

Tsuki ga Michibiku Isekai Douchuu

– Moon-led Journey Across Another World –

**- Volume 17 -
(Chapter 251-270)**

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[Reigokai: Isekai Translations]

Chapter 251

Great heights of a myriad year chinese restaurant

“Are we really going to stay the night here?” (Iroha)

Iroha-chan is shocked.

No well, I am of the same sentiment though.

Even within this place where inns are located, this one is clearly on a whole different level.

Just like in Zenno at the borders, there’s a really unsuitable inn for adventurers right in front of us.

If we are talking specifically how different it is from the others, it is as if this area was organized with this inn as its core.

It is not like the inn is truly at the center, but it is more like, the first one to be here was this one, and later, the surroundings developed with it.

I have seen towns developing quite a lot in Asora, so I have been able to somewhat tell this kind of things.

In other words, it is a well-established place.

Its aura is also incredible.

It is an appearance that one can’t enter alone.

I heard that they had already gotten an inn, but whether it is Beren, Hokuto, or Shii, I am pretty impressed that they were able to decide on staying in this place.

I only have vague memories of it, but this outward appearance is like that of a certain main building of a famous hot spring establishment that got even bigger, and created many other buildings at its surroundings.

It is completely made of wood, and that part does feel nostalgic.

But to think they would be able to remodel it so much. Honestly speaking, it feels like that one movie where you are spirited away and Gods go there to take hot spring breaks. <Reference of Spirited Away.>

“Hoh~, Shii has an eye for inns-ja na.” (Tomoe)

“Looks like a place we can relax more than in Mizuha-desu wa.” (Mio)

Seriously?

Even though I am just beginning to think a single-sized business hotel room would not be bad. I am still on the mentality that if there’s a big bath in their basement or their highest floor, I would consider it a treasure.

And yet, why is it that these inhuman two and the Forest Oni are more used to high-class inns?

In my case, at that carriage we used in our journey, I would have been able to rest comfortably with a single pillow there.

“Senjin Banrai Hanten. It is without doubt the number one inn in Kannaoui. I have never stayed in this place...” (Iroha)

If I’m not mistaken, the sign says *Chihiro Manrai Hanten*. <Great heights of a myriad year chinese restaurant.>

Restaurant? Wait, this is a chinese restaurant?

Isn’t that where inn or ryokan is supposed to be written?

I also thought of something pointless like, why isn’t it ‘myriad customers’ instead.

“The rooms, baths, food, service that responds to what the customer wants; of course, the price comes with it as well. Anyone in Kannaoui acknowledges this as the best inn-desu.” (Iroha)

“T-That much?” (Makoto)

They have a service that responds to what the customers want? What's that, that's scary.

Do they have concierges as well?

Maybe they have exclusive officials in the guest room?

I want to be left alone though.

But Iroha-chan nods with a serious face.

I have not spoken to Shougetsu-san about what we should do from here on, but this girl, is it okay not to bring her back home?

For some reason, her voice is shaking, and yet, her eyes are sparkling.

She is already fully decided to stay.

Well, we do have the money.

There's no problem even if we add one kid.

If I look at the price, I will most likely have a stroke, so I won't look at it and I won't ask. I will leave the paying to someone else.

I am still not used to paying such large sums of money.

I just can't get used to that sensation.

"It is the oldest and highest class ryokan in Kannaoui that possesses several legends-na no desu. There's one legend that says a certain wealthy man wanted to see the vegetable garden that is at the 3rd underground floor of the labyrinth, and in the next day, an adventurer party escorted the wealthy man's family all the way there unscathed." (Iroha)

...

That's on a whole different level from exclusive officials in the guest room.

Well... it is obviously something that the inn arranged after the unreasonable words

of the idiotic rich man, but a service that brings you all the way to the labyrinth?

Could it be, is it that?

The kind of business that doesn't say no to the customers? Do they have some sort of policy that smells 100% of unreasonableness?

The character of Lorel Union... I have to recognize it.

It smells of the Wise.

It is a way of thinking that stinks of Japanese.

The feeling as if they are putting their lives on the line for this service.

There's also the matter with Root's husband, the legendary swordsman, Iori-san, was it?

It wouldn't be any strange that Japanese people are involved in this.

But, why chinese restaurant?

What a mystery.

"I have heard that there's a secret menu only few people know of. That meal made from rice, oil, and egg is a delicacy that would make anyone that has eaten it to come here again." (Iroha)

What kind of fried rice is that?

Also, isn't it the one that you can put things like roast pork fillet, lettuce, shrimps, and well, all kinds of things, and season it with salt, pepper, and soy sauce?

It's been awhile, now I kinda want to make it.

When I was in Japan, we rotated the turns and I sometimes I made it, and yet, for some reason, I have forgotten it until now.

"A delicacy huh. I see, a delicacy..." (Mio)

Mio's eyes were shining suspiciously.

Her aim is clear with a glance.

"But only that dish is not in the menu, and only the ones who know the name of it have the qualifications to order it, or so it seems-desu. Truly a legendary dish. I also like rice food, so it is something I would like to eat at least once." (Iroha)

Iroha-chan goes 'Umu umu' as she nods widely.

From the corner of her mouth, I could see something shining faintly, or maybe I don't see it, yeah, I don't.

But in my mind, the only possibility this legend can be is fried rice.

This place being a chinese restaurant also feels like it is true now.

Lorel's food feels a bit different, but rice is eaten quite a lot, so a legendary dish being rice is also convincing.

Ah, if I remember correctly, in China, a chinese restaurant can refer to a hotel. *<Because hotels normally have restaurants as well. For more detailed info, check feliciax comment.>*

Then this can also be considered as a hotel.

"If it's a rice delicacy, I would like to try it-ja na." (Tomoe)

Tomoe is also with the intentions of definitely eating it.

If it is her, she can just read the memories of the people at the hotel and order it. There's no point in a secret menu with a power like that.

At this rate, Mio also won't care about the methods and will question about the name of that dish.

No doubt about it.

Until now, the rice meals we have eaten have normally been on the low side of stickiness, so fried rice would be a bit more novel.

There's a mysterious rule that curry, fried rice, and karaage, are, in the end, the number one most delicious food in their households.

And this is all getting so complicated.

Why is it that I am assuming it is fried rice?

No good, no good.

"Well, let's leave aside the fried—I mean, that dish. Let's regroup with everyone."
(Makoto)

Standing here all the time thinking about strange things will make me shy when trying to enter.

Just as I thought of this and urged the three, right at our front, Beren and the other two had come out from the entrance.

Oh, so they came to receive us.

Seems like we talked way too much outside.

The three must have been tired waiting.

"Finally came out. Seriously, you guys are late in receiving us." (Tomoe)

"Looks like you are not paying attention. How shameful." (Mio)

Eeh.

Tomoe and Mio spit out words as if they were waiting for Beren and the others to receive us.

So the two of them were conversing here to kill time?

I was thinking we would be regrouping in the room.

"Waka-sama, Tomoe-sama, Mio-sama, we have been waiting for you!" (Beren)

Beren approaches us in small trots.

“Everyone, good work in your jobs. Sorry for having you guys search for the lodging as well.” (Makoto)

“What are you saying! It has been a while since we have gone afar, we are all fired up to tackle these tasks! Please don’t mind it!! Now go ahead, go ahead!” (Beren)

Oh, Beren’s enthusiasm is plenty.

Even the silent Hokuto is visibly excited.

Shii was... I don’t know where she learned it from, but she was doing the police salutation as she has a serious aura with that small body of hers.

Led by the three, we enter the extravagant hotel.

Uh...

“Welcome. Kuzunoha Company’s Raidou-sama, Tomoe-sama, Mio-sama, we have been waiting for your arrival.”

In b-both sides, there’s employees of the hotel lined up?!

My legs stop in an instant.

This overwhelming welcoming pressure. Somehow able to go against it, I resume my walk that had stopped for a moment and once again move forward.

Words with no hesitation, and a welcoming by lowering their heads.

A sight that I have only seen in TV.

When entering, the first thing I see is the wide lobby, there’s a lot of people, but it isn’t noisy. The atmosphere of the lobby, contrary to its outward appearance, is western styled. Maybe it is the result of having in mind the tourists.

It is a bit more relaxing this way.

It was a lot easier to enter than suddenly having my shoes taken off and all the floor being tatami.

The place where the front desk is located can easily be guessed by how the employees are lined up.

They are practically saying 'that's the way'.

Understood.

Tomoe and Mio look unfazed and that's so mortifying.

It seems like Iroha-chan is also already coping with the situation.

...Well, she is a princess after all.

She is the kind of girl that when entering the bath, she will ask you to take off her clothes after all. This place might actually be more in her style than when we were riding the carriage.

Just a few moments ago, she was saying plebeian-like things, so I mistook her for a person in my side, geez.

So I am the only plebeian here huh.

I got it~.

"Welcome, Raidou-sama."

"I am Raidou of the Kuzunoha Company. We will be in your care for a while. Ehm, is there the need for any sort of procedure?" (Makoto)

It seems like they have already gotten a room for us, so it is probably okay.

But I will confirm just in case.

"Your room has been registered for 10 days. Everything has been arranged already, so there's no problem. But, the... lady there, we haven't received any notification of her, so, sorry for the trouble, but I would like to ask a few things..."

A beautiful japanese dressed Onee-san asked for information of Iroha-chan in an incredibly low posture.

But she paused a bit when she saw Iroha-chan.

She probably already knows her name.

She is one of the princesses of a distinguished family in this city, so it is not that strange. But well, her asking me is probably some sort of formality.

It is most likely the case.

Just as asked, we add detailed extra information, and finished filling out some simple documents.

(Waka, regarding the stay time, let's extend it to 1 month. We also have the matter of Iroha after all.) (Tomoe)

I glance at Tomoe.

Meaning, you want to look around, right?

I think 10 days is plenty enough, but... well, if we can secure more time, it would be okay to do it.

We could use this place as a safe zone to throw Iroha-chan in if anything happens.

"Sorry but, regarding the stay time, our plans might take a bit more time, so I was thinking about extending it. Is it possible?" (Makoto)

I feel like a super popular high-class hotel like this won't be able to cope with this kind of things.

If that happens, maybe we can bring her to the dungeon?

If possible, I want to avoid that.

It would be best if Shougetsu-san were to take over, but unless we talk about it first, there's no assurance.

...Even I can tell I am slightly soft with Iroha-chan.

But she is around the same age as Rinon and Komoe-chan, and she is also the fiancée

of Izumo.

How to say it, it is like I just end up minding her, or more like, I end up being soft on her.

“Yes, if the Kuzunoha Company-samas are okay with staying in the current room assigned, we can arrange it.”

Oh, how unexpected.

No well, she did say ‘if we are staying in the current room assigned’.

...

Ah, it is the same as the time in Mizuha huh.

So it is like that.

“Then please change it to a 1 month stay.” (Makoto)

“...A month, is it. Understood. Then, can you please show me the promissory note you have in your possession? This is a regulation, so please cooperate in this.”

It was possible.

Or would it be more accurate to say, I ended up doing it.

Are regulations different from 10 days to 1 month?

Hotels have it rough as well huh.

I show the promissory note with Sairitz-san’s mark on it.

Maybe she already knew of it beforehand, or it might be because she is a professional, the Onee-san didn’t change the color of her face as she writes in what’s most likely the hotel registry form like nothing happened.

“Also, regarding the staying price...”

The Onee-san that lifted her face up touches the topic of the price.

“Tomoe.” (Makoto)

Regarding matters of money, I will leave it to Tomoe.

“Yes. You have my gratitude for accepting the change on our own convenience. We will be paying the money in advance, so I would like to ask you to calculate the price.” (Tomoe)

“The full amount?”

“Of course. Obviously, if there’s any extra expenses, you can calculate them in the day of our departure. We are planning on heading to the labyrinth, so our stay in the hotel won’t be long, but we will be in your care in this time.” (Tomoe)

“In order for everyone to pass a pleasant time, all the employees will do their best.”

The Onee-san that is attending us lowers her head deeply.

At the same time, not only her, but the other Onee-san at the front desk also lower their heads, and the other people that are not attending customers also lower their heads.

“Well then, sorry for the hurry, but is it okay for my master and the others to head to the room? We want to rest the fatigue of our long journey, you see.” (Tomoe)

“Oh, sorry for the lack of tact.”

For a moment, the Onee-san sends her gaze to a location where no one of our group is in.

“Please, follow me.”

Soon after, another person speaks with us.

They are going all the way to guide us huh.

Beren and the others are already staying here, so we can just have them bring us to the room though.

Well, returning to the room and being released from this tension is honestly my true

feelings.

Let's just be guided.

We leave Tomoe, and after greeting the guide lightly, we ask her to show us the way.

Soon after we began walking, for some reason, Mio turned towards the direction Tomoe is.

"Tomoe-san." (Mio)

"I know. I am sorry for requesting things one after the other, I don't mind if it's for tomorrow, but I want to ask for at least one meal." (Tomoe)

"There's no need to mind, please request of us as much as you want."

"Umu. To tell you the truth, the Empress, Sairitz-dono, told us that there's a famous product of this hotel, you see. We would like to try out this 'fried rice'." (Tomoe)

So you already read it huh, Tomoe.

At this kind of moments, the eye contact ability of Tomoe and Mio is truly admirable.

And she nonchalantly brought out the name of Sairitz-san.

So Sairitz-san has also eaten here?

And it really was fried rice huh.

If it's Tomoe who has already read my memories, she should have already seen it before in them.

I can easily imagine her saying 'Oh, so this is fried rice huh'.

"...I will arrange it so that you will be able to enjoy it by as soon as dinner."

"You work fast-ja na. That's pleasant." (Tomoe)

"Thanks for the grateful words."

Just like the lodging price, I will try not to think about the price it takes to fill us all with fried rice.

Iroha-chan, who had a prim face from beginning to end, opened her eyes wide for a moment. Her mouth formed a smile... or so it looked, but she is desperately trying to hold it.

Just how excited are you?

Now then, what part of this building is our room?

This time for sure, we leave Tomoe and continue into the building.

...

This... I would get lost.

The map of the building at the side is practically a labyrinth.

Is this the preliminary match before challenging the grand labyrinth?

Heh~, it even has a courtyard.

...Wait, this place is not already the third floor?

In the first place, if I remember correctly, this building itself should be in a pretty high place...

It is in a location that's far away from the labyrinth, so we won't be oppressed by that gargantuan outer wall which makes me happy.

Tsige also has a big wall, so it might be worth seeing in its own way. When there's time, I am thinking of checking it out thoroughly.

"There's a section of the hotel that was made on a slope when it was constructed. I am sure that in your stay, the scenery from the bath, and the night view from your room will please you."

As if reading my mind, I receive an explanation of the courtyard.

We walk in that yard as we are guided.

We have gone outside.

Also, a room we can enjoy the night view huh.

“Seriously?” (Makoto)

“The room is that one. Of course, from this courtyard to the room, there’s strict security, so there’s no need to worry about anyone suspicious. In the past, people like Sairitz-sama and Priestess-sama have been welcomed here, a room this hotel is proud of.”

True.

It seems there’s around 5 people as security here.

If I search with Sakai, I can also tell, but their stealth skills are high enough that if I didn’t use Sakai, I wouldn’t be able to.

“Now then, please go ahead. Do take your time. We will once again explain the detailed information of the room to Tomoe-sama once we see her again.”

She opens the door to the room, silently places herself to the side, and waits until we enter.

She bows once and leaves.

Elegant until the end.

“To think this is the room that Sairitz-sama and the Priestess-sama have stayed in... wafuuu~” (Iroha)

Ah, she didn’t say -desu.

The moment it was only us, Iroha-chan mutters this in a trembling voice and falls at the entrance.

Her legs had lost strength and she leans onto the shoe rack.

“Hmmm, fried rice. I feel like I have heard that before...” (Mio)

...That Mio, I thought she was being strangely silent, but it was because her head was full of fried rice?

At any rate, even though we arrived here when the surroundings were already getting dark, they will prepare the dinner, and even hear out our request.

With only this much, I can tell that it is great service.

We have come to quite the place.

Can we really go to a dungeon while staying in such an incredible hotel?

A dark and confined dungeon.

Ah, only that part is shaving off my motivation.

Chapter 252

Interlude, even that is probably a peaceful journey (1)

Osakabe Iroha. That's my name-desu.

The Osakabe household is the head military family of the largest city in Lorel Union, Kannaoui.

But well, my household is only a branch family of the main one, so in reality, I don't have that much power.

When you become the head of the main household, your political influence is tremendous, and in times, you can even interfere in political situations, so looking at the Osakabe household as a whole, it can be said that we are a household that can enter in the top 5 even in Lorel.

Having said that, it doesn't mean that I myself will become the head of the branch family, and since the time I was born, it was already decided that I would be send off for a political marriage. Moreover, the other party is someone from the Ikusabe household that has been in an antagonizing relationship with the Osakabe household, a person of a branch family there.

They don't expect any sort of revolutionizing effect, and it is not considered an important milestone either.

If I had to put it into words, it was equal to throwing water to one of many heated stones.

Then, for what reason was I born in this city, in this family? Am I allowed to live my life without working and leeching off the tax of the people?

Without knowing the meaning of my existence, can I just be content with the standing I have been given?

In the time that I was inside the castle and my head was being constricted by questions that no answers could be found, I received a letter from my fiancé, Izumo-sama.

That in itself wasn't strange. Because we have been exchanging letters regularly after all.

Even when we have no memories of having seen each other face to face, telling the other party of our current state is the duty of a fiancé and a fiancée after all.

In his childhood, Izumo-sama lived in Lorel's capital, Naoi, and right now, he is devoting himself to his studies and techniques at Rotsgard Academy.

Since the time in Naoi and Rotsgard, we have been exchanging letters, but both are far away places that make it difficult to meet in person.

It was natural we had to resort to letters.

But the contents of the last letter I received from Izumo-sama, it was something that shocked me deeply.

Until now, Izumo-sama always told me about his unchanging everyday life, and would ask about my current state, but this one was completely different... that's right, its contents could be considered a kind of confession.

To tell you the truth, since a few months ago, my life has taken a big turn.

Since the time I began taking the classes of a certain temporary teacher, the world I was looking at felt like it had changed.

At summer vacation, it wasn't because I wasn't able to return, but because time was so valuable I couldn't return.

With the incident that occurred at the Academy festival, I have been helping in the reconstruction, and have helped rebuild a variety of things.

Paths, walls, houses, public facilities; I repaired those kind of things, and seeing people use those places with a smile on their face was something that gave me great joy and happiness.

I was truly wavering about whether to tell you this or not, but I believe that I have to

interact sincerely with you and reveal it.

Currently, I am at a loss in how I should live my life.

In a near future, I am thinking about creating an opportunity to personally meet you.

Being in the same place, voicing out the things we are currently thinking of, and if possible, speak our hearts out with only the two of us.

Please consider this in a positive manner.

Summarizing it, that's the contents of it.

What he refers to when he talks about the incident at the Academy festival, was the abrupt and unbelievable incident that occurred in Rotsgard Academy where people were transforming into powerful monsters.

When I learned of the place and details of this incident, I was about to lose consciousness, but Izumo-sama was safe.

Or more like, based on the information network of the Osakabe household and Lorel Union, leaving aside the results of the tournament, to my surprise, he played a heavily active role.

What I meant with 'leaving aside the results of the tournament' was that in the tournament form, he was quickly pitted against the person that had become the champion.

I heard that he put up a good fight, but he loss and the results were not that big of a deal.

But that champion, the person that became the strongest in the Academy, was a woman.

...I know that in worldwide terms, there's more strong women than there are men, but here in Lorel Union, we have one ideology that's different from the foreign countries: 'Men have to protect women'. That's why I don't want to imagine Izumo-sama losing to a woman.

I am happy for his achievements and growth, but I was in a complicated mental state.

Ah right, that's not the issue here.

In the letter of Izumo-sama, that wording about being at a loss in how to live his life, that's exactly what pierced me.

It is exactly because we have a lot of things in common that I was able to understand the true meaning of those words.

Izumo-sama has found something he wants to do.

If not, he wouldn't be at a loss.

The weight of the family, the role that our surroundings are expecting from us; the meaning and responsibility of carrying out these things has been taught to us plenty and we have grown with it.

Even so, Izumo-sama has found something that he is unable to hold back and is at a loss.

Ah.

This was completely different from my boorish question about the meaning of my existence. What an envious worry that must be.

Or maybe I was a bit jealous about Izumo-sama obtaining a type of worry that I have never been able to obtain myself.

And so, the next one, the part where he proposed for the first time to speak in person.

At the same time as I was happy, an anxiety that surpassed that feeling of happiness welled up inside me. That maybe he wanted to cancel the engagement at this time.

Of course, there was not a single mention about this, but thanks to his words 'I am at a loss', I ended up having this uneasiness.

Our marriage is a special kind, so when cancelling it, there's the need for a fitting resolve first.

There's obviously the resolve of losing all your lifestyle until now, and the resolve of being unable to live your life properly from there on.

That's why I don't think it will turn into such a heavy situation yet.

But in the possibility that Izumo-sama throws away everything as well as me, and prioritizes his own dreams... *what will be of me?*

The worries I had before reading the letter were collaborating exquisitely with my current emotions.

At that time, I felt like an empty doll.

In the past, even when I was troubled in that kind of way, I could just place the expectations of the people in that empty space, and deceive myself into thinking that 'I' am needed. But this time, I couldn't make it work.

Calling it 'right in time' would be imprudent, but at that time, because of the instability of Yaso-Katsui's grand labyrinth, the mamonos began to flood outside the labyrinth and bring harm to the towns with Kannaoui at its centre.

The whereabouts of the main culprit, the Dragon Slayer Sofia, were unknown, but even if that were the case, there's no way to ignore the harm it was bringing.

Kannaoui is currently beginning to grow stormy.

The way the damage is being dealt with is poor, even in my eyes. The reason is because the head of the Osakabe household that should be standing at the front dealing with the damage, is down with a disease.

And the many factions that are aiming for the seat as the new head were trying to obtain big achievements in order to hold the supremacy, so they were obstructing and keeping each other in check which served as a big reason as to why the situation was being so poorly dealt with.

My surroundings are normally disconnected to those kinds of political disputes, but as expected, after some time, they continuously came to make demands.

I have heard that, lately, there have been radical factions aiming for my life.

It is truly stupid-desu.

Killing a low seat princess like me won't make you increase your influence. Putting it

bluntly, even if worthless princesses were to join this conflict, we wouldn't be able to do anything anyways.

The labyrinth jurisdiction is being done in cooperation with the Adventurer Guild, so it seems it hasn't turned into a problem yet, but the surrounding towns that have suffered harm from this are affecting the tax collection in Kannaoui, and it is steadily turning into a big problem.

The labyrinth is in this unstable state, and in a situation where you can clearly see from the sides that the mamonos are flowing out from the grand labyrinth, and yet, the result of the meeting between the Osakabe household and the military families of power was to make a drastic increase in tax with the pretext of resolving various problems promptly and to deal with them urgently.

I thought that this was foolish.

They should properly judge the present condition, and calculate the amount into one that won't bring any problems to their livelihood.

When I told this to the person in care of me, Shougetsu, he told me that that should be the correct way, and praised me.

But Shougetsu didn't tell this to father.

That's why I spoke with father directly, but I ended up getting scolded, telling me that: 'Children shouldn't go saying such brazen things without even knowing about the world outside'.

I don't understand.

I don't understand what part is it I am wrong about.

If they mistake the increase in tax and the towns steadily decrease because of this tyranny, what are they going to do?

If we turn it around, this would also mean that the people doing the taxing will also face a decrease in tax received.

Something like that... no matter how I think about it, it is wrong.

That's why, I decided to create proof.

I am also a living being, not a doll.

I gathered up all the money I have saved until now and can freely use, just in case, I choose a few small articles that can easily be changed to money, and bring the protection sword that has been together with me since I was born, Hotarumaru.
<Hotaru=Firefly>

I decided to investigate the present condition of the neighboring towns on my own-desu.

Look at the scale of the towns and calculate the proper amount of tax; a journey for land survey.

Taking the documents that show the tax yields of the past as reference, it was all ready-na no desu.

My basic knowledge was also ready-desu.

Now that I think of it, I was truly naive. It was a childish decision that was filled with holes everywhere.

Even so, I was completely confident.

At dusk, I slipped into the darkness and left the house.

Like this, the first journey in my life -the life of Osakabe Iroha- had opened its curtains.



My journey came to a setback in just two days.

I couldn't even arrive at the first town.

At the dead of the night, within a forest that was disconnected from the main road, the swords of adventurers were pointed at me.

The funny thing is, they are adventurers I hired.

When I went to the guild to arrange both bodyguards and a carriage, kind adventurers called me on my way and I gave them a simple explanation of the situation. And then, they cordially accepted to take on the job of being the bodyguards and to arrange the carriage to the next town.

‘Adventurers are not all rude people, there are also a lot who are kind’, that’s what I thought moved, but... I was splendidly deceived.

