apparently.

"Well, the difference in this world is that we can defend ourselves without getting in trouble here."

Even if the person was a robber, it was still a crime to kill them back in Japan. It was very difficult to meet the legal requirements for self-defense for most situations.

“Hmm, can we really defeat humanoid enemies, though?” I asked.

“Well, would you be able to defeat a gorilla if one attacked you?” Haruka asked.

“Oh yeah, gorillas have very strong grips. Some even throw their dung at you,” said Touya. “Well, we’ll probably be fine, since we were able to defeat a bear.”

The only gorillas that throw dung at people are the ones in zoos. Well, I’ve never met a wild gorilla, so maybe they throw dung as well.

“Goblins should be fine as well, then,” said Haruka. “Goblins look closer to humans than gorillas do, after all.”

“That makes sense, now that you put it that way.” That example made me feel like I would be okay as well.

“Besides, can bandits actually be classified as humans in the first place? They’re more like wild animals that make noises somewhat similar to human words, but that’s about it.”

“Whew, that’s a hot take, Haruka,” I said.

“Well, I just think that thugs are the bane of society. I hate how things like extortion, shoplifting, and bike theft are just classified as misdemeanors! It’s absolutely ridiculous!”

“Yeah, I agree with you on things like bike and umbrella theft, Haruka! I really want to beat the crap out of people who do things like that!” Touya nodded and eagerly agreed to what Haruka said.

I felt the same way he did. It wasn’t the price of the stolen items that irritated me, but rather the nuisances that would assail me afterwards. For example, I would get soaked in the rain instead of whoever had stolen my umbrella, and I would have to walk a long distance on foot or be forced to use a bus or train if my bike got stolen. Once, I’d had to walk home without an umbrella because it

had gotten stolen, and I had seen a river on my way back. When I saw that river, I'd wished that the thief was nearby so I could dunk his ass in and send the guy swimming. However, my anger paled in comparison to Haruka's.

"Exactly! They're all crimes, so all of the perpetrators should be disposed of one way or another!" Haruka yelled out some spicy words as an indication of how furious she was.

Well, those words were reasonable from her perspective. Objectively speaking, Haruka and her friends were girls who were definitely above average in the looks department, and that meant that they had sometimes found themselves in troublesome situations as a result. Nothing had ever happened when Haruka hung out with just Touya and me, but whenever she'd gone out with just her girlfriends, they had often gotten unwanted attention from guys who tried to hit on them. In fact, there had been some occasions when it had led to the police getting involved. In addition, Haruka had somewhat of a natural inclination to take care of and look out for others, so she had often found herself getting involved to save her friends from nasty situations. *Well, that's just what I've heard, but knowing her, it's definitely true.*

"Especially rapists! They should be castrated immediately! Their genes have no place or value in this world!"

Haruka seemed to have recalled an unpleasant memory as she grimaced and continued to vent out her frustrations. *Yeah, people who can't control themselves like that are definitely human pests. However, that doesn't automatically apply to their children. Even if the pregnancy was against their will, there are some victims who still give birth to those children.*

"Um, Haruka, I agree with you for the most part, but it's not like children can choose what genes they're born with, right?"

I placed one of my hands on Haruka's shoulders as I tried to calm her down with my words, and Haruka seemed to realize that she had lost her cool, since she coughed awkwardly and averted her eyes.

"Y-Yeah, my bad. Perhaps I went overboard by saying genes. However, considering the mental damage that victims suffer and the chance of rapists offending again, I definitely think some kind of permanent physical punishment

is needed. Wouldn't it be terrifying for a victim to know that the person who raped them could be released back into society within a few years and could be living somewhere nearby?"

Haruka was still a bit extreme even after she had calmed down. *Well, I understand why she feels this way.*

"Hey, Nao, why's Haruka so angry right now?" Touya whispered.

"Oh right, I forgot that you don't know about this, Touya," I whispered back. "You see, a girl who was Haruka's friend got assaulted by a rapist before. Haruka managed to save her right before the rapist could actually do anything, but you know..."

"Mm, that would definitely be a traumatic experience for the victim."

Haruka had been quite scary and irritated for a while after that happened. It was a tough time for me too; I'd had to be careful around her and had been forced to do various things to placate her, even though I had nothing to do with the incident.

"Also, why is it that society actually tries to give rapists another chance to start over? What about the victims? They're the ones who can't start over due to the lifelong wound inflicted on them by rapists!"

Yeah, if you had friends or family who were assaulted by rapists, then there was no way you'd think those criminals needed a chance to start over. Rather, more common thoughts would be things like "Castrate them!" or "Keep them in jail!" so that the victims wouldn't have to suffer more. That would be followed up with something like "The victims' lives were ruined because of them, and you're saying the perpetrators should get a chance to redeem themselves?" and so on.

"Well, it's probably different in this world in that there's nothing to protect us," said Haruka. "If we lose a fight against bandits, then you two will probably get killed, and I'll probably get raped before I get killed. Just keep this in mind at all times when facing enemies like bandits or goblins."

"Oh, yeah, with that in mind, I feel like I won't hesitate to kill bandits who want to kill us," said Touya.

“Yeah. To put it in extreme terms, human rights and the idea of killing being wrong...those are just the luxuries of a prosperous society.”

There was no way we could hold back in a life or death fight against criminals. However, whether or not we could steel ourselves to kill other humanoid beings in real time was a different story. *I guess it’s a good thing that we discussed this topic now so that we won’t hesitate when the time comes.*

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Well, that was how our discussion about humanoids went. However, we luckily (or unluckily) didn’t come across any goblins on our way to our destination in the forest. My Scout skill did detect some boars, but we managed to avoid them since it detected them before we were close. From the time we entered the forest, it took us about an hour to reach our destination. We managed to get here despite having only a rough idea of where to go due to the fact that the dindel tree we found was much taller than the other trees around it.

“Whew, this tree is quite different from what I expected. We were told about this, but it’s very tall,” said Touya.

“How tall are these things?” I asked. “It looks taller than your average apartment building, right?”

“It’s probably at least fifty meters tall,” said Haruka. “Well, that’s just a rough estimate.”

The tree we were looking up at was more than twice as tall as the other trees nearby. I used my Hawk’s Eye skill to glance at its top, and I could barely see some red fruits, so this was probably the dindel tree that we were searching for. The trunk of the tree was extremely thick, but nowhere near as straight as a cedar; rather, it had spreading branches like a camphor tree. At the same time, it gave off an imposing presence due its sheer height. I had seen some of the largest camphor trees in Japan, but the dindel tree in front of me looked like it was at least double both their height and width.

“Whoa, that’s amazing. As elves, can you two actually climb this tree? I definitely can’t do it. I can’t even see the top of the tree—kind of like the Tokyo Skytree.”

“It’s not that tall, Touya,” said Haruka. “A closer example would be something like Tsutenkaku Tower.”

“That’s quite a downgrade...”

The height of the Tokyo Skytree was 634 meters, if I recall correctly. I wasn’t sure about the height of the Tsutenkaku Tower, but I would guess it was somewhere around a hundred meters? *I guess it is a downgrade...*

“People from Kansai would get angry at you for calling that a downgrade, Touya.”

“I mean, surely people from Kansai don’t think the Tsutenkaku can compare with the Tokyo Skytree, right?”

“It’s still a tall building, regardless, if you were to climb it yourself.”

“Yeah, especially since we’ll have to do something similar to free climbing,” I said.

We don’t even have carabiners to help us with the climb. I wouldn’t even think of trying to climb this tree if I wasn’t an elf. Sure, it was a tall tree, but I was confident I could do it due to the experience I had accumulated climbing trees in the forest many times over the past week.

“Oh yeah, does nobody actually try to gather dindels? I saw a lot near the top with my skill, so wouldn’t it be really profitable?”

“This isn’t only the dindel tree in this forest, Nao. Besides, you also have to factor in the amount of time it takes to get here.”

“Right, I forgot about that.”

It had taken us an hour to get here from the entrance of the forest. If we counted the amount of time needed for the trip here and back to town, we would realistically only have about two to three hours of time to gather dindel fruits. We would be able to save some time from our second attempt onward, since we would know a path that we didn’t have to clear, but it would still be a long trip. Even if we camped out here, there was a limit to the amount of dindel fruits we could actually hoard and carry back.

“Also, not everyone can climb dindel trees. It would be difficult for you, right,

Touya?”

Touya shook his head vigorously, as if to say it was an impossible task for him. “Absolutely no way. This is too scary for me!”

Oh right, you need to actually be able to climb this tree in the first place. The monetary reward for dindel fruits was fairly normal in terms of what rookies could earn, but the only problem was that not everybody was capable of taking on this task. It would be fairly easy for elves due to their racial trait of being talented at maneuvering around on trees without losing their balance. If you weren’t an elf, then you would have to be very talented at climbing trees for this.

“There’s also the painful part of having to actually bring down the dindel fruits from all the way up there.” Haruka pointed at the top of the tree as she said that.

In a way, that was the most difficult part of gathering dindel fruits. It wasn’t possible to just throw the fruit down to the ground due to how high in the air they were. There were branches in the way as well, and it was also impossible for someone on the ground to catch them. It would be like asking someone to catch over a hundred apples thrown from the top of an apartment building. Even if you tied a bag to carry them down faster, the branches would still get in the way, so you would have to do it slowly, with periodic stops along the way. That would require spending more time on the gathering process itself, which would further reduce the total profit relative to time spent.

“Thankfully, we have army-style backpacks, so that makes it easier,” I said.

The advantage of a backpack was that both of our hands would be free, and since they would be strapped to our bodies, they wouldn’t really affect our sense of balance on the tree. Those excellent qualities were probably the reason the military commonly used backpacks like these.

“So, what should I do?” Touya asked. “Should I just wait here on the ground?”

“No, it would be dangerous for you to be alone in this forest, so it’s probably best for you to climb up and stay on the lowest branch of the tree.”

Oh yeah, if Haruka and I are the ones who’ll be climbing to the top, then

Touya will be alone. Touya can defeat a boar by himself, but it could be dangerous if he encountered goblins for the first time without help.

"The lowest branch? You mean that one?" Touya looked up at a branch as he said that. It was about five meters up from the root. It was basically the equivalent to the roof of a two-story building. "That's quite high."

"Oh yeah, Haruka, how are the two of us even supposed to reach that branch in the first place? It's not reachable by hand."

Our physical abilities were improved compared to before, but not to the point where we could jump up all the way to a branch that was five meters up in the air. The area near the root of the tree was also fairly straight compared to the rest of the tree, and there weren't really any burls we could use to help us climb up. There were a lot of branches from the lowest one onward that we could hop across, so it would be fairly easy from there, but the problem was how to get to that lowest branch in the first place.

"Don't worry, I thought of that beforehand. The first step before doing anything is to gather information, right?" Haruka cocked her head slightly as she looked at me.

Uh, sorry, I didn't gather any information on my end. I thought all I needed to know was where we were going...

"I prepared a tool for us to use." Haruka took a long rope out of her backpack as she said that.

That's it? I had some rope on me as well, since she had told me to bring some.

"Throw the rope up like this!"

Oh, there's a weight at the end of the rope. The rope flew over the branch she aimed at, and the weighted end fell to the ground.

"Hold both ends of the rope like this, and then pull them like this."

As she pulled on the rope, it drew tight around the branch where it met the trunk of the tree.

"All we need to do now is hold on to this rope while we climb up."

As soon as she finished speaking, Haruka used the few burls that existed as

footing and started climbing up along the rope. She reached the lowest branch in no time.

“Damn, you made it look easy. Can you do it too, Nao?”

“Hmm, yeah, probably.”

It would have been impossible with my old body back on Earth, but I felt like I could do this just fine as an elf.

“Alley-oop!”

Oh, that was easy. I managed to climb up right next to Haruka in one go. It looked like I could perform feats like this just fine.

“I’m not as good as you are at this, Nao. Oh well, I should be fine with the rope.”

Touya grabbed the rope and pulled on it a few times, then grasped it firmly and climbed up. *Oh, he’s basically doing rappelling, except he’s going up instead of down.* Haruka and I had used the trunk of the tree as footing, but Touya was using only his own muscles to lift his entire weight and luggage, so it required a lot of strength.

“Whew, there we go. What should I do from here?”

Touya gave us a somewhat perplexed look after he reached the top of the rope. It would be possible to grab onto thin branches and climb up from there, but the branch we were standing on at the moment was at least fifty centimeters thick. On top of that, it had a rope dangling below it, so it was already difficult to move up here. Haruka and I had gotten here by using the trunk as footing, but Touya couldn’t do that. *We should’ve probably tied a rope to another branch before he got up here.*

“All right, grab my hand.”

“Thanks.”

I extended my hand to Touya and pulled him up. I didn’t have that much muscle, but I had enough to pull one person up, and Touya himself was very nimble due to being a beastman, so it wasn’t that hard.

“Okay, are we good to go? We’ll be going on ahead, Touya,” said Haruka.

Touya was going to hold the fort here on the lowest branch while we were gone. He would probably be bored out of his mind for a few hours here with nothing to do, but he would have to put up with it. *I mean, it's better than having to spend those hours climbing up and down to gather dindel fruits.*

"Oh yeah, can you lend me your bow, Haruka? Lend me Nao's spear as well."

"Sure, but why? You can't really use them here."

"Well, yeah, but with a bow, I can safely shoot down at enemies from here, right?"

"Arrows aren't cheap, so I don't want you to waste any if you can avoid it, but all right. Hold out the bow for a second."

Touya held out Haruka's bow and tried to draw the bowstring, but he wasn't very successful. *It's Haruka's bow, so surely you don't need that much strength to draw it, right...?*

"Don't pull on it with brute force like that. This is how you draw it..."

Touya adjusted the way he drew the bow based on Haruka's advice, and he succeeded after a few tries. Well, it looked like he did, anyway. *I'm not sure if he can actually land a shot, though.*

"Try not to waste arrows, okay?"

"Of course! I don't intend to waste any."

"Also, don't do anything reckless just because you have nothing to do."

"Sure, sure, trust me, I won't."

Touya replied with a casual tone, but I didn't feel like I could trust him on this. Haruka seemed to feel the same way, since she furrowed her brow when she heard his response, but she sighed afterwards as if she gave up and then turned towards me.

"I'm kind of worried, but oh well. Let's go, Nao."

"Yeah."

"Take care, both of you! I'm more worried about you two than myself!"

True, we could die if we fall on our way up. I don't really feel that scared,

though. I waved lightly at Touya and then turned away to start climbing up the trunk of the tree. Luckily, this dindel tree had a round trunk like the trunks of cedar, hinoki cypress, and other common trees back in Japan, and there were a lot of branches as well. That meant special tools weren't required to climb up the tree, but Haruka and I opted for the safe route and took turns holding onto the rope as we climbed up.

"This kinda feels weird, Haruka. Like, I seem to instinctively know the safe spots to climb up..."

"Mm, that's probably a racial trait that comes with being an elf. Okay, we're close to the top of the tree now."

How long have we been climbing? We were almost at the end. The wind had gotten quite strong as we neared the top of the tree, but for some reason, I felt almost no fear at all. The branches around me swayed in the wind, and there were plenty of ripe fruits growing on them, along with some fruits that were still green or yellow. According to Diola-san, the season for dindel fruits was halfway over, but the amount of fruit here meant that we would have plenty to harvest for a while.

"All right, let's split up and gather the fruits. Be careful, Nao."

Haruka pointed in different directions as she tied our literal lifeline to a thick branch, and I nodded in agreement before I started to harvest the fruits that were near me. The dindel fruits looked like apples that were slightly squashed in width. They were heavier than I thought they would be. Their skin was somewhat thick and seemed firm; it gave off a sweet and sour smell. I checked the color of the fruits to see if they were red and ripe or not and threw the ripe ones into my backpack as I found them. There had been no ripe fruits on our way up the tree, so it was as if all them were concentrated here. They were so plentiful that it wasn't possible to harvest them all, which also meant that I didn't have to move around that much. It only took me about fifteen minutes to completely fill my bag with dindel fruits. I took a break after I filled my bag, then looked at where Haruka was. Her backpack seemed like it still had some room for more.

"Haruka, I'm done over here. Do you want me to help you out?"

“Hmm. Nah, I’m done as well. It would be dangerous to climb back down with a full backpack.”

Haruka glanced at her backpack and then shook it lightly before nodding to herself.

“Y-Yeah, that’s true...”

Oh god, I completely stuffed my own backpack with fruits! Should I take some out and throw them away? Before I could make a decision, Haruka looked back at me and realized my situation.

“All right, move some of the fruit in your backpack to mine, Nao.”

Haruka pointed at her backpack as she said that, and I accepted her suggestion with an awkward smile as I transferred a few dindel fruits over. We then closed our backpacks and checked how much their weight affected us.

“This should be fine. All right, let’s start climbing down. Let’s leave the rope as our lifeline here, since we’ll keep coming back to gather more for a while.”

“You sure? What if other people use this rope and take some of the fruit here?”

It would be much easier to climb up the tree with this rope. *I think it would even be possible for people who aren’t elves.*

“Mm, that’s why I’m not going to let the rope dangle down completely. I plan to pull it up a bit out of reach for others. If other people still try to climb up, then oh well. It’s not like this is profitable to the point where it’s worth trying to hoard all of the fruit to ourselves.”

“Oh yeah, that’s true.”

Now that I think about it, gathering dindels isn’t really a profitable option for most people. It was possible to encounter monsters on the way here, so it would be a tough task for complete rookies, but by the time they could defeat monsters, they would have better options for earning money. That meant that only people like us who were slightly ahead of rookies would take on this kind of task, so we barely had any competition. The price of commodities would normally go up if supply was low, but this was a fruit. It wasn’t a necessity, so

there was an upper limit to the price that people would pay for it. The current price we'd been told at the guild was probably close to the limit. However, people who enjoyed this fruit absolutely loved it, so it was a fruit that was almost guaranteed to sell, and there were some people who would even post gathering quests specifically for dindel fruits. The reward for such quests tended to be just a little bit more than the market price, though, so most of the dindel fruits available in the market were spares sold by adventurers who ignored profit margins and gathered dindel fruits because they themselves enjoyed the taste.

"I hope we won't be considered rookies anymore and can take on more profitable tasks or quests by next year..." I said.

"That's if we're still alive by then."

"Don't say such ominous things, Haruka! All right, I'll start climbing down."

I told Haruka that I would go on ahead first and started to climb down. The way I climbed down was somewhat similar to rappelling. The trunk of the dindel tree wasn't exactly perpendicular, so even I could pull this off without any special training.

As I was descending smoothly, I saw something strange. It looked like a net that one would see in an obstacle course, and it was hung between two branches. Touya was lying down on top of the net.

"Oh, are you guys already done, Nao?"

"Yeah, there were plenty of fruits for us to gather. By the way, what's that net?"

I stretched out my legs on top of the net. It felt like it was quite sturdy.

"Well, I thought you guys would take a while, so I decided to create a place to rest during that time, but I guess it was kind of pointless."

Apparently he had used the rope in his backpack to create this net. It had taken him some time, so he had just finished a few moments ago.

"So I got here when you had just lied down on the net?"

"Well, this wasn't the only thing I accomplished." Touya pointed at a different

branch as he said that. There was a dead boar strung up there that already had its innards removed.

“You hunted this down and gutted it yourself?”

“Yeah, I can basically deal with boars just fine at this point.”

Touya and I had relied on Haruka to gut prey in the beginning, but we had both gotten used to it after a few days and were capable of the basics by now. It was still difficult for us to peel the fur off by ourselves, though. The boar that Touya had hunted down still had its fur.

“It looks like you had it easy, eh, Touya?”

Haruka arrived a bit after I did. She was looking at Touya and seemed a bit amazed as she said that.

“Well, we’ll be coming back here from tomorrow onward anyway, so I guess that’s an okay use of rope. However, don’t waste rope if possible, okay? They aren’t cheap.”

“Don’t worry—I didn’t cut the rope while I made this, so it can be used again just fine if I untie it. Also, I tied the rope to the branch here again.”

Touya pointed at the rope we had used to climb to the lowest branch in the beginning. The rope was tied a bit above the branch around the trunk of the tree and dangled down from there. *Hmm, that makes it easier to climb up compared to how Touya did it in the beginning. I guess he climbed up this way after he hunted down the boar.*

“I see you hunted down a boar as well. How many arrows did you use?”

“Thirteen. I did retrieve all of them, so...”

Touya averted his eyes as he said that, as if he was a bit uneasy about what Haruka would say next. In the past, when Haruka had slain tusk boars using only her bow, she’d generally only used three arrows, so thirteen felt a bit excessive, but I guess it was Touya’s first time using a bow. *Wait, I see some spear wounds on the boar, so I guess he used my spear as well. Well, even my spear wouldn’t reach from on top of the branch. If he jumped down to use my spear, he could’ve just used his own sword instead.*

“Well, I guess that’s acceptable, since there are some arrows that can be reused just fine.”

Haruka nodded to herself as she checked the arrows that Touya had used. The arrows that could be reused were the ones that had missed. *Yeah, it’s kind of obvious that arrows that miss won’t get damaged as much.* We could still retrieve broken arrows and fix them. With his Blacksmithing skill, Touya could fix the ones that weren’t damaged too badly. As for the ones he couldn’t fix, we’d have to bring them to the weapon shop. Arrows that flew straight were quite expensive. We couldn’t waste a single one, and small savings like this would build up over time.

“Was this boar the only thing you encountered?”

“Yeah, just this tusk boar. However, it seemed like it came here to eat dindel fruits that had fallen from this tree, so there’s a chance that this is a common gathering spot for monsters as well.”

“Hmm. We should return to town now if we want to avoid danger, but...”