In this situation, even if I were to do everything they say without opposing them, and I am miraculously spared my life, it would be impossible for a child like me to survive in the forest for a night.

“I was cleanly checkmated-desu...” (Iroha)

“Hmph, when you are a kid that has a good upbringing and a good head on your shoulders, they won’t plead for their life even in a situation like this?”

“...It is not a plead for my life, but there is indeed something I want to ask.” (Iroha)

“Heh~, what is it?”

“My request is not going to get in the way of anyone, on the contrary, it is something that will lead to helping others. Of course, there was no lie in the pay for your work either. And yet, what displeasure brought you to do something like this? I just can’t understand.” (Iroha)

“...Hah?”

I asked the question that was bothering me heavily inside and requested for an answer.

There’s no saving for me anyways. Then, I want to know the answer at the very least.

But the man that has his sword pointing at me, only let out a dumbfounded voice.

“As I said, why did you end up resorting to attacking your requester? That’s what I want to know-desu.” (Iroha)

“...See? An annoying brat, right?”

The man looks at his companions at the back.

“That’s true. But you know, an Ojou-sama that says so much idealistic stuff, don’t you think a ransom would be more juicy?”

“No, if the household is too high standing, the danger of us being killed is higher. Then, it would be better to just take all the possessions this girl has and profit big. It would also be harder to track us like that.”

...

Looks like there’s no need to push myself to try and survive in the forest.

I will be killed by them.

Right now, I am Osaka Iroha. If I introduce myself as Osakabe Iroha, their resolve to kill me would only strengthen.

If there’s no other way, I would prefer to die with dignity, by killing myself.

It would be sad to have my sword tasked to protect me, Hotarumaru, to kill myself though.

“Listen here, Iroha-sama, we are receiving an escort payment that’s higher than the normal price, but you know, a kid that’s able to bring out that amount of money because she wants bodyguards, must mean that she would have even more money than that, right?”

“Yes.” (Iroha)

I have to make him return me Hotarumaru.

Rather than dying by their swords, I want to die with Hotarumaru.

It would save them the pain, and I think they will probably return it to me.

“That’s why, we felt like taking everything. That’s the reason.”

So putting even more money than the appropriate amount didn’t serve as an insurance but ended up biting me huh.

With that, their greed appeared.

So such stupid things like this, that would come out as joke stories, actually do happen huh.

“I see. Now that it has come to this, there’s no technique that will allow me to oppose you. How about it, can I get my sword back?” (Iroha)

“Again? What did you say this time?”

“‘I will sportsmanly kill myself so, can I get my sword back?’, is what I am trying to say.” (Iroha)

“Hah?”

...

What’s going on?

I feel like my words are not getting through.

“...In other words, it is already hopeless, so you want to kill yourself?”

“Are you seriously saying that?”

“A kid killing herself, don’t joke around!”

They have the intentions to kill me, and yet, me killing myself is a no?

For some reason, that’s how those words felt to me.

“...It will save you the trouble—?!!!” (Iroha)

I saw as if the hand and sword of the man had disappeared.

At that moment, a sharp heat was felt in my cheek and my words were cut off reflexively.

“How is it?”

“...Tch, I was cut just now? But, even if you ask me how it is...” (Iroha)

The hand that touched my cheek had blood sticking on it.

So this is the feeling of being cut.

I already thought just a moment ago that I will be dying, so I am not that moved by it.

I think a variety of emotions have been numbed right now.

“I see! I won’t return you your sword! I will cut you to pieces as you are now, so do try your best to maintain that calm face of yours!!”

“Don’t go shouting in a bizarre-like manner right beside someone who is comfortably sleeping! [Light Cross]!!”

Suddenly, in the darkness of the night, an intense light was spread in my whole field of vision.

Inside that light, I was held in the arms of someone.

The light weakened in only a few seconds, and disappeared, but the situation made a complete turn.

The party of three adventurers was nowhere to be found, and right in front of me, there were only two silver haired women that were carrying me.

“...”

Words won’t come out.

Have I been saved?

“Oi, young one, are you okay?”

“Ah, you were injured. Then use this.”

“Wait! There’s no need to use that, I can heal her!”

“Ei.”

“Ah.”

After what seemed to be a conversation between the two women, a ringing of an elegant bell resounded, and..... a gentle and warm wind wrapped around me.

An incredibly comfortable, incredibly calming, and incredibly sleep-inducing wind.....

Maybe because my tension had disappeared, I fell into sleep without being able to even thank these two.



“So she is asleep now, Haku.”

“...She has fallen asleep, Bia.” (Haku)

“Haven’t I told you many times to throw away that strange magic tool, Haku?” (Bia)

“I have already grown attached to it, there’s no way I can throw it away!” (Haku)

“Activates heal and sleep as fifty-fifty, Storing of Bell. From how I see it, it is totally a cursed tool though?” (Bia)

“Actually, I don’t care about that part, but~ it is like, I haven’t found a bell that just clicks in me, or more like~ I just can’t cast aside this sound, you know~.” (Haku)

Without hearing the warning of the woman called Bia, the woman called Haku rang the bell. And then, the girl that was in Haku’s arms, fell into a sound sleep.

Haku, who was the reason for Iroha falling asleep, plays the fool and rings the bell once more, pretending to be drunk by the sound of it.

It seems like ringing it is not enough to activate the heal and sleep effect.

It would be completely troublesome if it activated every time it rang though.

“Listen here... the girl did fall asleep because of that, you know? We can’t ask her her circumstances like this.” (Bia)

While letting out a short sigh, Bia looked amazed at Haku.

“Now now, it is true that she was in a situation that we had to save her from, and things like this, you can normally guess the circumstances. Anyways, it is already late at night, so with Bia’s barrier in place, let’s go to sleep again. Let’s continue this in the morning, okay?” (Haku)

“...Hm, right. It would be foolish to get a lack of sleep when there’s already nothing to do. Let’s go to sleep.” (Bia)

“As expected of my partner, you really understand me!” (Haku)

“Yeah yeah. Well then, hurry and sleep, sleep.” (Bia)

The two women that saved Iroha from crisis, went in between the trees that were just a few steps from where Iroha was about to be killed, and from there, their figures disappeared.

They entered the barrier.

This military family princess, Iroha, who left her home and was soon to be killed, served as the trigger for the meeting of these women and her, and the results of such encounter will probably turn their future into something hard to predict.

Chapter 253

Interlude, even that is probably a peaceful journey (2)

“Homph~nom, gulp gulp...”

For a girl, she was showing quite the wild way of eating that didn't care about the eyes of her surroundings, and she is the person that is right in front of me.

One of the two adventurers that saved me that night.

Together with them, we were now in a small faraway town from Kannaoui.

Even if I say small, it is simply because I am comparing it with Kannaoui where I have been living in.

It is a place that is surrounded by an outer wall and has a higher than standard functionalities of a town.

...I don't know the name of the place though.

It has been over half a day since then, and yet, we have moved pretty far.

“You are being bad mannered, Haku.”

“I ninum geth fu eath thif momning after all.” (Haku)

...

Uhm, I think she tried to say, ‘I didn't get to eat this morning after all’.

“Seriously, you are a woman, so try to care about the gazes of the surroundings.”

“Gulp, at stage, I am properly paying mind to them, so that's fine~~.” (Haku)

“Hah... sorry, Iroha-chan.”

“Don’t mind it! I have been saved by you two-na no desu. Just by letting me accompany is already saving me an incredible lot-desu!!” (Iroha)

I have never seen it before, but a woman wearing a priest-like outfit threw the conversation at me.

If I remember correctly, her name is Ginebia-san.

And the other one that is immersing herself eating is *Haku Mokuren*-san.

She wore an exotic dancer outfit that is high in the exposure rate.

She spoke about a stage just now, so she is probably a dancer.

Both of them are probably in their twenties.

The two are older and give me the feeling that of reliability.

“Once again, I am Ginebia. Leaving aside my denomination for now, I am a bishop. Right now I am the guild’s... no, that’s not it, I am a free adventurer.” (Ginebia)

“I am Haku Mokuren. Just as you see, I am a dancer. Together with Bia-Ginebia, we were travelling far away for a bit.” (Haku)

Adventurers...

“I am Osaka Iroha-desu. Uhm, as I was returning home, I was betrayed by adventurers...” (Iroha)

“That...” (Haku)

“Eh?”

“Is mostly a lie, right?” (Haku)

“?!”

W-Why?

Haku-san looked at my eyes and suddenly said something like that with a smile on her face.

“You have the scent of a runaway girl coming from all over you, Iroha-chan. Also, your reactions are sometimes dull when calling you Osaka. Iroha is your real name, but Osaka is a fake one, right?” (Haku)

I-It’s only been half a day, and yet, it was all exposed?!

“Since you were at that place, you definitely came out of Kannaoui, and when taking into account a name that’s close to Osaka, and a child that has the money to hire adventurers... you must be a child of the Osakabe household, right?” (Ginebia)

The supplementary information of Ginebia-san is also exactly right.

...Correct-na no desu.

As I thought, my journey was destined to end in failure-desu ne.

“Ah... I...” (Iroha)

Anything I say would be pointless now.

I know that, but it seems like my mouth wanted to try saying some sort of excuse.

“And? Where was Iroha-chan trying to go that it made you run away from home?”

“Eh?”

“Tell this Onee-san, hm~~?” (Haku)

Haku-san moves aside the (many) piled up plates, and looks straight at me.

Eh? Wasn’t this the pattern where I get caught, brought back, and they get a finder’s fee?

Ginebia-san as well, she shrugged her shoulders a little, but looks like she intends to listen to what I have to say.

“A-Actually...” (Iroha)

And then, while nervous, I held a mysterious relief that maybe they will save me, and began telling my circumstances to the two adventurers, Ginebia and Haku.

Check the towns, investigate their actual life conditions, and have my father and the main family rethink their thoughts.

Ginebia-san and Haku-san had a gentle smile in their face from beginning to end, and listened to my story until the end.

“That’s why I left my house, and decided to leave to the outside on my own, but...”
(Iroha)

Just as the result points, I have not been able to do anything.

“I see. It is important after all, your quest to find yourself. I understand that feeling!”
(Haku)

Eh? Quest to find myself?

“Haku! What are you sympathizing for?! Don’t forget that as a result, Iroha-chan almost died!” (Ginebia)

“But you know, Bia, a girl that’s as reliable as her should study now, and in the future, it might bring prosperity to the country and the outside. It is true that Iroha-chan is currently naive. **Naive as a kasudosu*.*” (Haku) *<Naive in Japanese is also said as sweet. So sweet=naive. Kasudosu is a pastry.>*

I have never heard of this ‘kasudosu’.

I can somewhat tell that it is a sweet food though.

“In that case, it would be best to have a proper talk with father to—” (Iroha)

“Nai~~ve!! This is serious, Bia. Her rebellious phase is on the level that she can leave home! With this naivety of yours, Iroha-chan, you won’t last long, but in this quest to find yourself, you should learn a lot of things by yourself!” (Haku)

“Haku, what are you getting hyped for...” (Ginebia)

“Isn’t that fine? We are using the Spirit path to move safely, and well, we won’t be able

to bring her around to towns in order, but we can at least bring her with us till Mizuha, right?" (Haku)

"We are also not in a journey for fun, you know? Rokuya-san and Hitsuna are waiting for us after all." (Ginebia)

"That's why I'm saying we will do it while we are at it. Fortunately, Iroha-chan also has money, so we can have her go to Mizuha's Adventurer Guild and place her together with trustworthy people. If we search for an inn as well, it will be fine." (Haku)

"...Only in this kind of troublesome moments you have fast decision making." (Ginebia)

"That's why I love you, Bia~~!!" (Haku)

"I haven't given you the ok yet, you know!" (Ginebia)

"Heheh~" (Haku)

Seeing a comedy-like conversation unfolding right in front of me, to my surprise, it was decided that they will accompany me to Mizuha, the city that is said to be the entrance of Lorel-na no desu.

I-It has turned into something incredible-desu.

"Uhm, it is only been half a day since I met the two of you, and even though I haven't been able to reward you with anything, why is it that you are so kind with me?" (Iroha)

"In the world, there's bad adventurers, and there's the good adventurers as well. It is as simple as that." (Haku)

"Aren't you ashamed of calling yourself a good adventurer, Haku?" (Ginebia)

"But it is true! Without any reason at all, you two are doing so much for me..." (Iroha)

"So you want a reason to believe us, right? Hm hm, it is nice to be young. Well, putting it bluntly, it is because that inexperience of yours was nostalgic, but..." (Haku)

"Yes?"

"The thoughts that Iroha-chan currently considers as the correct way of a town, it kind

of... doesn't take proper form, I think. In that state, it will only stay as naive. That's why, I felt like seeing a bit of that decision you will bring out." (Haku)

"..."

The decision... I will bring out?

"Search unyieldingly for your ideal, and fall; or will you obtain the ability to gently deal with the situation, and at the same time, change your very own thoughts? Or maybe, you will continue single-mindedly with that sweet idealistic thinking of yours, and still possess something that will be able to change reality in some way..... just kidding." (Haku)

"The third one is way too ominous, Haku. Don't say things that might tempt others to make a pact with the devil." (Ginebia)

"Yes~. And so, that's how it is, Iroha-chan. The point is, I took an interest in you." (Haku)

"...Yeah, in that point, I am also of the same sentiment. In that case, about the movements of the Osakabe household..." (Ginebia)

"Rokuya-san, right?" (Haku)

"Right. I will ask her of it in thought transmission. We are in an advantage since we don't use normal paths, but if the other side were to use teleportation to close the distance, that would be it after all." (Ginebia)

"E-Excuse me!" (Iroha)

Within the conversation that was quickly proceeding, I had something I wanted to tell the two no matter what, so I cut into their conversation.

"What is it?" (Ginebia)

"Was the food not enough?" (Haku)

"P-Please call me Iroha without any honorifics!!" (Iroha)

"..."

“..”

“Ginebia-san? Haku-san?” (Iroha)

The two of them fell silent and look at each other.

“Hey, Bia.”

“Right.”

“Isn’t she a cute girl? To the point that I want to bring her back to my guild.” (Haku)

“Can’t do.” (Ginebia)

“I kno~w.” (Haku)

“Self-restrain.” (Ginebia)

“Well then, Iroha, it will be a short journey that will last until tomorrow morning or noon but, pleasure being with you.” (Haku)

“Yeah. Also, about the matter of me opening the Spirit path we will be using now, I ask you to keep it a secret, okay Iroha?” (Ginebia)

“Yes!! Understood!” (Iroha)

How reliable and amazing women.

They also have feminine charm and flexible strength.

They are calling themselves adventurers, so they must definitely be strong.

Strong, huh. How would that feel?

After that, I continued to listen to these two trusty people as I imagine a bit about my own figure fighting bravely by gracefully controlling Hotarumaru.



Spirit Path.

This unfamiliar name denotes the mysterious forest that Ginebia-san opens.

It is not a path, but a forest.

And that forest is warm, the sunlight filtering through the trees is bright, and it was a gentle forest like the ones that appear in fairy tales.

It is also a silent forest where we didn't encounter a single mamono or demi-human.

Spirit Path, after walking for a while in this forest, and once again opening the path with Ginebia-san humming the aria, we arrive at a far away place. A mysterious spell-desu.

It is similar to teleportation, but we are walking, so it takes more time than teleporting.

But the spell-user, Ginebia-san, doesn't seem to receive much of a burden, so this looks a lot better than teleportation.

It was truly a mysterious experience.

In the end, at noon of the next day, we arrived at the city of Mizuha.

'Bia, I am already tired. Let's just teleport until Mizuha, okay?' (Haku)

'If I teleport the three of us until there, I would be completely empty and won't be able to move for 1 whole week. Now, do you want to teleport? Hey, do you want to?' (Ginebia)

'I-I was just kidding, Bia-sa~n.' (Haku)

In the middle of the way, a conversation like that unfolded between the two.

How peaceful. It really soothed me.

One day... I want to become like the two of them, calm and unfaltering; a woman of composure. I wonder if I will be able to become like that.

I felt a bit of uneasiness towards my own future as well.

Also... Ginebia-san, even when she is supposed to be a priest, she is able to accomplish something like teleportation which surprised me too.

“This is Mizuha...” (Iroha)

I have only heard of it from word-of-mouth, the city that has the most amount of tourists in Lorel.

As the entrance of Lorel, there's a lot of traffic from various places, and as a tourist location, it is the city that has the highest scale in Lorel.

But well, in terms of tourism, the grand labyrinth in Yaso-Katsui doesn't fall so far off though.

The small information I had of Mizuha beforehand wasn't that different from the real thing. It is a place that's filled up with a variety of people.

The variety of people don't reach this level in Kannaoui, but there are a decent amount of tourist customers that come purely for sightseeing.

Also, as a whole, I feel like I see more merchants than tourists and adventurers.

Maybe they have come here to buy the unique articles of Lorel Union.

The path is wide and there's a lot of people too, and the number of carriages as well... Anyways, it is lively.

“This number of people, it is pretty numerous, right? First, let's find people we can trust in the guild, and... Bia?” (Haku)

“...”

The moment Haku-san was trying to keep me company as I was overwhelmed by the energy of the city, Ginebia-san suddenly stood still and seemed to be surprised. And then, after furrowing her brows a little, I see, for the first time, an expression that let out a scary atmosphere.

Only doing a signal with her eyes, she maintains her silence and doesn't answer the

words of Haku-san.

“Acha, is it a report that’s not good?” (Haku)

“Report? Ah, thought transmission?” (Iroha)

“Yeah.” (Haku)

“...Hmm.” (Iroha)

I was told that Ginebia-san was doing thought transmission, and at the same time, she made a short sigh and turned to us again.

“Bia, did you finish the thought transmission?” (Haku)

“Haku, I have received information of that person.” (Ginebia)

“!! We are just about to leave Lorel, so the timing is perfect!” (Haku)

“Not really. There’s information that the person was seen right in the middle of a war zone. That muscle brain... they said they would be going out for a while, and thought they disappeared, but now I see this, just what’s that person thinking?” (Ginebia)

“War... that means the north huh. I am not good with cold. Well, sounds like that person’s fine, and isn’t that just how master is?” (Haku)

“Also, the search for Iroha... or more like, the pursuit for Iroha has begun. It seems like they are already heading for Mizuha and going full-throttle with teleportation. The information came from Rokuya-san’s line.” (Ginebia)

“That’s quite the fast reaction. A little more and it would be unnatural even.” (Haku)

“Seems like the Osakabe household is the place Ryoken-kun is serving.” (Ginebia)
<Ryoken=hunting dog>

Ryoken?

Is there a person with a name like that?

One of my bodyguards, Yudoku, does give off that kind of feel though.

My other bodyguard, Akashi, if I had to define her with something, I would call her a wild boar. She doesn't give off the feeling of a hunting dog.

"Hunti—Ah! Shougetsu-kun huh. Heh~, that person huh. He should be pretty old already, but he is still in active service huh. Won't Bibi-chan get happy about it? If she learned that her master is still in active service and lively—Ah, Rokuya-san as well. His disciples are doing well after all." (Haku)

Bibi, Rokuya; again, names I haven't heard and don't know about.

...Eh?!

The old man, Shougetsu?!

Master and... disciples?!!

"Seems like his stalking—I mean, his pursuing skills have been polished even more. Now then, this is troubling." (Ginebia)

"Right. Now that we have information of master, we are also in urgency here, and if we are heading to the north, we are also in need for preparation. Having said that, we can't just abandon Iroha." (Haku)

"Exactly. We will guide her to the guild, and after that, we will give detailed instructions to the reception and leave the city as soon as possible. That would be the rough idea." (Ginebia)

"Right. Iroha-chan's search for herself and her study of society will be entering its real stage. Little girl, do your best, okay?" (Haku)

"Eh? Uhm... Yes!" (Iroha)

Suddenly having the conversation thrown at me, I reflexively answer.

"...If us meeting there was destiny, suddenly separating here is also destiny. At the very least, I think that Iroha-chan is blessed with good luck. Sorry that we had to do something like leaving the job halfway." (Haku)

"The two of you have been of great help already—desu! If there's a time when you come to Kannaoui, please, definitely visit my family—na no desu!" (Iroha)

“In that case, we will be intruding on you with Bibi-chan and Rokuya-san. Now then, let’s hurry. To the Adventurer Guild!” (Haku)

Haku-san pulled my hand, and the two of us entered together the Adventurer Guild.

A peculiar atmosphere.

I felt like ambition and greed were mixed in the air here.

Since my first mistake, a small sense of weakness was born inside of me.

Even so, the relief of being led by these two surpassed this weakness, and I continued my steps onto the reception counter.

“What is it?”

The middle-aged male staff member looked at us with a doubtful expression that he didn’t even bother to hide.

Maybe because we are sticking out like a sore thumb.

“We want to hire bodyguards for this girl. The reward will be paid by this girl. That’s why... I want to request for trustworthy and competent people. In regards to the pay, give them a bit of an extra, okay?” (Haku)

“Hah?! What are you saying all of a sudden—!!”

Haku-san immediately goes straight onto the topic.

Of course, there was no way the staff member would accept such a strange and suspicious request, but the moment I thought that, Ginebia-san does one step forward and lines to the side of Haku-san... and showed something to the man.

“We are in a hurry here too. I can ask this of you, right?” (Ginebia)

“P-People from the a-apple... you are...”

“Ginebia.”

“Haku Mokuren. Just like us, don’t pry onto this girl, and I ask of you to arrange the

lodging and the bodyguards. I am counting on you, okay?" (Haku)

"...Understood. Request accepted."

!!

The request went through with what was close to an immediate reply.

What does Apple mean?

Ginebia-san, Haku-san; they are filled with mystery.

"Okay."

"Thanks for the help." (Iroha)

I said my thanks to the two, and both looked at me.

"And that's how it is, so from here on, we are changing with this old man here. We will praying for your safety." (Haku)

"Me as well. We will be leaving before Shougetsu... -san arrives to this city, but we will be praying that you will be able to reconcile with him and your father." (Ginebia)

"I-I am truly grateful-desu!" (Iroha)

With a simple 'see you', the two left in quick pace.

"You two!!"

The staff member called Haku-san and Bia-san to a stop when they were about to leave the guild.

Stopping their feet, the two turned in silence.

"...I will prepare a coloured paper, so the next time you come, please give me your sign!"

Without answering, the two wave their hands and leave.

Sign?

So they were famous people...

“Uhm, I... my name is Osaka Iroha.” (Iroha)

“This is a request from the people of Apple, I will prepare you the best bodyguards. How much gold do you have?..... Hoh, so you are not a mere kid huh. Fine, there’s no problem. But...”

“...”

When I tell him the money I have left, that person nods satisfied and continues speaking.

“They will be returning tomorrow morning. People that I can soon arrange with the ones that are currently here... well, there’s no assurance that some unforeseen circumstances might occur. Sorry for this but, you will have to pass one day in the lodging of this city, but... is that okay?”

“It is okay-na no desu.” (Iroha)

“Alright. I will introduce you to a safe inn, and will arrange a carriage that will take you there. It goes without saying, but at the times you leave the inn, try to stay in places that have as much people as possible. Also, don’t walk outside at nights. It seems like you are being chased, so I think you already know though, but just in case.”

“...”

I silently nod.

When I hear the word ‘night’, it reminds me of that one night.

I could tell that the darkness was turning into fear and was whirling inside of me.

The current me is probably afraid of the night.

“Ah, right. Little girl! Are you registered in the Adventurer Guild?”

Maybe because I was silent with a bitter expression, the staff member suddenly said

that to me in a cheerful tone.

It is obvious but, I haven't registered in the Adventurer Guild.

There's no expectations for my battle prowess, and I have heard that people register as a means to obtain an alternate identification proof, but my household name is an identification in itself.

There's a number of people hidden that are able to proof whether someone is of the Osakabe household, and I don't think I would need an identification from the Adventurer Guild presently, or in the future.

That's why I shook my head to the sides.

"I see. There's a good amount of children that register at around your age though. In that case, how about registering today, since you are here anyways."

"Me? But things like being an adventurer and doing requests is just..." (Iroha)

"There's no need to use it. You can make it a conversation sparker, and when something happens, you can kill time by gazing at it wondering if there's any change to it. There's no demerits in having one. How about it?"

I can clearly tell that he is being considerate.

I understand that this is because the power of Ginebia-san and Haku-san's words are heavy, but it is most likely because the person himself is not a bad person.

Refusing would feel kind of bad.

Also, it doesn't seem like there's any obligation by simply registering.

Izumo-sama once said in a letter that he also registered. Right, if it can serve as a conversation starter, that in itself is useful.

"Understood. I will register." (Iroha)

"Alright! Well then, I will do the preparations, so wait for a bit. I will also arrange for the carriage. By that time, the registration should be all over... ah, in other words, we are diving straight into killing time already."

The staff member leaves into a deeper part of the guild with a relieved face.

Fuh...

After I make a single breath, the staff member returned.

I began filling the necessary spaces in the documents.

“Hoh~, what beautiful writing. Quite impressive for a person your age.”

At the end, I took the level distinction paper in my hands and check for my current level.

“Level is... 8 huh. I thought you were a lady from a good household but... maybe you are related to a military family? No, I won't pry into it, that was the promise. Sorry, please forget it.”

Level 8.

I don't understand well, but being able to guess that I am from a military family from this must mean that this is high for my level.

If I remember correctly, Izumo-sama is close to level hundred though...

While I was troubled by how to answer, the staff member stopped the conversation on his own and left again, and then, after a little while, he came back with a card in his hand.

Fast-desu.

If it was so easy to register, I can understand how children around my age can register as well.

“Done. This is the proof that you are an adventurer.”

Saying that, he gives me a card.

It is not something that I especially wanted, but why... I feel happy.

Silently thinking that inside of me, I was given an explanation of the card.

About levels, ranks, and even matters regarding requests and parties.

He explained it to me in an easy to understand way.

“And for the last part, there’s something called titles.”

“Titles?” (Iroha)

“Depending on your actions, there’s a variety of benefits. Like getting increasing attack and defense against specific demi-humans or mamonos.”

“Heh~~”

So there’s a variety of things huh.

What kind of titles does Izumo-sama have?

I will try asking on the next letter.

“If you touch this part, you can see them, but well, it is a matter unrelated to you right now... no, it looks like you already have.”

“Eh?! I still haven’t done anything though.” (Iroha)

“This is... a title I have never seen before either. [Owner of Unconventional Luck (Good)], the effect is... not bad. No, it is a vague description, but it is quite good.”

Owner of unconventional luck?

It makes me happy, but at the same time, it doesn’t make me happy...

I can clearly tell that it is telling me I am not normal.

But if the effects are good, well, that’s fine.

“Vague?” (Iroga)

“Yeah, normal titles have pretty straight effects, like; fighting a bug mamono will increase your attack power, or give you extra damage; well, it is that kind of straight. But this one is not like that. In other words, it is a rare type of title. For now, I will set

it for you.”

“Ah, thanks.” (Iroha)

“The effect is: ‘you will be guided by a good star. Respond to your own efforts and encounters, and turn troubles and disturbances into your stepping stones. Chance will be your ally in most situations’, or so it says.”

“...Rather than calling it an effect, I feel like I am listening to some sort of fortune telling.” (Iroha)

“Right. But there’s practically nothing bad written in it. I won’t know the details unless I investigate further into it, but I think it is quite the rare and powerful title. Aside from particular situations, it will passively show its effects, or something like that.”

It is true that the contents of it wasn’t that ominous.

“Well, for argument’s sake...”

“Yes?”

“There was someone with the opposite title [Owner of Unconventional Luck (Bad)], even if it is a rare title, I wouldn’t suggest to equip it. In the first place, there would be no one who would, because it would most likely bring that person to a premature death. But if we see it like that, little girl, you are (Good), so just leaving it like that will bring good practically with no conditions. It can be called a fortunate life. It might become a slightly lively and noisy life though. Hahahaha.”

Noisy life... That doesn’t make me happy-desu.

Also, the owner of strange and bad luck wouldn’t even need to set up the title, it sounds as if that person’s normal life is coated by misfortune.

It is true that I am happy because of my good luck, and that might be exactly why I was able to meet Haku-san and Ginebia-san.

...hm, that’s why I was betrayed by the adventurers I hired?

Uhm... it is probably better not to think too deeply about this title-na no desu.

“Oh, sorry for the wait, little girl. The carriage is here. I might not need to say this to an adventurer that possesses a rare title but, I wish you luck. Don’t forget to come here again tomorrow, okay?”

The staff member-san suddenly looks at my back, at the guild’s entrance.

“Yes, thanks for taking care of me.” (Iroha)

With this, I will stay in the inn for today, and then, hire trustworthy bodyguards.

With my own eyes, I will look at the real state of the towns, and with my own ears, I will listen to their voices.

I will open the eyes of father and the others.

I won’t let anyone get in my way, not even Shougetsu.

With that resolve deep in me, I ride the carriage that was prepared for me, express my gratitude to the staff member-san again, and left the Adventurer Guild for the second time in my life.

Chapter 254

Interlude, even that is probably a peaceful journey (3)

The cold night wind brushed my cheeks, and the legs that I definitely told myself not to stop and run at full speed were now unable to properly move.

Without being able to stay even one night at the inn, I was on the verge of being captured.

By the old man that has been taking care of me since infancy, Shougetsu, and my bodyguards.

I am in a far away city that I don't have a single acquaintance to rely on. Since the very beginning, I had nowhere to run.

That's why, my only options were to slip into a crowd of people or have the Adventurer Guild give me shelter-desu.

There's way too much distance between me and the Adventurer Guild, and in order to slip into a crowd of people, I would need to head to the bustling streets.

I decided to do the latter, but the pursuit of Shougetsu and his group was fast and precise.

I was cornered into an alley that few people pass in.

But my unconventional luck still... left me with a path for salvation.

When I thought it was all over, a woman appeared gallantly in front of me.

Tall figure, blue hair waving with the wind, and with two katanas at her waist, she gazed at Shougetsu and the others in a fearless manner.

My bodyguards, Akashi and Yudoku, let out a short scream and fall to the sides of her.

Even though the two are combatants that have received a fitting amount of training for their standing, the woman that had unsheathed the long katana had a cool expression.

She glances at me and says words that sounded as if they came out straight from fairy tales of princes and knights, and she drove away Shougetsu and the others in an instant.

“Are you hurt?”

What a lovely voice.

“Now then, little child, let’s find a safe place to—”

Her gesture of furrowing her brows slightly was also charming.

“Amazing... Amazing-desu! You were like the legendary master swordsman, Iori-na no desu!” (Iroha)

That’s right, the brave man that defeated a hundred dragons alone at the borders of the world.

Like the swordsman, Iori-sama.

Possessing strong power, a strong weapon, and doesn’t forsake the weak.

“Oh, master swordsman. What a nice sounding title-ja no.”

And that daring smile she showed made me stare fascinated.

“Ah, but the old ma—no no! I mean, those hoodlums there, are they okay?” (Iroha)

“Of course, I used the blunt side-ja.”

“Uwaaa~~”

Without killing a single one of them, and not boasting about it.

Just like Haku-san and Ginebia-san, this personage has gained my admiration.

Maybe because she is a swordsman that uses a katana, I could tell that my admiration grew greater.

“Chasing after a child in group, that’s not something that would normally happen. This must be some sort of destiny-ja, if it is okay with you, can you tell me your story? I am Tomoe. A person that has a decent amount of skills-ja yo.” (Tomoe)

“Yes!!”

“What an honest girl-ja na. What’s your name?” (Tomoe)

“Iroha, and... Osaka... Osaka Iroha is my name, Tomoe-sama!” (Iroha)

“Osaka huh. Fumu, well, that’s fine. Then, Iroha, let me introduce them. The one you see there is my master, Raidou, and the one over there is our servant, Mio-ja.” (Tomoe)

At the place where Tomoe-sama turns to, there’s the figure of two people.

One of them is a man of low height, and other one... it is a bit dark so I can’t tell the details well, but it is probably a woman dressed in a kimono and has black hair.

The short one is Tomoe-sama’s master?

It doesn’t click though.

That person held his head as if troubled and tells something to Tomoe-sama and the other woman, and then, turns to where I am.

“Before hearing your story, let’s first go to a calm place. Iroha, come to our inn. That way will be safer, and we can protect you.” (Tomoe)

“The inn of Tomoe-sama...” (Iroha)

It is true that the inn the guild introduced to me was instantly found by Shougetsu, also if something were to happen before reaching morning, I will get caught for sure.

If it’s those skills of Tomoe-sama, as long as I am together with them, no matter who attacks us...

“Looks like you don’t have any objections-ja na. Then, follow us.” (Tomoe)

“Ah, yes!” (Iroha)

This encounter... is it also because of my luck?

Being together with these three, is there some sort of meaning behind it? Will they help me find that special something?

Anyways, I don't have any other choice.

Right now, I should go with the flow.

...

At any rate, walking alone and walking together with someone is so different. I feel incredibly safe.

The master that hasn't turned his face at me much, seems like he is being considerate with me, his walking pace is pretty slow.

The two tall women were frequently talking with him, and his way of responding to them is incredibly natural, it felt like a space that was already well-formed.

From the pieces of conversation I could pick, it gave me the impression that this person called Raidou knows quite a lot about this country's culture.

But how to say it, it felt like it was old knowledge, or more like, not of the modern era. That mysterious knowledge felt strangely disjointed at some parts.

Hm, isn't that...

Something was bothering me.

But that threw me into a much bigger question.

The eyes of wonder that were being poured at us—no, not at me, the gazes that were being poured at Raidou-sama who is being courted by the two women.

I can clearly understand the reason, or more like, I am also questioning it myself.

Just what part of this person attracts Tomoe-sama and the other girl to him?

I don't understand at all.

His appearance is on the low side, and he is not equipped with anything amazing. More like, he is not even armed with anything.

Also, contrary to Tomoe-sama who exudes the aura of a strong person, I don't feel anything at all from this man.

There's practically no magic power.

I don't think his conversation skills are that much to praise, and... there's not a single trait that would attract the opposite sex.

Why?

...Ah, I thought of a reason.

He might be the same as me.

His pedigree is good. Or maybe he is rich.

Not his name or his individual traits, his standing is the amazing part.

If there's any appeal in this man called Raidou, it would definitely be on those lines.

But... would a great person like Tomoe-sama be attracted by such a lowly reason as that?

The woman called Mio apparently is a servant, so it is possible that she is trying to get on the good side of her master and obtaining favours that way though.

Even so, looking at it in the standards of Lorel, these two are quite the beauties.

Their ambitions should also be on the higher specs too.

As I thought... I don't understand at all.

While I was thinking this, we arrive at the inn they are staying in, and was allowed in.

It is a pretty good room-na no desu.

As I thought, this Raidou is quite the wealthy man.

Looks like my guess was correct.

And he is the representative of a foreign company called Kuzunoha Company and they are the top brass.

To my surprise, they revealed that they have obtained the permission of Sairitz-sama and are visiting this country.

The many questions that I had in my mind were heartily answered, and the representative of the Kuzunoha Company, Raidou-sama, was, contrary to his appearance, a really gently person.

And, it seems like my impression of Mio-sama was... a big miss.

I went through a terrible experience I don't want to remember.

"I-I...!!"

Since there's the chance that Mio-sama is in the same rank as Tomoe-sama, I can't ask her to help me with my clothes.

As it was inevitable, the moment we were to enter the bath in the room, I asked Raidou-sama to assist me.

He seemed to be surprised, but if it's Raidou-sama who is the same ordinary person like me with only his family being the imposing part, it would make me feel slightly at ease, though it might be a bit rude to him.

Asking this to super women that can cut through destiny with their own strength and at times affect the future of others, that would be outrageous.

It would be another story if it is when I have become woman-like, but with this pitiful looking body of mine I have now, that's just...

Even Raidou-sama probably didn't find anything good about it.

It has been a while since I haven't taken a bath, so I ended up being a bit too merry, but that man was easily coming in contact with Tomoe-sama and Mio-sama, so maybe

he is unexpectedly used to the body of women.

Even so, I truly felt that I am a princess.

With only a few days of not bathing, I couldn't take this unpleasant feeling on my body.

I can't believe that having sweat remain on my body was so unpleasant.

Polishing my skin as long as I want to in the bath can bring my spirit up this much.

Even though commoners wouldn't have the chance to bath everyday.

While in the bath, I couldn't contain it any longer and ended up swimming inside the bath even if it that was improper.

And my mind suddenly thought of something, that no matter how close 'we' get to the 'people'...we probably will never be able to intersect.



The next day.

At the traditional clothes store oriented towards tourists, after being shown a part of the overwhelming assets of the Kuzunoha Company, I asked Raidou-sama to let me drop by the Adventurer Guild, and I asked the receptionist that I will be cancelling my request.

I told them that it was because I have found reliable people myself.

And in truth, I have told Raidou-sama and the others as much as I could of my circumstances and they have promised to assist me.

But for some reason, there's been no contact with Shougetsu and the others today.

The old man wouldn't give up with only that one time last night. How strange.

The Kuzunoha Company also doesn't seem to mind at all about the attack of the old man's group. This is also strange.

But this was not a big deal at all-desu.

When we were departing from Mizuha, most of the troops garrisoned at the city were lined up to see off the departure of the Kuzunoha Company.

The carriage was a splendid one like the ones big aristocrats use, and the horse was of a first-class breed.

...It seems like it was a gesture from the city.

Raidou-sama said he would definitely return them and was sorry for the trouble, but... honestly speaking, this 'gesture' of theirs was definitely not of lending but of gifting.

This was, without doubt, not the behaviour they would have over a normal company.

"I am someone that simple ended up accompanying them because of a course of events but, just what are the people of the Kuzunoha Company?" (Iroha)

I spontaneously asked a person with good standing.

Even for myself, that was a suspicious manner of speaking.

"...I don't know any more than you who is accompanying them, but if you really don't know, just have Raidou-sama show you his promissory note."

"Promissory note... Thanks." (Iroha)

"...Don't mind it. Please give my regards to Shougetsu-sama, Iroha-sama."

"!!!"

"Please rest at ease. Shougetsu-sama and the others won't be getting in your journey's way any longer."

"...T-Then..." (Iroha)

W-What a surprise-desu.

I simply tried talking with what seemed to be an important person within the troops, and yet, that old man... he is unexpectedly a famous person-na no desu.

He was able to locate me easily too.

I feel like things are moving in a place I don't know of.

"Ah, Iroha-chan, you said you wanted to go to as many villages along the way as possible, right?" (Raidou)

Raidou-sama asks to confirm with me who had already gotten in the carriage.

That's right-na no desu.

I want to look at the current state of the villages, and confirm if the tax of this year is reasonable.

"Yes. Of course, it is plenty enough to have Raidou-sama and the others accommodate what's possible so that it doesn't affect your journey's plan." (Iroha)

"That's fine. But you said you wanted to do land survey, how are you planning on doing that? We won't be able to stay too long in one village, you know." (Raidou)

"I don't think it will take much time-desu." (Iroha)

"Eh?" (Raidou)

Raidou-sama makes a puzzled expression.

"I know the details of the tax from last year, and as long as I am able to confirm the harvest of this year and the state of the damage caused by the mamonos to the villages, that would be enough. Also, if I could tell the situation with the population, that would be plenty." (Iroha)

"...Harvest and damage, also, population. I feel like those things take time..." (Raidou)

Raidou-sama tilts his head.

Fufufu, he probably doesn't know this kind of things in detail.

If it's those three points, the village chief has a grasp of them all.

That's why things will be wrapped up by just hearing out the village chief.

"No, it is only listening to what the village chief has to say, Raidou-sama." (Iroha)

“Eh? Doesn’t that mean...” (Raidou)

“Their duty is to report this information to the feudal lord every year after all. Looking at the village in person, and listening to what they have to say will let me understand more precisely-desu.” (Iroha)

“...I see. That’s how it is... Understood. We will go to as many as possible. Right, being inside the carriage will probably be boring, so how about going to the coachman side with Mio and check out the scenery?” (Raidou)

After showing a surprised expression, Raidou-sama looks as if pensive and stayed silent for a while, then he encouraged me to go to the coachman side.

“But I can’t drive a carriage.” (Iroha)

I haven’t had those kind of chances until now, and I have no skills in controlling horses.

“It is fine. It is not like you will be going there to work. Didn’t I tell you? Go check out the scenery. The horse... well, just look forward to it.” (Raidou)

...

Well, if that’s what Raidou-sama says...

“Understood. Then, I will take you up on your words-desu.” (Iroha)

“Okay, have a good time.” (Raidou)

In the dim and cool passenger car, I left Tomoe-sama and Raidou-sama, and move to the coachman side.

There, I saw the figure of Mio-sama sitting there with elegance.

In her hand she is holding her folding fan, and at times, she is sending wind to her face.

Her other hand is left at her waist.

She doesn’t seem to mind the horses at all.

“Ara, Iroha. You are coming to this side-desu no?” (Mio)

“Raidou-sama told me to check the scenery at the coachman side.” (Iroha)

“Waka-sama did. How kind of him.” (Mio)

Mio-sama narrows her eyes happily and her mood goes merry.

“U-Uhm, is it okay to not mind the horses?” (Iroha)

“...No problem-desu wa.” (Mio)

“But if we let the horses do as they please, not only will we not arrive at Kannaoui, we won’t even know where we will be heading to.” (Iroha)

“These little ones will go at their properly thought up routes and bring us to Kannaoui. No need to worry. The villages Iroha wants, and the locations with water; they have all been told properly.” (Mio)

“Told... properly?” (Iroha)

By who?

Could it be... to the horses?

“Ahaha, that’s impossible.” (Iroha)

“What’s impossible of that? It wasn’t me you know? It was Waka-sama-desu.” (Mio)

Raidou-sama did?

Ah, I see.

...

Like hell it is!!

It is not a problem about whether Tomoe-sama, Mio-sama, or Raidou-sama did it!!

“You are a girl with an unexpectedly rich amount of expressions huh. You seemed like you were having quite a lot of fun in last night’s bath as well.” (Mio)

“That was, uhm, it had been a while since I took a bath, so I was a bit uhm... wait, that’s not the issue here! You have to properly hold the reins of the horses or—!” (Iroha)

“Or?” (Mio)

“They will move willfully!” (Iroha)

“Are they moving... willfully?” (Mio)

Eh?

When she says that, I look at the front again.

The horses were moving in a way that discipline could be felt and advancing rhythmically.

That advance felt like they properly had a goal in mind.

Even though no one is holding the reins...

“They are moving properly...” (Iroha)

“Right?” (Mio)

Mio-sama answers as if that was obvious.

“Raidou-sama... can speak with horses? Is he able to do something like that?” (Iroha)

“Yeah. It is Waka-sama, so that’s a given. Iroha, you are misunderstanding Waka-sama, aren’t you?” (Mio)

The eyes of Mio-sama got a bit scary.

“U-Uhm...” (Iroha)

“You are thinking of him as a simple wealthy man of a mercantile house, aren’t you?” (Mio)

“Uh...” (Iroha)

Bullseye.

“Seriously, believing only what your eyes can see is truly pitiful. Listen well, first of all, Waka-sama was able to obtain this fortune in his own lifetime.” (Mio)

“Eh?”

But... you know, isn't he a *Waka-sama*?

He would have to at least be a second generation or that would be strange... right?

“He is a person that earns more than he can make storages for, you know. By the way, he is also a person that is able to obtain the many raw materials in the border of the world and has a circulation of it in Tsige. At the same time, he is a person that has influence on the authorities of all four major powers, as well as being the strongest in Rotsgard as a temporary teacher.” (Mio)

“ ... ”

“The incident that occurred in Rotsgard, if Waka-sama was not there, who knows what would have happened. It wouldn't have been strange to have a notice of Academy Town's destruction-desu wa.” (Mio)

Mio-sama talks indifferently.

The contents are not entering me well.

“Hah... now you are playing the idiot. Hm, this is good timing-desu wa ne. Look there, Iroha.” (Mio)

As the carriage was advancing on the path in the forest, Mio-sama looks at the front and says that this was good timing.

The many shocking words still hadn't been digested inside of me, so I just followed the words reflexively.

“?!”

There's a cliff right at our front. It is pretty big.

A profound crevice at the ground.

I thought that my line of vision had gotten bright suddenly, but to think this was the reason...

Left or right; whichever it is, we have to circumvent it.

But what part of this is good timing?

At that moment, one of the horses makes a long neigh.

“Yes, understood.” (Raidou)

From the passenger car, I heard the voice of Raidou-sama.

Understood?

I don’t understand the meaning at all.

But it seems the horses understood it, they looked satisfied and continued onward.

T-There’s a cliff-desu!

At the! Direction we are headed to!

There’s no bridge or anything, only a deep cliff!!

The horses had no fear at all, and Mio-sama didn’t mind at all as if this was natural.

“Mio-sama?! Front, front!” (Iroha)

“Yeah, watch well.” (Mio)

“...”

Watch, you say? I can see the cliff.

That’s the only thing I can see... -na no... desu...

Both ends of the cliff begin to adhere to each other.

Both ends moved as if creating a path in the line we are advancing at.

The light of magic power can be dimly seen on the ground there, but I can't feel magic power at all.

In the time I blinked, there was a path there, and at both sides, there were supports for it. Guardrails of stone were made... and turned the path into a bridge.

A pretty sturdy-looking bridge.

Without me noticing, the surface of the ground had changed into stone pavings.

"I heard that he was helping out in the reconstruction of Rotsgard, but this is a splendid work. A magnificent bridge-desu wa ne." (Mio)

The horses were traversing that stone bridge as if nothing happened, and after advancing for a while, this time, the horses made a slightly scared cry.

Did something happen?

The uneasiness of the horses transmitted to me as well, and my chest felt slightly cold.

"There's a place with water close... time for a break huh. But, I see... it seems like there's undead coming out from the surroundings." (Mio)

"Undead! Mio-sama can tell?" (Iroha)

Things like skeletons, ghosts, zombies; that's the kind of monsters undeads are.

I have not seen them before, but I had the knowledge of it.

"Isn't that obvious? The stench of undead reaches all the way here after all." (Mio)

"Mio... the horses are scared, but if it's a pain, want me to do it?" (Raidou)

"No, Waka-sama! Something like this, I can clean it up." (Mio)

"I see. Then, I leave it to you!" (Raidou)

"Yes!" (Mio)

“While at it, can you open a path that can serve as a shortcut to the water place? It seems like it would be quite the roundabout way if we didn’t do that after all. Looks like the horses are also tired.” (Raidou)

“Leave it to me. Ei.” (Mio)

‘Ei’, you say, Mio-sama?

What are you going to do by making such a cute sound?

Also, you say ‘leave it to me’ with a gleeful expression as if flowers were to sprout in your vicinity, and that ‘Ei’ as weeelll—?!!

A pitch dark pillar suddenly appeared and swirls around to the point it felt like it could reach the sky.

“Iroha, did you become a goldfish or something? Your mouth is opening and closing. If you are a lady, be careful with your gestures. And so... the water place is over there and the current path is like that, so... if we make way in this line, it would be a shortcut?” (Mio)

When I was surprised with no words to say, Mio-sama cautioned me.

I couldn’t even respond anymore. The place where Mio-sama pointed her folding fan at, there, the trees that were lined up, were being swallowed by a darkness creeping on the ground... and disappeared.

At the other side of the darkness carpet, there was a lake that was sparkling with the light of the sun.

It is probably the water place that they have been talking about for a while now. Yeah.

The horses changed their route, and were joyfully heading to where there’s the presence of water, to the lake.

That darkness pillar probably defeated the undeads, and then, it opened a shortcut to the lake just like this.

Even though it hasn’t been long since we departed from Mizuha, I felt like I had lived several days of journey already. That’s the kind of fatigue I was feeling right now.

“...”

“So you are speechless. Well, did this serve as good seasoning and bleaching? Iroha, from now on, until we arrive at Kannaoui, we will be showing you a lot of the Kuzunoha Company, Waka-sama, and us. Learn. In the future, you will hear the name of the Kuzunoha Company and Waka-sama, and at that time, I hope you will be able to make the correct judgment. Tomoe-san and I won't be frugal in cooperating with that. Ufufufu.” (Mio)

I have already been shown how a bridge was made in an instant on a cliff, and how they easily create a path in a forest, and yet, there's more?

...

I will just empty my head.

I will just honestly get surprised and moved as it happens.

Might as well just be simply Iroha, and not Osakabe Iroha.

I will learn of these group of great people.

This is the time to show your resolve, Iroha.



Since the very first day Raidou-sama and the others left the city, along the journey, things that I would have never imagined, were occurring, and occurring, and occurring a hell lot.

Is this the doing of that strange title that the staff member of the Adventurer Guild set up?

Before arriving at the villages to hear them out, a good amount of problems happened, no no, at this point in time, I can already say clearly that those can't be considered problems at all.

Attacks of monsters, a dispute between demi-humans and a village, and then there was a mountain fire and a flood; those kind of obstacles that would even change the topography... there have been so many, I can't even remember which one occurred

where. Even though it has only been a few days, I can't remember anything in detail anymore.

The word count in my notebook has surpassed any instance.

This notebook, that I was originally planning on using to arrange the talks of the village chiefs from every village, proved useful in an unexpected way.

Of course, this notebook currently lying on my thighs also has the present condition of the villages.

It was practically all thanks to the Kuzunoha Company, but it is proceeding in an unbelievably smooth manner.

"As I thought, all the villages are in a bad state. If we were to increase the tax in this state, in just a few years, it might create irreparable harm." (Iroha)

Even if I look at their current state, there's not much bright things to say about the villages.

For some reason, in the timing that we arrived at the villages, big problems grew active, but in those cases, Raidou-sama's group settled them all.