Haruka held her hand to her chin and paused in thought. One of our objectives here was to slay goblins and gain experience. There would be rewards for slaying goblins that appeared near towns, but there would be no reward for slaying goblins here in the forest. That meant the money we got selling magicite obtained from goblins would be our only profit, so it wasn’t exactly a very enticing reward.

“Well, we have a boar here that Touya hunted down,” I said. “It’s been a while, so why don’t we just eat boar meat while we’re here? If we don’t meet any goblins on our way back, we can just search for them another time.”

“Hmm, okay. We’ll be coming back here from tomorrow onward anyway, so I guess it’s not like we need to rush things.”

“Oh, are we actually gonna get to eat boar meat for once?! It’s been a while, so I’m looking forward to it!”

We had only eaten boar meat on our first day. Lunch from that day onward had just been the takeout meals we brought with us from the inn. We had made that decision because it took some time to start a fire and cook the meat,

and we could also sell the meat instead of eating it ourselves. *Oh God, I'm drooling already at the very thought of the taste of boar meat...*

"Well, I'll prepare the meat, so I'll leave the firewood gathering to you two," said Haruka.

"Okay!" we said.

We were quick to take action. I started to search around right away and gathered branches. People barely visited this part of the forest compared to the outskirts, so it was even easier to find dry branches here. We placed the branches we gathered at a spot slightly away from the dindel tree, and then I swiftly started a bonfire. It was fairly easy for me to do so now, since I had gotten used to magic.

One might say this should be easy, but it was actually quite difficult. The basic version of Ignite was just a candle flame that wouldn't be enough to set small branches on fire, but if I went overboard on the potency of the spell, then the firewood would burn to a crisp right away. I had become able to control it so that it was enough to set decently thick branches on fire in a short period of time, but maybe it would be a good idea to develop a spell that could create a charcoal fire on the spot. A simple flame would be enough to cook food in a pot, but if we were to cook over an open fire, then it would only burn the surface, unlike a charcoal fire, and it would also take quite some time. If we just carried charcoal with us instead of gathering branches each time like this, then that would solve the problem, but it wasn't practical to carry around baggage like that. As Touya and I finished our tasks, Haruka had finished preparing the meat as well, and she skewered some pieces like she had last time. She distributed two skewers to each of us, plus an extra third skewer for Touya.

"Thanks, Haruka! You knew I wanted more!"

Touya grinned happily as he took the third skewer from Haruka, and then he stabbed one end in the ground near the bonfire.

"Oh yeah, Haruka, these are boneless ribs, right?" I asked. "Can we eat spare ribs as well if we get a pot to cook them in?"

Boneless ribs were delicious, but so were spare ribs. The meat of this tusk boar had tasted way better than regular pork, so surely its spare ribs would

taste as good. *I really want to eat some.*

“Oh, I want to try out spare ribs too, Haruka!”

“Yeah, I chose the easiest parts to cook with a skewer. As for spare ribs, a grill net would work too, but there’s still the problem of seasoning.”

“Right, I’d really like some soy sauce to go along with spare ribs.”

It was just my personal preference, but I felt like spare ribs combined with sweet and spicy soy sauce was the best way to eat them. There were also other good ways to eat them, but it felt like a waste to try them out while we still only had salt with us.

“Well, we do have some spare money now, so it would be okay to buy cooking utensils,” said Haruka. “I wonder if they sell camp stoves in this world.”

Camp stoves were cooking utensils for outdoor use, as indicated by the name, and they were very easy to carry around due to their compact size. *Well, I’ve never actually used one myself.* I had gone camping before, but it was the casual kind of camping where you went by car, so I had never had to worry about buying more expensive compact tools. The ones who bought such tools were probably people who enjoyed climbing mountains frequently.

“We can discuss this again when we take on a quest that’ll require us to stay outside for multiple days,” I said. “It’s extra luggage that we don’t really need right now, after all.”

“It would be great if we had an inventory system or spell for that,” said Touya.

“Well, we’ll probably have to count on Nao for that,” said Haruka.

“I-I’ll do my best to develop something...”

I’m not really sure if there even is an inventory spell, though. Time Magic was very rare in itself, so even information about the type of spells under that category wasn’t common knowledge at all. However, there was one spell that people knew about called Spatial Expansion. If you combined that with Alchemy, then it was possible to create bags or boxes that had more space inside and could hold more things than usual. The name for both bags and boxes made in this way was Magic Bag. That was probably the most realistic

solution to aim for in order to solve our luggage problems, but it would be very difficult to obtain one. First of all, there were very few of them on the market due to how rare Time Magic users were. Even if we managed to discover one for sale, its price would probably be some astronomical amount that we wouldn't be able to afford. All we could really do was hope that my Time Magic and Haruka's Alchemy would eventually be capable of making one after we leveled up or something. *I hope leveling is enough. Neither of us has any clue about where to start, sadly.*

"Oh yeah, can we try out some of the dindel fruits while we wait for the meat to cook?" Touya asked.

"I'm down! I wanted to try them out myself while I was gathering them!"

Touya had glanced at my backpack as he brought up the idea of trying out the dindel fruits, and I agreed with him right away. The fruits had given off an alluring sweet smell back when I was gathering them, and I could still smell that sweetness wafting out of my backpack. There weren't any cheap sweet foods in this world, so it had been a long time since I last ate something sweet, and the smell of dindel fruits was overwhelmingly tempting to me.

"Hmm, sure. I was wondering about their taste myself. A few dindel fruits wouldn't hurt."

Haruka seemed to feel the same way I did, since she agreed as well. I took out some fruits and a knife from my backpack.

"Well, let's slice one in half first."

We didn't know how to eat dindel fruit, so Haruka took one and sliced it to start off. We all looked inside the fruit after it was sliced.

"It seems like we're supposed to throw away the skin, right?"

The skin looked somewhat like the skin of an orange and didn't seem like it would be easy to chew. Its complete redness was interesting; it sort of looked like the skin of a red pepper as well. As for the inside, the flesh of the fruit was dense and looked ready for consumption. There didn't seem to be any seeds, so it sort of looked like a jelly that was packed tight inside the skin as a bowl.

"This is quite an interesting fruit," I said. "Seeds are normally located in the

center of a fruit, right, Haruka?”

“Yeah. Well, at least this means the fruit’s easy to eat. Let’s split it in four pieces and then try it out.”

Haruka sliced the fruit in half again and then handed us some slices. I took a bite of my piece the moment I got it, and a juicy sweet taste oozed out into my mouth along with a good tinge of sourness. It was a little chewy, similar to a hard peach, although the closest comparison that came to mind was a plum. It was easy to peel the skin, and it had no seeds, so I finished my piece fairly fast. It wasn’t really a fibrous fruit, and the texture was pleasant on the tongue, so it felt closer to, like, confections that took some time to craft.

“Damn, this is delicious!” Touya exclaimed happily.

“Yeah, and it’s easy to eat as well, so I can understand why it’s popular with some people.”

Touya and I looked at each other, and then we both turned around to look at the remaining slice in Haruka’s hand.

“Hm? Do you both want more?”

She noticed that both of us had our eyes on the remaining piece and asked us if we hadn’t had enough. She had sliced her own piece into smaller parts and was gracefully eating those instead of biting into the original slice like we had. We nodded in response, of course.



“Well, I guess we can celebrate. Eat as much as you want.”

“Huh? One dindel fruit is worth the equivalent of anywhere from two to three thousand yen, right?” Touya asked.

“You sure about this, Haruka?” I asked. “We can sell these for quite a lot of money.”

We would have enough for a night of rest at an inn if we sold just three of these fruits. That was if we just turned them in at a guild too. The market price was even higher.

Dindel fruits were basically the equivalent of high-quality mangoes back on Earth. They were smaller than apples as well, so their price wasn’t something everyone could afford on a daily basis.

“Well, since we’re the producers, or rather, the harvesters of this batch, we do have the right to enjoy them ourselves. It’s bad for our mental health to be frugal all the time, so it’s fine. Here you go.”

I thanked Haruka as she cut more slices and handed them over to us, and I devoured my slice right away. *Yep, delicious. It would be hard to get tired of this taste. It isn’t just sweet; there’s more to it...*

“However, in exchange for another piece, can you go gather some more, Nao? This tastes even more delicious than I thought it would, so let’s gather and bring back as many as we can.” Haruka looked at Touya’s empty backpack as she said that. Our initial plan had been to fill that backpack with materials from game and herbs on our way back, but I guess we were going to fill it with dindel fruits instead.

“Okay, I’ll get going,” I said after a pause.

Haruka was busy with cooking, and Touya wasn’t able to climb the dindel tree, so I was the only one left who was free to gather more fruits. Well, at least the ropes were already set this time. I wouldn’t have to spend time tying them again, and I knew the rough locations of the branches along the way up, so I would probably be able to return by the time the meat was ready. I shoved the remaining piece of dindel into my mouth, and then I carried Touya’s backpack with me as I climbed up the dindel tree to gather more fruit.

When I came back down the dindel tree, I saw a starving wolf was eagerly awaiting the feast before him. The “wolf” was Touya, of course.

“Welcome back! All right, time to dig in!”

He went straight for the cooked meat as soon as I arrived.

“Hell yeah, this is delicious!” Touya howled with joy as he chewed on the cooked meat on his skewer.

“You’re as restless as usual, Touya. Welcome back, Nao. Thanks for gathering more dindels.”

“Don’t worry about it. I guess I’ll start eating as well.”

I placed Touya’s backpack on the ground and then sat down next to Haruka. She handed me a skewer with cooked meat on it. There was a rock in the middle of the bonfire with some bread warming on top.

“Time to eat.”

I heard a crispy sound as soon as I chewed on the meat, and I could taste the juicy fat spreading through my mouth. It had been delicious the last time I ate it, and it tasted even better this time. *Oh, what’s this fruity smell?*

“Did you use some dindel fruit in this, Haruka?”

“Nope. It does smell a bit similar, though. Maybe the boar had eaten some dindel fruit that fell to the ground before?”

So dindel fruits are natural high-quality animal feed? I had heard stories about how Wagyu cows would be fed beer to make their meat taste better, so perhaps dindel fruits were even better for that purpose. I took some warmed bread off the rock and gently sliced it to make a pocket inside. Next, I sandwiched the skewer meat inside the bread and took a bite. The bread’s crusty outside and soft inside went well with the fragrant smell of the fat that the bread had absorbed. It was an exquisite dish. The only seasoning was salt, but it was still delicious.

“Aren’t we losing out by selling this meat, Haruka? I bet we can get way more money for this!”

“I agree, but it’s not like we can preserve the meat.”

“That’s true...”

Haruka was a genius when it came to developing spells, but all she could do currently was create some ice to cool the meat. We could only directly cool things with the ice, so it was only enough to cool drinks like water, not enough to freeze things. Even if we could freeze things, it would be pointless, since we didn’t have a refrigerator.

“It’s up to you to come up with something for this, Nao.”

Yeah, it was my responsibility, since my Time Magic can manipulate time and space. If a beginner created a magic bag with Time Magic, it would only have extra space, but after I improved my mastery of Time Magic, I would be able to add extra functions such as weight reduction and the ability to freeze time inside the bag. If I could reach that level of mastery, we would be able to fit a large amount of all sorts of baggage without any worries, including food that would normally go bad. That also meant that magic bags created by beginners would end up quite heavy as a result of more things being packed into the extra space.

“Look, I’ll master Time Magic by next year, and then we’ll come back to hunt more boars around the same time of year!”

“I’m looking forward to it. We’ll also be able to carry a lot more dindel fruits with us if that’s the case. What do you think, Touya?”

It was strange that Touya had been so quiet, since he would normally jump in if the topic was meat. We looked at him to see what he was doing, and I noticed that the meat on the three skewers he’d had initially was already gone. He had already started to cook some more meat that he’d sliced himself.

Touya noticed our gazes were on him, but that didn’t stop him from continuing to cook the meat. “Hmm? Wouldn’t it be a waste not to eat as much of this delicious meat as we can?”

“Are you trying to stuff yourself with food? I mean, I guess it’s fine.”

It was Touya who had hunted down the boar, after all. Besides, it wasn’t like we’d been struggling with money recently. However, Haruka and I couldn’t eat as much as Touya, sadly. Elves were no match for beastmen in that respect.

“We’re not trying to tell you not to eat, Touya. Just say something before you cook more meat. It’s not going to taste good without seasoning.” As Haruka expressed her amazement at Touya’s appetite, she sprinkled some salt over the slices of meat he was cooking. “This should make it taste better, but it’s going to take a while for those large cuts to cook. Hmm, should we try out some spare ribs, Nao? We happen to have a nice heated rock that we can cook some on.”

“Sure, that sounds—”

“I want to try some too!”

Touya interrupted me as he raised his hands to catch Haruka’s attention. She seemed to have predicted his reaction, since she shrugged, salted some spare ribs, and started to cook them on top of the rock.

“I feel like boneless ribs would be better, since we only have salt, but oh well.” Haruka added more firewood to the fire as she said that. She used chopsticks to flip the meat during the cooking process.

Those chopsticks were handmade, of course. Chopsticks were a great tool due to how easy it was to make them, and because of the vast number of things you could use them for. They could fulfill the role of basically every other utensil. The only downside to chopsticks was the difficulty of learning how to use them, and the fact that specialized cutlery tools were better for certain uses.

“Okay, the spare ribs are almost done. How should we eat these ribs, though?”

Oh yeah, we don’t have any plates, and we only have one pair of chopsticks. Haruka paused in thought for a moment and then tore some leaves off of a nearby branch and used them to wrap the spare ribs. She handed portions to all of us.

“This’ll do in place of plates. Some stalls in town wrap food with these leaves like this, so it’ll be fine.”

It looked like she’d chosen the leaves at random, but apparently she’d known what she was looking for. *All right, let’s see what these spare ribs taste like. Mm, yeah, they taste good. They do taste good, but I feel like something’s missing.*

“Mm, yeah, I think these would taste better without the bone if we’re going to cook them with salt. There’s not really any fat here, so it doesn’t feel complete.”

“What do you mean? The hard and chewy taste is pretty good, isn’t it?”

That sounds more like the bone than the meat, Touya. If you think the bone is delicious, then that’s probably because you’re a beastman. I definitely wouldn’t want to chew on bone.

“Would you prefer to have some femur bones instead, Touya?”

“Are you treating me like a dog, Haruka?!”

Touya looked like he was shocked at Haruka’s words, but it was his own fault due to what he’d said earlier.

“Do bones actually taste any good at all, Touya?” I asked. “I mean, obviously I’ve seen pictures of dogs with bones in their mouths, so it isn’t the weirdest idea, but still.”

“Well, it’s more like it’s enjoyable to chew on bones. It’s got some kind of taste that isn’t exactly great, but it makes you want to chew on it.”

Something like chewing gum? Well, that actually has proper flavors, so it’s a bit different. Maybe it’s his inner animal instincts that make him want to chew on bones, like how hamsters gnaw on hard objects that aren’t edible.

“Yeah, uh, I don’t really get what you’re talking about. Just try not to chew bones in public if you can avoid it, Touya.”

A bone chewing-hobby wouldn’t cost any money, but I wouldn’t really want to be associated with a friend who chewed on bones while walking around in public.

“Dude, it’s not like I’d normally want to chew on bones! It’s just like if the meat I’m eating has a bone in it, then I kind of want to chew on the bone too!”

Guess I don’t have to worry about any damage to my reputation. Touya crushed through the rib bones as he said that, though, which was quite a shocking sight for me. It wasn’t like the bone had been thoroughly stewed for a long time. It was just bone cooked with fire, so I was fairly sure the bone was

still quite hard. It would be more than enough to destroy the jaws of a human or elf.

“All right, that’s enough about bones,” said Touya. “What about the remaining meat? Can we make dried meat with this?”

“Oh, dried meat! That sounds like proper fantasy setting food!”

I’d fixated on the idea of frozen meat due to modern standards, but there were different methods for preserving meat in the past! If we used “primitive” methods, then we could—*Wait*...

“Actually, how is dried meat made? Do you know, Touya?”

“No ideas here. Do we just slice up the meat and dry it in the sun?”

That sounded like the wrong way to do things. The meat would probably rot that way, and even if we somehow managed to dry the meat like that, boar meat was technically a type of pork, so it wouldn’t be edible as is. *Mm, surely Haruka can save us in situations like this.*

Touya and I both looked at Haruka, and she responded with a lopsided grin. “The usual method in this world is to preserve meat with salt. It might also be good to use herbs that can help with preserving meat. Once the salt has soaked in, you wash the meat and dry it. That should be it.”

“What about bacteria or parasites?”

“It’s the same as dry-cured ham. The salt should take care of that.”

If we had spare time to spend on trying to perfect dried food, we could have tried to marinate or smoke it to make it taste good, but the best we could make at the moment would most likely turn out to be some salty dried meat that wouldn’t taste very good.

“I can give it a shot and try to make some if that sounds good enough.”

The drying process would normally take about an hour, but it was probably possible to skip the long wait via the Dry spell that Haruka had practiced on dindel fruits, so we had a choice before us.

“Sure, can you give it a try?” I asked. “I’ve kind of always wanted to try dried meat, since it’s what I consider standard fantasy food.”

“Yeah, same here! Rye bread and ale didn’t live up to my expectations for standard fantasy food, so I hope this does!”

“Expectations? I think dried meat will be joining those two as well, Touya, but I’ll give it a try.”

Before she started, she mentioned that it would probably only be a little bit better than the dried meat that we could buy in town, but she still agreed to give it a shot.

“Honestly though, this world doesn’t really feel like a fantasy one aside from the existence of magic.” *Well, I guess our status display screens and Help Guide are kind of magical too, but still.*

“That’s more than enough to make it a fantasy world even without getting into how the town looks and what our daily lives there are like. Besides, have you forgotten what our race is, Nao?”

Right, we’re elves. On top of that, Touya has animal ears on his head. I guess it’s a fantasy world indeed. I wouldn’t really consider the town landscape and our daily lives as fantasy, though. It felt more rudimentary and inconvenient than anything else. That was probably what standard fantasy worlds were like, but still.

“I mean, yeah, you’re right, Haruka, but we haven’t encountered something that screams ‘fantasy!’ yet...”

“Mm, I feel the same way as you, Nao. We haven’t encountered anything that would be absolutely impossible back on Earth yet.”

“Doesn’t magic count? If not, what counts for you two?”

“Well, things like fantasy metals such as mithril, or swords that can slice through anything for some reason, I guess?”

The examples Touya gave were quite fitting considering he’d gotten the Blacksmithing skill. Swords like those definitely defied the laws of physics. There would be narration in fantasy works about how a sword would cleanly slice through things like a thick tree in one blow, but normally a sword would just get stuck. You’d know this if you had used a saw before, but a saw blade had teeth with both left-tilting and right-tilting bevels. They were designed like that to

increase the area that the blade could cut and shave through, and the gap between the left-and right-tilting teeth allowed the saw blade to pass through the wood cleanly.

I wonder how swords that can slice through anything would work for this. Such swords had rhombic cross sections, so even if they could slice through anything, the slice would only be as wide as the cutting edge. The back of the sword would be very thick, so there was no way it could pass through. If swords like that could actually cut through anything, then they would need to have a very thin blade like a metal plate, or it would have to be something like a beam saber that could slice through things with more than just its edge. Otherwise, the sword would have to defy the laws of physics and pass through the sliced object magically. *Hmm, actually, I want to see those kinds of magical swords, since we're in a fantasy world.*

"As for me, I would consider things like dragons or dungeons as things that scream 'fantasy' to me," I said.

You can't describe fantasy without those two things, yep. Touya vigorously nodded in agreement with me when I looked at him, so that was probably a common idea about what fantasy should be.

"Really, Nao? Be glad we haven't encountered a dragon yet. We would be dead by now."

Haruka sighed heavily at what I said; I seemed to have rendered her speechless. *Come on, it's just a dream of mine. Don't be so harsh...*

"Well, dragons are legendary creatures, so I don't know what'll happen if we actually encounter one, but we'll probably get killed if we do. As for dungeons, they technically do exist in this world."

"Wait, really? There are actually dungeons?"

"Damn, I wanna go to one!"

I felt the same way Touya did.

"Nobody knows why or how dungeons exist in this world, apparently. On a side note, if we had started out in a dungeon when we were initially transported to this world, we would probably be dead by now."

That made sense. Our starting conditions in this world had been harsher than even an early Wizardry game. There was no way we could successfully raid a dungeon with just clothes made out of cloth and ten large silver coins as our starting items. Maybe it would've been fine in a game, but this was real life for us, so we would most likely die if we tried.

"So yeah, Touya, we're not going to explore any dungeons until much later in the future. You don't want to die, right?"

"Well, yeah. I guess I'll leave the decision to you, then, Haruka."

Our general policy was to leave things to Haruka, since that was our best option. That was what we'd learned from this past week.

After that discussion, we waited for Touya to finish his meal and then headed back to Laffan. In the end, we didn't encounter any goblins or even boars on our way back. Touya wanted to slay at least one more boar to increase the amount of dried meat we had, but we had plenty of meat as it was. Haruka scolded him and told him about the time and effort it would take her to dry the meat, so he reluctantly gave up on the idea of a hunting session. Even if we managed to hunt down another boar, we wouldn't have enough space in our backpacks to fit all the meat and fur, so it wasn't a realistic choice in the first place. Due to the lack of space, we only gathered a small amount of herbs that we could use with dried meat on our way back.

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Compared to other times of day, the Adventurers' Guild was rather empty during the period before evening. The busiest times were right after dawn, when day laborers came to look for jobs, and right before sunset. It was quite unpleasant to visit the guild during those two time periods. Thankfully, our daily schedules rarely overlapped with those workers. People who visited the guild during this time period before evening were adventurers who had gone outside of town for work or quests, but there usually weren't that many of them. This area was fairly peaceful compared to other areas in this world, which also meant that there wasn't as much work for adventurers available, and thus adventurers who had gotten some experience would move to other towns in search of quests that offered better rewards. That meant we could take it easy

with work here, so this area was a good starting place to get transported to initially. *Thanks, "evil" god!*

"Hello, Diola-san."

"Hello, Haruka-san. I'm glad to see you again. Hello to you two as well, Nao-san, Touya-san."

"Hello."

"We're back!"

Diola-san would often be at the counter at this time of day. The concept of weekends didn't exist for most of the working class, and that included the Adventurers' Guild, so apparently, she would clock in for work every day unless something happened. The truth was that one would have to work that much in order to earn enough for a living that wasn't miserable. Well, that was what life as staff at the Adventurers' Guild was like, at least. Adventurers would eventually be able to take breaks as they became more skilled. One reason for that was the increased reward per quest as your abilities improved, but it was also because there would be a lot of difficult quests, and it would be painful if you couldn't take some days off to recover.

For example, escort quests would require adventurers to camp out during the journey, and they would have to be on guard at night as well. Even if you took a nap in between, fatigue would still accumulate over a few days. Thus, it was common for adventurers to take one or two days off to rest after they reached town; otherwise, it would negatively impact their ability to work and complete quests. If you continued to take on work without resting due to a lack of money, you would make mistakes more often, and sometimes those mistakes would be fatal. Apparently, this was the most common cause of death for middle-aged adventurers who couldn't force themselves through grueling work schedules anymore. That was the cruel reality of an adventurer's life.

"Your information helped us a lot, Diola-san. As thanks, here are some gifts for the information fee."

"Thank you very much. These dindel fruits are one of my favorite parts of this season!" Diola-san smiled as she took the dindel fruits that Haruka handed over, and she smiled again at the delicious smell. "Mm, the smell of dindel fruit

is great. I'm looking forward to this after dinner." She then placed the dindel fruits into a bag next to her, as if she was stuffing away some treasure.

"I have to say, I'm quite impressed by your party's skills at hunting and gathering in the forest, Haruka-san. Is it because two of you are elves? Your party would be able to earn even more if you had magic bags." She looked at our fully stuffed backpacks as she said that.

"We haven't seen any magic bags around here, but aren't they expensive?"

"They're expensive and rare, since you have to be both an alchemist and a mage who can use Time Magic to make one. There's almost nobody who fits those requirements."

"I see. I guess that means it's quite difficult to create one as well."

"Oh no, it's just that mages who can use Time Magic are quite rare. The process for making one isn't that difficult in itself, apparently. The crafting recipe for magic bags is available in the alchemist encyclopedia."

Hmm? I knew magic bags were rare and expensive, but they're not difficult to make? I've also never heard of that last thing she said...

"Alchemist encyclopedia?"

"Hm? Have you not heard about this before? Every alchemist has one with them, apparently. From what I've heard, you're required to buy one when you join the Alchemist Association."

"I see. Does that mean it's something that you can't normally obtain?"

Haruka seemed a bit disappointed as she asked that, but Diola-san shook her head in response.

"Not quite."

"Hm?"

"It appears that the money paid for an alchemist encyclopedia serves as the admission fee for the Alchemist Association, so you're required to buy one even if you don't need it. However, the book is useless for people who aren't adventurers, right? What do you think happens when alchemists with these books die?"

“The books get disposed of?”

“Yes. These books aren’t something ordinary citizens read, and even if the deceased alchemist had family who would also become alchemists, they would be forced to buy a new one when they join the Alchemist Association anyway. That means that you can sometimes find alchemist encyclopedias for rather cheap in used bookstores.”

“Hmm, that’s interesting. Do they actually sell?”

“They can be used as a reference guide for buying alchemical components, so there is some demand for them. The Adventurers’ Guild here has some of these encyclopedias as well, in case adventurers request information here.”

These alchemist encyclopedias were used to look up items that were effective against monsters with special or unique attacks, apparently.

“Well, I’m glad your party came here this year, Haruka-san. Information about where you can gather dindel fruits would be useless if there was nobody who could actually go gather them.”

Diola-san mentioned that she enjoyed trading information about the location of dindel fruits to rookies who would go gather dindel fruits in exchange for some of the harvest. However, rookies like that who could actually climb dindel trees were quite rare, so it was a perk of the job that she could only enjoy once in a while.

“Doesn’t that count as abuse of power, Diola-san?”

“What do you mean? This is a fair trade. After all, it helped your party save time not having to search for dindel trees, right?” Diola-san smiled and waved her hands to deny what Haruka pointed out.

I mean, yeah, it’s true that we didn’t have to search around aimlessly in the forest thanks to her information.

We would have had to have given a tip even if we had gotten this information from someone else.

“Abuse of power is quite different. It’s more like things such as complaining about how the fruits are damaged, and then offering to buy them for a cheaper

price and—”

“Huh?” When she heard that, Haruka stopped in her tracks just as she was about to take some dindel fruits out of her backpack.

“O-Oh, we don’t do that here at this guild! We’re a fair and clean guild! We buy materials for fair prices! I’m not lying!”

There was visible panic on Diola-san’s face as she denied the allegations, but she seemed very suspicious. Everything about this situation seemed suspicious.



“Really? Will you buy these fruits at a fair price?”

“O-Of course! But, well, um, some of these are...”

Dindels would go for anywhere between one hundred to three hundred Rea. Most of the dindels that Haruka took out had a three hundred Rea price tag attached to them, but there were a few that had gone for two hundred Rea instead. The ones that had gone for two hundred Rea amounted to a little bit less than five percent of all the dindels. I took a look and checked those dindels myself. They looked perfectly edible despite being slightly damaged.

“You see, those damaged parts are the reason these ones go for less, so...”

Diola-san seemed a bit hesitant as she told us about how the guild would properly inspect dindel fruits and pay a fair price for them, but it was also normal for the price to go down if the fruits were damaged, and she would buy those from the guild at a staff member discount. Such fruits were fine if they were consumed right away, but if they were preserved by drying, the damaged parts would cause them to rot more easily, so that was why they were cheaper than regular dindel fruits.

“What I’m saying is that we’re not unfairly complaining so we can buy them for a cheaper price. It’s just that, well, there are some adventurers who don’t understand this...”

“I see.”

So they’re the type of people who incessantly complain without good reason? It would cause some trouble if adventurers found out that the fruits they sold more cheaply would be bought by some guild staff members for personal consumption.

“Actually, now that I think about it, aren’t staff member discounts basically a form of black market trade?”

“Not at all! I buy them before they’re entered into the guild ledger, so it’s perfectly legal!”

Oh, so she thought this out. Wait, no, isn’t that walking a fine line between legal and not?

Diola-san seemed to notice the nuance behind the looks we gave her, and she shook her head in denial. “Believe me, it is! It’s illegal to resell them, but personal consumption by yourself or family is allowed! Implicitly, that is...”

So does it count as a perk of the job? This was a harsh world to live in, so I couldn’t tell if the idea of employee benefits existed in this world or if it was just that the rules weren’t strictly enforced. Her voice lowered as she mentioned the “implicit” part, so it was probably the latter in this case. I wasn’t a stickler for the rules by any means, so I didn’t really consider it a bad thing. There were some countries back on Earth where employers took tips into account when calculating the salary for their employees, and there were also some jobs that paid a lower salary in exchange for benefits such as staff meals or the option of live-in work.

“Well, I don’t really mind as long as you don’t get fired, Diola-san. It would be a shame if we were to part ways so soon after we just started to get along well.”

“Don’t say such ominous things, please! This is one of the few perks of this job that I enjoy!”

Diola-san loved dindel fruits, but the market price for them was expensive enough that she couldn’t really afford them with her salary as a receptionist. Well, they were luxury items and too expensive to purchase on a regular basis, so it was technically a reward for her to be able to purchase slightly damaged dindel fruits from the guild for less than half of the market price.

“There aren’t that many female staff members here in this guild, and I’m glad about that, since it means I don’t have much competition for dindel fruits!”

Touya and I looked at each other when we heard those words. We both had bitter smiles on our faces. *I would personally prefer a guild with a lot of young and beautiful female receptionists. Diola-san is more the cute type than the beautiful type, and she looks to be around thirty years old, so she isn’t exactly young—wait, what was that chilling feeling I got just now? Uh, yeah, actually, Diola-san counts as young, yep.*

“So yeah, I would appreciate it if you would be willing to sell all of the dindels that your party has.”

The dindels that Haruka took out were just the ones from her own backpack. Diola-san had her eyes fixed on my backpack and Touya's as well, which were both stuffed full. Well, Touya's backpack was mostly stuffed with meat, so that was the wrong backpack to stare at. The dindels that I'd gone to gather myself to make up for the ones we'd eaten were split between Haruka's backpack and my own.

"Oh, it's not like we're purposely selling fewer dindels for no reason, Diola-san. We have other plans for these ones. Would you happen to know how to process dindels into dried fruits?"

"Wait, are you planning to attempt that by yourself? It's probably impossible, since the recipe for dried dindel fruits is a secret."

She gave us a look that seemed to say we should sell all of our dindels instead of wasting some of them trying to make dried dindels, but we wanted to make dried dindels if possible so we could sell them for a higher price, and we also wanted to keep some for ourselves if we could preserve them.

"We'll sell them here if we don't succeed, so can you share some information with us? If we do succeed, we'll share some of them with you."

"Oh, really? I guess that leaves me no choice but to say yes." Her choice of words was that she had "no choice," but she was grinning as she said that, so it was fairly easy to tell what was on her mind. "Well, I don't really know much about the process myself. All I know is that the basic method appears to be to wash them clean, remove the calyx, and then just dry them. You need to do so in the right weather and temperature, and there's a specific method to dry them in the sunlight, but all of that seems to be a secret."

"I figured that would be the only public information. Oh well."

"Well, hmm..."

Haruka seemed a bit disappointed at the lack of information, and Diola-san was about to respond to her before she stopped herself.

"Hm? Is there something else?" Haruka asked.

"Mm, we could use any hints available," I said.

Our only option at the moment was trial and error, but we were going to use fruits that wouldn't last very long before going bad, so even though we were going to use magic, we wouldn't be able to try that many times. Any sort of hint would be very useful for us.

In the end, Diola-san gave in and hesitantly answered our requests for more information. "Well, I saw the drying process once myself, and I saw water being boiled multiple times, but I'm not sure if that has anything to do with the process."

Boiling water? Are we supposed to boil the dindel fruits before drying them? Maybe we're supposed to melt chemical additives and mix them with the fruit. Or are we supposed to infuse herbs as a preservative to coat the fruit with? I think there was some modern-day method of preserving citrus fruits via coating them with some kind of juice.

"I see. Thank you for the helpful information," said Haruka.

"I'm glad to be of help. However, please try to avoid spreading this information if possible. It's standard information for people in the know, but there are some people who would be troublesome if they got word of this..."

"Of course, don't worry. Being a receptionist sure is a tough job. After all, you have to deal with all sorts of people, even if they're unpleasant or weird."

"Indeed! I'm glad you understand—I mean, not at all!"

Diola-san was about to nod strongly in agreement before she stopped herself, forced a smile, and hastily denied Haruka's words instead. It would be okay to grumble like this at a bar, but it was definitely not okay here at the guild. After all, there were other adventurers nearby, and her boss was probably here at the guild as well.

"Your polite and thoughtful support has helped us constantly as adventurers, Diola-san," I said. "Right, Touya?"

"Yeah. It was thanks to your help that we've been able to earn money without any problems, even as rookie adventurers."

The look that another staff member was giving Diola-san seemed to have become a bit harsher than before, so we did our best to back her up. It was

Haruka's banter that had started all of this, after all.

"Oh no, not at all! I'm just doing my job."

Whew. Diola-san seemed a bit flattered as she waved her hands to deny our praise, and the staff member who seemed like her boss looked away from her as if to shake his head. *He looked away, so I guess she won't get yelled at now? I'm sorry if you get yelled at in the end, Diola-san.* It would probably be a good idea to leave the guild before Haruka blurted out anything else that would cause trouble for Diola-san. It wasn't a busy time of the day, but it was probably not a good thing for her to spend too much time chatting while on the job.

"Okay, we'll be going now. We'll be back tomorrow to take on more quests and work."

"I look forward to seeing your party again."

Diola-san sent us off with a bow as we headed out of the guild.

Chapter 5—Let's Make Some Nonperishable Food!

"All right, we're all going to prepare the meat and dindel fruits before we go off to practice our skills for the rest of the day!" said Haruka.

In front of Haruka was a backpack full of dindels, a leather bag full of the remaining meat from the tusk boar, and some tools like a barrel and pot that we had bought on our way back to the inn.

"Hey, I have a question!"

"Go ahead, Touya!"

Haruka pointed at Touya, who had energetically raised his hand to ask something.

"Is this something I can do?"

"Of course—anyone can do this. That includes you as well, Nao. Let's start with the meat first."

Haruka lined up three cutting boards and placed some meat on them.

"First, we need to slice this meat into portions that are easy to eat. The portions should be about one centimeter thick, and they should be about half the size of your palm."

Haruka gave out instructions as if she was following a recipe. She specified the portion size after she glanced at Touya for a moment. *Mm, it's dangerous to give ambiguous instructions to a beginner, Haruka.* Instructions like "a little" or "a pinch" wouldn't make sense to people who didn't know how to cook. It was very likely that Touya would cut an extremely thick slice if left to his own devices, since he would consider that easy enough to eat.

"Remove the bones cleanly afterwards. You should also remove the parts that have a lot of fat."

"Hm? Are we going to throw away the fat as well, Haruka?" Touya asked. "The fat of this meat tastes really good, though..."

The cooked meat would give off a bit of the fragrant smell of dindel fruits from the fat. I thought it was great. It seemed like it would be a complete waste to throw the fat away.

“Yeah, I know, but it would be bad for dried meat if the fat were to oxidize.”

Hmm, okay. I didn’t really know what Haruka was talking about, but she was the one who was good at cooking, and she even had a skill for it now, so it would be best to follow her instructions.

“Can I at least try for just some portions?”

“If you’re willing to dispose of them yourself, then sure, Touya. Only a few portions, though, okay?”

“Yeah, sure.”

All right, I’ll have some myself if they end up tasting good. If they don’t, then Touya will be responsible for stuffing them down. He’s the one who brought up the idea in the first place. Quite cruel, if I do say so myself.

There was a lot of meat to go through, since it was a whole boar’s worth. While Touya and I were slicing the meat and meticulously removing the bones and fat, Haruka mixed some herbs, salt, and spices along with small slices of dindel fruit skin in a pot. She joined the slicing team after she finished that and easily overtook us in no time; soon, the meat piled up in her area. Haruka sprinkled some salt she’d prepared on the meat that couldn’t fit on the cutting boards and then tossed it into the barrel.

“How do you two think dried dindels are made?”

Haruka brought up the question as we were preparing the meat, and I responded with the thought that had come to my mind earlier. “I think we should either boil them and then dry them afterwards or coat them with preservatives made from herb juice before we dry them. Given the size of the dindels, they’d normally just go bad and rot if we dried the entire fruit, right?”

“They’ll probably still rot eventually even if we boil them, but the preservative idea sounds like it could work.”

That made sense. The bacteria would be dead right after we boiled the fruit,

but new bacteria could grow over time. *Well, they wouldn't if we could place them in a completely sealed space like a retort pouch, but yeah.*

"Any ideas on your end, Touya?"

"Hmm, well, it's not going to get cold anytime soon, right?"

"Hm? Yeah, it won't get that cold. It'll still get colder since winter is approaching, but apparently it won't drop below the freezing point here even at night. That includes the coldest time of the year as well."

Oh, that's good to know. It wasn't like I couldn't stand winter, but there were no airtight houses or central heating in this world. We didn't know if there were puffer jackets or anything like that in this world to keep us warm either, and they would cost money even if they did exist. Warm weather would help us save money just by removing the need for goods to survive in cold weather.

"I guess that means what I had in mind won't work. I thought we could take advantage of the temperature if it did drop below the freezing point. Like, have you heard of Andean potatoes before?"

"Oh yeah, those do exist."

I felt like I had heard about them before during a class. People in the Andes Mountains area would expose harvested potatoes to freezing temperatures outside. The potatoes would freeze overnight, and then, at noon, people would tread on them to squeeze out the water. After that was done, they would then dry the potatoes to preserve them. Dindel fruits would probably get completely crushed if we stepped on them, but if we could remove the water with a different method, then we could dry dindel fruits without them going bad.

"Wait, boiling water has nothing to do with this, though."

"Well, maybe that water was just used to make staff meals or tea for the people working on drying the dindel fruits?"

Touya paused for a moment in thought and then bluntly stated what he thought about that hint we'd gotten from Diola-san. If he was right, it basically meant that hint was completely useless.

"Hmm, that might be a possibility. Technically speaking, Diola-san didn't

specifically say boiling water was required to make dried dindel fruits."

I mean, yeah, you're right, Haruka, but still! That makes me look like an idiot for wasting time thinking about how to use boiling water for this process!

"What do you think the boiling water is used for, Haruka?"

"Me? I thought it might be something similar to how it's used for dried persimmons."

The basic way to make dried persimmons was to peel the skin off of astringent persimmons, and then you would just suspend them on a string to dry them, but there were also variations where you would dip the persimmons in boiling water. Haruka's idea was to use the same method for dindel fruits.

"That means the boiling water's used to kill bacteria, right?" I asked. "It would only deal with the surface of the fruit, though. Is that enough?"

Killing bacteria with boiling water would be better than washing the dindels by hand, since there would be a lower chance of mold growing on the fruit, but it seemed a bit too easy.

"Dried persimmons can be made that way just fine, so I think it's possible that it'll work for dindels."

"Aren't there other factors involved in the process of making dried persimmons, like winter temperatures, ventilation, and the fact that persimmons have their skin peeled beforehand? It's warmer in this world and the dindels aren't peeled. The only good factor in this world for this is that the humidity seems to be low here."

Temperature and humidity were two big factors that influenced how fast food would go bad. Humidity was especially important, and it played a key role in drying fish that would go bad easily. Dried persimmons were fine because they would dry out before they went bad, but I wasn't sure if it was possible to dry something as small as a dindel fruit while leaving the skin intact.

"I think that part requires expertise. It wouldn't be a secret if it was so easy to make dried dindels."

"That means your Dry spell lets you skip over the required expertise, right,

Haruka?”

“Skip over makes it sound like I didn’t work hard for this. It took me quite some effort to develop that spell, you know?”

“Yeah, I know.” After all, I hadn’t been able to develop a unique spell of my own yet despite my efforts! It wasn’t something I could be proud of by any means.

“Actually, aren’t we forgetting something? We haven’t seen a dried dindel ourselves in the first place. What if mold is used to make them, like how mold is used for bonito flakes?”

“Well, that would change everything,” said Haruka. “Good job thinking that up all of a sudden, Touya.”

“I don’t know of any dried fruits that are made with mold, but I guess it’s not impossible,” I said.

“Well, if that’s the case, then it’s not something we can do in a short period of time, so let’s not worry about it for now. All right, this should be it for now.”

Touya and I, along with Haruka, had continued to prepare the meat as we were chatting. Haruka had joined us midway through, but she had finished before us and managed to slice the most portions of meat; later, we finished as well. All we had to do now was to move the meat to the barrel and then pack it completely with salt to finish. We could just throw the removed fat and bones into leather bags and then throw those bags away in the forest tomorrow while we were doing work.

“Both of you, hold out your hands and knives.”

Haruka used her Purification spell to completely clean our greasy hands and knives and the cutting boards as well. It really was a convenient spell. It was basically better than kitchen detergent. I didn’t want to think about how we would have to deal with this grease without it.

“Is that all we have to do for now, Haruka?” Touya asked.

“We’ll have to wait at least a few days or even a week for the meat to absorb the salt. After that’s done, we’ll lightly wash the meat with water and then start

to dry it.”

“Hmm, that’ll take a while. Do we need to buy extra barrels?”

“How much dried meat do you plan on making, Touya...?”

“Huh? Just all of the meat that we got from the boar, that’s all.”

Touya apparently thought his idea was obvious. Haruka and I looked at each other and sighed in unison.

“You know we won’t be able to eat all of the meat, right?” I asked.

“Really? Even if we made one ton of meat, it would be less than one kilo per person over a year for the three of us. Is it a bit too much?”

“It’s more than just a bit too much!” Haruka exclaimed. “Meat by itself is fine, but if we eat that much salted meat, then we’ll die from excessive consumption of sodium!”

It sounds dangerous even without salt. Does the Robust skill help protect against lifestyle diseases too?

“Do you really want to go through the process of preserving meat every day, Touya?” I asked. “I definitely don’t want to.”

It wasn’t that much trouble to remove the bones and slice the meat, but it would be annoying to remove the fat. Touya seemed to recall how annoying it was, and he grumbled in disappointment.

“If we could just leave the fat as is for the taste, or if Haruka could use a spell to remove the fat easily...”

“How much do you intend to rely on my magic, Touya? Well, I can probably do it, but still.”

“You can?!”

I would expect nothing less of the amazing Haruka-san.

“Hmm, I could use the melting point of lard as a reference point and try to squeeze it out like that. The only problem would be the amount of mana required.”

Unfortunately, our status display windows didn’t have an MP bar or number

anywhere, but I had a rough feel of something being spent when I used magic. I felt like I was able to use magic for a longer period of time now, but I wasn't sure if it was because my mana pool had increased or if it was just that I had gotten better at using magic. It could also be that I was now able to squeeze out every last drop of my mana. *I wish I knew. If there was a concrete number I could check, it would be very helpful for my experiments with magic.*

"MP potions aren't worth it, since they're rather expensive, and Haruka's the only one among us who might be able to craft some for us..."