Even so, settling those big problems only served as small plusses that didn't solve the root of anything.

"But if I show this to father, he will definitely—!" (Iroha)

"Hey there, Iroha-chan. Are you not going to sleep yet?" (Raidou)

"...Raidou-sama. It is night, but you have prepared a light for me, so sleeping right away would be a waste-desu." (Iroha)

"...Lack of sleep is not good for children though. It might have been a mistake to prepare a light." (Raidou)

As if troubled, Raidou-sama kneads his temples.

"That's not true! It makes me incredibly happy!!" (Iroha)

In the first place, when sleeping outdoors, the most you can have normally is the light of a fire, but Raidou-sama and the others don't have any fear of things like beasts and mamonos, so even the fire is extinguished and they prepare their own lights as they pass their nighttime.

When I asked for a light to continue my writing, Raidou-sama easily lighted up a lantern with the light of his magic power, and I have been using it all this time till today.

It lights up on its own when it gets dark, and extinguishes on its own when it is day; a kind light-desu.

The night has already deepened, and yet, it still continues to release a calming light.

"Haha, I see. It must be that, right? In the villages we went to, a lot of things happened and we involved ourselves with it and even meddled in their business. This lantern that I have given to Iroha-chan can be considered a part of this meddling, right? And so, how was your impression after checking the villages?" (Raidou)

"...Not good-desu. As I thought, a tax increase is not something that should be done at this time." (Iroha)

"From the information you picked up, that's what you thought?" (Raidou)

"Yes." (Iroha)

"Then, what did you think... after seeing the actual people of the village, the problems that each village had, the attacks they received, and their behavior in crisis?" (Raidou)

"Eh?" (Iroha)

Instead of saying Raidou-sama wanted an answer, it was more like, he wanted to know about my thoughts of it.

Even if you ask me what I think...

"The people at the villages were incredibly troubled-desu. It was great that Raidou-sama's group was coincidentally there when things happened, but if that wasn't the case, a number of villages would have definitely fallen." (Iroha)

About that, I felt like it was the fault of my title, and that made me feel even worse.

“...About that, well, it might be because of me, so I ended up saving them though.”
(Raidou)

“Eh?”

“Ah, well... I see, ‘troubled’, that’s all huh. Iroha-chan is really kind. I am even beginning to think that ‘comparing our answers’ will be a bit cruel.” (Raidou)

“Comparing answers?” (Iroha)

Raidou-sama is the type of person that no matter what kind of out-of-standard things he says, it wouldn’t be strange, but what is this about ‘comparing answers’?

I don’t understand more than normal-na no desu.

At times, from Raidou-sama’s hand, a line of light is shot and flies somewhere. And I have become able to understand that ‘Aah, there *was* a mamono in our vicinities huh’.

When I asked him what he was doing, he told me he was practicing his magic, but that’s definitely him lying.

Everytime that happened, Mio-sama directed cold eyes towards the direction it flew to, so it was obvious.

And in reality, there hasn’t been a single attack of anything since our journey in this carriage.

A poisonous valley turns into a field of flowers, bridges are made at cliffs, forests turn into paths; in a sense, this felt more of a cheat-like journey than the Spirit Path of Ginebia-san.

Thinking about the villages we have gone to, it would normally take around 1 month.

“Let’s leave it as something to look forward to when arriving at Kannaoui. It won’t take that long after all.” (Raidou)

“As I thought, Raidou-sama is really a Wise-sama-na no desu. The moment I saw the promissory note, more than being surprised, I felt like I could comprehend. A mysterious and amazing person-desu.” (Iroha)

“...Wise huh. I just can’t get used to that way of calling. Also, the Japanese that were here were mostly fooling around, and frankly speaking, being placed in the same category as them would make me so embarrassed I wouldn’t be able to walk outside.” (Raidou)

“Aren’t you happy about the numerous great achievements that they have left behind?” (Iroha)

“I know about a number of bright achievements, but... you see, even with those there, when I look at the practice uniforms being bloomers limited to only women, my respect is blown away to the stratosphere. It seems like there were quite a lot of Japanese from the Heisei era, and yet, why are short pants not good?” (Raidou)

“They are incredibly good, those bloomers. Is that something that would make you lose so much respect?” (Iroha)

I can somewhat imagine what ‘short pants’ are, because of the wording, but I don’t think that would be something that would influence one’s impression of the achievements the Wise-sama have left behind...

“I thought it was a ditch that will never be filled up. Period.” (Raidou)

With a serious face, Raidou-sama mutters as if groaning.

“...And so, what is it that Raidou-sama wanted to say? If you want me to quickly go to sleep, I will go and sleep for today.” (Iroha)

“Ah, that’s not it. I was just speaking with the horses, you see. And so, since I had the chance, I called out to Iroha-chan who was still awake, that’s all.” (Raidou)

“...Now that I think about it, I have never heard stories of Wise-samas that are able to speak with animals. Or more like, Raidou-sama is not only able to speak with animals, you even spoke with demi-humans, mamonos, spirits of dead people... weren’t you? No, if that was just my misunderstanding, that would be a relief-no, I mean, that would be fine.” (Iroha)

“Actually, I can.” (Raidou)

“You can?” (Iroha)

“Yeah.”

“That’s an impressive ability. Admirable-desu.” (Iroha)

Being able to speak with anyone in this world, if that’s true, it is an incredible ability.

And we are talking about Raidou-sama, so it is most likely true-na no desu.

“If possible, keep it a secret along with the things regarding the Kuzunoha Company, okay? I am not forbidding you from telling anyone, so just think of it as a promise between friends.” (Raidou)

“Friends...” (Iroha)

It is a word I am not used to.

I think a promise between friends is quite heavy.

If Raidou-sama is my friend, there would be nothing as reassuring than that.

I now understand that me saying something like ‘we are friends’ would be presumptuous, but as expected, I can’t have Raidou-sama... assist me in my bathing anymore.

In my standards, he is the number one person I shouldn’t have asked to do that.

In this journey, I have learned how to change clothes myself anyways.

“By the way, lately, I have been able to kind of understand things like trees and stones. Haha, after all this time, this really does trouble me.” (Raidou)

“Trees and stones...” (Iroha)

Being able to understand the wills of trees and stones... I feel like there’s no need for it to be a living being anymore.

“Ah, right. Since I have the chance, let me ask you one thing.” (Raidou)

Raidou-sama who has confessed something outrageous, acted normally without any changes and looks straight at my face.

“...If it is something I can answer...” (Iroha)

Might as well just reveal that I am from the Osakabe household.

“It isn’t something to be so tormented about, you know. Uhm, you see...” (Raidou)

“Yes?!” (Iroha)

“Is Iroha-chan... the fiance of Izumo?” (Raidou)

.....

...

Izu... mo?

“There’s not even the need of hearing the answer, it was a bullseye huh. Mio also said this but, it shows in your face, Iroha-chan. You are like my past self... no, I am still the same as well.” (Raidou)

“R-Ra-Raidou-sama?” (Iroha)

Why is the name of Izumo-sama coming from Raidou-sama?!

“Actually, it is something that I was practically sure of though. Simply confirming.” (Raidou)

“Uhm... I... uhhh...” (Iroha)

“It is fine. I am not blaming you or anything.” (Raidou)

“...Why?! Why do you know?!” (Iroha)

“Ah, so you go for that. You have probably already heard from Tomoe or Mio but, I am a temporary teacher in Rotsgard. To tell you the truth, I am teaching Izumo practical skills.” (Raidou)

“?!! Could it be... you are...” (Iroha)

“Hm?”

“With a cool face, he toys around with his students at death’s door, trains them without forgiving them and without letting them die...” (Iroha)

“...”

“He would change his behaviour whether the person is male or female, but in the end, what he is doing doesn’t change at all. In a sense, he is an incredibly fair merchant-or more like, an ogre wearing the skin of a merchant.” (Iroha)

“...”

“‘Just knowing him would cause goosebumps, so I will not mention his name’, are you that temporary teacher?!” (Iroha)

The face of Raidou-sama is stiffened.

But I most likely- no, I definitely have a stiffened face too.

“...Seriously, that Izumo does say some troublesome things huh. Ahahaha...” (Raidou)

“Really. Even though you are such a kind person. Geez, that Izumo. Fufufu.” (Iroha)

I don’t think I can do it, but I tried to somehow smooth over the situation.

At any rate, Raidou-sama, and the Kuzunoha Company.

A merchant, a Wise-sama, and on top of that, he is the teacher of Izumo-sama.

This meeting was most likely the guidance of the Spirits.

The Priestess-sama has been outside the country lately, so the words of Spirits have grown scarce, or so I have heard.

But there’s no doubt about it.

Is this because of the antagonism between the Ikusabe and the Osakabe households?
Or maybe because of their consideration regarding the instability of the grand labyrinth in Kannaoui?

This is... it has become quite the major incident.

I have probably been appointed as the person who will witness... what this personage and the Kuzunoha Company will achieve in Kannaoui.

This is not the time to be surprised by small things.

My homeland, Kannaoui, is something going to happen there?

I, Osakabe Iroha, will properly witness this with both of my eyes.

Chapter 255

Beren's report

There's a garden, and we were guided to the shed there.

Even if the hotel is big, it is still strange to have a shed at the third floor of a hotel, and on top of that, there's a garden.

From the window of the room there, I could appreciate the pseudo-japanese garden.

No well, it does feel strange to have palm trees and several colorful fruits constantly changing colors, but I think this enters into the category of a japanese garden.

I don't have much knowledge about gardens after all.

I am simply feeling like: what the hell is this?

The inside of the house is tiled and the rooms were covered in tatami mats.

It may be a mix of japanese and european style, but it is a bit more relaxing this way.

Probably because my house felt similar to this.

Nevertheless... there's 4 rooms and the passage is wide enough for two people to walk side by side.

How fearsome is Chihiro Man Rai restaurant.

"Now now, Waka-sama, over here."

After checking out the rooms and the garden, Beren guides me again.

Well, even if I say guide, he simply led me to the room where I saw the garden, and made me seat at the seat of honor.

Around the square table, there's a number of floor cushions.

This is something I see for the first time in this world as well, but for me, it is a fresh view.

It is been awhile since I have seen a room without chairs.

When I sit, Mio beckons Iroha-chan and both of them sit as well.

I did suggest Beren to take a seat too, but he stayed standing.

‘It would be outrageous to sit before Tomoe-sama comes’, apparently.

The Forest Oni, Shii, in a terrible twist of fate, respects Eris and is mimicking a lot of her speech and conduct, but in this kind of situations, she hasn’t been able to completely mimic her.

At her roots, Shii is a serious and athletic type of girl, so she hasn’t taken a sit either.

If it were Eris, she would have the guest Iroha-chan sit, and while at it, she would also sit as well, no doubt about it.

Seems like Akua and Eris are pretty admired by their juniors, but the athletic type ones, no matter if male or female, are easily attracted to Akua’s side, but for some reason, Shii is one of the worst cases.

Her way of fighting is one that’s rare in Forest Onis, close range combat, and she is the power type that swings around a metal rod that doesn’t match her small stature.

In this part as well, she is not similar to Akua and Eris.

Hokuto who is at her side, is one of the 4 Arkes.

He is a serious person and likes fights.

We don’t interact much, but I heard from Tomoe that he likes ninjas.

His looks are that of a big man of good build, and yet, he has a technical battle style using strings.

The reason these two were chosen to accompany us this time was because, from Tomoe’s perspective, ‘they are the casts that fit the best in terms of physique and

ability’.

Beren, who had encouraged me to take the seat of honor, is probably the person within the Elder Dwarfs that I speak with the most.

In terms of weapons, he has a decent mastery in a good amount of them, but the one he is the best with is the axe. In terms of magic, he can use self-buffs and healing, but the other magic is on the negative side.

Even so, calling him a warrior would not be accurate.

Beren’s fighting style is to use a variety of equipments and tools with effects, and by taking advantage of those, he aims for a decisive strike with his axe.

My impressions when spectating him, feels like the style of magic warriors.

Hm, she is here.

“Sorry for the tardiness.” (Tomoe)

While I was thinking about the people from the Kuzunoha Company that have come with us to Lorel, I felt the presence of someone at the door.

After an apology, Tomoe entered the room.

Confirming that Mio, Iroha-chan, and I were sitting, she nods and finds her floor cushion to sit on.

“Sorry about leaving you a troublesome matter like that.” (Makoto)

“It’s okay. Aside from the fried rice that is famous, there’s also many other things that seem to be delicacies as well, so I think we will be able to enjoy the meals here for a few days.” (Tomoe)

“As expected of Tomoe-san. Gud jobbu-desu.” (Mio)

Before I got the chance to answer, Mio makes a thumbs up satisfied.

“Leave it to me, Mio. As we journey, we will eat their specialties. That is one of the good parts about journeys-ja.” (Tomoe)

“Just as you say. Fried rice, I wonder just how good of a rice dish it will be.” (Mio)

It is rare to see Tomoe and Mio be so in sync, and they are all smiles too.

“Oh, you guys as well, good work-ja. Now then, take a seat already. Let’s hear your report.” (Tomoe)

I can tell that the two of them are in a good mood.

After this, as long as there’s no troublesome things coming out from anyone’s mouth, it would be great.

The three heed the words of Tomoe and sit.

...In seiza.

N-No well, it is true that that’s not incorrect, but is that okay?

By the way, I am sitting cross-legged, Mio looks like she is in seiza, but she is actually more slanted to the side. Tomoe and Iroha-chan are doing seiza.

Tomoe is used to it already, and Iroha-chan did it naturally so she is most likely used to it as well, but... I haven’t seen Beren and the others doing seiza at Asora...

Well, they did it themselves so let’s not mind it.

“Well then, I will begin.”

The three look at each other and Beren nods.

The report begins with Beren huh.

If I remember correctly, he entered the country from the north mountain ranges.

Seems like it was because the dwarfs he is familiar with are living at the north side.

“Beren huh. Fine, begin.” (Tomoe)

“Yes. I received the order to act independently from Waka-sama and the others, and to enter the country from a different way to gather information. So I crossed the Tortoise

Soul mountain range and passed the mountain belt to reach Kannaoui.” (Beren)

“The Tortoise Soul mountain range?! The one at the north national border...” (Iroha)

“Ah, yeah. That’s right, Ojou-san.” (Beren)

“Iroha, sorry but, please stay silent for a bit. Hm, right. Beren, Hokuto, Shii, let me introduce her. This girl is Iroha. Fate brought us together, and she is a guest that will be accompanying us for a while. Then Beren, continue.” (Tomoe)

Now that I think about it, we didn’t properly introduce her... I feel like they already knew.

“Yes... after I visited the village of my acquaintance dwarfs, I traversed to mostly settlements of demi-humans on the way, but what piqued my interest was how high the good will of demi-humans was towards hyumans, and also, the attitude of the hyumans towards the demi-humans.” (Beren)

“As expected, it was a lot better compared to other countries?” (Tomoe)

“Yes. But... both sides had the influence of that special existence called Wise. Accurately speaking, the good will of the demi-humans is directed towards the Wise, and this indirectly affects their view towards the hyumans in this country that treat the Wise well. The comparatively softer behaviour the hyumans have towards the demi-humans is also... because the Wise are tolerant with the demi-humans, so it indirectly affects them as well.” (Beren)

...Fumu.

If the Wise are japanese, they would definitely treat the demi-humans more equally than most of the hyumans in this world.

The Wise were loved by the demi-humans, and as a result, the hyumans in this country that were actively giving the Wise shelter were favorably seen.

Favorably huh.

It somewhat feels like a warped relationship... but delving deeper would be uncouth.

This is allowing them to have a better impression with each other compared to other

countries, so if their relationship is also better, there's no need to touch the topic.

"That's why, when the absence of the Wise is long, there's the tendency that the relationship between hyumans and demi-humans deteriorates. There have been conflicts recorded in the past." (Beren)

"That's a lie-desu! It is because the demi-humans try to advocate for too much authority—" (Iroha)

"Iroha, we will hear that later. Don't make me say it so many times." (Tomoe)

"Y-Yes, sorry." (Iroha)

"The first dwarf village I questioned didn't interact much with hyumans. Of course, there weren't conflicts between them either. However, in a number of mountain villages, there was indeed that kind of reality. No doubt about it." (Beren)

"We are not doubting you, Beren. Continue. We have already understood the relationship between demi-humans and hyumans, so move on." (Tomoe)

"Then, this is a report I have brought to Tomoe-sama before. Along my journey, I told the clearly skilled craftsmen and the people that were especially interested in migrating about the 'Kuzunoha Company', and there were several cases where the other party got pretty proactive about it. We have already made the proper arrangements." (Beren)

Ah, if I remember correctly, I heard that from Tomoe before. That there were quite a lot of people aside from the first dwarf village he went to, that want to move to Asora.

Wanting to migrate and being proactive about it doesn't exactly mean that the settlements are fed up with hyumans, but I heard that more than half of them are.

I think I will be meeting the people that Beren has already spoken to in the near future.

The customary closing interview.

"This is only to confirm but, is there any race or settlement there that is deeply involved with the current Lorel?" (Makoto)

"Of course, no. This is a strict order from Waka-sama, so I edged it in my heart and

didn't forget a single word of it." (Beren)

"Thanks. Then, there's something I want to ask before you continue." (Makoto)

Regarding the mysterious sprite that Beren probably knows more of than us.

That bearded—I mean, that strong sprite that has a beard, and yet, it is cute.

Well... it is the beard.

"If it is information that I have heard along the journey, ask me as much you want!"
(Beren)

"Then, I will be straight, what in the world is a Marikosan?" (Makoto)

"...Marikosan, huh." (Beren)

"Yeah." (Makoto)

The tension of Beren lowers.

It feels like he felt despondent the moment he heard that name.

"The only thing I heard of it is that they are sprites that live mainly in the Yaso-Katsui dungeon. Since they are earth sprites, they probably have connections with us dwarfs, but... in terms of details... I am truly sorry!!" (Beren)

"Ah, no, there's no need to apologize." (Makoto)

"Things I know would be... they are around this size. They are girls with an overall cute appearance. Also, they are mainly wearing things like hard hats, hunting caps, or have beast ears. Anyways, no matter which one it is, they all like to wear a hat." (Beren)

O... oooh...

Detailed information came out!

As expected of Beren!!

But wait... something is kind of bothering me here.

What part?

Uhm...

“It seems like their physical strength is decent, but maybe they are lazy, they hate walking and are mostly floating. There was also information that they have a number of mysterious special characteristics from Spirits and other sprites.” (Beren)

As I try to think about what part of Beren’s explanation was bothering me, his explanation of Mariko-san continued.

Overall cute gir—Ah?!

That’s it!

“The Marikosans are only girls? Isn’t that pretty rare as a race?” (Makoto)

Well, there are races like the Gorgons, but frankly speaking, I haven’t met a race that’s only women aside from the Gorgons.

There’s no doubt they are quite the rare race.

By the way, I have not met them in person, but there are races that are the opposite of Gorgons, races that only have males. It is apparently pretty rare as well, but they do exist.

If it is only knowledge, I know of the Ogre Rex, a type of Oni race, and the Veil Gazer, a type of one-eyed demonic beast.

If the Marikosan are in that category of races, I feel like their name should be more widespread.

“I think this is something that lacks credibility, but I heard that if you have a special crystal and fulfill a number of prerequisites, races other than Marikosan can... uhm... ‘increase’” (Beren)

“Increase? Ah, like in a reproductive kind of way? The propagation type?” (Makoto)

“I... wonder...” (Beren)

With a troubled expression, Beren is stuck in how to respond.

Can't be helped.

After finally gathering outward features, this new information about using crystals and doing things to 'increase', what's with that? We learned one thing and then even more mysteries got piled up.

"...From what I heard of Beren, rather than calling it a peculiar race, aren't they just a washout version of Spirits?" (Mio)

Mio voices out a deduction of hers.

It is true that he said they had similar characteristics of Spirits and other sprites.

Abilities that naturally activate strongly for Low Spirits in places where the respective element is.

In that case, they would be a race that's a lot closer to spirits?

"It is a possible hypothesis, but I wonder if a race that's closer to Spirits would be at the side of a Superior Dragon. Superior Dragons and Spirits are fundamentally in an antagonistic relationship, you know?" (Tomoe)

Tomoe tilts her head at Mio's opinion.

The conditions apply, but the relationship doesn't huh.

According to Tomoe and Root, the Spirits were existences created by the Goddess.

They began by being able to govern over the four elements, and then, headed on to many other elements... as a result, the ones that were managing these elements from the 'beginning' and were the personifications of them, were replaced by the Spirits.

Like for example; the Superior Dragons.

Root also wasn't content with that result, and in the long past, quite a lot of fights took place.

For some reason, there's a lot of cases where, the older the race is, the higher the hate

they have towards the Spirits, with the Superior Dragons being the first ones. I heard this from a certain genius and perverted dragon who then said that these sequence of events are not written in any existing books.

It seems like the I am the only one who knows this within the currently living demi-humans and hyumans.

I can still remember the face of Root. He had a wide smile as he placed his index finger onto his mouth and whispered to me: 'If you imprudently speak of this, the Church will use their whole force to erase you, so Shh~, okay?'

Yeah, even though I didn't ask of it, he still told me this on his own convenience.

Oops, gotta stop.

This is a bad habit of mine I can't seem to throw away.

Concentrate on the reports.

When I turned to look at Iroha-chan to change my mood, I could see a question mark floating on her head.

For her, Marikosan is simply Marikosan, and probably doesn't have any issues about what kind of existence they are.

It is certain that they are a mascot-like existence for Kannaoui after all.

"Pardon."

"What is it, Shii?" (Makoto)

I urge the small Forest Oni, who suddenly raised her hand, to go ahead with what she wants to say.

"Isn't it okay to think of it in a more simple way? We also investigated a variety of things about Marikosan, but thinking about the results, I thought that maybe they are unexpectedly pretty easy to understand." (Shii)

"Result?" (Makoto)

Is it the point that this rare and mysterious sprite is indeed existing in the dungeons?

“This labyrinth, that is the biggest within the ones that have been currently confirmed, is the dwelling of one of the Superior Dragons, Doma, and seems like there’s a sprite race that likes the place. In other words... isn’t it an incredibly simple reason like ‘their interests align, so they are coexisting?’” (Shii)

“...”

Tomoe, Mio, Beren, and I, and even Hokuto who has been silent from the beginning were staring at Shii.

“Even if we say Superior Dragons, each one of them has an individual personality, and that Marikosan who I don’t know if it’s a fairy or a spirit, had a perfect affinity with each other, and they went like: ‘why don’t we coexist?’. How is that?” (Shii)

That kind of attitude that is practically saying: ‘this is so troublesome’ and rounds up all documents and throws them in the trash can.

Nice.

I like that attitude.

But society normally hates that way of acting.

‘Because it would make things more complicated as a result’, or so they say.

“...Fuh... normally, I would have slapped you with the paper fan a long time ago, but... we are talking about Doma after all. The possibility is there-ja.” (Tomoe)

Hah?!

The first one speaking out was Tomoe, and what came out from her mouth were words that sounded like an affirmation.

“Even a dragon like you who was sleeping till death would say that much about this dragon? Just saying but, if that guy is worse than Root, I will stop thinking and just let my instincts move my body.” (Mio)

“I won’t stop you, I promise.” (Tomoe)

With a look of being truly fed up, Tomoe sighs.

Even in the eyes of Tomoe, there's the chance that, in terms of personality, this dragon is even more hopeless than Root.

"A dungeon Spirit huh. Well, we are going to be meeting them in person, so let's just think of them in that way for the time being." (Makoto)

"Sorry for not being of much help, Waka-sama." (Beren)

"No, you have been plenty helpful." (Makoto)

With his tension still low, Beren apologizes.

I tell him that it was plenty enough. And in truth, he worked pretty hard, and looking at his luggage, I can tell that he has also checked a variety of materials.

There were so many things that you would even question just how in the world he carried them all the way here, and they were stuffed in a different room, so I can tell.

"That's the only amount of information I could gather about Marikosan, and the demi-humans didn't have any detailed information about the mercenary group that's based at the labyrinths depths. That's why, what's left for me to say is about the products and specialties... ah." (Beren)

"What's wrong?" (Makoto)

"I will return soon, so please wait for a bit." (Beren)

Regarding the products and specialties, we can move them all to Asora and have them investigated, researched or whatever they want to do.

That's why I thought the report of Beren was over, but he seemed like he had just remembered something. He rushed out from the room, and went to the above mentioned room where the luggage is.

Sounds were heard for a few minutes, and then, Beren returned with what clearly looks like a special cloth wrapped around something.

It is pretty big.

And it looks reasonably heavy.

It is a long and thin cylindrical shape, so maybe it is a sword or a spear.

“How to say, it is interesting... or more like, ill-natured... anyways, it is that kind of weapon. The chief of the dwarf village that had it stored told me to please show it to Waka-sama. I was also told that, if pleases you, you can take it as a present from them.”
(Beren)

“Is it a sword... or a spear?” (Makoto)

I try to directly confirm my guess.

Whichever it is, I don't think I would be able to properly use it even if I had it –to my disappointment.

“It is a sword.” (Beren)

“Hoh?” (Tomoe)

Seems like the answer of Beren pulled the attention of Tomoe, she made a sound of being interested in what it is.

“...It is probably not something that would fit Tomoe-sama's taste, but this was most likely the favorite sword of a person called Iori. The demonic dragon slayer sword *Einkaref*. Please take a look.” (Beren)

“?!! Ior-?! A-Au... wafuuu...” (Iroha)

“Wa, Iroha-chan?!” (Makoto)

What appeared when Beren unwrapped the cloth was a very long and thin sword.

Hearing the explanation of Beren, Iroha-chan suddenly stood up and screamed unintelligible words in an upright stance, and just like that... she fell backwards.

I hurriedly catch her as she fell to the floor and breath a sigh of relief.

Iori huh.

If I remember correctly, that's the historical figure that Iroha-chan likes.

"This time she loses consciousness huh. Iroha is a troublesome girl, but it is nice that she is quiet now. But, Dragon Slayer huh." (Tomoe)

The eyes of Tomoe narrow.

A risky atmosphere leaks out slightly, but maybe her curiosity is winning, it wasn't a dangerous atmosphere.

But probably because of how much the Forest Oni, Shii, has been wrung by Tomoe, her body springs up reflexively and trembles.

...

The sword of a Dragon Slayer huh.

The figure of Sofia appears in my mind for a second.

Her sword was a lot bigger than this.

Compared to that one, this one looks pretty delicate.

I don't know if you are supposed to smear poison at the blade of the sword, but there's some complicated patterns on it, or maybe those are seams? Anyways, I don't understand it well, but the craftsmanship looks pretty complicated.

Rather than saying it is strong enough to cut the scales of a dragon like butter, it is probably more like a special effect lets it be more advantageous against dragons.

I don't know about this ill-natured part that Beren mentioned, but... it is certainly true that I feel something different compared to the weapons I have seen before.

I wonder what.

"This demonic sword Einkaref was made by our ancestors at that time, and crafted with a certain tree as its core..." (Beren)

The explanation of Beren begins.

Aside from Mio, everyone else showed some interest in it and were listening to what he was saying.

A special tree huh.

Is that the reason for this sense of discomfort that's different from other weapons?

But I feel like it somewhat resembles my Azusa... or maybe not...

(Is that true, bro? Those are really unsure words, but do you know a companion of mine? Seriously?)

...

"Waka, is there something wrong?" (Tomoe)

"...No, it is nothing." (Makoto)

I heard something.

I look at my surroundings.

But aside from me, there's no one that seems to have noticed it.

The most that happened was that they were worried about me looking around the room.

But this was not an auditory hallucination.

It had a clear sensation of being here and speaking.

It felt kind of light and cheap though.

(That's rude~. Even though I have finally been freed and was able to arrive at a place with an interesting bunch.)

Ah.

Lately, the boundaries have been slowly disappearing and I have been able to speak with a variety of things.

I see.

I look at the sword that's on top of the Japanese style desk.

It is this thing huh.

(Jackpot, bro. You are a guy with good adaptability. I am Einkaref. The supreme Dragon Slayer that accompanied the old man Iori his whole life.) (Einkaref)

So I am now able to speak with weapons.

It is true that I was able to speak with things like trees and stones, and not only people, I am able to speak with most things that can hardly be called animals.

If I am not careful, I will be treated like even more of a weirdo.

Hah...

(Don't worry, bro. The only ones that can speak with me are a handful of worthy swordsmen. It is not like you have gone crazy.) (Einkaref)

I am not even a swordsman, so it is a situation I can't be relieved about.

Ah... the reason why I felt you were similar to Azusa was because the sensation was close to when my will is connected to my bow huh.

(Eh? Wait, this is strange. Looks like it is true that bro is not a swordsman. I was created so that I can only talk with masters that are 'compatible' with me though. Hm... oh well, let's not mind the small stuff. I've had a lack of people to talk to, you see. Let's begin by introducing ourselves.) (Einkaref)

The explanation of Beren goes through my left ear and out to my right.

Not much of it enters in my brain.

Because this odd sword, Einkaref, that's one-sidedly talking to me, is sonorously talking about his own history and achievements without stopping.

Seeing myself slowly become less and less human, I felt a bit of self-pity.

Iroha-chan didn't show any signs of waking up, and the strange meeting (for me) continued.

Chapter 256

The Kannaoui of fire and oil

Hearing both the report of Beren and the talk of the sword, I could feel my confusion increasing steadily. But salvation descended upon me.

Pin Pon

The sound of a chime that didn't match the atmosphere of the room rang, and after that, a voice called out.

It is the waitress.

A call telling us that the meal is ready, and to contact them when we are ready to go.

Beren's report had been turning into a lecture about the history of the dwarf blacksmiths and what was popular at that time, so this was truly good timing.

This sword, that's name seems to be Einkaref, still continues sonorously speaking about his own personal history in a merry manner.

If I keep a bit calm and composed, and simply whisper inside my heart what I think, he won't hear it, but if I don't put much mind to it, and just think without caring, it will be picked up by him too.

Seems like the rules of speaking with the sword are like that.

Obviously, I have only tested it a bit and checked its reaction, so I might be mistaken.

But... because the inside of my head has already been read by third parties so many times, I am pretty loose about those kind of things. But well, since there's the part about privacy, it is a plus that I have found a safe sphere in this mental conversations.

"Then, we will continue after eating, how about it, Waka?" (Tomoe)

"Good. Let's have them bring it now then." (Makoto)

“Yes.” (Tomoe)

Tomoe received my acknowledgement and rings the room’s chime to request the preparation of the meal.

A few minutes after...

A number of people I don’t know where they were in standby had entered into the shed along with the scent of food.

This is the shed and the corridor is quite long, so in what kind of way did they get here so fast?

This level of speed could be considered a feat already.

The darkness of the service business is deep.

It surpasses the line of being impressive and turns into scary.

Hm?

“Beren and everyone else, where are you going?” (Makoto)

As if natural, Beren, Hokuto, and Shii stood up and were about to leave the room.

Even though we are going to eat now.

“We were thinking about eating in a separate room. Eating together with Waka-sama would be too much of an honor.”

“...Hah? I don’t really mind so let’s eat together. The food tastes better when everyone eats together.” (Makoto)

“B-But...”

“It is fine. I don’t mind it, and Mio will be asking for your opinions on it later, so we can do that while eating and that will save time. Tomoe is interested in what Hokuto and Shii have to say, so we can get some light reports while eating. See? Lots of benefits.” (Makoto)

...Regarding Tomoe, she probably has an evil plan like identifying what dishes she likes the most and pillaging them from the others anyways.

Leaving me aside, I pity Iroha-chan.

I want to avoid the route where Tomoe aims for the share of Mio and it turns into a monster fight.

I will have these three work as lightning rods– no, as insurance in case Tomoe isn't satisfied with only her portion. Yes, insurance.

Well, what I said a moment ago was also how I truly felt.

"I-Is it really okay to accompany you?"

"Of course." (Makoto)

"Too long-winded. Waka said it was okay-ja. Just sit already." (Tomoe)

"In that case, we will change our clothes immediately—!!"

"They are telling you to sit down, right? Good grief. Also, we are all family here. There's no need to mind how you are dressed-desu wa. Right, Waka-sama?" (Mio)

Mio and Tomoe joined in convincing Beren and the others who are crazy nervous.

Mio did some smooth movements with her folding fan, making them swim in midair, and had them seated by force.

W-Well, as long as the results are good...

After that, I nod at the words of Mio.

"Everyone from the company is like family, so there's no need to mind your clothes." (Makoto)

We will be having our meal in a Japanese-style hotel, so they will probably be bringing the dishes in small trays. We will probably have respective trays for each one of us.

In that case, we can just eat without minding much.

It is exactly as Mio said, we are all family, so there's no need to mind our clothes.

"Pardon the intrusion. Is everyone going to be having their meal here?"

"Yeah, please do the preparations."

I nod at the waitress-san that asked for confirmation.

"Understood."

Saying this, she turns her gaze towards the corridor.

"Hoh?" (Tomoe)

Tomoe voices her interest.

The two waitresses brought some big rounded thing that seems to be made directly of wood, and places it on top of the big table.

Eh? Could this be...

"There's a small space between the table and this. Is this a part of tonight's plans for dinner?" (Tomoe)

"Yes. This is a device that is used around Kannaoui since a long past. Like this..."

No doubt about it.

In the middle of her explanation, the waitress-san places a hand on the round shaped 'table' and turns it.

Just as Tomoe said, there's a space in between, so the round shaped table revolved.

It is not like I have seen it that many times, but... this is that. The thing you see at chinese restaurants. <Rotating trays, a.k.a Lazy Susan>

In that case, today's dinner is not Japanese-style... but chinese?!

So it really is a chinese restaurant!

I completely thought that they would be bringing things like nabe and sashimi, and maybe sushi.

At any rate, a rotating tray, it reminds me of the Showa era <1926-1989>.

‘When talking about a feast, it has to be chinese food’, maybe a Wise from that kind of era was involved in the food here.

“It is rotating.” (Tomoe)

“Yes. The dishes are placed here and distributed in order. It serves for that function.”

An expected explanation.

And while at it, the many dishes were being lined up one after the other.

Dishes that are considered the art of fire and oil, in a sense, nostalgic dishes.

By the way, when it is called chinese food <chuuka ryouri> it means that it is chinese food that was changed to fit the taste of the japanese, and when it is called chinese cuisine <chuugoku ryouri> it means that the food is made exactly as its roots. <I left the difference as -food- and -cuisine->

There was one guy in my archery club that was specially fussy about this.

He was saying things like: ‘don’t nonchalantly go to stores that make sichuan cuisine, it can kill your tongue’, or something like that.

I didn’t understand what he meant.

In the first place, is sichuan cuisine and chinese cuisine any different?

Chinese food will obviously be different though.

Mapo tofu tastes good though, is that so bad? <Part of Sichuan cuisine.>

For some reason, I ended up worrying about a pointless mystery.

“Sauteed octopus, deep fried chicken, and that’s... sweet-and-sour pork? Ah, ebi chili! I see, so that was chinese too. Also... mayonnaise shrimp? Isn’t that from the Heisei

era? I hope it doesn't simply look like mayonnaise shrimp but is actually a weird syrup that tastes sugary. I will get angry with you if that's true, okay "mayonnaise shrimp"?" (Makoto)

"There's dishes here that you can easily find in other restaurants around the city, but all the ones here are made with the best ingredients and by the number one chef in the present age. I can vouch that this will definitely become a good memory for your journey, so please take your time enjoying it."

The waitress-san turned her gaze and made a gently smile at me when she heard about how I knew a number of the dishes here, and simply gave supplementary information.

In other words, she is saying: 'our food is different from other places, you know. Hehe'.

Ah, the fried rice arrives.

A fragrant scent... This... it smells a bit like they singed the soy sauce.

That means they have decent amount of knowledge in the flavoring.

Nice nice.

Might be a particular style of this world though.

And there's also... is that the dessert?

Annin tofu and Agar are cut in cubes and floating in some sort of transparent syrup along with some fruits, like a chinese-style fruit punch.

This is a guess that relies on a past that already feels pretty far, but it is probably not so off.

Next is... the black and big iron pot that has some sort of red food making gentle boiling sounds. The looks are similar to mapo tofu.

But a part of it is different from the one in my memories.

A darkish powder has been sprinkled all over it, and maybe it was cooked beforehand, there's clear vivid red chili pepper placed on the sides.

Well, that's probably decoration.

It seems like there's minced meat in the tofu, so maybe it is the regretful-type of mapo tofu?

In the end, the round table that was pretty big was lined up with dishes one after the other, and after preparing a massive amount of plates, the waitresses left.

I woke up Iroha-chan, and after the customary: 'Itadakimasu', we began dinner in our first day at Kannaoui, at this room that's completely filled with the scent of chinese food.



When there's a rotating tray, the revolving will create fights.

The moment Tomoe and Mio were at my side, I could tell this future.

With something as simple as what direction I turn it to, sparks would fly.

I moved away as soon as possible, so it ended only as sparks though.

It is true that going around and around is a pretty interesting gimmick, and as a result, everyone had fun with it.

The food was mostly good as well.

It was truly chinese food.

The bon bon chicken was good, the sweet-and-sour pork was on the sour-side which is to my liking, and the deep-fried chicken-looking one was carefully made and the skin was crispy. No complains.

It must be made differently compared to the deep-fried chicken until now. It was cut in chunks after all.

Ah right, the ebi chili was good too. The thickness of the sauce was not much, and the shrimps used were pretty big. Yeah, that one was nice.

But... the mayonnaise shrimp and the mapo tofu... you guys were no good.

You damn sweet cream in the guise of mayonnaise shrimp, perish.

I felt as if this was the grudge of Shiki who was left behind.

Also, the mapo tofu that I felt as if each spoon I brought to my mouth hurt and numbed me, this was the first time in this world that I felt I was fed poison.

This is the worst.

The waitress explained that 'there's a lot of people that get addicted to this dish', those guys must have something wrong with their tongues.

Must be that black pepper-like thing, yeah. Moreover, it was hard to get used to it.

The hot taste of the chili pepper was plenty enough already. Just what in the world where they thinking when they made this monstrosity?

Tomoe, Beren, and Hokuto said something weird like: 'I can understand how someone could get addicted to this'.

That mapo tofu poison must have taken out their tongues, definitely.

(And you see, the things I like to eat the most are famous swords. At present, I can eat almost all weapons. But it is not like you can always find those, you know. That's why I normally eat materials in order to distract myself from hunger. If I had to choose from those, it would definitely be the scales of dragons. If you try putting me inside a warehouse full of dragon scales, I am confident I can empty it all in one night. Seriously.)

Probably because he was provoked by our happy dinner, the self-proclaimed Incredible Dragon Slayer Sword speaks about his own likes in food.

A sword is talking about eating...

That feels kind of bizarre already.

This sword, Einkaref, can eat.

This sword is a weapon that was made with a special tree as its core.

The name of that core was Parasite Tree.

This tree parasitizes on demonic beasts, takes over its body, and changes it into nutrients for its own body. Attacks other organisms, devours them, and increases its own power; a strange tree.

One time, there was a dwarf who learned that a magic clad crystal was considered as a parasitic target as well, and was utilized as an ingredient for crafting which attracted the attention of everyone.

And so, the equipment that was born from this were quite powerful, but at the same time, in order to continue showing their capabilities, they had to continue feeding them.

What a pain.

According to Einkaref, the equipments that are masterpieces in that category can predate on strong weapons and outstanding materials in order to increase their power even more, though the increase variates between each one.

Einkaref said that, in his case, his affinity with dragons is high.

Eating plenty of the dragon scales that are his favorite, and also nails, fangs, and horns, he increased his Dragon Slaying power... but after the death of Iori, there were no masters and he was forced into a long sleep at the dwarf village.

Being unable to continue eating, falling into a dormant state was unavoidable, and in that time, his ability as a weapon had plummeted.

Moreover, the equipments that were made from the parasitic tree all had some will of sorts, and only people that are able to communicate with them can properly utilize them.

In other words, their masters are incredibly limited, and maintaining their performance capabilities is difficult.

Hence, this trend didn't continue for long and the use of parasitic trees for weapons was discarded.

It is truly an understandable and obvious end.

But in the knowledge that Beren has, the weapons made from the parasitic trees suddenly faced an abnormal decline in their power, and the reason of it was not understood, so they were steadily thrown away.

The reason was most likely because they were not used for battle in a good while and because they hadn't found an owner for a while so they entered a dormant state.

From the dwarfs' perspective, they had done the proper maintenance, so they couldn't understand the reason why their performance decreased.

Right now, at this very moment, Einkaref was telling me the reason why this happened to him and the other weapons.

I don't know if it's because of him being a sword or because of the parasitic tree part of him, but thanks to my ability to speak with a variety of things, I can communicate with him.

It seems like it is easier to speak with me compared to his time with Iori, so the sword has been talking a storm.

At the time when Beren was wrapping up the matter of Einkaref so Hokuto and Shii could begin their report, I spoke about a variety of things with the intention of giving out supplementary information, but Beren's eyes flew wide open. His mouth was also wide open.

It is unusual of Beren to make faces like that.

And then, Tomoe asked me to reveal how I knew that information, so I told them that I spoke to the sword. At that moment, a hard to describe atmosphere covered the room.

No well, isn't this the usual?

It would be one thing if something big happened, but... it is about me, so I would like it if you were able to cope with about anything. Just kidding.

...Hah...

Ah, the fried rice was normal.

Everyone had praises for it, but for me, it had a taste that I seriously could only describe as normal.

It is a bit of a pity.

“I now understand the reason for the performance decrease. But as a blacksmith, hearing about a weapon that eats materials and cannibalizes on other weapons just... sends shivers down my spine. Seriously.” (Beren)

Right?

I heartfully agree with Beren’s words.

“And so, Hokuto and Shii, you said that you encountered strange mercenaries. The first one sounds like the ones we came here for, but the other ones, I have no idea. What are the ‘people of Apple’?” (Makoto)

When Hokuto and Shii did some consequential sweeping of the mamonos that were coming out from the grand labyrinth in Kannaoui, while walking to the settlements of humans until they reached here.

Regarding the state of the humans they saw on the way, well, there wasn’t anything special to mention.

We kept Iroha-chan company, so we have gone around a good amount of places. What they said was within what we already know.

What piqued my interest were the two parties they encountered and fought together with, the mercenaries.

One of the parties called themselves Picnic Rosegarden. They had quite the ability, and were going around defeating the mamonos that came out from the grand labyrinth.

And the other one was... a group of two that called themselves people of Apple.

Hokuto and Shii both said that they have ‘outrageous’ ability, and one has the looks of a dancer and the other a sister.

Both were women.

Tomoe muttered: 'it is them huh'.

Maybe she has met them before, or she saw them in a memory of someone; whichever it is, it seems like she has an idea of who they are.

“Waka, about that Apple—” (Tomoe)

“E-Excuse me...”

The moment when Tomoe was probably going to speak about those people, Iroha-chan lifts her hand nervously -along with a frail voice.

“What is it?” (Makoto)

Iroha-chan and Tomoe always have bad timing and interrupt each other.

It seems like she has something to say, so this time, instead of Tomoe, I urge her to continue speaking.

“About those Apple people, I probably have met them-desu. Uhm... they saved my life once. A silver haired person that, even though she is dressed as a dancer, is an expert at sniping, name's Haku-san; a person that has the same silver hair, is dressed in a priest outfit, and provides incredibly precise healing, name's Ginebia-san.” (Chiya)

Tomoe nods lightly.

I see. She learned of them when she read Iroha-chan's memories huh.

“Meeting those two, I...” (Iroha)

It seems like Iroha-chan had been betrayed by the adventurers she hired at the outskirts of Kannaoui, and at that time, she was saved by the Apple people.

Hmmm...

That's why she was able to come all the way to Mizuha huh.

Even so, I feel like the speed they moved at was way too fast.

Those two probably have some sort of... teleportation-like technique to mobilize.

Iroha-chan obviously knows this, but it doesn't come out in her story. In exchange, she told us that those two are no longer in Lorel.

She said they headed to the north.

If they are mercenaries, it is a valid possibility that they went to the war's front line.

But for some reason, my intuition is telling me that's not the case.

Whichever it is, there's no point in minding people that are not even here right now.

The most I would do would be to have someone investigate about the Apple people or the keyword 'Apple' from tomorrow on.

Now then... it is already reaching the time where we can't avert our eyes from the cave, dungeon, grand labyrinth.

Also...

“ ... ”

Staring at Iroha-chan, she looks back at me with wonder.

I have already contacted Shougetsu-san and the others about Iroha-chan, at worst, we won't be able to journey together anymore.

Thinking about it rationally, there's no way we could bring her with us to the labyrinth.

It seems like the city of Kannaoui is also having a number of issues, and there's signs of Tomoki scheming something.

It is probably better to deal with this in a Koumon-sama way, divide the duties in: Beren's group at the city, and us for the labyrinth.

What is the correct answer?

In this kind of moments, it really helps out that Tsige is currently in a lull state.

The latest report of the situation I received was that there's no real need to enter the defensive, and they are currently using the negotiations and raids cleverly to produce

an advantageous stalemate.

It is the situation that Rembrandt-san wished for. That's ideal.

...Right, the matter of Tomoki and Iroha-chan occurred after we arrived here.

In other words, irregular events.

In the first place, the Kusunoha Company and I have come here in order to gather the cards that Tsige currently needs. Can't go changing that.

Just like Mio who suddenly said she wanted to go to the kitchen while the meeting was about to enter its second half. Yes, just like Mio who turned around on her way just to say that she will be back by bath time. Truly a person that doesn't change.

Since she was looking at my reactions, there's no way she will be going to the kitchen to learn how to make the mapo tofu.

If I teach her the normal recipe later, I will be able to rest at ease... probably.

"First, the grand labyrinth. If it seems like there's enough spare strength, we can investigate the city at the same time. Only if we have the spare strength, that is."
(Makoto)

"As you will. I think that's a good plan. Even if there's the need of everyone here to beat the labyrinth, we still have more personnel. Let's leave the people I chose as spares just in case to these guys here. You can do it, right?" (Tomoe)

"Yes!"

Beren and the others return an affirmative answer at the confirmation of Tomoe that felt as if she was putting pressure on them.

It is true that if there's the need to, we can increase the amount of people.

I unconsciously tried to divide the work with only the people that are here.

The amount of times Tsige can step in strong has increased and the independence is growing closer. That's why, first, we have to secure the cooperation of the mercenary group.

After that, let's do all the miscellaneous business we have here. In my opinion, it feels like it will mostly be about Tomoki, and that depresses me.

We have decided on our plan.

Chapter 257

Entrance, like an underground discharge channel

“What is this...?”

Grand labyrinth of Yaso-Katsui, that’s the largest labyrinth in the world.

The word ‘grand’ just naturally describes it.

A dark, confined and humid underground dungeon that brings chills in my spine, the big boss of the caves.

In the first place, I thoroughly hate labyrinths, and on top of that, it is dark and humid... oops, let’s stop repeating that. Anyways, it is true that I came here with quite the resolve.

...And yet, right now, I had my mouth wide open and was looking at this place.

It is bright like broad daylight, is unbelievably vast, and has an abnormally wide and tall ceiling.

I remember having this feeling before.

Right, that was when I was watching a TV program about the underground discharge channel.

It was the same feeling as when the excessively spacious space was projected like some ancient historic ruins.

It is a space that reminds me of how incredibly small people are.

This place is similar.

Grand Labyrinth of Yaso-Katsui, wide first floor underground.

That’s the name of this place.

“The entrance gate was gigantic as well after all. It looks like they give it quite a lot of maintenance.” (Tomoe)

“Right-desu wa. Leaving aside how far of this dungeon looks like this, the power of the people is pretty impressive. About 1-2 kilometers of the World’s Borders has begun to have the handiwork of people involved, so once the conflicts are resolved, it might become a situation like this.” (Mio)

What Mio said about: ‘how far of this dungeon looks like this’ referred to the situation in our surroundings. It is like a famous touristic spot.

People, people, people; unbelievable liveliness.

...Well, the World’s Border might become like this around the entrance.

Leaving aside if the World’s Border can actually be considered a good tourist spot, the current vitality of Tsige is certainly unmeasurable.

Looks like Tomoe and Mio didn’t know that the labyrinth was in this situation either, they are looking around with interest.

They aren’t showing an unsightly behavior like opening their mouths wide though.

After advancing for a while, the density of people steadily decreased and it finally entered a state where we can look at our surroundings.

Even though it is a labyrinth, the groups of people stand out more than the mamonos.

The field of vision is also satisfactory. There’s simply a lot of people, there’s no darkness.

There’s a lot of people that seem to be customers and also gatherings of beginner-looking adventurers.

Since it is a labyrinth, it will obviously have mamonos appearing here and there.

I can see a number of people fighting.

The moment a mamono is spotted, the cases when they gang up on it are many.

How to say it... how peaceful.

For a moment, I felt like I came to a beginner field in an MMO game.

It feels exactly like a famous hunting spot that's a few maps away from the city.

"Hokuto, how's the accuracy of the map you bought at the guild?" (Shii)

"...There's parts where the scaling is not measured well, but it is mostly accurate, Waka-sama." (Hokuto)

"Hello~? The one who asked just now was the companion that has been with you for several days now, Shii-chan." (Shii)

"You coincidentally asked something that I was about to tell Waka-sama, that's all, Shii." (Hokuto)

For some reason, Hokuto directed the answer of Shii's question to me.

Hokuto and Shii, it looks like they are doing well.

They are both from different races, so I was wondering how it was going, but I don't see any such friction between them.