It wouldn't be an issue if we were in a game, but this was reality, so it felt like Touya and I had made some wrong choices with our skills. We were useful during combat, but neither of us was very useful during daily life. If we didn't have the skills we'd been granted, then both of us would just be ordinary people in terms of our abilities. All we could really do were menial tasks.

"I would have to dry the meat as well, so it would be great if you could remove most of the fat, Touya. It would reduce the total amount of mana I would have to spend."

"What, really?! You can count on me! It's time for my Disassemble skill to shine!"

"Touya, you really do love meat, eh?"

However, he didn't actually have the Disassemble skill yet.

"Well, it'll help us save money on food expenses, and I'm willing to help since Touya said he would help as well. Nao, how much have you mastered your Accelerate Time spell?"

"Uh, I can increase the flow of time by three times, and it'll last for a bit less than ten hours if I use up all of my mana."

"I guess that means it'll save about two days or so if you cast it on this barrel and we leave it for a few days. We can't exactly have you cast it again tomorrow morning."

"Mm. It would be okay if we were taking a break from work, but otherwise it would be a bad idea to have no mana for combat if we were to go to the forest."

I hadn't really used magic recently during combat, but it was necessary as a backup measure. We still hadn't encountered any goblins yet, after all.

"If we're going to let the meat absorb salt for about three days, then we'll need another barrel," I said. "Barrels are actually more expensive than I thought they would be."

I couldn't really compare because I had never bought a barrel before back on Earth, but barrels in this world were about two sizes smaller than a metal barrel, and their price was roughly three thousand Rea apiece. The barrel was a bit more expensive than the pot that we had bought along with it.

"Actually, it's not like we need a newly made barrel for this, right? Let's ask the innkeeper here if he has any spare used barrels that he can give us. Business here seems like it's booming for him, so surely he has to stock up on some food or drinks stored in barrels, right?"

"Oh, that's a great idea, Touya!" Haruka exclaimed. "Yeah, used barrels would do just fine for soaking meat with salt! It's not like we need to worry about the smell."

We went to ask the innkeeper later, when he had spare time, and he gave us barrels for free in exchange for some of the dried meat we were going to make. The barrels were full of alcohol and a bit smaller than the one we'd bought, but he gave us multiple barrels, so we didn't have to worry about a lack of barrels. We looked up more information about barrels at a later time, and apparently used barrels were sold normally on the market, with barrels in good condition (not much visible damage and no bad smell) being sold for about half the price of a newly made barrel, so we shared some dindels with the innkeeper to express our gratitude, since he'd basically given us barrels for free.

We moved to the well at the inn. Next to it sat a simple stove and pot; we had permission from the innkeeper to use them.

"All right, we don't have much time, so let's hurry," said Haruka.

We had taken quite a while to prepare the salted meat earlier, so we didn't have much time left before sunset. Back on Earth, people would still be at work past that time, but it was common sense in this world that sunset was the signal for work to end for the day. We could use magic to create a light if we wanted

to continue working, but the only one among us who could use a spell like that was Haruka, and it would also make us stand out too much. Our surroundings would be almost completely dark while we continued to work with a bright light around us, so we would be bound to attract attention, which could cause some trouble if people noticed that we were working on valuable dindel fruits.

"We need to boil some water first. I'll leave that to you, Nao."

"Okay."

"While you do that, Touya and I will remove the calyxes from the dindels and wash them."

All I could really do easily was light up the firewood, and then I would have to wait for the water to boil. If I tried to use the Ignite spell continually in place of firewood, I would probably pass out before the water reached its boiling point. Thus, after the flame became stable, I went to help Haruka and Touya with washing the dindels. I placed the dindels into strainers after I washed them. These strainers were also something we'd bought today. A simple way to describe them would be as a tool for drying things like salted Japanese plums. However, the strainers we were using were made out of something similar to eulalia grass instead of bamboo. Eulalia grass, or *Miscanthus sinensis*, was a plant that was easy to obtain in the mountains before winter. This kind of strainer was a handicraft that farmers made to earn spare money in the winter months. That meant that we had been able to purchase a set of ten strainers for fairly cheap.

The water had started to boil by the time we were halfway done with washing the dindels.

"What should we do now, Haruka?" I asked.

"Well, all we can really do is soak the dindels in the boiling water, right? Let's try soaking them for different lengths of time and see what happens."

We left one dindel as it was, soaked one dindel for a brief moment, and soaked one dindel each for between one and five minutes for a total of seven different attempts. We threw six dindels into the pot and took them out accordingly to place them in separate strainers. We had to count the time for each one since we didn't have a watch.

“I wish we had a watch for situations like this.”

“Mm, we’ve gotten used to the sense of time in this world, but a watch would still be useful,” said Haruka.

Watches and clocks weren’t common in this world, so people were very casual about time. Well, there was a town bell that rang five times total during the day between sunrise and sunset, so it was possible to know roughly what time it was based on that, but it wasn’t possible to know when the bell would next ring, so it was hard to specify a time to meet up with, like, a certain number of rings. Thus, it was common for people to just use measures like “Meet up at a certain place after the bell rings,” and you would have to put up with this kind of loose sense of time to get by in this world. In addition, the bell wouldn’t ring after sunset, so there wasn’t a specific time when places like taverns and inns would close shop for the day. The inn we were staying at had closing times that depended on when the innkeeper felt like closing, so there were times when the inn would stay open until every customer left, and there were times when the innkeeper would chase customers out. This is just what we knew based on what we had heard from downstairs; we would stay away from the dining area after dinner, since people would be drinking.

“All right, this might not exactly be perfect, but it should be good enough,” said Haruka.

The seven dindels that were lined up in the strainers didn’t look much different from each other. Well, the one that had been boiled for five minutes looked a bit softer and more tender than the one that hadn’t been soaked at all, but it wasn’t something one would notice unless one looked and compared the two carefully.

“Hmm, they don’t look much different,” said Touya.

“Yeah, we wouldn’t be able to tell if we mixed them together,” I said.

“Mm. Is this just how fruits turn out when boiled? I’ve never actually boiled an entire fruit before in my past cooking experiences...” said Haruka.

Yeah, most people just eat fruits as is. Fruits would have to be boiled to make jam, but that was more like crushed fruits that were boiled down instead of just boiled whole.

“Well, I guess we’ll see what happens. *Dry*!”

“Whoa!” Touya and I exclaimed together at what looked like a time-lapse video playing out before our eyes. As soon as Haruka moved her hands over them and cast the Dry spell, the puffy dindels shrunk in no time.

“Hm, this should do.” Haruka lowered her hands when she said that, and the spell’s effect stopped immediately. Before us were a bunch of dried dindels. From start to finish, it hadn’t even taken a minute. *Even modern science would be no match for her when it comes to this, right?*

“Damn, this was amazing. Now this is what I would call magic,” I said.

“Yeah. In a way, I’m more impressed by this than I was when I first saw the Fire Arrow spell.”

Hmm? Are you dissing my strongest spell just because it happens to be Level 1, Touya? I kind of feel the same way as you do, though, so I can’t really retort!

“Heh, feel free to praise me! It was quite a struggle to develop this spell.”

Oh, it’s rare to see Haruka’s smug face. She normally doesn’t boast about her efforts, so it was probably actually really hard for her to accomplish this. Touya and I looked at each other, then applauded in unison as we praised Haruka, who seemed like she was quite proud of herself.

“Whew, you’re amazing as always, Haruka-san!” Touya exclaimed.

“We’re only able to survive thanks to you, Haruka-san!” I exclaimed.

“Would you possibly grant us the honor of referring to you as Haruka-sama?”

“Or rather, should we refer to you as a goddess instead?”

“Let’s create an altar to worship her!”

“That sounds like a great idea!”

We were both praising Haruka nonstop, but she eventually responded with a bitter look on her face, and she raised both of her hands up in the air to stop us.

“Okay, that’s enough. You two don’t have to go that far with the praise. Stop with the stupid combined barrage as well.”

It looked like she wasn’t very pleased with our praise. We were overdoing it

on purpose, of course.

“All right, let’s try these dindels out,” said Touya.

“Yeah. Can you slice them for us, Haruka?”

“Really, you two...? All right, then. Let’s slice them into four equal parts first, then.”

Haruka seemed like she was almost at a loss for words as she sighed at us, but she sliced the dindels, and we started to taste them one slice at a time. *Well then*. They tasted quite different than they did raw. They had a sweet taste, but it wasn’t the kind of sticky sweetness that normal dried fruits would have. It was more similar to something like red bean paste, so it was easier to eat. They tasted a bit different depending on how long they had been boiled, but they were all delicious. Haruka had managed to create these dried dindels easily, but it would normally take a few days to dry them, so it made sense that they were expensive.

“Okay, we’ve tried them all out now. Which ones tasted the best?”

Touya and I spent some time in thought before we answered.

“For me, I think it’ll have to be the one that was boiled for one minute,” said Touya. “The raw dindel and the one that was taken out right away had hard skins and tasted a bit bitter.”

“I’d say the two-minute one for me. Actually, something a bit less than two minutes would be perfect.”

As Touya had mentioned, the bitter taste and the hardness of the dindel skin would go away after being boiled. The skin wouldn’t really be edible while raw, but it would merge with the fruit and improve its taste after it was boiled and turned into a dried fruit. In fact, the skin was exactly what made the dried dindels so delicious. I described it as similar to red bean paste earlier, but perhaps it was more like it had the same role as the skin of a confectionery like manju. Manju would taste better than just straight up eating the red bean paste as is without the outer skin. That was basically the best way I could describe it.

“Hmm, something between one and two minutes? I think they’re already delicious enough as they are right now. Maybe it’s the difference between the

fruit being fully cooked or not. I wonder if we have to cool them rapidly like soft-boiled eggs."

After she heard our opinions, Haruka pondered the results as she tried out her own slices. According to her, you would have to precisely measure the time for soft-boiled eggs and then run them under cold water right away after the boil time was over. This was necessary because otherwise the yolk would harden from the leftover heat if left as is. Her theory was that it would be similar for dindels. If we took out the dindels after the skin was properly boiled and then cooled them, the insides of the fruit would remain raw and would be more delicious that way.

"Let's try cooling these dindels after two minutes of boiling this time. Prepare the water, Nao."

We used two dindels this time and went through the boiling, cooking, and drying process. After we were done, we sliced them in half and tried them out.

"Mm, it tastes better this time. What do you two think?"

"Yeah, it does," I said. "It's a small difference, but it still tastes better."

"Honestly, I can't really tell, so I'll leave it to you guys to decide," said Touya.

We had two yes votes and one abstain vote.

"Let's just make dried dindels this way for today. We can have Diola-san try these out tomorrow and then ask her how close they are to the dried dindels on the market. Even if they're different, we can just eat them ourselves instead, since they're delicious."

"That makes sense, since we're also going to harvest more from tomorrow onward."

If we were going to make these as nonperishable food for ourselves, we wouldn't have to match them with the ones on the market to make a profit. It wouldn't matter if our dried dindels didn't sell, since we would be more than happy to consume some delicious food for the time being. These dindels would go to good use either way.

"Touya, can you make some toothpicks with some kind of mark on them and

then stab them into the dindels?” Haruka asked.

“Sure.”

“Oh, that’s a good idea, Haruka. That way we won’t confuse them with regular dindels.”

I’d thought we would have to put the dried dindels into a completely separate bag. Toothpicks would be more than enough if we were just going to bring them to the guild tomorrow.

“If we had something like a bento box with a mark to distinguish them, we wouldn’t need toothpicks, but oh well. We’re going to mass produce these dried dindels.”

This batch of dindels was from a completely filled backpack, so it was definitely mass production. Most of the hard work would be on Haruka since only she could use the Dry spell. All Touya and I could really do was take care of the other tasks that didn’t involve magic.

That day, Haruka ended up using her magic until she was completely exhausted. She was so exhausted that she fell asleep while she was eating, which wasn’t normal for someone as reliable as she was. I carried her to her bed after we were done eating and then passed out myself after I had used most of my mana to cast Accelerate Time on the salted meat in the barrel. Touya was still energetic that day since he was the only one who hadn’t used magic. I asked him the next day what he’d ended up doing, and apparently he’d practiced his sword abilities after Haruka and I had passed out. It was reassuring to hear that, but he sure was tough in terms of vitality.

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I felt fairly okay when I woke up the next day. It was good to know that I would recover just fine the next day after a good night of rest even if I had used almost all of my mana. Well, I only had a rough feel for my mana pool, so I wasn’t really sure if it had fully recovered to max or not. It would be great if I knew a specific number for my mana pool, but when I asked Haruka about the idea of trying to measure how many times we could use magic, she asked me if I could “place a total of five kilos of weight on a scale one hundred times with perfect accuracy” as an example, and I gave up right away after I heard that.

The fact that we could adjust the potency of spells also meant that the amount of mana spent could differ as well. There was also the problem of how efficient we were with our mana, so the mana spent on a spell with the same potency wouldn't always be the same. We were currently able to use more magic for a longer period of time compared to when we'd first started, but it wasn't clear if it was because our mana pools had increased or because we had become more efficient with our mana usage. Magic was a difficult field to master.

"All right, time to get up!"

The bell that indicated sunrise had already rung, so it was already later than when I usually got out of bed. I got up from my bed and noticed a rare sight: Haruka was still asleep when I looked at the bed next to mine. She was usually the first of us awake to prepare for the day, so the fact that she was still asleep was evidence that yesterday's task had been quite a burden on her. I reached out my hand to wake her up, but I changed my mind midway and stopped myself. We would normally head for the forest right after breakfast, but our plan for today was to head to the Adventurers' Guild first to have Diola-san try out the dried dindels we'd made. However, if we left the inn at the usual time, we would arrive at the guild during a busy time of the day, which could possibly cause some trouble for Diola-san. We would have to head out a bit later to avoid that. That meant it was fine to let Haruka continue sleeping for a bit longer.

I looked at the bed on the other side and there was nobody there. Based on his usual routine, Touya was probably training by himself right now. He hadn't exactly been the type to go jogging early in the morning back on Earth, and he hadn't been the type who was serious about club activities either. However, ever since we had arrived into this world, he would spend his free time training, since he was very passionate about improving his abilities with a sword. I would spend free time training as well, but we were definitely putting more effort into it now that our lives depended on it. *I mean, who wouldn't put in more effort in circumstances like these?* The only kind of people who would continue to be lazy in a situation like this would probably be extremely carefree people, people who had confidence in themselves with no concrete basis, or delusional people who thought they would be fine no matter what since they were the

protagonist of the story or something. The scary part was that I couldn't say for sure that there weren't people like that among my classmates. It was quite possible. I didn't fall under any of those three categories, of course, so I didn't plan on slacking off at all.

I grabbed my spear for some self-training of my own and did my best to leave the room without making any sounds. Haruka woke up a bit after that, and we had her cast Purification on us when we all met up before going to eat breakfast. We took a short rest after that and then headed towards the Adventurers' Guild with the samples of the dried dindel fruit we'd made yesterday. We rarely visited the guild at this time of the day, but there were only a few parties of adventurers inside, so the peak time had already passed. There was nobody at the counter where Diola-san sat, so we headed towards her right away.

"Good morning, Diola-san," said Haruka.

"Oh, it's quite unusual to see you all at this time of the day. Good morning."

"Good morning," Touya said.

"Good morning. We've brought some samples of dried dindel fruit that we made."

Diola-san looked very surprised when I mentioned that.

"Already?!"

"Would you like to try them out?" Haruka asked.

"Yes, it would be my pleasure to do so! As a dindel connoisseur, I'll give these dindels a fair and harsh rating!"

Her surprised expression quickly turned into one of joy. She said that she would be fair and harsh with her ratings, but it was probably more like she would happily indulge in the opportunity. In any case, it would be helpful to have Diola-san rate our dried dindels. We didn't have any of the dried dindels that were sold on the market, so we had nothing to compare ours with at the moment. That meant we would have to ask someone who had eaten regular dried dindels to compare, which in this case was Diola-san.

“Thank you very much. It would help us out a lot.”

“Not at all. He he, I love this part of my job.”

Diola-san whispered those words after she responded to Haruka. I heard her just fine, but it wasn’t anything bad, so it didn’t matter.

“By the way, Diola-san, have you really eaten enough dried dindels before to consider yourself a connoisseur? They’re much more expensive than regular dindels, right?”

“O-Of course. Dried dindels go for an average of about one thousand Rea each.”

Well, well, her eyes were swimming around in every direction as she said that. Nervous, are we? If I had to compare the speed of her eye movements to something, a swimmer doing the butterfly stroke would be the closest example.

“I seem to recall you mentioning something about how it was difficult to purchase and obtain raw dindels as well, right?”

“W-Well, yes, and dried dindels are more expensive than—”

“Dried dindels aren’t brought here to the guild either, right? After all, they count as processed materials.”

Haruka cut her off, and we all stared at her together. She desperately tried to avoid meeting our eyes, but eventually it seemed like she couldn’t stand the looks of doubt that we were giving her, and she swiftly lowered her head to apologize.

“I’m very sorry for not being truthful! I haven’t eaten enough dried dindels before to be able to rate them as a connoisseur! But, well, I have eaten some before, so I can compare these samples to them!”

We asked her for more details as she continued to hang her head in apology, and she explained that she had only eaten dried dindels a few times, and that those dried dindels had been gifts from other people rather than ones that she’d bought herself. The way she put it, it sounded like those dried dindels were the equivalent of gifts one would bring when visiting someone in the hospital.

“I mean, as long as you’ve eaten some dried dindels before, then that’s all that matters,” I said.

“Mm, we just want you to compare our dried dindels with the ones you’ve eaten before. Give these a try first.” Haruka placed some samples of the dried dindels we’d created yesterday on the counter as she said that. She lined them up in random order so that the order wouldn’t affect how Diola-san would rate them. *This came to mind yesterday as well, but the marks on the toothpicks in them are the only way to tell them apart, since they look very similar to each other.*

“Um, eight different types?”

“Yes. We made each one with a slightly different method. Try them out and compare them, please.”

“Okay.”

Diola-san tried out a bit of each dried dindel from right to left as she compared them. She muttered words like “Hmm” and “This is...” as she nodded and lined them up again in what seemed to be the order of her rating. *I didn’t expect her to rate them this seriously. I thought she would just devour them and yell something like “Delicious!” as she went along.*

“Okay, I’ve tried them all out. The ones from here to here are the ones that tasted better than the dried dindels I’ve had before.”

I looked at the ones she mentioned, and based on the marks, they were the ones we had boiled for one minute, two minutes, three minutes, and the one we had boiled and rapidly cooled afterwards.

“This one tasted about the same as what I’ve had before, and these last two weren’t quite as good in comparison.”

Based on her ratings, the one we had boiled for four minutes was about the same in taste; the one we hadn’t boiled along with the one we’d dipped in boiling water only briefly and the one we’d boiled for five minutes were both worse than the dried dindels she’d had before.

“Thank you very much, Diola-san. Does that mean the ones on the market are the same as this one?”

Haruka pointed at the dried dindel that Diola-san had rated as about the same as the ones on the market—the one we'd boiled for four minutes. However, Diola-san shook her head in response to Haruka's words.

"I'm not too sure, honestly. I don't know how you made these dried dindels, but you made them yesterday, right? Dried dindels will still lose some of their taste depending on how well they're preserved, and I don't know if the ones I ate before were in good condition or not..."

That made sense. I hadn't been sure if the flavor of dried dindels would deteriorate over time or if they would age well and become tastier, but they definitely wouldn't remain the same. Ours had been freshly made just yesterday, so depending on how we'd preserved them, they could change over time even though they were the same quality now. Even if the taste wouldn't go bad, there could be other problems; for example, it was possible that mold might grow on them easily. With all that in mind, perhaps we couldn't sell these dried dindels as nonperishable food until next year. If we were to make absolutely sure that these were good for sale, then we would have to buy some market dried dindels and preserve both those and our own to compare in a controlled experiment. *Well, there aren't any labels to indicate expiration dates in this world, so we could just ignore all that and sell our dried dindels anyway, but still.*

"However, this one is absolutely delicious! I think it'll sell for quite a decent amount of money."

The dried dindel that Diola-san pointed at as she said that was the one we rated as the best ourselves, which was the one we'd boiled and rapidly cooled afterwards. It looked like we'd had the right idea for improving the taste of the dindels.

"Oh, so we can sell our dried dindels by emphasizing the taste instead of emphasizing how long they would last."

It seemed like Haruka had had a similar thought about the taste and had come to that conclusion after she'd heard Diola-san's rating for our rapidly cooled dried dindel.

"Um, wait, are you going to sell these dried dindels yourself, Haruka-san?"

“We haven’t decided yet, but it would be fine to sell them via a stall at the morning bazaar, right?”

In the past, we’d taken a look at the morning bazaar before we headed out for work, and we’d seen farmers who seemed to be located nearby who would come to sell their produce. People were free to sell as long as they could get a space to do so. Most citizens would purchase their groceries there; the food that they bought in stores or other places was mainly things that would last for a long time, like grains and processed food. We weren’t able to set up our own store, but people sold fruits at the morning bazaar, so that was the best place for us to sell our dried dindels—or rather, it was the only place we could sell them. If we happened to set up a stall elsewhere without permission, then the Merchant Guild would come in and remove it. On a side note, if someone wanted to set up a stall to cook food at the morning bazaar, that also required the permission of the Merchant Guild. There wasn’t a health inspector or office that would issue permits for food stalls, but the Merchant Guild basically served that role in this world.

“Well, it would be fine to set up a stall, but I’m not sure if your dried dindels will sell or not...” Diola-san sounded a bit hesitant about our idea.

Haruka looked a bit confused when she heard that. “Huh? Didn’t you say our dried dindels would sell for quite a decent amount of money, Diola-san?”

“I mean, yes, I think they’re worth a lot of money. However, dindels are already expensive enough that even I can’t buy them on a regular basis despite the fact that my salary is rather decent compared to others. That’s how it is for me, so as for whether or not people who visit the morning bazaar could purchase these frequently, well...”

“Oh, yeah, that makes sense...” said Haruka.

“Yeah, I guess our dried dindels wouldn’t really fit the morning bazaar...” I said.

After Diola-san pointed that out to us, we looked at each other. If somebody asked me whether or not supermarket muskmelons that were priced as gifts for special occasions sold on a regular basis, I would have to answer with a no. Perhaps it would be different for the kind of muskmelons that were sold in

boutiques in the basements of department stores or in gift shops outside of hospitals, but morning bazaars here were the most similar to nearby supermarkets back on Earth. Even if there was a place similar to a department store boutique that sold dried dindels, one hundred per day was definitely an excessive supply based on the population and average income of people in this town.

"Ugh, I can't believe our plans were crushed like this all of a sudden!" Haruka sounded a bit devastated as she said that, and we all sighed in disappointment. The dried dindels would still go to good use for our own consumption, but while we were working on making these dried dindels yesterday, we'd been thinking about turning a large profit.

"Man, we put in a lot of work for this..." said Touya.

Well, Haruka did most of the work, but yeah.

"Hmm, wait, raw dindels don't last for long, right?" Haruka asked. "How does the guild deal with raw dindels, Diola-san?"

"The guild has connections with nobles, merchants, and artisans as well. There's enough demand for the ones your party brought in yesterday. As for dried dindels, those are sold to other towns as well, so it's more like there's a lack of supply."

The Adventurers' Guild actually did deal in dried dindels, apparently. Those goods were registered in the ledger first, so they weren't something that Diola-san could purchase for cheaper than normal.

"Could you introduce us to some of those connections—actually, probably not, right?"

"Mm, I can't do that. The wholesale commission fee for such goods is a major revenue source for the guild." Diola-san had an awkward smile on her face as she said that. It made perfect sense, so we had to give up on that option. "Well, the guild does buy dried dindels in bulk, if that's okay. It's not as much as what you would get for retail trade, but your party would probably profit more by spending time on other things instead of on trying to sell dindels by yourselves."

"Yeah, that makes sense," said Haruka. "What do you two think?"

“It’s a bit of a shame that we can’t make a big profit on them, but it’s probably safer to sell to the guild instead of trying to sell them ourselves, since we have no experience doing that,” I said. “There’s no point in forcing ourselves to do things we don’t have to.”

“I feel the same way,” said Touya. “We would probably turn a bigger profit via hunting or something.”

We weren’t merchants, and we didn’t have any skills that would help us in the field of trading either. There was a chance that we would get scammed by a shady merchant if we tried to sell dried dindels ourselves, so it wasn’t a bad choice to leave all the work to the Adventurers’ Guild. Sure, we would earn less this way, but we could consider that gap in profit the same as what we would have to pay as an insurance fee. Haruka grumbled to herself for a while as she thought it over, and eventually she sighed to indicate acceptance, then forced a smile.

“Oh well, that works. We’ll bring some more at a later time.”

“Thank you very much. Um, can I have one of these as a sample? The guild needs to assess how much to pay per dried dindel.”

“Sure, here you go.”

Haruka handed Diola-san one of the dried dindels that we’d kept around as emergency rations. We also had some other emergency rations on us that we’d bought from stores, but luckily we hadn’t needed to use them yet. I used the word luckily because we had all tried those emergency rations before once, and it was an experience more shocking than the one we’d had at the stall that we’d encountered on our first day. Thus, we were going to get rid of those emergency rations and shift to dried dindels and dried meat as soon as the dried meat was ready.

“Okay, thank you. The assessment will be done by the usual time in the evening, so I’ll pass on the results if your party comes to the guild at that time or later.”

“Thank you very much.”

It had been a mistake to count our chickens before they’d hatched. We were

a bit dejected that our moneymaking plan had failed, and we bowed our heads slightly towards Diola-san to express our thanks before we left the guild.

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“Ugh, we should have thought of this...” said Haruka.

“Yeah, we only thought about how much we would get from the price of the dried dindels,” said Touya.

“Expensive things wouldn’t always sell well no matter how good they were even back in Japan, so I guess our plan was bound to fail,” I said.

We were discussing what went wrong with each other on our way to the forest. We were walking faster than usual since we had spent some time at the guild.

“We should have thought about the demand and our customer base from the very beginning,” I said.

“Mm, it’s like how bento boxes from a department store boutique wouldn’t sell well at a convenience store.”

It would depend on the location, but there definitely would be plenty left unsold if one tried to sell premium bento boxes at a convenience store that was located on the way to a school. I think the guy at the convenience store near my parents’ house had mentioned how “Location, weather, season, and customer base are all factors that needed to be considered before deciding what to stock up on in order to make a profit” or something like that. I’d responded with just an “I see” back then, since I hadn’t been paying that much attention to what he was saying, but I guess it just meant that business wasn’t easy no matter what world it was.

“What should we do, Haruka? Should we continue to make dried dindels?”

“Hmm, well, what do you two think?”

It depended on whether or not the profit was worth the time spent.

“Most of the hard work for making dried dindels is on you, Haruka, so I’ll leave the decision to you, but I’m not as enthusiastic as before,” I said.

“My vote’s for more dried meat,” said Touya.

“Dried meat won’t sell, Touya. Besides, I don’t want to only eat dried meat all the time.”

We weren’t even sure if the dried meat we were making would turn out to taste good or not in the first place. It would be very depressing if the large amount that we’d prepared turned out to taste bad after all that work.

“Personally, I think it’s best that we continue to make dried dindels. We’ll still get more for them compared to selling regular ones as is, and we can motivate ourselves to make them by thinking about how they’ll make our daily lives better as rations that we can carry with us. Don’t you two agree?”

“Well, yeah, it’s a great source of motivation,” I said.

“Mm, it’ll help us ignore some unpleasant things,” said Touya.

The rations that we carried around as emergency food were what adventurers would eat when they camped out, and they were definitely high quality in terms of how long they lasted and how easy it was to carry them around. However, the trade-off was that they tasted horrible. It was hard to describe how “splendorous” their taste was. The closest example I could give would be something like eating paper clay. We hadn’t taken on any quests or work that required us to stay outside overnight yet, but if we did in the future, then we would have to think about what we would need for them. Our problems would be solved if I could craft a high-quality magic bag before we had to take on such tasks, but it wasn’t that easy to improve my magic to the point where I could craft magic bags. This world wasn’t kind enough to let people improve their magic abilities easily in no time.

“We’ll save money if we can prepare our own lunch. As for how we’ll divide the dindels, we can sell a third of them as is and then dry the other two thirds. We’ll sell half of those dried dindels and keep the other half for ourselves. How does that sound?”

“I don’t mind, but is that really okay with you, Haruka?” I asked. “The work yesterday was really exhausting for you, right? There’s also the dried meat to deal with.”

“Well, yeah, it was exhausting, but we could leave the dried meat preserved in salt in the barrels until dindels are out of season.”

The dindel season that Haruka mentioned was the period of time in which dindels could be harvested. That period would differ depending on the weather, but it would usually be around a month long. According to Diola-san, it was highly likely that there were only about one to two weeks left of the dindel season for this year. That would solve the mana problem for Haruka, but there was still a problem regarding the barrels. The innkeeper had promised us he'd hand over some barrels, but we didn't know if there were enough for a week's worth of meat, and even if there were, we didn't know if we could fit those barrels in our room.

"How about we have Haruka take a break and rest when she's not using magic, and we do the other tasks together, Nao? That should make things better, right?"

"Yeah, it should. That's all we can do, I guess."

"Mm, it's not like we can use skill points to learn magic like in games."

If leveling up would get us points like we'd had initially during character creation, then things would be much easier, but I guess the evil god wasn't exactly kind enough to provide bonus services like that. *Well, I'd like to ask him about it if we meet him again, but he seemed like he enjoyed our plight, so I doubt he would help us out.*

"In that case, I guess it's impossible for Touya to learn magic, right, Haruka?"

"Mm, it's common sense in this world that learning magic is very difficult for beastmen. That probably has to do with whether or not a race has innate aptitude for magic."

"Elves are fine in the aptitude department, right? Why don't you try to learn Water Magic, Nao?"

"Ugh!"

It's not as easy as you think it is! I haven't even managed to level up my Fire Magic yet, even though that was the first thing I learned. It would be great and convenient if I could use the Water Magic and Light Magic that Haruka is capable of, but that would mean I would have less time to practice other things.

I looked at Haruka in the hopes that she would back me up, and she laughed

dryly before she did. “Well, in my case, I took the aptitude skills for Light, Wind, and Water Magic along with the aptitude for alchemy. In Nao’s case, he doesn’t have the aptitude skill for Fire Magic, and while he does have the aptitude skill for Time Magic, that’s a type of magic which is difficult to master, so it’s only natural that he’s been struggling.”

“Yeah, exactly!” *I knew Haruka would have kind words for me!*

I sighed in relief at what Haruka said, but a playful expression appeared on Haruka’s face as she added more words for me. “However, since we’re elves, that means we can learn magic without the aptitude skills, so it might be a good idea for both of us to buy a beginner’s grimoire and learn the basics from that.”

“Okay...”

I couldn’t exactly say that I didn’t want to learn or study, so I nodded in response without complaining.

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The price that the Adventurers’ Guild had decided on for our dried dindels was apparently eight hundred Rea. We could harvest about three hundred of those dindels in a day, so if we saved one hundred of those dindels for our own use and divided the rest between selling as is and selling dried, then we would be able to earn around one hundred thousand Rea per day. *I can’t believe that in the beginning, we worked so hard only to earn one thousand Rea per person.*

However, we had to work until we were completely exhausted to maintain that daily income. Most of the burden was on Haruka, as we’d expected, and even though Touya and I tried to ease that burden by doing all sorts of other tasks, we ended up with no time to work on dried meat. We switched to different dindel trees three times over the ten days since our first day of harvesting dindels, and we stopped harvesting them once our harvest had dropped below two hundred dindels per day. We could have continued to harvest more dindels for a while longer, but Haruka’s fatigue was building up to dangerous levels, so Touya and I decided to stop the dindel moneymaking schedule. Our daily income dropped as a result, but we were all glad to be able to finally get some rest.

As for goblins, we encountered them on our third day of gathering dindels.

We really didn’t have to be worried about them at all. First of all, they weren’t very strong. They were a bit cunning, but overall, tusk boars were a tougher enemy to deal with, so goblins weren’t a threat. As for the fact that goblins were humanoid, that was also something we didn’t have to worry about. They didn’t really seem like they had human qualities. The only thing human about them was the fact that they stood on two legs and that they carried wooden clubs. Snow monkeys were more similar to humans than goblins were. Maybe it was because the skeletal structure of goblin faces was completely different. We were glad about that in a way, but it also meant that our plan to get used to fighting humanoid enemies wasn’t a success. Overall, these results weren’t exactly good or bad. *Perhaps it would be a good idea to consider hiring someone like a combat instructor to get used to fighting against other humanoid beings.*



After the dindel season ended, we took a break from work to rest for a few days and used some of our free time to work on making dried meat. We took the meat out of the barrels, washed it, and then lined the pieces up in strainers before Haruka used the Dry spell on them. She would then go back to our room to rest while Touya and I stuffed the dried meat into bags. After we were done with that, we would both start self-training until Haruka had recovered. We kept this schedule for our days off work. It wasn't exactly a full break with just rest, but I had to continually use Scout when we were outside on the job to keep on guard against enemies, so the fact that I didn't have to do so on break was more than enough for me in terms of mental rest.

As for self-training, it wasn't like we trained to the point where we passed out and were tired the next day, so overall, we more or less got some good rest. Honestly, it was better to do something to avoid that uneasy feeling I got when I was doing nothing. Touya probably felt the same way I did, since he didn't skip out on self-training either.

A more realistic problem to consider was what we would do if we encountered two wipe bears at the same time. We would probably all die. Or rather, definitely would be a more fitting word than probably. There was no way we could outrun those bears since they were extremely fast. Even a world record holder for sprinting wouldn't be able to outrun a bear. *Would we have been more easygoing and taken the time to enjoy sightseeing in this different world if we hadn't encountered a wipe bear before? Maybe we'd already be dead due to that easygoing mentality. Well, we're still alive now, and our livelihood isn't that bad. That means we haven't made any wrong choices yet, and that's all that matters.*

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"Whew, our room finally has space again!"

"Yeah, our room wouldn't have been so cramped in the first place if you hadn't gone overboard, Touya..." said Haruka.

"Indeed," I said.

Haruka and I looked at each other and sighed in unison at Touya, who was absolutely beaming with happiness. The reason our room had become tight and

cramped was because of barrels filled with salted meat. We had made way more than we'd initially planned on, and by the time we were done, we'd had almost no energy left to even walk.

All of this was Touya's fault, obviously. We'd kept a pace of just one boar per day at first, but once we had decided to leave the meat alone to dry while we dealt with the dindels, Touya had said "It's okay to make some more since we're gonna leave them alone, right?" which started all of this. Afterwards, he would hunt down tusk boars whenever he saw them, even if they were away from our usual path, which meant that there were plenty of days when we had to deal with two boars' worth of meat. Touya volunteered to gut and prepare the meat of those boars himself, so it was hard to say no to him. The salted preserved meat had kept building up in this way, so we'd kept making dried meat like that for three days. After those three days were over, we had finally managed to remove all of the barrels of salted meat that had been taking up space in our room. The biggest victim of Touya's meat adventures was Haruka, who'd had to keep using her Dry spell on the meat, but I'd done my best to help her as well. It was only natural that we would both be exhausted as a result of all this.

"We finally don't have to suffer from the smell of the meat anymore," I said.

"Mm, that smell was honestly quite unpleasant," said Haruka.

We'd had to process a large amount of meat in our room, and it had continued to pile up as salted meat in here. Even the Purification spell wasn't enough to remove the smell completely.

"It was worth it, though, right?" Touya asked.

"Well, yeah, I guess."

Touya looked very smug for some reason when he asked that, but it was true that the finished dried meat was quite delicious. We could chew on it as is, or roast it, or even put it in soup. The innkeeper had praised our dried meat as well, and we'd traded some of it to him in exchange for a decent amount of money. As for the small quantity of dried meat with fat that Touya had made, the innkeeper had said that "This is edible, but the ones without fat taste better," so it was about what I'd expected. We'd been right to spend the time

removing the fat instead of avoiding that work.

“However, it was thanks to Haruka that the dried meat turned out to be delicious, so why are you so smug about this, Touya?”

“W-Well, I was the one who decided we should make a lot, which was a genius idea!”

“That meant a lot of extra burden on me, but oh well. I guess it’s okay since you helped a lot with gutting and processing the meat, Touya.”

Touya looked away as he made an excuse, but Haruka shrugged with a bitter smile as she backed him up.

“Thanks for being understanding, Haruka! Oh yeah, I forgot to mention something. I somehow managed to obtain the Disassemble skill after all of this.”

“Wait, really?!”

“Yeah. It’s Level 1, though.”

“You did work very hard on processing the meat,” said Haruka. “Well, you’re the first one among us who’s managed to obtain a new skill.”

“Yeah,” I said.

We had all put in a lot of effort for quests and training over the last half month, but none of us had managed to obtain any new skills or even level up the skills that we already had.

“Mm, I spent quite some time staring at meat. I didn’t reach triple digits, but I was definitely fairly far into the double-digit hours,” said Touya.

“Still, I can’t believe it took you that long to learn a fairly simple skill like Disassemble,” said Haruka. “I guess that means it’s not that easy to level up or learn skills.”

“Wait, hold on, didn’t you learn that Staff Fighting skill a while ago, Touya?!”

He had learned that skill fairly quickly while he’d been forced to use a long iron baton. I’d completely forgotten about its existence since he had been using a sword recently.

“Oh yeah, that technically does count as a new skill. I forgot about it since I

haven’t used it at all, ha ha!”

He laughed about it in a carefree manner. *You should at least remember your own skills, Touya.*

“You haven’t managed to level up any of your skills, right, Nao?” Haruka asked. “I thought your Scout skill would at least have increased in level by now due to how much you’ve used it, but I guess not...”

“Mm, it’s still the same. I did a lot of self-training with my spear as well, but my Spearmanship skill hasn’t leveled up either.”

I would actively use my Scout skill almost the entire time we were outside of town, so it was my most-used skill. I personally felt like I had gotten better at using it by now, but its level hadn’t changed at all.

“You’ve still gotten better at using a spear, so the training didn’t go to waste. It’s normal not to be able to see your improvement via some kind of concrete number, so don’t worry too much about it.”

“Well, a while ago, I thought I would be able to motivate myself more if we could see concrete numbers via a status display screen, but now our status screen makes me feel like I’m being told that I haven’t made any progress at all...”

“Oh yeah, that thought has crossed my mind before too, Nao! I wish our status displays would display an experience points bar for each of our skills, like how it is in some games!”

Oh yeah, I would love for our status screens to have a function like that. There were many times when I wasn’t sure if I was doing things right during self-training. I had gotten better at combat compared to before I started self-training, so it wasn’t completely useless, but still.

“I think it’s best to not worry and just accept the idea that it’s very difficult to level up skills,” said Haruka.

Skills weren’t common knowledge in this world, so there was no concrete information about a level cap for skills, but apparently the highest level spell that was inscribed in a grimoire was Level 10, so we could use that as a reference for the level cap of other skills. Mages who could flawlessly use Level

10 spells were very rare, and it was normal to be unable to reach that level of mastery even if you devoted your entire life to magic. That was just how difficult it was.

“It’s probably easier to level up skills at low levels, but there probably comes a certain point where it’ll take years of hard work and training to reach the next level,” said Haruka.

“So we shouldn’t expect to get any results from just half a month of training?” Touya asked.

“We’ve gotten stronger than we were initially, so that counts as results. Since we’ve gotten results, we shouldn’t worry about whether our status screens reflect that or not.”

“Yeah, I guess we should just treat our status screens as something to check once in a while,” I said. “If we can do something new, then it’ll appear as a skill. It’s not the other way around.”

Touya’s Disassemble skill just indicated that he had gotten better at gutting and cleaning animals, but it didn’t mean that he had gotten good at it.

“Level ups in games would immediately improve your abilities, but I guess in this world you have to slowly improve your abilities over time, and you have to reach a certain point for it to be displayed as a new level on your status screen,” I said.

“That sounds normal, yeah, but it’s not gamelike at all,” said Touya.

“We can’t really trust everything the evil god told us,” said Haruka. “In a way, this is actually a good thing. The fact that things aren’t gamelike means that there’s no temptation to be reckless.”

“Oh yeah, indeed. If we could see an experience points bar for our skills, I would get an urge to earn experience points to level up,” I said.

“Yeah, I feel the same way! That’s the gamer spirit!”

Would anyone who calls themselves a gamer not try to level up if there was an experience bar in front of them? Of course not! The grind calls for a gamer!

“There’s no such thing as time loops via death in real life. Perhaps I should

thank the ‘evil’ god that skills aren’t gamelike, considering how you two would act otherwise.”

“Trust me, we wouldn’t be reckless, since our lives are on the line here in this world!” Touya exclaimed.

“You sure? You sure you two wouldn’t say something like ‘I’m almost about to level up, so let’s slay some more goblins!’ in certain situations?”

I stared at Touya after Haruka said that. Our eyes met, and I felt a deep connection with him in my heart.

“O-Oh yeah, what are we going to do tomorrow?” I asked.

“That’s a very obvious change of subject...”

I mean, what am I supposed to say?! I can easily see myself or Touya saying something like that! It’s only natural for a gamer to be a bit greedy and push the limits, right? I’m pretty sure over ninety percent of gamers out there in the world would agree with me on this. Well, probably, at least.

“Fine, I’ll play along. Now then, I have an important announcement to make, since we’ve reached a milestone. We’ve managed to amass the amount of money for our short-term goal after we sold some of our dried meat to the innkeeper the other day!”

“Oh, finally!”

“That took longer than I thought! Yay!”

We clapped for a bit and then high-fived each other. Our initial short-term goal for money had been about five hundred thousand Rea, but that amount had disappeared in no time after we’d spent it on some general goods and our weapons. As a result, we’d increased that goal to one million, five hundred thousand Rea.

“This means we’ll be fine for a while even if Touya suffers some heavy injuries or if Nao gets stuck in bed due to an illness! Yay!”

“Don’t say ominous things like that, please!” I said.

Once again, she didn’t include herself. Sure, she was less likely to suffer injuries since she was our backline, but her Robust skill was the same level as

mine, wasn't it? *Well, I guess I took days off school due to colds more often than she did back in Japan, but still.*

"Our budget now has a solid buffer, and we have a clear vision for the future!"

"Stop, you don't have to imitate tryhard talk, Haruka!"

She seemed to be very cheerful and happy at the moment, since she smiled and gave us a thumbs up, which was something she wouldn't normally do.

"But yeah, this means we've established a stable lifestyle," I said.

We had the equipment that we needed by now, and we wouldn't have to worry too much about injuries or getting sick. That was just how powerful and great money was.

"Yeah, this is my first step towards a cute animal-ears wife!"

When did you start to emphasize the cute part for your animal-ears wife dream, Touya? Well, it's your dream, so feel free to do so. I'm rooting for you, Touya.

"Mm, yeah..."

"Hm? Am I not allowed to aim for a cute animal-ears wife yet?"

Haruka had a slightly gloomy look on her face as she agreed with Touya. He tilted his head and asked her again to confirm.

"Nah, that's fine. Feel free to go for that. But, well—okay, there's something I want to discuss with you two."