Even if their time together has been short, it would be nice if this serves as a test case for future chances.

The Arke, Hokuto, has in his hands the map of the grand labyrinth that we bought at the Adventurer Guild before coming here.

In a lot of meanings, he is the best choice to hold the map.

It is a super high-class article that shows the layout until the 10th floor, and it is thick. The price was also brutal, but well, it is crazy thick.

For some strange reason, just because of this one point, I was able to somewhat accept its price. Must be the magic of thickness.

Of course, it is not like we are walking around with the closed map.

We had unfastened the superficial map first.

“Please leave the mapping to me.” (Hokuto)

His other specialty aside from fighting is mapping.

Maybe because there were many occasions Hokuto has been asked to do things like surveying, at some point in time, he had obtained enough ability to call it his specialty.

He said that by activating the surveying skill, he is able to grasp the surrounding topography in a distance of around 100 hectares.

The first time I was explained this, I remember that I was flustered when I suddenly heard the word hectares. When he added by saying: ‘Maybe it would have been easier to understand if I had put it in ares?’ it made me even more flustered.

Neither of them click in my head, geez.

For a normal person, measurements like ares, hectares, and hectopascals are already puzzling enough, and yet, for some reason, everyone in Asora is able to adopt such a variety of my memories.

Hectares is supposed to be a measurement used in agricultural lands, so I think he is able to survey quite a large distance. Thanks to the special mapping skill of Hokuto, I am able to use [Sakai] for the usual self-defense and power concealment.

I am grateful for that.

“I am counting on you, Hokuto. Beren, is that matter with the sword okay?” (Makoto)

“I have tightly shut him up, so please don’t worry. Even if by some chance a person that can hear its voice appears, releasing the seal will take several days. Wouldn’t even be possible to move it.” (Beren)

“Nice. Hah, it was so noisy I couldn’t take it. That guy spoke nonstop for all night.” (Makoto)

“In the end, no one else aside from Waka-sama was able to hear its voice, so in my personal opinion, it actually feels pretty vexing.” (Beren)

“I think not being able to hear it is for the best. That thing is seriously...” (Makoto)

“A weapon that has a will, and yet, no blacksmith was able to hear its voice, but Waka-sama is able to. Why? Hmmm...” (Beren)

“Lately, I have been able to speak with a variety of things, so I am the strange one here. At any rate, I am not even a swordsman to begin with.” (Makoto)

Right now, the people here are me, Tomoe, Mio, Beren, Hokuto, and Shii.

Einkaref is currently... at the hotel's room.

...We left it there together with Iroha-chan.

While at it, we also left Shougetsu-san and his companions there too.

We told them that we will be returning every night there, and then, Akashi-san shouted: ‘Safety secuured!’ and made a victory pose. That image is burned in my mind.

‘Being able to receive safety, that surpasses what someone can buy with money, is fantastic’, is what Yuduki-san said.

The security in the Chihiro Man Rai restaurant is, to be expected of a high-class hotel, in quite the level to begin with, so we simply placed a bit more defense on the shed.

In the end, even if they return home, the ‘prince and princess battle royale: assassination race’ is still continuing, and if Iroha-chan returns there, she will be in a situation that invites danger.

I thought about escorting them there this morning, but Shougetsu-san's group was at the reception in good timing, and we agreed to them using the room.

Accurately speaking... it was Shougetsu-san with bloodshot eyes pleading at me though.

The charming information gathering and land survey Iroha-chan did in the many villages we visited on our way to Kannaoui, and the investigation results we gathered; we gave that information to them, and told Shougetsu-san and the others to hear about it and try comparing.

...That girl is... kind.

The current me can understand her a bit.

The numbers and the present state that the people in the villages answered Iroha-chan with, its meaning... those numbers were quite different from the actual numbers.

Even so, it is not like it was a mistake.

The tax of this world is absurdly high after all.

From country to feudal lord, from feudal lord to government officials, from government officials to the village chiefs; as this information gets passed around in this fashion, there's bribery that's really usual.

Even in the Edo period, there was a ratio of 4 to government and 6 to people and they were still saying things like: 'it is practically tax-free', as they opened their arms wide and collected heavy amounts of tax.

That's why villages will protect themselves as well.

They are thinking of a lot of ways to live by even if taxes are taken.

And in truth, in Kannaoui, the normal ratio is 8-government 2-people, and 9-government 1-people.

Even in the villages that we had gone to, their report compared to the real amount harvested is incredibly low, and by doing this, they managed to reduce the tax for a long time, and they also secretly cultivate crops with high potential to turn into money and do side jobs.

With Tomoe and Mio, most situations can't be hidden, so the real situation in those kind of parts was completely laid bare to me.

That information... I don't know how it will roll, but I have left it in Iroha-chan's hands.

I didn't have any intentions of receiving any money or rewards, but hearing the words she declared as she turned around when we arrived at Kannaoui, I decided to give this to her in order to have her stop.

This is just too much after all.

“The new route that will connect Mizuha and Kannaoui, I will negotiate with the country and make sure to have it named Raidou route! With a grand public work project, we will place all our gratitude and respect! Definitely-na no desu!”

That’s no joke, geez.

Just remembering it is making my head hurt.

“Now then, let’s begin the labyrinth exploration. Anyways, the priority is to find the stairs going down.” (Makoto)

If we simply stand around the vicinity of the entrance, we might become the preys of ardent salesmen trying to push us tour guides or souvenirs.

And in reality, the presence of business is stuffy here.

Around here, the people that are holding a flag are selling tour guides, and there’s also salesgirls from companies that have temporary stores inside the dungeon.

Their commercial spirit is tough.

Of course, they are selling on site, so it is a lot pricier than buying it in the city. Must be because the location price is also included.

It is a mystery whether a place as close as this can become good business though.

“Hokuto, where’s the stairs that head down-desu no?” (Mio)

Mio asks Hokuto the location of the stairs.

Receiving a question from a direct superior, Hokuto was slightly flustered, but after a bit, he said that it wasn’t that far from here and points at the crowd.

...It is unexpectedly close.

“It seems like there’s people heading down from there.” (Hokuto)

“For a spacious place, it is pretty close.” (Makoto)

Is the objective of these people to sell things to the ones that are soon going to the second floor?

Whatever it is, it can still be bought in the city though.

Everyone should have at least that amount of intelligence.

“But... uhm...” (Hokuto)

“Yeah?” (Makoto)

“That place and over there as well. And there’s also one there too.” (Hokuto)

“Eh? Eh?” (Makoto)

Hokuto was pointing different places one after the other.

In almost all the places he pointed, there were people gathered.

Why are there so many places where you can go down?

...Is it because it is big?

Is it because it is nothing but big?!

I was beginning to get dejected in a different meaning.

When I look carefully, there are stores in each of those places, and it seems like they are selling what seems to be tools.

“...Well, that’s fine. For now, let’s go down from there.” (Makoto)

I don’t have a hobby of completing maps anyways.

Just quickly advance.

“Oho, wait there! That’s a bad move!! You guys, this is your first time in here, right? Beginners, right?”

Oh crap.

In the time I was amazed and overwhelmed, we were caught.

Even though we have already cleared the place that was the most crowded.

“I have been picking a biiit of your conversation for a while now, you see. Yeah, I have deduced that you need my help here!”

“No, we are fine here. Thanks.” (Makoto)

I throw him some small change and gesture him to disappear.

So small. He is probably a demi-human, the child-looking type.

His height doesn't even reach my chest, so in the standards of the people in this world, he is pretty short.

Well it must be like those shota and loli.

He is probably not the age his appearance shows.

“Don't give me that please, man. I know something that will be of use to you, you know? I can be useful.”

Looks like he is not backing off.

...Was the money to shoo him away not enough?

It may be normal for a tourist spot to have rip-offs, but maybe it is also because this is a dungeon that takes entrance fees.

It might be that.

There's an entrance fee every time, so in order to stay long in this dungeon without leaving, there's stores inside the dungeon, probably?

It is true that the entrance fee was strange.

There's the 1 time, a pass for 1 week, a pass for 1 month, and there's also a 1 year pass; with a value set for all of them, you would get benefits from it.

Of course, paying each time will obviously be costly. But... this place was the contrary, it steadily increases. You can tell at a glance that paying the entrance fee each time is the best choice.

I was wondering what in the world they wanted to achieve with that.

Obviously, we paid the one-entrance fee.

As long as we don't know who we will meet and what kind of relationship it will turn out in, I have the intentions of paying for the fee tomorrow and the day after too.

"The tour guides and information stores around here are all useless after all!!"

"..."

If that's the case, you should be useless too.

Why should we believe that this one in front of us is the only proper one around here?

"...Understood, I get it! Then, I will provide you some special service!"

Oh, it came. The 'special service'.

I feel like he will be saying things like: 'I will half the price', when we haven't even heard the price yet.

"The money you gave me just now, I will pay it with a bit of information."

"..."

Oh, he is surprisingly saying something decent.

For a rip-off, that is.

"Sensei, you said just now that you will be going down from here, right?"

"Yeah." (Makoto)

I certainly did say that.

I'm not a 'sensei' though.

"Do you know what's below that?"

"The second floor underground?" (Makoto)

"See?!"

"Hm?" (Makoto)

"That's an answer that tells me you don't understand this place at all!"

You are too close.

It should be the second floor down there.

If it's actually the third floor or something like that, it would make me happy though.

The child demi-human is looking at me smiling.

Well, his face is saying: 'Do you want to hear more? Is it bothering you?'

He is probably asking for more payment, so I give him a silver coin and decide to see his reaction.

"Wao! Nice. I like people that are generous!"

"And so, what's this you were talking about 'what's beyond here'?" (Makoto)

"The Trap Floor."

"Are you saying the second floor is filled with traps?" (Makoto)

"Nope, the 2th floor that these stairs lead you to is filled with traps, the strength of the mamonos is low, and their element is mostly fire."

...

The 2th floor that these stairs 'lead' to?

Ah, I have an incredibly bad feeling about this.

“I have been given this much, so... the one you see at your right is the Rock Wind Floor. Sturdy rocks create a labyrinth and from here and there you will encounter squalls, there’s practically no traps, and in terms of mamonos, there’s mostly Golems, and...”

“And...?” (Makoto)

“It is a dead end.”

Uwaaa.

In other words, it is that? There’s so many stairs here that I don’t even know how many there are by looking from here, and all of them are connected to the second floor, moreover, there’s no assurance that it will be connected to the third floor?

It will probably continue being like that from the third floor on...

So that’s the reason why that map was so thick.

This is the worst.

“I see. So that’s how this labyrinth works.” (Makoto)

Floor 20.

Hahaha.

“Now that you understand... it looks like you guys don’t have any intentions of having someone accompany you. Must be because you already have a consolidated party.”

“Well, yeah.” (Makoto)

“Then, how about this. The information I know, and the information you want to know; how about buying all of that at once?”

Fumu.

“Hokuto, seems like it is this kind of dungeon. How long would it take to make a route? Do you think we have the time to hear what this information broker has to say?”

(Makoto)

“I have finished surveying several floors already, but it seems like I will need a bit more time. There’s still some parts down that I...” (Hokuto)

“Understood. No need to hurry.” (Makoto)

“This is surprising. Is the big one there the one in charge of mapping?”

“How much for all?” (Makoto)

I am not obliged to answer his question.

“Heee, it would be about this much of the big ones.”

The information broker opens up his palm.

Big ones... he is talking about gold huh.

5 of those.

If it’s useful information, I don’t mind paying that amount, and it wouldn’t be a bad idea to ‘feed’ a number of useful people here.

Can’t say for sure that we will be able to move all the people of the company that are currently here, and it wouldn’t be bad to show that I am a good pay.

Let’s just try to bargain for the looks, and give him the gold later.

Like the time when I was buying bamboo rakes from the store owner.

“5 gold coins huh. Isn’t that... quite the price?” (Makoto)

“G-Gold?! No no no! It is silver. Please don’t joke. 5 gold, you say. That would be surpassing the boundaries of a rip-off and entering the realms of robbery. I am a proper information broker!”

Oops.

I wasn’t intending to actually haggle though.

It instantly turned cheap.

In the first place, it was my own misunderstanding huh.

The entrance fee here is 2 silvers for each person.

Even if we are his first customers today, is it really okay to spill out all your information for only 5 silvers?

“Isn’t that quite cheap?” (Makoto)

“The information I have, or more like, it is the information that the people in the first floor sell, so yeah.”

“Are you telling me there are specific information brokers for the deeper floors too?” (Makoto)

“Of course. At the respective floor’s portal, there will be information brokers. But well, in the floors that safety hasn’t been secured, the information of that area will be less though.”

“More specifically?” (Makoto)

I pay him 5 silver coins and urge him to continue.

“I’ve heard that till the 13th floor, there will be information brokers on every floor. There, it seems you will get information until the 15th floor.”

“‘You have heard’? ‘It seems’? Could it be that you have never been there?” (Makoto)

“Please spare me. In my times when I was active, the lowest I could reach was the 6th floor and that was by chance. I am a guy that was always just going around the 5th floor. Yeah, it truly was only by chance that I was able to reach the 6th floor and I only took a peek of it. At that moment, I learned of my own limitations.”

In that case, maybe the 5th floor is the first place where you will hit a wall?

And the simple fact that he has experience in reaching the 6th floor is something to boast about?

I don't really understand what's the connection between his active days and his change in job to an information broker though.

"I see..." (Makoto)

"Ah, see there? There's a guy there that's guiding the labyrinth beginners, right? He is a guy that was in the same party as mine, we have known each other for long. Well, I have experience in parties as well. There's a lot of things, you know. Separate ways, deaths, break ups; in the past, we did a lot of reckless things at the 5th floor."

"..."

I got no use for your reminiscing though.

I want my 5 silver worth of information.

"Sorry for interrupting your reminiscing, but what are those 'portals' that you mentioned in your talk with Waka? It is a name I am not familiar with-ja." (Tomoe)

"Oops, this wasn't the time to be talking about me. Sorry about that. Portals are, putting it simply, teleport devices located in each floor."

Teleport... devices?

What's with that pleasant gimmick?

"Teleportation huh. In other words, you can use that to instantly go to the deepest parts?" (Tomoe)

She said exactly what I was thinking.

"Yeah, in outline."

"In outline huh." (Tomoe)

"Right after passing the entrance gate, you saw a path that goes another way, right?"

"Umu, there certainly was." (Tomoe)

"There's a portal there that connects the entrance with the first floor. You can use the

teleport device free of charge, but... there's a condition."

The information broker points his right hand's index finger at us.

"That you have already reached the portal of that floor. That's the condition for its use. Arrive there once, and by registering your adventurer guild's card, the teleportation device will be available for use."

So it is not that simple huh.

But with this, we can go in and out of the deep floors without arousing much suspicions. Useful information.

Now that I think about it, the only things I found at the Adventurer Guild when I went this morning was the thick high priced map, and a thin pamphlet for a countryside town somewhere.

'If you want more details, please go there and learn of it', that's seriously what I was told.

Entrance fees, stores, information brokers, guides for adventurers; everyone is going full-throttle in doing business.

"Now then, let's get back in track. I am a former explorer of the labyrinth, name's Lubrahon Gonzou, I will have the honor of giving you a lecture about the labyrinth's outline. What I like is my first grandchild that was born this year, and what I hate the most are Cat Siths." (Gonzou)

Gonzou starts his talk like a desultory conversation –wait, that's an impressive name you have there, Gonzou.

What you like is your grandchild huh, that's cliché... wait what?! A grandchild?!

"A grandchild huh. Must be cute. Treasure them dearly, Gonzou. We are the Kuzunoha Company. The person you have been speaking so familiarly with is the representative, Raidou-sama. Our Waka-sama. I am Mio, and the one over there is Tomoe-san; we are his close-aides. There's the employees: Beren, Hokuto, and Shii." (Mio)

"Oho, thanks for the politeness." (Gonzou)

“You introduced yourself, so this is just formality-desu wa. We are not chatting here, so continue on.” (Mio)

So Mio warned him as she did our introductions huh.

And I could see Tomoe giggling.

Beren and Hokuto are dividing the work of the map and are in the middle of confirming it, Shii is bearing the metal rod that doesn't match her body size... as if she is playing baseball.

“The first thing I have to mention is a misunderstanding that's normally made when coming here for the first time. This first floor, popularly named as Entrance, is vast and the people that see it for the first time get surprised by it, but...” (Gonzou)

That's true.

I unintentionally made a dumbfounded face.

The ceiling is truly tall and the wideness is crazy.

“The smallest floor in the Yaso-Katsui labyrinth... is this Entrance.” (Gonzou)

...

Are you serious?

This is the second time today that I felt the words '20th floor' as something incredibly heavy.

I could feel my stomach churning.

Chapter 258

“Pretty rare” ALT floors

Entrance, Garden, Path, Valley, Maze...

In the grand labyrinth of Yaso-Katsui, each floor has their own trait and, with that as a guideline, they have their own ‘general term’ for it.

Aside from Entrance which we are currently in, it seems like all floors are different depending on where you descent from, but the floor shares similarities to a certain extent.

And this information is thanks to the hard work of the Wise, and it is how the information brokers can live by.

“Thanks for the help, Gonzou. If there’s anything more, can I rely on you again?”
(Makoto)

“Of course! You can search for me here or you can call me at the Adventurer Guild and I will be there!” (Gonzou)

Gonzou was chuckling to himself and all smiles. There’s not a single trace of him being dissatisfied as he nods at my words.

...The effectivity of silver coins is... incredible.

The information as well, it felt as if he said everything he had to say and has finished his job.

We were able to ask quite a lot of things, so we didn’t feel like it was a loss either.

“Now then, Hokuto, have you found a number of paths that can take us until the 5th floor?” (Makoto)

I try asking about the mapping progress of our teammate that has been endeavouring on it while we were hearing the information of Gonzou.

“There’s around 40 routes that can take us to the 5th floor, around 20 routes that can take us to the 10th floor; this is only a conjecture, but I have found 3 routes that can take us even further down.” (Hokuto)

“Promising routes that can take us further down after the 10th floor huh. Nice. Let’s go with those. Mio, can you choose which one of those 3 look like the best?” (Makoto)

“Understood. Hokuto, which ones?” (Mio)

“Yes, it is these 3 that I think are good...” (Hokuto)

If the stairs were physically connected to the floors, I would be able to use [Sakai] to investigate.

But with a system that makes it so you get teleported to the lower floors, even if I were able to check how much of a distance there is between floors, I won’t be able to check the pathing.

If I activate it in a limited range, I would be able to investigate it in detail, but I feel like it would be the same as having Hokuto do it.

If it’s the guess of Hokuto who is currently making a map as he advances, I feel like it is a good choice to abide to what he says.

If we add the instincts of Mio, it would give me even more peace of mind.

“Ah, now I think about it...”

“Hm?”

Gonzou tilts his head as if he had suddenly remembered something.

“Did you know that there’s talk of the master here, Doma, being slayed and that this place has become unstable due to that?” (Gonzou)

“Yeah, we have heard about it to a certain extent. If I remember correctly, it was done by an adventurer that was called Dragon Slayer.” (Makoto)

“Yeah, the blue haired one. A dangerous woman. Was her name Sofia? It seems like she was the one who slayed Doma. Since the time those rumors began, the inside of the

dungeon has been filled with earthquakes and cave-ins. Also, the types of mamonos changed and a lot of things happened.” (Gonzou)

“ ...”

Because the owner has been lost, the dungeon is unable to hold itself.

This hypothesis of mine is pretty simple.

“At times, this would stabilize completely. If I remember correctly, it was the time when the hero called Hibiki-sama was at Lorel. For us, the bad mood of the labyrinth affects the business, so what Hibiki-sama did -what the hero did was something we were grateful about.” (Gonzou)

“Heeh, the time when the hero came huh.” (Makoto)

Did Senpai do something?

Thinking about the unstable labyrinth and the busy Hibiki-senpai, I just can’t picture that person coming here...

“Yeah, but since that happened, reports about things that have never happened before were beginning to arrive at the adventurer guild.” (Gonzou)

“Things that have never happened before? If it’s okay, I would want to know.” (Makoto)

“This information is not certain, so listen with that in mind. The first one is that all the floors below the 10th floor have changed their structure greatly. Regarding this, the frontline for the exploration are members that were chosen by the guild, and it is a matter of absolute secrecy, so there’s no certainty in that. It is simply a bit of information that entered my ears.” (Gonzou)

“The structure changed...” (Makoto)

“This is just complementary info but, in the past, the guild sold maps that reached till the 13th floor, and yet, the maps they sell now only reach the 10th floor.” (Gonzou)

“I see.” (Makoto)

Maybe it is related to the labyrinth regaining its stability, or maybe there’s a

completely different reason for it.

No idea.

No way to know right now.

Things like the structure changing certainly sounds more believable when we combine the talk about the maps at the adventurer guild.

It can also be seen as those conspiracy theories that are made often.

“The other thing is about talk that the guild is soon going to make a move. Seems like when they have people go to the lower parts of the labyrinth, there are pretty rare times when they reach a strange floor.” (Gonzou)

“A strange floor?” (Makoto)

“Yes. The conditions to reach it are completely unknown, but according to the people that have gone there and returned, the strange floor exists from the 3th floor and below, moreover, when you head down, there’s times when the floor returns to normal, and there’s also times when you are thrown into another weird floor.” (Gonzou)

“It is not like the floor itself is different?” (Makoto)

Like for example, going down the 1st floor and suddenly arriving at the 5th floor.

“No, at each floor there’s a number that denotes the floor you are in, and a strange symbol carved, but the floor itself is the same.” (Gonzou)

“Fumu... do you know what symbol it is?” (Makoto)

“For now, from the four parties I have confirmed with, all of them were the same symbol so I remember it. I can’t read it, but if I remember correctly...” (Gonzou)

Gonzou writes in the notebook he had, and showed it to me.

Alt.

This is from the alphabet.

Also, this is a word I have seen before. If I remember correctly, it was at the keyboard of computers.

The Alt key.

...This is bad.

I have never used it aside from games, so I don't know the meaning of it.

If I remember correctly, it was used for displaying things and changing the skill panel...

I had a friend that was good with computers, but I don't have the knowledge.

But well, if the alphabet is appearing here, it means that the Wise are definitely involved in this.

It wouldn't be strange at all if there's a Wise that has been deeply involved in this dungeon, so I feel like he has told me something pretty important in a nonchalant manner.

That was helpful.

"I see... a mysterious symbol. In that case, if a person arrives to this strange floors, there would be a writing like '3 Alt' somewhere around that place." (Makoto)

"Seems like it is engraved right at the pillar you see when you arrive. The details of these floors are being sold at a pretty high price currently." (Gonzou)

"Then, if there's a chance where the Kusunoha Company goes there, I will have Gonzou buy that information from me." (Makoto)

"I will be waiting expectantly for it." (Gonzou)

He smiles.

...As I thought, he doesn't look like the age to have a grandchild.

"Waka, it is about time." (Mio)

Tomoe who was looking at the state of Mio and I, whispered at me.

Seems like the first route has been decided.

“Understood. Gonzou, sorry for taking so much of your time. This is a token of my appreciation. Also, I don’t think we will be encountering those mysterious floors, but if there’s a time that happens, I promise we will call you. Well then, see you later.”
(Makoto)

“!!! No, sensei—Raidou-sama! I can’t take this—” (Gonzou)

I give him 5 more silver coins and walk towards the direction Hokuto and Mio point.

“You can use that money to treat your child and grandchild something. Now then, Gonzou, thanks for the help.” (Tomoe)

Tomoe follows after my words.

As she suggests him a way to use the given money.

“The next time we meet, prepare information about things that are tasty.” (Mio)

After that, Mio.

Even if he is an information broker, is that type of information also counted?

“...”

Hokuto follows us silently.

“...You will probably become an incredibly fortunate information broker.” (Beren)

Beren places a hand on his shoulder deeply emotive and then chases after us.

“Well, there’s nothing to worry about. In the time Waka was speaking to you, he was earning several hundred times more than that. You have told Waka the information you have without lying. Good for good. This is a reward for being able to act in the most effective manner towards our company and Waka-sama. Ah, you should save money too, old man. See ya.” (Shii)

Shii probably felt a sense of camaraderie from a fellow chibi <small person>, she spoke with Gonzou in somewhat familiar terms.

And then, she waves her hand and follows after us.

But, Alt huh.

“...Let the Kusunoha Company have the blessing of Futsu-sama.” (Gonzou)

Futsu.

Now that he mentions it, that’s also something I still don’t know much of yet.

The words of prayer that Gonzou directed to us, reminded me of the dragon called Futsu, and then, before long, we arrived at the second floor of the labyrinth.



Evening.

Inside the dungeon, it is incredibly hard to tell the passing of time in one day, but the time is flowing as normal.

At the Adventurer Guild, they square the accounts of that day’s ventures and training, as well as the materials that were brought that day. One day there is filled with busy times.

Continuing further on inside this building, there were the big shots from Kannaoi’s adventurer guild, a number of staff members, and a number of outsiders as well.