Haruka looked determined and serious even though she'd been a bit hesitant at first. She firmly declared the following words: "We should leave this town by tomorrow, or at least within the next few days."



Side Story—Yuki and Natsuki

I panicked at the sudden flash of light and closed my eyes. A few seconds later, I cautiously opened my eyes again, and what I saw in front of me looked like an alley that you'd see somewhere in Europe. *I feel like I've seen something like this before on a travel TV show. I mean, it has to be that, since I've never gone on a trip overseas before.* I sighed to catch my breath. When I looked around, I met eyes with someone next to me. She looked somewhat different from before, but she still closely resembled a good friend of mine.

"Natsuki?"

"Yuki? I'm so glad that we managed to meet up! I thought we would be separated!"

She hugged me after she said that, and she looked very relieved, as if she was about to cry. I hugged her back. We had been sitting next to each other on the bus, so I'd hoped that she was near when I'd decided to stick to the soul that was right next to me. *I'm glad I made the right choice!* Honestly, I would've felt terrified if I'd been thrown out here alone.

"I'm really glad we're together! Um, where's Haruka? Is she not here...?"

"Yeah, her seat was far away from ours..."

Natsuki, Haruka, and I hung out together quite often. I had known Natsuki since elementary school and Haruka just since high school, but for some reason, we all got along well, so we'd become good friends quite fast. Haruka would spend a decent amount of time with Nao and Tomoya, though, so Natsuki was my best friend. *Damn it, Haruka! You're the one with the good life! I can't believe you're keeping two hot guys all to yourself! Curse you!*

"Yuki, what's wrong? Do you feel uneasy because Haruka's not around?"

The recent turn of events that had placed us here had been quite shocking, so I was somewhat subconsciously trying to escape from reality by thinking about stupid stuff. Natsuki seemed like she was worried about me; she was looking at

me closely while my mind was wandering. However, the expression on her face looked like she was feeling way more uneasy than I was. I hastily shook my head after I saw that expression.

“Oh, nah, I’m fine, trust me.”

As I shook my head, I tried my best to calm her down, since she definitely needed reassurance more than I did. *Whew, that was close. I almost gave in to my inner dark side. I do wonder, though—who’s Haruka actually going after romantically? I feel like she’s closer to Nao. I mean, the normal choice would obviously be Nao, right?*

“Oh yeah, who do you think Haruka is going after romantically, Natsuki? Do you think it’s Nao, or do you think it’s Tomoya?”

“Huh? Was that what you were thinking about in this situation?!”

Whoops, right, my bad.

“Hmm, I think it might actually be Tomoya-kun. I feel like there’s less restraint behind Haruka’s interactions with him. The easy answer would be Nao-kun, though.”

I love that you answered anyway, Natsuki! Thanks!

“You sure? As far as lack of restraint, I feel like she almost goes too far. Wouldn’t you be, like, a bit more demure towards the person you like or something...?”

I wasn’t exactly very experienced when it came to romance, but the way Haruka would jab at Tomoya and shoot down his antics felt quite ruthless. *Surely she would hold back a bit more around the person she loves, right...?*

“I mean, well, it’s probably just her inner shyness as a girl that’s preventing her from being honest with herself.”

“Inner shyness...?”

“Yeah, her inner shyness. Wait, Haruka’s inner shyness...? Hmm, that actually doesn’t sound right.”

As she pondered, Natsuki had an expression on her face that indicated mixed feelings. Haruka was quite cute and feminine, but she wasn’t exactly the type of

person that I would use words like “shy girl” to describe. *Well, based on what I know of her, at least.* She was more like the type of cool girl who other girls would look up to—the type who would be more popular with girls than with boys. However, she didn’t have many fangirls like that, since she was good friends with Nao and Tomoya and spent a lot of time with them.

“Wait, no, now’s not the time for this kind of girl talk!”

Right, we should stop getting sidetracked.

“Well, believe me, Natsuki, I only brought up this topic because I wanted to help you calm down.”

“I’m not too sure if that’s really all you intended, but okay. More importantly, is there anyone else we know nearby? It looks like there isn’t...”

I looked around as well, and there was nobody around at all. We were the only ones here.

“Let’s move to wherever the main street is and sit down in some cafe to discuss things.”

“That sounds fine with me, but are you sure things will work out, Yuki?”

“He he, you can count on me! I have the General Knowledge skill!”

I’d had 5 Points left over once I’d gotten everything I wanted during the character creation process. I hadn’t been sure what to use those points on when I’d happened to stumble across the General Knowledge skill. Intercultural communication would be key when visiting a foreign country, so I obtained the skill because I felt like it would be quite useful for that purpose. Thanks to that skill, I knew how to act so as not to be suspicious or stand out, and I knew the prices of things in cafes and dining places as well.

“Well, it’s a good thing you chose to get that skill, but what about money?”

“Ugh, I completely forgot about that...!”

Right, there’s no point knowing the price of things if we don’t have any money! There’s only one thing to do in this case.

“Let’s sell something for—”

“What do we even have on us to sell?” Natsuki spread her arms out as she said that. Her clothes looked like the kind of cheap cloth garments that a commoner would wear. She didn’t have any belongings on her, and neither did I. That would help us not to stand out, but it also meant that we couldn’t obtain money by selling the belongings we’d had on us back on Earth.

“I wish we still had our old clothes, since we could’ve sold things like the handheld mirrors that we had in our pockets...”

“Pockets? Wait, Yuki, there’s something in the pockets of these clothes!”

Natsuki held out her hands as she said that, and there were a few coins on her palms. I checked my own pockets right away and found the same ten coins that she had.

“These are large silver coins! Let’s see, ten of these are worth the equivalent of about ten thousand yen in total, so it’s more than enough to pay for food at a dining hall, since the price of regular food in this world is cheap!”

We could get a full meal with the amount of money you’d have to pay for a beef bowl back in Japan. High-quality food, on the other hand, was very expensive, because distribution channels weren’t developed at all in this world.

“All right, let’s get going, Natsuki! We can have some drinks while we discuss our plans!”

“Wait a minute.”

Just as I was about to take a step forward, Natsuki grabbed me by my hand and stopped me in my tracks.

“Are you sure we can go to a dining hall right away?”

“Well, I know what places to avoid thanks to the General Knowledge skill, and we won’t get ripped off in terms of prices either.”

“No, that’s not the problem. The problem is the money we have. Between us, we only have the equivalent of twenty thousand yen combined, you know? Will this last us until we can start earning some money? As for clothes—well, sadly, we’ll have to give up on clothes for now, but we still need money to stay at a place like an inn and for food as well.”

“Oh, right...”

Accommodation and food expenses were relatively cheap in this world compared to back on Earth, but twenty large silver coins wouldn’t last us more than ten days even if we tried our best to be frugal. That was only if we allocated all our money for those two expenses, so we would run out of money even sooner if we had to spend it on other things. I explained that to Natsuki along with the typical prices of things.

Natsuki grimaced when she heard that and then sighed deeply. “That means we don’t exactly have the luxury of finding some cafe to sit down at while we discuss things. Let’s just find some safe place first and discuss things there. I don’t want to discuss things here, since we seem to be in an alley.”

“Mm, you’re right. Well, I don’t think this is a dangerous alley by any means, but let’s head for the main street first.”

It didn’t seem like we were in the slums, so we probably weren’t in any danger of being suddenly attacked out of nowhere, but it was still true that there was nobody around if that did happen. I took Natsuki’s hand and led the way towards where the main street seemed to be.

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“Okay, let’s discuss what skills we have first!”

“Yeah, that sounds like a good idea!”

It appeared that the town we’d been transported to was a small port town near a river. One side of the town faced out towards the river, and the port was in that area. There was an area a bit away from the town and the port that appeared to be a plaza. It probably served as a buffer zone whenever floods occurred. That was the place where Natsuki and I chose to discuss things. We didn’t want other people to overhear what we were discussing, but we also felt uneasy about talking in a place where there was nobody around. This area was a fairly open space with a decent number of people around, and it would be easy to notice someone approaching us. On top of that, we would look like we were just gazing at the river if we sat together, so we wouldn’t be very suspicious. It was a pretty good place to choose.

“Okay, so how can we check our skills, Yuki?”

“Um, well, first of all, skills aren’t common knowledge among people in this world.”

“Huh? Why’s that? We have skills, though, right?”

“Mm, based on what I know from the General Knowledge skill, it’s just what common sense appears to be in this world. Maybe these skills were gifts and talents that the evil god let us choose since our lives ended abruptly before we got transported here?”

We hadn’t had any magic skills back on Earth, of course, and many of the abilities we did have would be useless in this world. If we had been transported to this world as we were before, without skills, then life would obviously be easier for someone who had worked hard at athletic activities compared to someone who’d spent all their time mastering a different language, for example. Knowing a different language back on Earth wouldn’t help you at all in this world.

With that in mind, skills were basically a way for us to reallocate the abilities that we had learned and accumulated in our lives to different fields, and we’d been granted a chance to start over with those skills in this world. *He called himself an evil god, but he was rather kind for someone “evil.”* However, that didn’t mean you would completely forget things like the languages you knew, so I had no idea how all of that was factored into calculating the number of points that he’d granted us individually. Perhaps the value attached to our abilities depended on how useful they would be in this world.

“Well, that’s a bit of a problem for me. I don’t remember what all of my skills were.”

“As for me, I remember most of my skills.” That was because I’d spent most of my points on the Copy skill, so I didn’t have many points left to get a lot of other skills.

“I remember about half of my skills and that I got the Help Guide—hold on. Oh, I see.”

Natsuki had suddenly interrupted herself in mid-sentence, and her eyes

wandered around for a bit before she nodded to herself as if she understood something. *I have no idea what you mean by "I see," Natsuki.*

"What happened?"

"Yuki, you just need to say 'Status' to check your skills."

"Huh? How do you know that?" *I had no idea about that. How come Natsuki knows about this and I don't*?

"It's because I got the Help Guide. The Help Guide is a skill that provides some advice, and—wait, does that mean you don't have the Help Guide, Yuki?!"

"Y-Yeah, I don't..."

Visible panic suddenly spread across Natsuki's face when she asked me for confirmation. The cost of the Help Guide had been 20 Points, and I'd thought I would only be able to use it during the character creation process, so I'd ignored it right away. Based on what Natsuki had said, if you could still use it and receive advice after being transported to this world, then it did sound useful. *I have the General Knowledge skill, though, so surely I didn't need it, right?*

"Listen to me carefully, Yuki. There were some very bad and dangerous skills among the ones that we were offered. You didn't get skills like that, such as Copy or Plunder, right?"

"Uh..."

Yikes. Wait, did I step on a land mine or something? I thought if I had the General Knowledge and Copy skills, I would do just fine in this world, so in my head, I went, like, "I'll protect you as well, Natsuki, yeah!"—but am I actually in big trouble? Based on the look that Natsuki was giving me, I probably was. I felt the blood drain from my face after I saw that look. *Oh God, I feel a bit dizzy.*

"Calm down, Yuki. Say 'Status' to yourself and tell me what your skills are."

"O-Okay. *Status*! Wait, what?"

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Name: Yuki

Race: Human (Age: 17)
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Condition: Healthy

Skills:

A display window that looked like a status screen appeared in the air, but I didn't see any skills listed.

"Um, my status screen doesn't show any skills for me, Natsuki. What's up with this?"

"Huh? That shouldn't be right. Wait, my skills are gone too—they're back? Is this status screen bugged or something?"

My skills were displayed as soon as Natsuki said that her skills were back. It seemed to be something like lag when loading a website. Her status screen, like mine, hadn't displayed properly at first, so it was probably just a bad connection to the god internet or something like that.

"Is this what I think it is...? Hmm, that means the first thing we should do is...okay. Can you tell me what your skills are first, Yuki?"

"Okay."

It appeared that I couldn't directly show her my status screen, so I read my skills out loud.

Copy, General Knowledge, Magic Aptitude: Earth, Magic Aptitude: Fire, Magic Aptitude: Water, Magic Aptitude: Time

Level 1 Earth Magic, Level 1 Robust, Level 1 Third Eye

"Your skill build seems a bit weird to me, but it looks like the only bad skill you have is the Copy skill."

Natsuki breathed a deep sigh of relief after I had finished telling her my skills. I sighed in relief as well after she told me that I didn't have any other bad skills. I would have been overwhelmed with despair if she'd told me that all of my skills were bad.

"It's a good thing you decided to get Copy instead of Plunder. Copy's still gimmicky, but it can be useful depending on how you use it."

"I mean, Plunder is basically theft, right? Copy bothers my conscience a bit as

well, but it's still better than Plunder."

I'd thought Plunder would be very useful, but it kind of didn't feel right to steal other people's hard work and talents. Plunder had required fewer points than Copy to get, though, so it had been a very tempting choice.

"I'm glad your conscience kicked in. In this case, it saved your life, Yuki."

"Really...?"

"Yeah. I'll explain in further detail later, but just promise me you won't use the Copy skill, okay?"

"I mean, if you insist, then sure, but why later?" *If I somehow saved my own life without knowing how, I'd prefer an explanation now...*

"It's because there are more important things to deal with right now."

"Hm?" Natsuki had a serious look on her face when she said that, so I put on a serious look as well and asked her for more details.

"First, let's take a walk through the main street of this town for about an hour."

"Huh? A walk? Did I hear you right?"

"Yeah, you heard right. I'll explain why later, so can you just trust me for now?"

It seemed that I had heard right. *What is she thinking? A walk, despite the plight that we're in? I would've ignored those words if it hadn't been you who'd said them, Natsuki!*

"Okay, sure. Should we just walk together, Natsuki?"

"Yeah. While we're walking, we can take the opportunity to discuss common sense and knowledge in this world."

She smiled happily as she said that, so I went along with her idea. We actually ended up walking through town for about an entire hour.

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As soon as I could see again, I swiftly examined my surroundings. I was in some plaza, and the town landscape looked like what one would expect from a

town in a fantasy world. Once I was done looking around, I dashed into an alley and hid myself in the shadows, out of plain sight. How far up I could ascend in life here in this different world would depend on how I started out. It also depended on whether I could successfully get by in life without my classmates finding me. *I mean, that's obvious, right? My classmates have cheat skills, so it would definitely be dangerous to bump into them.*

The most *yikes* skill among the ones that we'd been offered had definitely been the Plunder skill. After all, it would let you steal skills that people had spent their own points to get. I'd wanted to get the 2x EXP skill, but I hadn't had enough for it after I spent points on the Plunder skill. Some of my classmates had probably decided to get the 2x EXP skill, since they would've also thought that it seemed useful, so I'd figured I could just steal it from those people. There were skills that would affect one's looks, so I could expect to become good-looking myself if I stole those skills as well. Those kinds of skills made absolutely no sense to me, but all that mattered was that they were obtainable one way or another. That was why I'd decided I would use all of my points to get the Plunder skill.

"My highest-priority targets are definitely my classmates. Some of them should be nearby right now."

It was highly likely that my classmates had useful skills, but there was a chance that they would move to a different town over time. I had the option of just randomly choosing targets to steal skills from, but it was highly unlikely that a cheat skill like Plunder had no limits or restrictions.

"There wasn't anything about restrictions in the description, but maybe it's something like 'Plunder only works once per target, since they'll try to resist,' or maybe there's a daily limit to the number of times I can use this skill."

If there were restrictions like that, then it meant that I couldn't randomly use my Plunder skill without thinking. It would be the end for me if I bumped into another classmate who also had the Plunder skill while I couldn't use my own Plunder. There was a high chance that all of the skills that I'd gathered up to that point would get stolen away from me.

"Yeah, that means my best choice of action is to prioritize my classmates as

targets.”

They were almost guaranteed to have useful skills, so they were basically like freebies for the taking. But I might only have one shot to take that freebie, since it was possible that things would end up as a stealing competition between those of us who had gotten the Plunder skill. I wanted to go out and search for my classmates right away before I lost my chance, but at the same time, it was risky, since another Plunder user might find me first instead.

“If some of my other classmates got transported nearby, then they would probably avoid deserted alleys like this and head for open areas like the plaza. I should just wait here in this alley for now.”

After I muttered to myself to wait, I spent some time observing my surroundings from where I was hidden. My patience was finally rewarded when two familiar girls appeared a couple of meters away from me. They looked like they were Yuki Shidou and Natsuki Furumiya. Those two hung out together with Haruka Azuma as a group of three quite often, and they were all quite popular among the boys. Azuma and Furumiya were the beautiful type, while Shidou was more like the cute type of girl, but Azuma’s beauty was on a whole different level. Azuma was good friends with Naofumi Kamiya and Tomoya Nagai as well, so those two were the victims of some nasty jealousy from other boys. *Well, both Kamiya and Nagai were friendly and sociable, so it wasn’t like they were completely ostracized. It was more like just teasing in good fun. However, everything might change in this different world.*

“It’s a shame Azuma’s not with them, but oh well. Shidou and Furumiya will do just fine as my first targets.”

They would probably struggle to survive in this world if I stole their skills. If I just acted kind to them and helped them out after that, then everything would go well for me. I was going to become stronger and stronger from now on.

“All I have to do is make them completely reliant on me! Also, this isn’t Japan, so I can eventually buy some slaves and have some fun, mwa ha ha!”

I intuitively knew how to use my Plunder skill, and I used it as I looked at them. Right after I used my skill, my consciousness faded to black.

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“Okay, Natsuki, I want an explanation!”

We’d actually done nothing but walk. On the way, we’d discussed things like the Adventurers’ Guild, the price of things, and common sense about money in this world, but it was still just a walk. We’d walked all the way from the port to the town gate and then back to where we started. That was all we’d done. *Well, we did a bit of window shopping, but that doesn’t really count as something significant, right?*

“Of course. I’ll start by explaining to you exactly why the Copy skill is dangerous.”

She explained the gimmicky part of the skill to me in a very flat tone and with a serious look on her face.

I felt the blood drain from my face again as I listened. “Wh-What should I do, Natsuki?! Am I done for?! Is my life ruined and over?!”

“Calm down, Yuki. It’s true that you’re not helpful at all right now.”

Ouch! I can’t deny that, but those words hurt, Natsuki!

“However, we can still put your Copy skill to use. You can just copy my skills.”

“O-Oh, yeah, that works! Good idea, Natsuki! I knew I could count on you!”

I can still use skills that I get via the Copy skill as long as the person teaches me how to use them! I thought I had wasted 100 Points, but I guess not!

“Well, I don’t know how I’m supposed to teach you so that you can also use my skills, so that’s a problem.”

“Ack!” *That makes sense! Teaching someone a skill like Cooking sounds easy enough, but I have no idea how I would teach someone a skill like Third Eye!*

“I think I’ll be able to teach you the practical skills that I have, so there’s no need to feel down about it. You’ll be able to copy and learn more skills from Haruka as well once we meet up with her.”

“Yeah, that’s true! I wonder where Haruka is, though...”

“She’s probably together with Nao at the moment.”

“Oh yeah, then that means Tomoya is probably with them as well. Those

three were most likely able to tell each other apart even in that soul form we were in."

When the god had told us that it would be a good idea to stay near people we knew before we got transported, I'd only had a vague feeling that Natsuki was close to me. *I think I would've noticed Haruka if she had been nearby as well, but I'm not completely sure. Well, those three were probably able to recognize each other even if they weren't physically close together initially.*

"If all three of them were transported close together, then they'll probably do just fine. In fact, they'll most likely be better than us at getting by in this world."

"Mm, they definitely seem reliable when it comes to survival."

Another way to word it would be that they were very tough and good at adapting to whatever situation got thrown at them. Tomoya had a bit of a reckless side to him, but that wouldn't be a problem if Haruka was around to rein him in. It would probably be safer for us two girls to wait for them to find us instead of searching around ourselves.

"I hope they're in this town as well..."

"We didn't bump into them even though we walked down the main street and beyond, so I'm not too sure if they're here."

Mm, that makes sense. This isn't a big town by any means, so we would have probably met them by now if they were in this town.

"We haven't met any of our other classmates either. I wonder if none of them are nearby at all..."

"Nah, considering the existence of the Plunder skill, it's unlikely that there was nobody nearby. Actually, there was someone we passed who might've been one of our classmates."

"Wait, really?"

"Mm. I'm not completely sure about it, though."

"Hmm, yeah, I guess we all probably look a bit different compared to before."

Neither of us had gotten skills that affected our looks, but the shade of our hair had changed slightly, which was enough to make us appear a bit different

from before. There were various factors that would affect your looks, such as your race or skills like Extremely Attractive Appearance, so there was a good chance that we wouldn't recognize people we weren't really familiar with.

"Oh yeah, I forgot to mention just how bad Plunder is compared to the Copy skill. You'll understand once I explain."

Natsuki sighed as she told me about the gimmick behind the Plunder skill, and I was absolutely shocked when I heard what she told me.

"Wait, does that mean you'll outright die if you randomly use the Plunder skill on the wrong target?"

"Yeah."

"Yikes, I almost screwed myself over! I'm glad I decided to listen to my conscience!" If I'd given in to temptation back then and had decided to get Plunder instead of Copy, then I would be dead for sure. "Hm, wait, why did we spend time on a walk earlier, then? Wouldn't it have been more important to explain this first?" *I didn't plan to use the Copy skill without thinking, since Natsuki told me not to use it, but wasn't this explanation about Plunder very important?*

"Hint: the explanation itself. Take a guess."

"The explanation itself...?"

The explanation about Plunder? The information provided by Natsuki's Help Guide was that the user's life span would be reduced by four percent of the level of the stolen skills, and that total amount would be transferred over to the target, right? Let's see, we walked nonchalantly through this town while one of our classmates who had the Plunder skill was also in this town, so...

"Wait, did you let that person use Plunder on us on purpose?"