It is rare to see people that are not personnel at the deep parts of the adventurer guild.

“And so... how’s the Kusunoha Company that was called here by Sairitz?”

The first one to open his mouth was a person that seems to be an outsider.

A man in the prime of his life.

His personal appearance is good and the other people were obeying him.

Even if the guild staff members are not, they still seem to be showing a certain amount of respect.

“In the morning, they finished their preparations and have headed to the labyrinth. Seems like they are still inside the dungeon. Hey, what’s their progress?”

The guild leader responded and inquires the details from a subordinate.

“They are currently in the third floor, but... it seems like there’s already one that has dropped out. There’s no response.”

“They arrived at the 3rd floor in the first day. It is a pace comparable to a Dragon Slayer, but... they might have hurried too much, someone died. Kougetsu-sama.”

“For people that came here by the recommendation of Sairitz, they are not the big deal huh. But it is true that since the time they were involved with princess Iroha, no one has been able to put a hand on her. We can’t be negligent, but...” (Kougetsu)

What came out from the man’s mouth was the name of Iroha.

It can be understood that the objective of the man called Kougetsu was not directly the Kuzunoha Company but Iroha.

(Buying the most expensive map and reaching the 3rd floor on their first day, isn’t that only on the level of being a bit competent? Moreover, they have already lost one of them, probably already dead.)

(I am of the same opinion, but don’t say it. We are simply devices that answer what we are asked. Understood? I want to continue working here tomorrow, you know.)

The two staff members of the adventurer guild brought their faces near each other and exchange whispers.

They are in the same room, so there’s no way that would go unnoticed. The gaze of Kougetsu was directed in an instant to them.

However, there was no further allusion to it, and his gaze returned to the guild leader.

“If possible, I would want everyone to disappear and dress it as an accident inside the dungeon though. Can you return the people at the foremost line?” (Kougetsu)

“Kougetsu-sama, sorry for the rudeness but, are you sane? They are the most competent team in this guild, and they are doing their best to clarify the situation of

the grand labyrinth. This is a mission of the highest priority.”

“I am talking about a high priority mission that involves this city and this country though. The scales of your and my high priority missions are totally different.”
(Kougetsu)

“...Please don’t mistake our priorities. We are not interested in the political fight of Kannaoi and Lorel Union.”

“...Hoh.” (Kougetsu)

“Because no matter the result, our situation won’t change much anyways. I wonder if a country on the scale of Lorel Union can maintain its livelihood without the adventurer guild. If it is gone, who knows how much national power decline it will invite. There’s not even the need to think about it, right?”

“It is true that the adventurer guild is necessary. It is unthinkable to have it disappear. But you know, for example, if there’s no need for you to be the representative, and there’s no need for the staff members to be the ones there...” (Kougetsu)

“?!”

The two staff members clearly jumped at those words.

“Kougetsu-sama, leave it at that. If you say any more than that, we will have to turn into your enemies.”

“It is a situation where the result is already clear, and yet, you are siding with the princess? Are you sane?” (Kougetsu)

“I didn’t say anything about taking Iroha-sama’s side. The people that turn their fangs at us are deemed as enemies. As long as the Adventurer Guild is not touched, we are neutral.”

“ ... ”

“Of course, if we were to be requested cooperation by a person that possesses the same influence as Kougetsu-sama, we would have acted the same way as today. I will say this bluntly, if you want to assassinate the people that Sairitz-sama has personally told the country to make accommodations to, go ahead and do so by yourself.”

“Hmph. Neutrality.” (Kougetsu)

As if saying how worthless that is, Kougetsu raises both hands up.

There’s no reaction from the guild’s side.

“Even if they were given to us, the contact with the Shadowless has been severed. Princess Iroha not only has not returned to the castle, she is staying in a facility that has the same stance as yours, the Chihiro Man Rai restaurant. They had to reunite today of all days with Shougetsu and his group, and until the very end, they were persistently running around. Seriously, how annoying!” (Kougetsu)

“...”

“It is already a hopeless situation. This city and the Osakabe’s era. It is already settled who will be guiding in the future, and yet, no matter how many times I brush them away, those damn flies keep flying around...” (Kougetsu)

“If they are flies...”

“What?”

“If you are unable to even brush away something like that, there’s no way you can guide the future of the old family. This is not a matter I should relate with religion, but don’t you think this is an ordeal that you have to surpass with your own strength?”

“Big words there. I wonder how Sairitz will see you guys when she knows that I had you investigate the movements of the Kuzunoha Company. Isn’t that already a betrayal?” (Kougetsu)

“Are you saying we are accomplices in crime? Are you trying to threaten us?”

“I am just speaking the truth.” (Kougetsu)

“...Truly a pity. You are obviously lower than Sairitz-sama, but it seems like you are lower than the Kuzunoha Company too. You are dancing on the palm of Sairitz-sama, and your existence has already been noticed by the Kuzunoha Company. The Kuzunoha Company already has foreknowledge of the ones that are trying to investigate their movements. Seems like they have no problems in others knowing their movements. Not only that, they were concerned for the standing of the Guild.

About a lot of things, they even mentioned you by name.”

“What?” (Kougetsu)

“Now then, I wonder who’s the one that’s the most out of the loop. Looks like the problem of your household still has no settled winner. Do take care.”

“...Remember this. I will never forget today’s disgrace.” (Kougetsu)

“If by chance you win the political strife, I will remember. The door’s over there.”

Kougetsu was displaying his anger and leaves the room together with his subordinates.

“...A storm is coming.”

“Yeah.”

The representative looks at the door where Kougetsu left and mutters this.

The staff member girl reflexively answered those words.

“Kannaoi will be in a dangerous state for a while. Don’t think you are safe just because you are office personnel. With how he is, it looks like he won’t hesitate in dragging us as well.”

“If princess Iroha is able to turn around this situation, that would be pretty... no, it would be engraved in history, you know.”

“But she has the Kuzunoha Company–no, she has the Wise with her. We are witnessing the beginning of a legend. It might be the moment when history moves.”

“A Wise-sama?! That Raidou... -sama?!”

“According to Sairitz-sama, that is. Seems like he is the second Wise-sama that exists in the current age. No, maybe he is the third one.”

“Does that mean... the Empire’s hero might be one as well?!”

The male staff member was also listening and enters the conversation.

The representative just sighs at it.

“...Yeah, so it seems.”

“But if that’s the case, that means Raidou-sama who is working at a company, is the one who is the least powerful among them. It seems like he has already lost one member after all. Both hero parties were the very definition of dazzling after all.”

“About that information... is it reliable?”

“Yes.”

“I didn’t ask before but, who’s the one that was lost? Is it known?”

“I can check right now. Let’s see... Eh?”

“You are kidding, right?”

“What’s wrong? Who’s the member that the guild card signal was lost?”

“From the members of the Kuzunoha Company that are currently in the third floor, the one that we lost the signal of was... Raidou-sama.”

“...What?”

The representative looks at the information he was presented, with eyes as if he was trying to eat into it.



3-Alt.

3-Alt.

3-Alt.

No matter how many times I read it, it is still 3-Alt.

The third floor area that’s called ‘Path’.

“I heard it was a strange floor. I also heard that its existence was known from the 3rd floor and below. And just as told, the symbol is engraved here.” (Makoto)

My thoughts were leaking from my mouth.

To think I would draw it so suddenly.

Moreover...

“I have been separated from everyone. Even though we advanced through the same teleport formation... why did it turn out like this?” (Makoto)

I was standing at a long corridor. Ah, so ‘Path’ refers to a corridor huh.

When we went down to the second floor, there was a teleport formation to return to the first floor.

But there’s none here.

In other words, there’s no way to return.

The floor shines a dim red light, and at the ceiling, there’s also a round light bulb-looking thing that’s shining a red light too.

The floor is wide enough for 5-6 people to walk side by side.

The light continued forward and looked like a path.

Must be the direction I have to progress.

From the sides, there were cylindrical pillar lights lined up.

It felt like neon lights.

After that, there’s pitch black darkness.

From here and there, I could feel the presence of mamonos. Quite the numbers.

Even if there’s not as many as the 2nd floor Drake Garden... no, that one was excessively spacious, so in terms of density, this one might be higher.

“How to say it... it feels cools, slippery, and made of inorganic materials. Like tiles.”
(Makoto)

This is not the time to be making calm observations.

Yeah, I have ended up in that strange floor.

I didn't expect it would even separate us.

Chapter 259

That's probably the Mascot M

What a problem.

Even the thought transmission made in Asora was not able to connect at all.

I can feel the safety of Tomoe and Mio who I have formed a pact with, so the other side probably also knows about my safety.

That's what I want to think.

In this labyrinth, the first thing we do when we arrive at a new floor is to search for the Obelisk-like device called 'Portal' and register the floor we have reached.

The Alt floor I am currently in, curves and bends loosely back and forth, but it is one road.

That point honestly makes me happy.

Probably, as long as I continue advancing in the path that I am directed to, I will arrive at some portal, or... the teleport formation for the next floor.

Now that I think about it, if there were a portal here, an adventurer that has come here once, would be able to come here as many times as they want.

...In that case, the chances that there's no portal and only a teleport formation are high.

The enemies at the second floor were, as expected, not that big of a deal, so the mamonos at this floor shouldn't cause me much trouble either.

That applies for me and for Tomoe and the others as well.

In other words, instead of stopping here trying to regain communication, it is better to move ahead and hope to regroup.

“Let’s go.” (Makoto)

With slightly fast-paced steps, I advance through the red lighted corridor.

There are times when mamonos are encamped normally at the corridor, and some that come out from the other pitch black side of the pillars where the light doesn’t reach to make surprise attacks, and it is a pattern of being attacked every several minutes.

It is not to the point that I would have to stop my advance.

It all finishes with one magic attack, but... they are a lot stronger than the ones of Drake Garden.

At the second floor, there was a sign saying that the second floor is a fiendish area, and there were few parties fighting close to the teleport formation.

When we advanced, we saw a number of lesser dragons, that were slightly stronger than the one that defeated Jin and the others quite a long while ago, flying in the sky and walking on the ground.

Just like the name Garden denotes, it is a strange area where there’s a pseudo-blue sky and verdant grass.

It was an important place that taught me that a dungeon doesn’t always equal caves.

“At that place, the dragons called drakes were divided between two elements: earth and wind, but this place...” (Makoto)

After already defeating around 20 of those, I could tell that the element of the enemies on this floor are all a mess. Not only that, there’s also ones that cast magic from far away, some that try to cut me with their claws and fangs, undeads that are armed and come rushing at me; truly a variety that doesn’t bore me.

I am using a non-elemental Brid to bulldoze through the place, so it doesn’t feel problematic at all.

But compared to the second floor, I feel like the difficulty has increased quite a lot.

No, saying it bluntly, this is practically throwing someone to their death.

Alt huh.

There's no assurance that it is connected to the keyboard's Alt, but it sounds like it has connections with english.

A word that begins with those three letters...

...

Someone please bring me an english-japanese dictionary.

Well, I can try to associate words and see...

I am not using my brain for anything aside from moving forward, so thinking about this is better than moving foward brain death. *<The following part is pointless for people that know english. [marks the beginning and] marks the end. It was actually longer than this, but equally pointless.>*

[Alto, Alter, Altar...

Alter... I think I have seen it before in a game written as alternative.

What was the meaning of it?

Like 'the other thing'? 'One other'? I feel like that was the meaning of it.

If I remember correctly, I learned at the music class that Alto is the volume of your voice.

But I wonder if that was english.

It felt kind of european.]

From within those choices, well, it's probably safe to assume that alternative is the one.

Different floor, one other floor; it feels like that's correct.

I can also understand why it is at a computer's keyboard.

...At any rate... isn't the encounter rate for mamonos increasing?

The amount of Brides I am casting has increased quite a lot since the initial stages.

From the front, from the sides, and even from the back where I have already passed through; even though I haven't found the portal or the teleport formation, a variety of mamonos are attacking me.

Leaving aside the lights from the ceiling, the density of mamonos is enough to cover most of the red lights from the floor.

At this rate, it is a matter of time before I get completely swarmed over and can't move at all.

Let's increase the pace.

From a jogging pace, I changed into running speed and shake off the mamonos from behind while I scatter the ones from the front.

I single-mindedly run on top of the red light.

I evade the avoidable ones from the side, and blow away any that seemed like they would get in the way of my progression.

Seeing the second big curve I encounter, I somewhat understood the shape of this floor.

The first straight line was around 3km, a circular curve of around 90°, and then, it returned to a straight line and once again a curve, after that, another long straight line.

It is close to the form of a track field.

Also, there's some slight slopes, so it might have a spiral shape.

On top of not finding the portal, the frequency of enemy encounters isn't lowering at all.

I pray that there's no more curves ahead.

As I pray for this, I continue running.

Even if the situation is different at the place of Tomoe and the others, I wonder if they are facing the same unavoidable battles.

If that's the case, this place is really ill-natured.

More than scheming, more than solving puzzles, and more than mapping precision; it is simply stressing on battle prowess.

If this kind of floors appear sporadically in this place, Yaso-Katsui is quite a bothersome dungeon.

While thinking this and running, I found something that was not a portal, but is better than another curve.

"Is that... a curtain of light?" (Makoto)

A fleeting and gentle green light was undulating like an aurora as it trails forward.

This thing that covers the floor all the way to the ceiling certainly did look like a curtain.

If this means that we are at the end, that would be the best, but at worst, I would like it to be a checkpoint of sorts.

"And goal." (Makoto)

I pass the curtain without much resistance.

It felt like cutting through a goal tape.

Well, I wasn't the athletic type in my world, so I don't really know how it feels to cut through a goal tape though.

There's no presence of mamonos at my front.

At my back...

When I turn around, the mamonos that were approaching the curtain retreat towards the darkness at the other side of the pillars.

That's pretty sportsmanly of them.

At any rate, it seems like I have arrived at some sort of resting area.

A sigh unconsciously leaks out from my mouth.

“If possible, let there be a teleport formation for the next floor...” (Makoto)

I move to investigate the area.

“You have passed the goal curtain, so it is obvious that there will be a teleport formation. You say some interesting things.”

This is the first time I hear the voice of someone else in this floor.

What came flying gently out of the shadow of the pillar was a small floating...

“...Could it be... you are a Marikosan?” (Makoto)

“Eh? Am I popular?!”

Incredible.

What an exaggeration.

What’s with this criter?

First of all, as expected of a fairy race, her body is small.

Just like the information.

Hm? Even so, she doesn’t look so small.

For example, if you were to place her on your shoulder, it would be pretty strainful depending on her weight.

“I feel like... I am being directed quite the rude gaze.”

Looking at her total size, she would be the size of a medium-sized owl.

If she were standing, she would be at a baby size.

Her face is cute. Rather than calling it beautiful, it is cute.

Her overall attire is not fit for the place, but it looks good on her.

She doesn't have anything resembling a weapon, but the medal furnished hunting cap looks like a trademark of hers and fits her equally well like her clothes.

For some reason, there's the letter M engraved on it that's probably from the first letter of Marikosan.

...

No, let's stop averting my eyes.

This is probably... no, this is definitely an existence that the Wise are extremely involved in.

She is the very picture of the popular brother plumbers. *<Mario and Luigi! *insert bad italian accent*>*

Aside from her gender, everything else is a cosplay. Yes, let's be honest, this is a cosplay.

Are Marikosans that kind of existence?

She also has the bob cut hair that I haven't seen much in this world aside from Mio.

"Well, that's fine. You have shown me something nice after all. A good while ago, there was someone that finally managed to clear this place, but not only is that person not here anymore, they probably aren't adventurers anymore. That person's eyes were not normal, you know. A rude person that left even though I showed myself."

I am the second.

And the first person was quite exhausted.

Well, that's a matter of course. Being suddenly thrown into a floor like this, anyone would be.

I wasn't really cornered, but I can understand how that person felt.

Wait... one person?

Is there such a brave soul that would dive into the dungeon alone?

Is what I thought without really answering to the words of the Marikosan, and as I was pondering her words, she lightly flies around me as if observing me.

“The one at that time was used to the labyrinth, and also knew the way to clear the Path floor, so I thought that person would have the chance to clear it. And in truth, it was quite the unsightly and boor way to do it, but that person was able to come all the way here. On the way, that person would abandon companions as the occasion calls and used them as bait, so only that person remained in the end. For a fiend like that, it was quite the deplorable result.”

...

So that person came with a party huh.

The only survivor then.

...

If this place can be done with a party... why am I alone?

“In that point, you are incredible in a lot of ways. Path is a floor which the mamonos’ strength and numbers are directly proportionate to the time passed. That’s why, it is of highest priority to obtain a map and concentrate on arriving at the next floor as fast as possible.”

“ ... ”

I did hear a bit about the floor, but I only saw Path as a battle centered floor.

But did they also mention something like that?

I feel like they did a different explanation though.

“And yet, you began to leisurely investigate at the entrance, and after taking your time loitering around, you made a ‘walking’ start. I thought you were a funny challenger. On top of that, you were alone.”

That was a bad move huh.

Yeah, if it's a floor where time is of essence, I can understand that making a running start is the correct choice.

But leaving aside the strength, the encounter rate was at quite the nasty level.

Calling that directly proportionate is a bit hard to swallow.

I was only standing around for 20 minutes.

"Moreover, this is the Alt floor, you know? All the mamonos are enraged and their strength... well, even if there's a lock in their strength so they don't surpass the 10th floor power... The increase was even changed into being inversely proportional. Ah of course, the numbers as well."

...

Not only were they throwing people to their death, they were totally intending to kill everyone.

Even I can clearly understand the difference between directly proportionate and inversely proportionate.

It is clear that inversely proportionate is no good.

Taking 20 minutes, I did something crazy.

And it really was Alternative huh. An alternate floor.

Understood.

"Wouldn't that normally kill the person?" (Makoto)

If you are thrown here by yourself, it wouldn't simply end with death.

So as usual, this time my luck was the worst as well huh... Ah.

Party.

It is that huh.

I am not in a party with anyone.

About Tomoe and Mio, I didn't enquire about where Tomoe trained, but it seems like she was able to increase her level and is now close enough to Mio's level, so they are able to form a party.

Beren and Shii as well.

But in that case, Hokuto would be a hanging element in our group as well.

It is true that I wasn't in a party, but I feel like there's no reason for me to be experiencing something like this.

"...Of course. It was made with a relatively high difficulty after all."

The Marikosan was showing a wide smile.

It is a pure smile that instead of condemning herself, it felt as if she was saying: 'go ahead and praise me' as she puffs her chest.

"Let me tell you this since I am one of the few ones who have cleared this. Isn't this kind of crazy difficulty a bit too much for being such an early floor?" (Makoto)

"The concept is that the difficulty is similar to that of the 10th floor and below after all. In the first place, even if you tell me this after clearing it unscathed, it doesn't sound convincing."

10th floor and below, she says.

I was at a loss of words.

"To begin with! You can't enter the Alt floor unless you clear the previous floor with an excelling grade. In your case... at the Drake Garden... the Earth Dragons and Flying Dragons... you killed over a hundred of both? Eh? Is this number for real? Do you some special grudge towards dragons?"

...So that's the cause.

It is true that most of the second floor was handled by me.

All that came into my sight, I shot them down.

Because I hunted way too many on my own, I ended up being invited here alone huh.

Hah...

“What an outrageous person. But personally speaking, I like those kind of people. If the current master of this place were the same kind of outrageous as you, I would be able to work a bit harder though... The world doesn’t always go favorably.”

The Marikosan tilts her head with a charming gesture.

Until now, I have somehow been able to ignore it but, at her face, there’s a toothbrush moustache.

‘There’s something on your face’, that’s how out of place that moustache felt.

...It feels as if you can really take it off.

It is evident that trying to have a connection with her would be the worst.

Let’s try to be careful here, yeah.

It doesn’t really bother me much that she is floating even though she doesn’t have wings, but a fairy with a cute face and beard, I feel like that’s an incredible trait.

The impact of having her face to face is unbelievable.

“Master. Are you referring to Doma?” (Makoto)

Master.

A word that bothers me.

And I know of an existence that this word can apply to.

I did hear that he is quite the peculiar dragon though.

“Doma... wait, isn’t that the dragon that was defeated not that long ago? That was someone who poured power to this labyrinth, but he isn’t the master of this labyrinth. You are an interesting adventurer, so I will tell you. Right now, he is normally together with the mercenary group that’s at the deeeep parts of the labyrinth, but the one that manages this labyrinth since a long time ago has recently returned.”

“Manager? Returned?” (Makoto)

“Yup, that’s the master here. That’s why the labyrinth has grown active again and the Alt floors have revived. We Marikosans are now pretty numerous, you know. Unless you are at an Alt floor or a pretty deep floor, you won’t get much chances of meeting them though.”

Why, why?

Why didn’t you return AFTER we left, administrator?

Being thrown into this kind of places just because we are going fast, leaving it to brute force, and doing a bit of search and destroy; seriously, what a pain.

I was planning on just taking a peek today and return, you know!

“Uhm, if possible, can you tell me a bit more about that?” (Makoto)

But since I have encountered a source of information, I have to hold it on returning and ask her a lot of things.

“Hm... next time we meet, adventurer-san. I have spoken a bit too much after all.”

“Ah, my name is—” (Makoto)

I notice that I haven’t introduced myself.

And I don’t know her name either.

Marikosan is the name of the race and not the name of the individual.

“Let’s leave the introductions for next time too. Well, I say that, but I actually don’t have a name as an individual, and I haven’t thought about wanting one. The only ones that would want something like that would be the ‘rogue’ ones. Once we meet again,

please tell me your name! See ya, mysterious adventurer-san! It was fun!”

Cutting off my words, she one-sidedly talks a storm and disappears, leaving only a faint phosphorescence behind.

I can see a teleport formation deeper inside.

Silence takes over the place.

No well, I actually think the Marikosan was several times more of a mysterious existence than me though.

She looks like a mascot, and yet, her bearing is like that of a merchant.

But it is certainly true that... she has powerful traits that can make them be considered the specialty of this labyrinth.

I stood on the teleport formation while praying that I wouldn't be send to another Alt floor.

Fortunately, it ended in an unnecessary worry.

I was safely able to reunite with the 5 that were waiting close to the entrance of the next floor.

Chapter 260

Encounter with the unknown

“Alt floor? At the third floor, there was an Alt engraved at the entrance.....!!! Could it be the ‘Crimson Corridor’?! To think it actually existed.”

“We have confirmed the Crimson Corridor... I won’t be surprised anymore. I have grown up.”

Accomplishing the first encounter of a Marikosan, I was able to reunite with everyone at the next floor.

We decided to finish the exploration of that day and returned to the hotel.

Third floor clear.

We anticipated that we would be able to go even lower, but we had a harder time than expected.

While we were doing a reflection meeting of sorts, Iroha-chan and her group who were taking refuge here were participating at some point in time.

Shougetsu-san was surprised when he heard the name Crimson Corridor and we received words of surrender from Iroha-chan.

“According to Hokuto, the route till the 10th floor has been made, and if there’s a problem happening from tomorrow on, it would definitely be those Alt floors. A place where not even thought transmission works, just what kind of mechanism is at work there?” (Tomoe)

“That’s the part. It seems like there’s some sort of requirements. You have to show excelling results at the previous floor in order to be thrown to those Alt floors, so it would be bad to hurry too much and get everyone separated.” (Makoto)

I don’t think speed is the only condition.

At the Garden, the condition was the number of Drakes defeated, or it was at least one of the conditions.

Leaving me aside, in the cases where Beren, Hokuto or Shii are thrown into the Alt floor, it might become dangerous.

The lower we go, the dangers most likely increase.

“Then, how about going to the labyrinth with just Tomoe-san, Waka-sama, and I from tomorrow on? If it’s us, no matter who gets thrown into the strange floor, there won’t be much problems.” (Mio)

Mio proposes what’s possibly the number one safest way.

It is true that with that there will be no dangers.

If it’s only us three, most of anything would be okay.

But... there will be no mapping from Hokuto, no judgment from Beren, and no deftness of Shii.

In a dungeon environment, their abilities might even be better adapted than us three. Especially in lower floors where we don’t have a decent amount of information. That can’t be called a good idea.

Yeah.

The words of Mio served as the trigger. A number of proposals were coming here and there.

Of course, there were the proposals saying they wanted to accompany us. Their desire to accompany us from tomorrow on was clear to see.

Even if they don’t go to the labyrinth, they can do things like gather information regarding Iroha-chan, so it is not like there’s nothing for them to do.

But that part is not the original objective, or more like, its priority is low.

The number one priority is to put all our effort in making the negotiation with the mercenary group succeed, you know...

The reflection meeting that continued till dinner had idle talk mixed in it as well, and it didn't look like the decision could be reached.

"I have an opinion. Is it okay to say it?"

That voice came from my back.

At a place that was close to my neck, a blade was placed there, and with the other hand that wasn't holding it, that person saluted.

"?!"