"Yeah. Remember earlier when our status screens didn't display our skills for a bit?"

"Was that because someone used the Plunder skill on us?"

"It's very likely that that was the case. It would make sense for someone with Plunder to choose other classmates as their targets."

It was technically possible for someone with Plunder to steal another person's Plunder skill. The logical conclusion would be to steal as much as possible before someone stole your own Plunder, so Natsuki's theory made sense to me.

"Besides, we might as well make good use of life span freebies, right?" Natsuki smiled as she said that.

You sound a bit evil, Natsuki! Well, what you said makes perfect sense, but still! It would be great for our own safety if people who had the Plunder skill and didn't hesitate to use it would disappear from this world as soon as possible. It was a bit harsh, but that was a fact.

"Perhaps I went too far by calling them life span freebies, but we technically did take a risk by purposely dangling ourselves as bait to tempt such people to use their Plunder skill on us, so it is what it is. Also, that applies to the Copy skill as well."

"Huh?"

"We can bait someone to use their Copy skill on us in order to weaken them."

"Right, that would apply restrictions to the skills that person could learn..."

Skills that you could normally learn gradually through training would become unavailable to people who copied them from us. They would have to beg us to teach them if they wanted to be able to learn and actually use those skills. That in itself would give us an advantage over those people, so it was perfectly rational to use ourselves as bait while we walked around. *Well, it's still a bit evil, but oh well.*

"There are also nasty skills like Heroic Aptitude that will cause trouble for anyone else nearby, but all we have to do is avoid people with those kinds of skills."

"What if we get asked to team up with them?"

"Huh? Just say no, of course. Do you think we can trust people like that in our current circumstances, Yuki?"

"I guess not..."

We didn't really have that many friends. Or rather, we technically did have a

lot of friends, but they were more like casual friends. We would get along well with them in school, but we would barely associate with them outside of school. None of us knew where each other lived, and we wouldn't meet up on the weekends or during the holidays either; that was the kind of friends we were. In this world, it would probably be very stressful to team up with people like that for a long period of time.

"I wouldn't call such people our enemies, but there are too many demerits to consider teaming up with them."

"Yeah, that makes sense. Is there anything else I should watch out for?"

"Nah, there's nothing else that I really have to say about your skills, Yuki. Well, your skill build is a bit weird and bothers me somewhat, but that's about it."

"Really?"

"Yeah. Let's start off by writing our skills on the ground so we can discuss them."

"Okay."

We sat down right where we were and started to write on the ground, copying down the skills that were displayed in our status screens. It would have been very convenient if we could just show our status screens to each other directly, but people in this world didn't know about status screens, so even if we could, it would only cause trouble.

"Okay, I'm done."

Copy, General Knowledge, Magic Aptitude: Earth, Magic Aptitude: Fire, Magic Aptitude: Water, Magic Aptitude: Time

Level 1 Earth Magic, Level 1 Robust, Level 1 Third Eye

"Right, I'm done as well. Let's start off with your skills, Yuki."

"Sure."

"I'm going to ignore your Copy skill for now and focus on the other ones. This General Knowledge skill of yours was a good choice. I didn't notice that there was a skill like that available at all."

“It was probably added later at someone’s request, I think? I didn’t notice this skill at first either.”

This skill was a very useful one even though it had only cost 5 Points to get. It would only be useful during our first few months here in this world, but it was probably important for getting past and surviving those first months.

“You probably took the Third Eye skill to go along with your Copy skill, right? That’s fine. What interests me the most is the fact that you took a lot of aptitude skills for magic, but the only magic skill you took was Earth Magic.”

“I mean, aptitude is something innate that you can’t get later on in life, right? Magic is something you can learn over time, but aptitude isn’t, so wouldn’t it be better to spend points on aptitude skills instead? I would’ve gotten some more magic skills if I’d had more points, of course, but yeah.”

You could get better at things like sports over time if you practiced, for example, but your aptitude for sports wouldn’t change over time. On the other hand, if you had an aptitude for sports, then there was a chance that it would be easier for practice or training to come to fruition even if you started as an amateur. *Well, I don’t want to think that it’s impossible to achieve anything without natural talent, but I still think you need some aptitude to master whatever sport you choose to tackle. I mean, I don’t think the difference between pros and amateurs is the amount of time they’ve devoted to practice and training, so there has to be another factor.*

“That’s why I decided to get aptitude skills while we could. It would be a waste not to, right?”

“So that’s the reasoning behind your choice of aptitude skills? I see. Well, you made the right choice in this case, then. Humans actually can’t learn magic without a specific aptitude for that type of magic.”

“Wait, really?” I said. “So, does that mean if you weren’t born with the innate aptitude for a certain type of magic, then you wouldn’t be able to learn it no matter how long or how hard you practiced?”

“Yeah, that’s how things work. On top of that, there’s no method for people in this world to check their skills. Is it very difficult for people in this world to learn magic?”

“Um, let me use my General Knowledge skill to check. Okay, yeah, there are very few human mages in this world.”

My General Knowledge skill didn’t tell me anything about how aptitude was required for humans to learn magic, and there was no way to check what magic you had aptitude for if you couldn’t access a status display screen. In order to learn magic in this world, you would normally have to become a disciple to some mage, and then you would have to spend some time practicing magic. It was common knowledge in this world that if you couldn’t learn to use magic through that practice, then you wouldn’t be able to become a mage. However, that common knowledge didn’t factor in aptitude for different types of magic. It was possible that those disciples who couldn’t learn to use magic actually had an aptitude for a different type of magic than the type that their masters could use. With that in mind, the path to becoming a mage in this world was actually quite harsh and tough. It was a field that was completely dependent on what kind of aptitude you were born with.

“It’s a shame you don’t have the aptitude for Light Magic. If you did, you could copy my Light Magic skill.”

“Oh, do you have the Light Magic skill, Natsuki?”

“Yeah. It’s Level 1, though. Injuries in this world sounded extremely scary to me, since there’s no healthcare system here, so I decided to get that skill. Oh yeah, why was Earth Magic the one magic skill that you decided to get, Yuki?”

“Well, I thought it would be the most useful one among the magic skills for earning money safely. I mean, there are a lot of uses for earth, right?”

I’d had no idea what a different world would be like, so I’d based my decisions on what I knew from back on Earth, but magic didn’t sound like it would be useful for daily life there. Indoor plumbing made Water Magic redundant. Fans would do just fine for making a breeze, so Wind Magic wasn’t necessary either. Fire was no good, since recently you weren’t allowed to even light a fire in your own yard. Light Magic had sounded useful because of the Cure spell, but I’d figured it probably wouldn’t be possible to make money off it if your Light Magic level was low. I couldn’t really think of a good use for Darkness Magic. The only thing that came to mind was something like a dare or a test of

courage. Time Magic, however, sounded like it offered infinite possibilities. Or rather, it only offered possibilities, since it was a form of magic almost no one could master.

Out of all those types of magic, Earth Magic was the only one that seemed like it had many different uses. You could use it for combat and also for construction work or farm work, so there would probably be no shortage of jobs available on a daily basis. *Construction sites that don't use machines would probably value Earth Magic highly, right? Well, this is a different world, so things probably aren't the same, but it's probably still true that Earth magic is a very flexible form of magic for daily life.* When I explained all of that to Natsuki, she seemed quite impressed for some reason.

"I chose skills for my own build based on what would help protect me from harm, but you sure put more thought into this than I expected."

"What do you mean by 'more' thought? How rude!"

"That's amusing to hear coming from you, considering you took the Copy skill without thinking."

"Please, just forget about that!" *I want to bury that memory forever!* "What about your skills, then?! Show me, Natsuki!"

"Sure, take a look."

Help Guide, Level 4 Robust, Disease Resistance

Poison Resistance, Night Vision, Weapon Proficiency: Spears

Level 4 Spearmanship, Level 1 Light Magic, Magic Aptitude: Light

Level 1 Throw, Level 3 Martial Arts, Level 3 Pharmacy

Level 1 Traps and Snares 101, Level 2 Lock Picking, Level 2 Sneak

"Hmm, yeah, your skill build really looks like it was designed for protection from all sorts of harm. Well, you have some skills such as Lock Picking that sound like what a thief would have, but other than that, yeah."

Back on Earth, Natsuki had been someone who was a little sickly and frail, so she'd probably decided to get skills like Robust, Disease Resistance, and Pharmacy to help improve and maintain her own health. Robust itself already provided resistance to disease, so she was probably quite vigorous and tough now, considering her other choices. *Well, she still looks like the same frail and graceful beauty on the outside, though.* As for Spearmanship and Martial Arts, she had practiced martial arts such as aikido and naginata wielding for the purpose of building up stamina, so those choices weren't too surprising to me. The levels she had for those skills were much higher than I expected, though.

"I have no plans to walk down the thief path in life. I just decided to get this skill, since I thought it would be useful if I ever found myself in a situation where I was locked up somewhere."

"Let's see: you're vigorous, tough, sneaky, can see and act at night, and you know martial arts. Well, you sound like you belong in special forces or something."

If she had skills that were related to the use of a knife instead of a spear, then she would fit that description even more.

"Please, all I did was prioritize skills that would help with survival. Well, is your Earth Magic useful in any way, Yuki?"

"Of course it is! Give me a second. Let's see, the spells I can use at Level 1 are..." *Ground Control and Sand Blast are the spells I can use, eh? I guess I'll try out the one that sounds obvious from its name first.* "All right, here I go! *Sand Blast*!"

I extended my hands as I cast the spell, and a mere handful of sand shot out of my palms directly forward. It immediately fell down to the ground afterwards.

"You could use this to blind someone, I guess...? I can do something similar, just like this." As she said that, Natsuki picked up a handful of sand from the ground and threw it at me.

You didn't actually have to throw that sand to prove it! I know my spell wasn't exactly impressive by any means, so give me a break!

“Well, I mean, I’ll have the element of surprise if I cast this spell suddenly in the middle of combat, right?”

“I guess that’s true. Mm, and you wouldn’t have to sneakily pick up dirt or sand since you have that spell.”

Natsuki nodded with a kind and gentle smile as if to reassure me that things were okay, so I hastily waved my hands around to indicate that I had more up my sleeve.

“It’s okay, I still have one other spell! *Ground Control*!”

I pointed at the ground as I cast the spell, and a dent appeared in the ground that looked like a hole. The hole appeared to be about thirty centimeters deep.

“This spell sounds like it’ll be useful for creating holes to throw garbage in, I guess...?”

I felt a stronger sense of kindness and gentleness behind Natsuki’s smile after that result. *Why?! I thought Ground Control would be way more amazing than this! I can’t even use this for gardening purposes!*

“Hold on, don’t jump to any conclusions just yet! This is nowhere near the limits of my inner potential!” *I guess it’s my fault for using these spells without any thought behind them, yeah. I’m sure it’ll be different if I imagine a concrete and clear result in my mind and give it my all. Let’s do this!*

“*Ground Control*!”

This time, a hole in the ground appeared in front of me that looked like it was about one meter wide and about two meters deep.

“Success!” I staggered and swayed around as soon as I joyfully exclaimed that word.

Natsuki hastily hugged me from behind to prevent me from falling down the hole I’d made. “A-Are you okay, Yuki?!”

“Y-Yeah, I just felt exhausted all of a sudden, but I’m fine now. Thanks, Natsuki. Without your help, I was about to fall down this hole. I almost literally dug my own grave, ha ha!”

“That’s not funny, Yuki. In fact, almost isn’t the right word, since you literally

dug a hole."

I'd basically laid my life on the line to pull off this amazing joke, but she ignored it with a straight face. *Damn it.* Well, I'd staggered due to the sudden rush of fatigue, but it wasn't so bad that I'd be unable to stand up if I was calm and ready for it. *Is this how it feels to spend mana? I probably need to get used to this feeling, or else I won't be able to go all out with magic during combat.*

"Well, I learned something from this, at least. It looks like magic is dependent on how much mana you use and what image you have in your mind when you cast a spell, so you need to have a clear mind to conjure a concrete image in your head. Check this out, for example." This time, I used the Ground Control spell to make the ground rise up a bit. The bump that protruded out from the ground was only about ten centimeters in height, but it looked like enough to trip someone if I could swiftly cast the spell.

"I see. That is quite impressive. However, you're forgetting something, Yuki."

"What is it?"

"We need to fill in this hole you made. You know that, right?"

"Yeah..."

We couldn't exactly just leave this hole alone, since it was a hazard. It was possible that someone who fell into this hole would suffer grave injuries if they were unlucky. There was a chance that we would be put on a wanted list if we left the hole alone. *We absolutely need to avoid that!* I mustered as much of my inner potential as I could and restored the ground back to its original state. I had to take a few breaks in between tries, but I still succeeded in the end.

"Well then, Yuki, I guess your Earth Magic turned out to be a bit useful, surprisingly."

"What do you mean by 'surprisingly' and just 'a bit' useful?! I'm sure this magic will become very useful once I master it!"

"Yeah, yeah, I'm looking forward to it. More importantly, you don't have any skills that affect your close combat abilities, right?"

"Huh? Well, no, I don't." I'd felt like I would get by just fine if I could copy a

skill like Swordsmanship from someone else. Things weren't as easy as I'd thought they would be, though.

"Honestly, I feel uneasy about starting our life here right away. I'm not sure how safe this town is, but we're just a group of two girls, so if we can't protect ourselves, then..."

"Oh, yeah, it would be quite dangerous for us."

I had gotten unwanted attention from random guys before back on Earth, so I had learned some simple self-defense techniques, but I was nowhere as skilled as the pros. On the other hand, Natsuki had Level 4 Spearmanship and Level 3 Martial Arts, so the average adventurer would probably be no match for her at all. *Do I have to roleplay as the princess and ask her to protect me as my knight? If I clung to her and said something like "Oh, please protect me, Prince Natsuki!" would she protect me?*

"Thus, our first priority is to have you learn the Martial Arts skill from me."

"Yeah, I guess that makes sense. We might as well put my Copy skill to use if possible, after all..."

"I'm not sure how much you need to learn from me to be able to use the skill, but I'm confident that I can teach you."

"Well, let's give it a try, then. *Copy Level 3 Martial Arts*."

I probably didn't have to say that out loud to use my skill, but I did so anyway to make it obvious that I'd used it. *Hmm, I don't feel any different—oh, a skill got added to my status screen.*

"Okay, I've obtained Level 1 Martial Arts. The skill name is grayed out in my status screen, though."

You were only able to see your own status screen, and the default state of mine was a black semitransparent screen with white words written on it. However, the words Level 1 Martial Arts were in gray, whereas my other skills were in white. *Is this what the Sealed status looks like?*

"Good, that means your Copy skill worked fine. All that's left is for me to teach you so that you can learn to use the skill. I'll start by teaching you the

basics, so check your status screen frequently and tell me at what point the skill isn't grayed out anymore."

"Okay."

I obeyed Natsuki's instructions and copied the moves that she showed me, and my Martial Arts skill turned from gray to white in my status screen around ten minutes after I had started. Well, it was more like my body movements suddenly became quite smooth, so I checked my status screen when that happened and saw the result. It wasn't as natural as the ordinary experience of getting the hang of something over time, so it was a bit scary.

"Hmm, it only took you ten minutes? Perhaps the Copy skill actually is quite useful as long as the person you copy from can teach you, even if you can only copy the Level 1 version of the skill."

"Yeah, maybe it is! See, I didn't make a mistake by choosing this skill, right?"

"It'll truly be worth the cost if you manage to learn at least twenty skills with it. On a side note, there are only about three or four skills left that I'm sure I can teach you."

"Ack!"

Most skills cost about 5 Points to obtain at Level 1, so Natsuki was right about the number of skills I would need to learn in order to make up for the cost of the Copy skill. Skills related to weapons seemed like they would be pointless no matter how many of them I learned, since it would just be the basics. *As for other skills, they probably aren't very useful at Level 1, so yeah...*

"Was this skill a waste of points after all...?"

"It's possible that you might end up with a good skill build if we can meet up with Haruka, so don't feel too bad about it."

My hopes had been dashed. I curled up in a ball on the ground. Natsuki gently patted me on the back to cheer me up, but she was in no position to do so.

"You know, you were the one who struck down my hopes, Natsuki."

"Well, that wasn't my intention at all..."

Natsuki forced a slightly awkward smile as she said that. I slapped myself on

my cheeks when I saw that look.

"Okay, I'm done being sad about this! All I have to do is learn at least five skills per person from Haruka and the other two who are probably with her, and that'll make up for the cost of the Copy skill!"

If that didn't work out, I still had a backup plan. I could just spend all my time mastering Earth Magic, and then I would become famous and get a title like "Earth Archmage" or something.

"Besides, I don't have time to be sad right now. We don't have much money on us, so we need to spend the time we have on coming up with a proper plan and course of action, or else we'll be in big trouble!"

"Mm, indeed. Based on what you mentioned earlier, we should start off by registering at the Adventurers' Guild and then find work there to earn money."

All we had on us was about two thousand Rea. The phrase "time is money" was definitely true for us, since we didn't have much of either to waste before we would run out.

"Before we do that, however, we should come up with a backstory for ourselves."

"Backstory?"

"Yes. We're two young girls with no belongings aside from the clothes on our backs, which is definitely a bit suspicious. We need to come up with a story about why we're here and what our short-term and long-term goals are. We also might need to buy things on the way to achieve those goals."

"Oh, that makes sense. That'll affect what kind of work we can choose and how we should explain things to others in this world."

I knew I could rely on Natsuki in situations like this. If we didn't decide on things like that beforehand, then we wouldn't even be able to answer if we were asked something like "What kind of work would you two be looking for?" at the Adventurers' Guild. We discussed those topics together for a while and decided that our backstory would be that we had arrived at this town in a party with some other people, but things had come up that they'd had to deal with, so they were temporarily away, and we were waiting for them to return. It

would normally seem strange for two girls who didn't look very strong to be traveling alone, after all.

"The next thing we need to decide on is what kind of work we should look for. There are two rough categories, right?"

"Yeah. Either we look for a part-time job in town, or we look for work that'll require us to go outside of town."

"That makes sense. Work that requires us to go outside of town sounds like it'll be a bit dangerous. Can you handle combat, Natsuki?"

"It depends on what kind of danger we encounter, since we don't know what kind of enemies might appear. Thanks to my skill levels, I think I'll be fine if I can obtain a spear, so I'm more worried about you, Yuki."

"Yep, I'm worried too!"

I had managed to obtain the Martial Arts skill thanks to Natsuki, but the skill was only Level 1. This world wasn't like a game where each area would have its own fixed pool of enemies that appeared as random encounters, so I wanted to be as ready as possible. Bandits in particular would be the worst kind of enemy to encounter. Two girls like us were definitely easy prey for bandits. Natsuki would probably be able to defeat the average bandit with her Spearmanship skill, but I would feel extremely bad if I forced her to take on a life or death fight against other humans by herself. I wanted to learn to fight to a certain extent myself so that all the burden wouldn't be on her.

"I guess we'll have to spend some time earning money via part-time jobs for a while..."

"Yeah. I doubt we can afford proper weapons at the moment with the amount of money we have."

"We should buy proper weapons and armor for ourselves before we take on work that'll require us to go outside of town, right, Natsuki?"

"Mm. Based on what you mentioned earlier, it would be dangerous to walk around unarmed."

"All right, let's go to the Adventurers' Guild to look for work, then."

The Adventurers' Guild in this world offered many different services, and one of those services was helping people find work, which was basically what an employment agency would do. That meant the most efficient way to find a part-time job would be to ask a staff member at the guild. Things like help wanted posters on shop fronts or magazines advertising part-time jobs weren't common, after all, because most people in this world couldn't read.

"No, let's go shopping first before we do that. We would appear suspicious without any belongings on us."

"I guess that's true."

It was possible that the staff at the guild would assume that we'd left our belongings at an inn—but actually, maybe that was just wishful thinking. It would also probably be better to ask for inn recommendations at the guild.

"Also, it would be better to have a weapon on us so that we seem like we can handle ourselves just fine. I'm quite decent with a spear, after all. We're just a group of two girls together, so we should be as careful as possible."

"Okay. Let's start with that, then!"

The first place we headed towards was the weapon shop, and we bought a spear that Natsuki said would do for now—barely. The price of that spear was eight hundred Rea, which was close to half of all the money we had on us, but it was a very cheap spear that wasn't of any real value. Natsuki had tried her best to look for a good deal, but we hadn't been lucky enough to come across one, so we'd just ended up with a somewhat okay spear. The next place we headed towards was the general goods shop. Satchels were a luxury that we couldn't afford, so we just bought some cheap bags that we could carry on our backs. We wouldn't be able to convince anyone if we had nothing on us, but it was possible that people would think we had the luggage we'd need for travel if we just stuffed these bags with random odds and ends. After all, it wasn't like they would know what was inside the bags.

"We bought the cheapest things possible, but we're already down to about one thousand Rea. This isn't good, right?"

"Mm. Even if we decide to take on day labor, we can't start working until tomorrow, so we'll need to spend money to stay at an inn tonight."

“Ideally, we need to find a place where the two of us can stay for five hundred Rea, so that only leaves us with five hundred remaining...”

We wouldn’t have much money left at all, and everything was quite expensive in this town. It wasn’t like we could do anything about it, though. Natsuki and I discussed what to do with our remaining money, and we decided to purchase what we considered absolute necessities, which were spare underwear and some cloths to use as towels. We threw them inside the cheap bags that we’d bought earlier. The underwear and cloths were just as cheap as the bags, but they were all we could afford.

“We couldn’t afford to buy a change of clothes...”

“Mm, even the ones at the secondhand clothes shop were a bit pricey. The prices made sense considering they aren’t mass-produced goods, but that doesn’t help us at all.”

“At least the clothes we have on us seem quite sturdy despite looking very plain.”

These clothes seemed like they were actually of quite decent quality compared to the clothes at the secondhand shop and the clothes of people we passed in town. The texture of the cloth was quite firm, and the stitching also seemed well done. We would probably be able to afford a couple spare sets of secondhand clothes if we sold the clothes we had on us, but I dropped the idea after I gave it some more thought. *I mean, those clothes I saw at the secondhand clothes store were a bit too much for me. They looked quite dirty, and a lot of them looked like they would wear down and become full of holes just after being washed a few times. The quality difference between those secondhand clothes and our clothes is just too big.*

“All right, let’s go look for some work!”

“Mm. It’s finally time.”

“Yeah. We just need to find work that fits with our backstory that we’re looking for some work while we’re waiting for our other party members to come back.”

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We arrived at the Adventurers' Guild thanks to directions from people in town who we asked along the way. The building we saw looked quite compact. We wouldn't have known this was the guild building if we'd had no information beforehand. It was quite empty inside as well, and there was just one old lady sitting at a counter. *This isn't what I expected at all from the Adventurers' Guild...*

"Um, hello."

"Hello. What would you happen to be here for today?"

"We're here to look for work. Is there any work for adventurers available here?"

"Oh, there's barely any work like that available. Take a look over there." As she said that, she pointed in a direction, and I saw a bulletin board when I looked at where she was pointing. "Most jobs and quests for adventurers tend to be offered at Laffan, so it's rare for such work to be available in this town."

For real? Are you implying that we should move to that town called Laffan if we want to make a living as adventurers?

"Would there happen to be any other kind of work that the guild here could help us get...?"

"Nope, there's not much like that either. This is a small town, after all. Well, there's still some work available. What kind of work are you looking for? The guild doesn't offer any recruitment services for prostitution, just so you know."

"W-We're not looking for that kind of work!"

"Hmm, is that so? You two look like you would be able to earn quite a lot of money in that field if you were."

I could feel my forced businesslike smile crack a bit when I saw how the old lady snorted at me after she finished her sentence. Natsuki had left the talking to me, since I was the one who had the General Knowledge skill, but I wondered how Natsuki had reacted to what I'd just heard. *Well, actually, I guess Natsuki's able to maintain a poker face if needed, even when she's furious deep inside.* We'd only come to the Adventurers' Guild looking for work because my skill had told me that the Adventurers' Guild would recommend proper job

opportunities. If we were looking for work in the field that the lady had mentioned, we wouldn't be here in the first place. *Can we really trust this old lady to do her job properly?* I felt a bit uneasy about how things had turned out so far, but it wasn't like we had any other choice.

"We'll be waiting for a while for our other party members to return from dealing with their business, so we want to earn money for living expenses while we're waiting. Lodging expenses aren't cheap, after all."

"I see. Well then, I do have a good recommendation for you two. There's an inn that's looking for live-in waitresses to work in their dining hall. The pay isn't much, however."

"Live-in work...?"

I asked the lady for more details, and apparently we would only be paid a mere one hundred Rea per day, but we wouldn't have to spend money on lodging and food. I asked her to describe the other kinds of work that were available, and the pay for those jobs would barely be enough for us to afford food and lodging at the average inn in this town. The working conditions in this town were quite horrible, but there wasn't much work available here in the first place, so there would still be people who took on such jobs even if the pay was bad. *I guess the live-in work doesn't sound too bad compared to our other options.* I looked at Natsuki for confirmation, and she grudgingly nodded back at me.

"Okay, we'll take the live-in work."

"Hmph. Hand over your adventurer cards."

"Oh."

Right, I forgot that we needed to register at the Adventurers' Guild first! Should I say that we lost our cards? Actually, there's probably no point in lying...

"Can we re-register here...?"

"Hmm? Yeah, that's fine. It'll cost six hundred Rea."

"Ugh, okay..."

I know what you're thinking, but don't glare at me, Natsuki! We barely had

enough, but we're basically broke now! I endured Natsuki's inner glare while we finished registration as quickly as we could, and we left the guild as soon as we received the job posting.

Natsuki started speaking as soon as we were outside. "Yuki? What was that about the registration fee? I didn't hear anything about it beforehand."

"I completely forgot about it! I'm sorry!"

I'd completely forgotten to explain that there was a registration fee when I told Natsuki about the Adventurers' Guild earlier. We hadn't included that fee in our initial budget, so we were lucky that we happened to have enough left to pay.

"We happened to have enough this time, but you know that we might not have been able to register if things had gone a bit different, right?"

"Yes, of course, you're completely right."

"I trusted you on this, since you're the one with the General Knowledge skill, but I guess I was wrong to do so..."

"I'm very sorry. I have no excuses."

Ugh, Natsuki's losing a bit of trust in my General Knowledge skill! It's basically the only advantage I have over her! Well, I'm the one at fault for forgetting something as important as the registration fee, but still!

"Well, everybody makes mistakes, so I'll leave it at that, but I can count on you in the future, right?"

"Of course! You can trust me!"

It wasn't a grave mistake, so she dropped the subject right away, but the flat tone of her voice when she scolded me was very scary...

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"Hmm, so you two are the ones who applied for this job? I guess you'll do just fine."

When we arrived at the inn with the job posting in our hands, we were greeted by a fat lady who looked like she was fairly old—at least fifty-

something. Well, maybe I was wrong to assume that. It was always hard to tell how old a foreigner was, especially in this different world. That was just what I assumed based on what I saw in front of me.

"Were you told about the conditions for this job?"

"Yes."

"Okay, will you two start working today? You won't get paid for today, but I'll provide dinner and a room to stay in."

"Yes, please."

We would have to sleep outside if we didn't start working today.

"Oh yeah, there's one last thing I have to mention. You can take days off if you tell me beforehand, but you'll have to pay for lodging and food on those days. You're free to sell yourselves after work, but if you're going to pick up customers here at this inn, then don't forget to hand over a portion of your earnings."

"We won't do that!"

Why do all the ladies we've encountered in this world recommend prostitution to us?! Well, I kind of understood why the inn lady had said that to us. In this world, waitresses at inns would often offer their services as prostitutes too. If they only earned one hundred Rea per day for waitressing, then it would be impossible to save money, so it made sense that they would have to take on side jobs to survive.

Waitresses who were basically prostitutes also existed in Japan not too long ago, during the Edo period, and their existence was considered fairly normal at the time. However, we had no plans to do such work. I would rather gamble and go outside of town to hunt monsters for a living than become a prostitute, and Natsuki would probably commit suicide by biting her tongue off instead of choosing the prostitute option. *Well, actually, she would probably murder monsters with absolute wrath for sure. She's definitely strong enough to pull that off.* The only reason we hadn't considered the option of hunting monsters for a living at the moment was that we weren't completely cornered yet. We probably wouldn't hesitate at all when it came to it if we were actually in

danger of dying due to a lack of money. If possible, safer options in life were the ideal, but yeah. And thus, that was the end of our first day in this different world.

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I said earlier that “that was the end of our first day in this different world,” but I was lying! The rest of our day all the way until bedtime was extremely tiring in all sorts of ways. I’d thought waitress work here would be similar to what waitresses had to do at restaurants in Japan, but the customers in this world were absolutely disgusting.

They would try to grope our butts without any hesitation, and there were also many men who told us that they would pay for sex. I refused right away, of course. It was ridiculous that they thought saying something like “How about three thousand Rea?” would work. I mean, that doesn’t mean I would sell myself for any price, but lowball offers also kind of pissed me off. I was really glad that Natsuki had taught me the Martial Arts skill. I wasn’t able to skillfully dodge all of the sexual harassment like she did, but I dodged most of it. However, the look on Natsuki’s face became scarier and scarier over time. She kept up a businesslike smile initially, but that gradually shifted to an expressionless look. I was scared that at any moment she would lose it and smash her elbow into a guy’s face. It wouldn’t be the first time, after all. She looked like a graceful and quiet girl on the outside, and that tended to be true most of the time, since she was physically frail, but she was absolutely terrifying when she was angry. When she was angry, she would unleash some very nasty attacks without batting an eye, and— Actually, I won’t go into details.



Our waitress work was hard and stressful, but the real trial we had to overcome was waiting for us after we finished work. The old lady assigned us a room for two, so the lodging part worked out fine. The problem was the food she provided.

Based on how bad our working conditions were, we were scared about what kind of food we would be provided, but we ended up receiving leftover food from the inn. It was as if we had been scared for no reason, but it made sense considering that we served all of the customers large bowls of stew, so there was no reason for the inn to cook something different for us waitresses to eat. I was a bit worried about what would happen if there was nothing left, however. The cost of this food was 70 Rea, and the quality of the food that we would receive for breakfast and lunch would probably be a bit worse, so the total value of our meals from this inn was probably somewhere around 150 Rea per day.

As for lodging expenses, it would cost 400 Rea per night for two people to stay in one room. If we included the amount that the old lady paid us per day, then that would add up to a total of 650 Rea. It felt fairly cheap for an entire day's worth of waitress work. That daily wage of 650 Rea was the equivalent of 6,500 yen, and a day's worth of work was ten hours, so we would be earning an hourly wage of 650 yen. It wasn't ridiculously low paying by any means. Well, it wasn't much at all, but we also had to take into consideration that the inn lady had hired us despite not knowing about our background. *Perhaps this job isn't too bad compared to what our other options could have been.* Or, well, that was what I thought until I actually tasted the food.

What the hell is this? Can you really call this food? Isn't this an insult to the art of cooking itself? Was this a form of torture specifically for us—actually, probably not, considering that we also served the customers this food, and they ate it with no problem. I looked at Natsuki sitting next to me, and she was frozen in place with her spoon stuck in her mouth. She had turned a bit pale, and it looked like a cold sweat had broken out on her forehead. Based on the muscles moving in her throat, it seemed like she was doing her best to stop herself from spitting the food out. Honestly, if I'd been served this kind of dish at a restaurant back in Japan, I wouldn't just have wanted my money back—I

would have gone so far as to sue the restaurant for damages, and I would probably have won the case too.

However, this was a different world. We had no choice but to consume this food if we didn't want to die, since we had no money to spare. *Let's try out the water first. Hmm, okay, it isn't delicious, but I can drink it down just fine.* I took a deep breath to prepare myself and then pinched my nose as I forced myself to chew and swallow the food along with a mouthful of water to alleviate the taste. I didn't want to suffer that taste by itself. I repeated that process a few times and managed to set a record for the fastest meal I had ever finished in my life. I washed out my mouth with water afterwards and exhaled deeply as I let go of my nose.

"Ack!"

What the hell is this strong smell?! I wasn't ready for it at all, since I had my nose pinched the entire time! I pinched my nose again immediately. It would probably be a good idea to just breathe through my mouth for a while.

"Well done, Yuki."

Huh? Natsuki, why do you look like you're as proud of me as if I just defeated your mortal enemy for you or something? If you consider it objectively, all I did was make myself look like a fool, so I don't get it.

"Do I have no choice but to do the same thing as well...?"

"If you can get the food down without having to pinch your nose, then it's fine, but I think cutting off the smell will definitely help suppress the urge to spit the food out."

The smell of food was more important than you'd normally think. For example, spiciness would only be a sensation of pain without the taste behind it. The difference would be very obvious if you pinched your nose while you ate some ginger, which would just be a painful experience. However, if you took your hands off of your nose, you would be able to smell the ginger, which would then change the taste impression from pain to something completely different. The experience I had just gone through with the inn food was the exact opposite of that. The food was already absolutely disgusting, but it transformed into some unfathomable blasphemy against the art of cooking itself after I took

my fingers off of my nose. *Is this what it means to gaze into the abyss of cooking? Have I discovered some dark secret...?*

"You're right. I guess I have no choice but to force this food down my throat somehow, since we barely have any money left. I never thought I'd experience something like this in my whole life..."

Natsuki had been born into a fairly wealthy family back on Earth, so what she said made sense to me. If she had continued her life without any incidents—like being transported to this different world—then it was highly unlikely that she would have found herself in a situation where she didn't have money for decent food. In addition, a proper meal didn't cost that much money in modern-day Japan, as long as it wasn't some ridiculously expensive food.

In the past, there was a politician who'd gotten bashed for saying "The poor can just eat wheat," but it was now possible to buy wheat for cheaper than rice if you weren't picky about a specific brand. That politician's words had a different meaning behind them than you'd expect, however. What he meant was more along the lines of "Wheat is good for your body, so you'll become more resistant to diseases by eating wheat, which will also help save on medical fees," apparently. That politician had eaten wheat himself in the past because his body was quite frail back when he was younger. The media had simply cherry-picked the words that were convenient to report on—or rather, the media had twisted his words, since he hadn't specifically said "the poor" at all.

In the past, wheat had been the go-to example of a cheap grain, but now it would probably be brown rice instead, since brown rice was cheaper and easier to obtain than white rice. Brown rice tended to be more nutritious than high-quality white rice, which had some of its nutritional value removed during the milling process. Brown rice was definitely the better choice over white rice if you could stand the smell and taste. I was quite confident that I could happily devour some cooked brown rice by itself right now. There was also a mixture of various grains and beans that used to be consumed as a substitute for white rice in the past, but that mixture was now more expensive than white rice itself, sadly...

Oh, whoops, this food tastes so bad that I ended up distracting myself from facing reality. Time to slowly take my fingers off of my nose—okay, I can stand

this. It still bothers me a bit, but it wasn't like I could breathe through my mouth forever. I looked at Natsuki afterwards, and she was still trying her best to get the food down.

"It's a good idea to continue pinching your nose for a while after you finish eating, Natsuki. The food might fly back out of your mouth the moment you let go if you don't react very well to the smell."

She looked teary-eyed as she nodded in response and forced herself to swallow these mysterious objects that were supposed to be food. It looked like a very painful experience for her. She tended to prefer food that was light and delicate in taste, so this food was definitely more painful to digest for her than for me. She looked like she was trying her best to chew the food as thoroughly as she could, but she was also swallowing very fast, which would probably be bad for her stomach. *I hope she doesn't get sick from this. Level 4 Robust, Disease Resistance, and Poison Resistance will do the job, right? My Robust skill is only Level 1, so I'm a bit worried for myself. Well, now that I think about it again, this should just be normal food. The customers who came to the inn ate it just fine, so the only problem with the food is probably the taste. Surely it isn't something that would require the Robust and Poison Resistance skills to protect you, right...?*

"Well done, Natsuki."

"Thanks. Honestly, I didn't expect that it would take this much effort just to finish a meal..."

"Yeah, I didn't expect it either, considering the fact that the dining hall was full of people who came to eat."

"Wait, is food like this what people eat every day in this world?"

"Huh? Where did you get that terrifying idea from, Natsuki? Don't scare me like that..."

Well, people probably wouldn't come to this inn to eat if they thought the food tasted bad. Even if the food wasn't the main attraction here, people surely wouldn't come back if the food was of lower quality than the average in this world. That didn't seem to be the case, since people came and ordered this food as if it was normal.

“Ugh, I don’t feel confident about whether we can actually survive in this world anymore...” I said.

“You too? I happen to feel the same way. That food, if it could even be called food, or something that seemed like food was...”

“You’re going to short circuit your brain if you keep repeating the word food to yourself, Natsuki. Anyway, this is a small town, so there’s still hope that there’s something better somewhere out there in the world. Besides, there might actually be some delicious food hidden somewhere in this town as well.”

“I guess you’re right. It’s too early to lose hope. Let’s go find some delicious food to eat once we actually have money.”

“Yeah, let’s use that as motivation to do our best at work and earn money!”

We firmly held each other’s hands and reaffirmed our resolve together to survive in this world. However, we would have to wait until we met up with Haruka before we were finally able to consume delicious food.

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About two weeks had passed since we’d first started doing the live-in waitress work. By now, we had gotten used to what this job entailed, which included being able to deal with and dodge sexual harassment from the customers. The job itself was quite simple—there weren’t that many items on the menu, and we weren’t required to provide great customer service the way similar places would have back in Japan. It made sense that the pay was low, since basically anyone could perform this job. However, the one thing I hadn’t been able to get used to was the food that the old lady provided us every day. Breakfast was fine, since we would just get some brown bread and water. It was a simple meal, but it actually tasted fairly decent if you lowered your expectations. The bread itself was baked and delivered in the morning, so it would still be a bit warm, and it wasn’t that hard to chew either. Natsuki would look very calm and at peace when she ate that bread, since it had a light taste.

As for lunch, it was still fairly acceptable. The lunch that we were provided was some brown bread that had gotten a bit hard and some light tasting soup with vegetable scraps stewed in it. It wasn’t delicious by any means, but it also wasn’t bad enough to make us want to spit it out. Meat would be mixed into

the soup on some rare occasions as well, which usually tasted fairly decent. There would also sometimes be fish fillets in the soup that seemed like they were leftovers from the previous day, and the soup would become absolutely horrible when that happened. It would make the soup smell and taste muddy. Natsuki's face would become expressionless whenever she saw this version of the soup. However, that fish fillet was rather popular among the other part-time waitresses, so maybe the people in this town had nostrils that were immune to that muddy aroma.

Dinner was the part of the day that was really a struggle to survive. If there were any leftovers from the daily special that this inn offered, then the food provided would be similar to what we'd experienced on our first day. The main dish would be some kind of freshwater fish, and there would be three different variations: stewed, simmered, and grilled. That order indicated how bad they were, with stewed being the worst and grilled being the least bad. They all had a muddy aroma, but the grilled variation wasn't as bad as the other two; we wouldn't have to spend as much time pinching our noses while we ate it. We would receive some rye bread or potatoes along with some vegetables. The lucky outcome would be some stewed vegetables, while the unlucky outcome would be sauerkraut.

During dinnertime, Natsuki would usually look like her soul had escaped her body or something. Her eyes would wander around unfocused, and she would operate like a machine that repeated the process of stuffing food in her mouth and washing it down with water, her nose pinched shut the entire time. It would take a while after we were done with the meal before she recovered.

There were some rare days when the dining hall was completely filled with customers, and on those days, there would be no leftovers from the special, which was the best outcome we could hope for. We would be provided some cheap and simple meal in place of the special whenever that happened. The best variation that we had gotten so far was some dried meat along with parboiled and lightly salted potatoes. The other waitresses didn't seem to like this kind of fare, but Natsuki and I would celebrate in our room and toast each other whenever we had a cheap and simple meal like that for dinner. Well, we toasted with water instead of alcohol, since we had no money to spare, but

yeah. In the days after we first experienced that simple dinner, we became absolutely dedicated to convincing customers to get the special, of course. However, after that happened, the inn lady who'd hired us increased the amount of the daily special that she would cook every day. *It was pointless in the end, but still!*

Afterword

Thank you very much for deciding to purchase this volume of *To Another World... with Land Mines!* My name is Itsuki Mizuho, and it's nice to meet you. As for the people who have been reading the web novel version, I'm grateful for your support, as always. It was thanks to all of you that this volume could be published. You probably know this if you've read the volume, but this story doesn't have a heroic protagonist who faces difficult situations that he or she overcomes with no trouble, and there's also no obvious altruistic heroine with a kind heart for everything either. At the same time, the circumstances that the characters are put in are a bit too severe to call this a slice of life story. The idea I had in mind when I wrote these characters was that I wanted them to be both realistic and relatable. Thus, as I was writing and posting chapters online, I assumed that this story wouldn't be very popular with the general public, so I was quite surprised and pleased to find out that a lot more people read my writing than I'd expected.

Also, I'll provide some behind-the-scenes information here and say that I wrote the characters' actions and skills with a rather customizable tabletop RPG format in mind. By that, I mean I wrote characters who have a lot of potential but start off rather weak. They can perform all sorts of feats depending on what ideas they come up with, but there are going to be things that they'll fail at, and I balanced it so that the skills can't be used in a way that's overpowered and ruins the game, so to speak. Well, it's closer to a more realistic world than a tabletop RPG world, since characters like Nao don't know how much mana they spend per spell, and there's also no dice system to indicate success or failure.

Last but not least, I would like to thank the editor, the proofreader, and the illustrator, Nekobyou Neko-san, along with all the other people who were all directly involved in creating this volume. Thank you all very much. It was thanks to all of your help that this volume could come into existence. Once again, I would also like to thank the readers who purchased this volume. Thank you all very much for taking the time to purchase and read this book. I hope we can

meet again soon somewhere else. I'll end on that note.

Itsuki Mizuho


"Prioritize self-care!" said Haruka.
"Don't aim to become a hero!"
"Obey all of Haruka-sama's orders!"
"—Wait a minute!"
Haruka
The smartest of the group of three childhood friends. She keeps a realistic mindset even in a different world.
Able to use healing magic.
Backline support.
Touya
A guy who became a beastman in order to get a chance at marrying a cute girl with animal ears.
Frontline fighter, skilled at using a sword.
Nao
The brilliant heart of the group. He naturally ends up being the central figure and gets things done.
Uses spears and magic.
Center position.


I took some warmed bread off the rock and gently sliced it to make a pocket inside. Next, I sandwiched the skewer meat inside the bread and took a bite. The bread's crusty outside and soft inside went well with the fragrant smell of the fat that the bread had absorbed. It was an exquisite dish. The only seasoning was salt, but it was still delicious.
"Aren't we losing out by selling this meat, Haruka? I bet we can get way more money for this!"
"I agree, but it's not like we can preserve the meat."
"That's true..."
To Another World... with LAND MINES!

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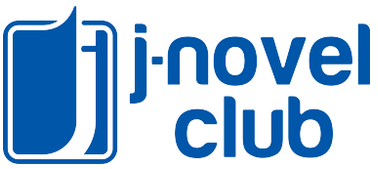
Side Story—Yuki and Natsuki

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To Another World... with Land Mines! Volume 1

by Itsuki Mizuho

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Ebook edition 1.0: February 2022