Tomoe, Mio, and everyone else noticed the current situation after those words.

Well, that was the same for me.

It truly was as if he had suddenly appeared just now.

Really a surprise.

So surprised that I lost the chance to get panicked.

"Grand Master?!"

But within that surprise, one person directed the words 'Grand Master' at that man.

A word I am not familiar with.

It is a word that I feel was given to some sort of robot in a game.

The owner of the voice is Shougetsu-san.

"Umu, it has been a while, Shougetsu-kun. You have gotten quite the presence now."

"Y-Yes. Rokuya-sama truly hasn't changed." (Shougetsu)

"I am an eternal 20 years old after all." (Rokuya)

Suddenly turning his blade at me, yet speaking nonchalantly; I don't know what kind of intentions he has, but this man that seems to be an acquaintance of Shougetsu-san

even introduced himself and made a joke. He parted the blade from my neck, and, without any noise, he moves towards the wall and places his back there.

Is he an assassin?

I can instantly tell that he is incredibly skilled.

I don't know what skill it was, but not a single person in this room was able to catch his presence.

Because he moved, I was able to confirm his appearance as well.

He has a low height similar to mine which is pretty rare in this world, white hair that's neither long or short, extremities that I can feel firmness and flexibility from.

To my surprise, his appearance is a lot further than the standard of this world, even more than me. *<Don't know if he is calling him ultra beautiful, or incredibly ugly.>*

The identity of the blade that was at my neck are a pair of katars.

He wasn't taking a stance with them, he only had them with him.

"...Shougetsu-san, who is he?" (Makoto)

"He... Rokuya-sama is my... master's master." (Shougetsu)

Master's master?

Ah, so that's why it is grand huh.

Like when you say grandparent.

Shougetsu-san who is already an old man is calling him the master of his master; just how should I read those words of being 'eternally 20 years old'?

However, the appearance of the man named Rokuya is really around 20.

Is his aging stopped with some sort of method?

"I am a passing assassin, name's Rokuya. Pleased to meet you." (Rokuya)

“I am Raidou. The representative of Kuzunoha Company. Pleasure is mine.” (Makoto)

“Sorry for doing something dangerous a few moments ago. Since I wanted to see the person who was able to pass the Crimson Corridor, I suddenly did something as stupid as that against my better judgment. Even though you were approached to such a proximity, you didn’t seem to flinch at all. It has been a while since that happened. You are quite... splendid.” (Rokuya)

“Rokuya... Assassin Rokuya. Are you the real one? You are still alive? Is this a joke?”

“I thought Shougetsu-sama was able to make funny jokes, and yet... seriously, this joke’s not funny at all.”

The two bodyguards of Iroha-chan were dumbfounded.

By the way, Tomoe and Mio had taken their battle stances in an instant, so I command them with my hand and calm them down.

Because if he went through the trouble of speaking with us, that means he didn’t come here with the intentions of killing.

He is still an unknown factor though.

“Rokuya-san, was it?” (Makoto)

“Yeah. The remaining people here are your subordinates, and... the people that serve princess Iroha, right?” (Rokuya)

“That’s right. And so, is it okay to assume that you are not an enemy?” (Makoto)

I heard the word Assassin.

Lately, I have been attacked by those all the time.

Even I wouldn’t just assume that he is not related.

“Fumu, currently, the answer to that question would be that... I am not.” (Rokuya)

After a short silence, Rokuya-san faces me and answers in that fashion.

“...Then, what’s your business?” (Makoto)

“I was a bit interested in the objective of you guys. I heard that Raidou-kun’s objective is the 20th floor, more accurately speaking, the mercenary group. Is that true?” (Rokuya)

“...Yeah, that’s true. But that doesn’t answer my question.” (Makoto)

“Of course, I know. Let’s answer in order. About me, well, it would help me a lot if you just ask that from Shougetsu-kun later. In that way, the information would be more definite than if I were to say it myself after all.” (Rokuya)

...

It is more definite than him speaking himself?

What does that mean?

“Then, what’s your answer to Waka’s question-ja? Speak in the time we are being docile.” (Tomoe)

“That’s what I shall do, dragon samurai. The reason why I visited Raidou-kun... one of them is, just as I said before, my interest for the person that was able to pass the third floor’s Alt floor; the other one was to confirm his objective; and the last one, is to leave a message to him.” (Rokuya)

“Message, you say?” (Tomoe)

From the voice of Tomoe, I could tell that she was pretty angered towards Rokuya-san.

That was the same for Mio and everyone of Asora here.

Everyone from Iroha’s side seemed to feel some sort of reverence towards this person called Rokuya-san.

The reason why they haven’t participated at all in the conversation unless they are directly spoken to by Rokuya-san must be because of those emotions of theirs.

“Right now, my comrades and I are together with the mercenary group you set your objective on. By the way, the current leader of that mercenary group is my disciple you

see. Name's Vivi –not Bibi, okay? She gets pretty angry about that, so be careful. Also, she can be considered the direct mentor of Shougetsu-kun there.” (Rokuya)

?!

The leader of the mercenary group is the mentor of Shougetsu-san?!

Wouldn't that make her quite the old woman?!

Is she still in active duty?

Well, it seems like she is mindful about being called Bibi instead of Vivi -though I feel like they are both the same-, so at that time, let's be considerate about it.

My name is Makoto, but if we play with the words a bit, it can turn into Maggot <Magotto in english>, and I wouldn't like that either.

“Yes, Vivi-sama is my mentor. She is probably the person that possesses the most prominent skills in stalking and surprise attacks. A pro at raids.” (Shougetsu)

...

What an unpleasant explanation.

Yeah, I don't like it.

As a negotiation target, I don't have a good feeling about this.

Even before I meet her, I can say that.

When I look at Shougetsu-san, I could see that he was talking about his mentor with pride. There were no signs of doubt. He didn't feel anything negative from it.

Have no choice but to say that they are in a great teacher and student relationship.

“I see. Then, that message you have for me is...” (Makoto)

Could it be from that Vivi-san?

“No, it is not from her. It is from a different person that's at the same floor. It was a

favor from a comrade of mine, so I am fulfilling it since I was going outside anyways. Well, I decided to take it. As a result, I was able to meet an... outstanding talent like you.” (Rokuya)

“A different person...” (Makoto)

“I don’t know the details of his business or his plans, but according to him: ‘Going right now would be the worst timing for both sides. If you want to negotiate with Rosegarden, I want you to wait for a while.’” (Rokuya)

Worst timing huh.

I don’t know the current situation of the 20th floor, but it doesn’t sound like a message with evil-intent.

Wait, huh.

It depends how long.

If it’s to a certain extent, I think I can wait.

“That ‘wait’, how long is it exactly?” (Makoto)

“I wasn’t told the details. If it is okay with my subjective opinion, I can tell you though.” (Rokuya)

“I don’t mind.” (Makoto)

“I see. To me, it felt like he was talking about several years time.” (Rokuya)

Nope.

Can’t wait for so long.

And those are not the words of the mercenary group’s Vivi-san, but of someone else.

In other words, it was a warning from a third party.

They don’t know our circumstances either.

Then, there's plenty room to try and make a direct negotiation.

"...You have a face that's saying it is way too long." (Rokuya)

"Just as you say. We want to request the strength of Picnic Rosegarden as soon as possible." (Makoto)

"I don't understand. It might be rude to say this, but I don't think you guys need their strength at all. If it's a battle at the 20th floor, it is certainly true that they might be strong enough to be a match, but... everything aside from that, I don't think you guys would be falling behind them at all. You guys are stronger." (Rokuya)

"The ones who need the strength of the rumored numbered one strongest at defensive battles are not us but Tsige." (Makoto)

I decided to speak about our circumstances.

How to say it, it is because I felt like it was okay to speak about this to this Rokuya person in front of me.

"Tsige. The town of the people that challenge the World's Border huh. No, it might not be the case now though." (Rokuya)

"No, you are correct. Currently, Tsige is aiming for an independence from Aion and is fighting against two forces. Of course, in the advocacy of war, there's negotiations and verbal disputes, but the strengthening of defenses is an urgent matter, and it is the strength that Tsige currently lacks the most." (Makoto)

"...Are you saying that what you lack, Rosegarden can fill it?" (Rokuya)

The attitude of Rokuya-san was still skeptical.

The Kuzunoha Company and Picnic Rosegarden.

Looking at both as fighting forces and knowing them to a certain extent, it seems like he sees us as quite the power.

"We are thinking about being only a temporary help to Tsige." (Makoto)

"A mercenary group that's hired with money is the very definition of temporary, you

know?" (Rokuya)

"But this will definitely become the example for many of the combatants of Tsige, and I think they will become an existence that will provide many lessons to them."
(Makoto)

"...Is that the meaning of your 'temporary'?" (Rokuya)

"...Yes. I –the Kuzunoha Company is being called abnormal and monsters by a lot of people after all." (Makoto)

"Kuku!! Abnormal and monsters huh! That's quite unfortunate. You guys must be relied upon by their own convenience quite a lot then." (Rokuya)

The calm face of Rokuya-san changed to a broad smile in an instant.

It was short, but it was to the point that he even laughed.

"I don't really mind being relied on. As long as we are there, that is. Tsige has been taking care of us as well after all." (Makoto)

"...Hoh. If you don't think of it as a pain or troublesome, then, why is it not okay for you guys to help them out?" (Rokuya)

"We are being viewed as monsters by a lot of people, that's why no one would want to learn from people like that. The word monster itself is a word that arbitrarily places the person as different kind of existences from themselves. A good habit." (Makoto)

"..."

"That wouldn't do. That's why I want Tsige to be able to protect itself even after the independence. For that sake, I want to obtain the seed for it. If it's them who have survived, protected till the end, and have worked as an organization, I think they will be able to become that seed. Even if the day that we have to leave Tsige arrives, I would be able to have peace of mind." (Makoto)

"...Truly... interesting. Fumu. Now that I have heard this, the story changes. I have already mentioned this 'worst situation', and if Vivi and the others are handed down to Tsige, that would be great." (Rokuya)

Hearing my words, the complexion of Rokuya-san changed, and while muttering his thoughts, he moves left and right.

However, that figure of his had no openings.

He is a person that's always ready for battle.

"If you were with the intentions of having an excursion, I would have had you leave, but it seems like it was completely different. You have obtained an official entrance permission from the Empress, and your power... your way of thinking... yeah, nice!" (Rokuya)

"Eh? Nice?" (Makoto)

It is a word I wasn't really expecting.

"Later, I want you to show me how abnormal you are, how much of a monster you guys are. If you are able to do that, I will become your intermediary. Saying it myself is questionable, but I can become a reliable ally, you know. Vivi is a wei—bothersome girl, but I -her master- will be your ally, so that single point alone would be an advantage. You can understand that, right?" (Rokuya)

It is not certain that she is a person that respects her mentor though. Things like the Confucianism had their questionable parts too after all.

I look at Shougetsu-san.

If it's him who knows her directly, he should be able to serve as a measurement.

The result of the eye contact was a serious nod in return.

Okay, let's accept.

"It is a grateful proposal. Then, is it okay to fight you now? Or do you have some sort of challenge in mind?" (Makoto)

"Hahaha. I am an assassin, you know? Even if I were to fight against this many powerhouses up front, it is clear that I will be defeated midway. It is the latter. I want you to reach the 10th floor by tomorrow. You can, right? You have enough power to be called a monster after all." (Rokuya)

“With Alt floors and all?” (Makoto)

“...Haha, right. There were those. Understood. I will turn those off. No need to worry.”
(Rokuya)

“Off?!” (Makoto)

“If it’s something like that, there’s no problem in doing it temporarily. The one who wanted me to leave a message to you was the designer of Yaso-Katsui’s grand labyrinth after all. Him being there means that the last fail-safe has activated, in other words, it is a crisis for the grand labyrinth, but to tell you the truth, I don’t really feel that negative about it though. That extreme shut-in can be a pretty good talk when you speak with him personally. Seriously.” (Rokuya)

“I see... eh?” (Makoto)

The designer of the grand labyrinth?!

I don’t really want to meet him though?!

I don’t think I can have a good conversation with someone that has been a shut-in deep underground since forever(most likely).

Wait, Rokuya-san is not here anymore.

S-Since when?

I didn’t notice at all again.

He nonchalantly said something dangerous like ‘crisis for the grand dungeon’.

I only have a bad feeling about this.

“...What a scary one-ja na. Depending on the situation, he can seal our thought transmission, infiltrate in anyone’s room without the person noticing, and disappear. Looks like this won’t end in simple sightseeing. Well, Waka, he really got us there.”
(Tomoe)

Tomoe, who doesn’t really seem like she actually feels that way, only speaks heavily on her opening statement.

Moreover, the latter half sounded like she was having a hell lot of fun.

“Shougetsu, speak in detail about that person. Immediately, without hiding anything, and make it brief. Begin.” (Mio)

Mio doesn't seem to be in a good mood.

Looks like she doesn't see Rokuya-san in a favorable light.

This is of no importance, but I feel like saying everything without hiding anything while being brief about it is quite the difficult request.

Moreover, no questions asked.

“Ah, yes. Of course I will speak about what I know. Rokuya-sama seemed to be welcoming it after all.” (Shougetsu)

“I said *brief*!!” (Mio)

So strict.

It seems she won't accept any extra talk.

However, in the talk of Shougetsu-san that he began after being urged by Mio, there was something... Shougecking—I mean, shocking in it.

“Rokuya-sama is one of the people called the ‘Adventurers of Origin’. It seems like, in a long past, there were legends at every country about it, but now, most of those stories were not lost and still mostly remain at only the major power Lorel. Now then, I will be speaking of the legends and about my experience. Everything I know of.” (Shougetsu)

Chapter 261

Born question, born hatred

Before Lorel existed as an union, there was a guild called 'Apple' that had unparalleled power in this land.

Whether this is true or false, this existence called Apple that was made up of a few elites was supposedly the model for the Adventurer Guild.

This part is probably the result of a mixture of various stories.

The Adventurer Guild is something that was created by Root, and the origin of it was his first husband.

If I remember correctly, it was created when he was involved with Elysion?

...Well, that's only supposing Root isn't lying at all.

In his case, he probably has a massive amount of truths he hasn't spoken about, so I can't trust him at all.

But if we base trust on that, who knows how much I can actually trust Shougetsu-san about what he is saying of Apple and Rokuya-san.

After all, the 'adventurers of origin' are words that denote the members of Apple. Even if you have met with people that have the same name, it is hard to believe that they are the same people.

In terms of how it feels, it would be like... on the same level as Momotaro is to japanese people.

Aznoval, Rokuya, Ginebia, Haku Mokuren, Hitsuna; it was formed with around 10 people, and their names are absurdly popular.

I heard there's a lot of epics and anecdotes of them.

I was told that Rokuya-san has left numerous stories of being a chivalrous thief as an assassin.

“It is incredibly hard to believe that the said person is still alive though...” (Tomoe)

Tomoe’s comment is natural.

Hyumans don’t live that long.

When you reach a longevity on the level of Root, it is already to the point that you would question if they are immortal.

“Even if you tell me that he had the same age and appearance as the time when this Shougetsu-san over here received his training, its reliability is weak-desu wa.” (Mio)

Seems like the perception of Mio didn’t pick up much.

That’s true.

It would be more believable if I was told that the name Rokuya was being inherited every generation.

“Haku Mokuren and Ginebia...” (Iroha)

Iroha-chan seems to be groaning.

Looks like what Shougetsu-san said just now wasn’t something he has told her before.

Apparently, she was busy with politics and learning things.

Simply means that nobles have it hard in their own way.

Having a fiance at her age is already amazing.

Even though she is at the age where a primary schooler knapsack would still suit her.

“Apple huh. Lorel really is a country that has a lot of stories that don’t circulate to other countries.” (Makoto)

The Wise are the model example, but aside from that, I feel like this country is pretty

secretive towards other countries.

Once you enter, the talks about it can be easily picked up, so I feel like it is a bit different from being secretive though.

Apple, the adventurers of origin, and then, there's the reverence towards a dragon that's not Doma, but one that's name is Futsu.

It is truly a mysterious citizen nature.

"I truly have not met Rokuya-sama for several decades, but he said to go down till the 10th floor by tomorrow. It seems like his absurdities are still going strong... no, it has grown stronger with time. Hm, but his appearance was the same as in the past." (Shougetsu)

Shougetsu-san has been looking nostalgic since a while ago as he reminisced Rokuya's image.

As long as I am not kidnapped by Alt floors, we can reach the 10th floor by tomorrow.

That's not a big deal, and if that's his challenge, it overlaps with our original objective anyways.

Absolutely no problems at all.

"Hokuto, can you construct a route that reaches till the 10th floor?" (Makoto)

I once again confirm with Hokuto who has been the number one person looking after the map.

And in reality, the 10th floor must have several different types as well, and there would be no point if we can't go lower than the 10th floor after that.

In other words, it would be best if it is a 10th floor that has good prospects of continuing onto the 20th floor.

"Yeah, there's no problems. That grand labyrinth has a troublesome structure where the number of teleport formations and the amount of types in that floor increase the lower you go and it becomes more complex as well, but... there's a certain tendency it inclines to that can be used as reference." (Hokuto)

The first floor, Entrance, was crazy spacious place, but according to the Arke's lecture on the labyrinth that even I can understand, the amount of floor types from the 2nd floor on increase steadily.

It is certainly true that if I look at Garden and the Alt floor that followed after, Entrance felt more spacious.

"Continue." (Makoto)

"Yes, Waka-sama. Putting it plain, the higher the floor's difficulty, the higher the possibilities of that floor to continue lower. If we take into consideration the words of that Rokuya person, it would be more likely to throw us into the Alt floors if we were to pass those said floors fast." (Hokuto)

I see.

The more difficult the floor is the more likely it is that it will lead to lower levels.

Since we have to reach the 10th floor in one day, I thought that being abducted by the Alt floors would be pretty troublesome so I enquired about it, but... Rokuya-san instantly said he would turn them off.

With those words into consideration, Hokuto had deduced the concrete conditions of being thrown into an Alt floor.

Yeah, I didn't read it that far in.

It seems like this time around we will be able to ignore them, so let's just be happy about it.

I think that's fine, yeah.

"Making a comparison of difficulties of each floor types, as long as you go down the most dangerous floor marked in the map, you will be able to definitely find the teleport formation for the next most dangerous floor. Since we haven't tested it yet, it will stay as a hypothesis, but I think it is plenty worth to try in tomorrow's plan." (Hokuto)

"Right. Then you are saying that we can continue on in the same route as today, and as long as we choose the most dangerous ones, it would be less likely to reach a dead end. What do you think, Tomoe, Mio? I am in favor of Hokuto's proposal." (Makoto)

“If it’s something that Waka has decided on, there’s no objections.” (Tomoe)

“Same here. If Hokuto has proved himself useful, it is an honor-desu wa.” (Mio)

“That’s great.” (Makoto)

From tomorrow on, there’s no worries of ending up alone, and we have established a route already, so I feel like we can advance to the 10th floor.

...No, I should head for even higher heights instead of being satisfied with only that.

The decision of which ones are the most dangerous floors can be done by Tomoe, Mio, and I.

We will probably experience several dead ends even with that.

There’s no need to waste time.

If possible, I want to return before an urgent message comes from Tsige after all.

“Hm? What’s wrong, Iroha-chan?” (Makoto)

I look at Iroha-chan who nervously lifted her hand.

“I probably have met two of those Adventurers of Origin-desu.” (Iroha)

“...Eh?”

“When I was betrayed by the adventurers I left together from town, I was saved by this person with a dancer-looking outfit named Haku Mokuren and a woman with a foreign country’s priest outfit named Ginebia.” (Iroha)

“...Princess... By the way, do you remember any other outward traits of those two aside from that?” (Yuduki)

Yuduki-san who has been silent up until now, opened her eyes wide when she heard the words of Iroha-chan, and asks her more about their outward appearance.

A dancer and a priest.

Rokuya-san was an assassin.

I wonder what kind of party were the Adventurers of Origin.

“The two of them have silver hair; Haku-san is cheerful and refreshing, but a graceful woman. Ginebia-san is prudent, composed, and a kind woman. Both of them looked like they got along incredibly well, and they called each other partner. Both were adult women.” (Iroha)

A dancer and a priest calling each other partners.

It is a grouping I wouldn't be able to picture well.

Leaving aside the girl called Ginebia, I feel like the cheerful and refreshing part of Haku doesn't coexist well with the trait of being graceful.

“I have not met those two, but it is certainly true that their traits are the same as the ones from the Ginebia-sama and the Haku Mokuren-sama from stories.” (Shougetsu)

“Yeah, also... it matches too well with the Haku Mokuren-sama and Ginebia-sama that saved my homeland 18 years ago.” (Yuduki)

“To think that the princess had met with them, moreover, you were saved by them.” (Shougetsu)

Shougetsu-san and Yuduki-san seem to be pondering something.

However, a great amount of question marks were floating over my head.

I was thinking: ‘Isn't 18 years ago pretty recent?’.

They were talking about it as if that were something normal, and no one is retorting to that. What's going on?

Is it really a succession of names?

“Uhm, I don't understand how people that appear in fairy tales are able to appear 18 years ago though.” (Makoto)

I go ahead and ask.

“Ah, right. I haven’t spoken everything about that topic yet. To tell you the truth, the people of Apple continue to appear every now and then in Lorel’s history. Always, even in the present day.” (Shougetsu)

“They continue appearing in history? Always?” (Makoto)

“There hasn’t been any records these decade, but it is just as said. I have not spoken much about it to others and it isn’t an incident that has much to do with history, but the most recent records of Rokuya-sama is probably when I was trained by Rokuya-sama around 50 years ago.” (Shougetsu)

“...”

I don’t understand even more.

Are they really immortal?

“Sometimes, when there’s some sort of crisis, they declare their names as people of Apple and cooperate in resolving the matter without having any feelings of self-interest and once again leave. For some reason, it is only in this country. It is one of the mysteries in Lorel.” (Shougetsu)

“And you are saying their names and appearances are always the same?” (Makoto)

Everyone from the Lorel group nod except for Iroha-chan.

They don’t show any signs of joking. Instead, I sense a feeling that’s close to worship from them.

Unbelievable.

Isn’t this already in the boundaries of horror?

“What a strange story-ja no. And they are calling themselves the ‘Adventurers of Origin’?” (Tomoe)

“No, that’s not it, Tomoe-dono. They don’t call themselves in that way. It is just that, from the information we have of them, we decided on calling them that way on our own volition.” (Shougetsu)

“...What do you mean by that-ja?” (Tomoe)

“For example; the leader of Apple, Aznoval-sama, was a former swordsman; Rokuya-sama who you met not that long ago, was a former thief; the dancer Haku Mokuren-sama was a former archer; Ginebia-sama was a former apprentice priest; the blacksmith Black Smith had a history of being a merchant in the past.” (Shougetsu)

“Fumu, and?” (Tomoe)

“The present jobs of the adventurers, it is said that the basic form of those jobs and the ideas of those were taken as a reference from them, and in truth, that’s exactly how it is... and there’s not a single one of the Apple people affiliated with the adventurer guild.” (Shougetsu)

“...Hoh. It is true that it is interesting... but that’s on the same level as saying ‘which one was first, the chicken or the egg?’ kind of thing, isn’t it?” (Tomoe)

“Probably. However, leaving aside things like a swordsman to a knight, and an ascetic practitioner into a priest; why is it that a thief grows into being an assassin, and why is it that an archer opens the path to being a dancer? Why is it that you can’t get the smithing skills unless you are a merchant? We consider that the adventurer guild used the brave people of Apple as a cornerstone.” (Shougetsu)

“...I see. Hearing that, it can serve as a decent explanation, and it would be pointless to hear all of it. But... it might be possible they used them as reference. The Adventurer Guild is not something that Root would be able to create from the memories of only one person after all. And it is not like he can do the same things as me anyways.” (Tomoe)

Tomoe does a short sigh and begins thinking about something else, she turns her view away from Shougetsu-san.

Shougetsu-san looked like he wanted to continue speaking, and I ended up locking eyes with him.

Well, it seems to be interesting, so let’s listen for a bit more.

“At present, in order to become a holy knight, you can’t simply be registered in the adventurer guild and turn from a swordsman into a knight, you also have to pile up a certain amount of religious experience. It would be too late by the time you are a

knight, and conversely, if a priest that has gathered enough religious experience tries to learn the way of the sword, they wouldn't be able to become holy knights. This is because the job branching alignments are different. That's what they have told us." (Shougetsu)

"The job branching..." (Makoto)

I remember the online games I played at Japan.

Like high ranked jobs and branching jobs.

It is truly that way of thinking.

Swordsman to knight or holy knight; ascetic apprentice to monk or priest.

In those cases, no matter how much an ascetic apprentice learns the sword, that person won't be able to become a holy knight.

They wouldn't be able to equip a sword to begin with.

But in reality, you should have the freedom to decide if you want to begin learning the sword or endeavour in religion. Whichever the origin, you should be able to become a holy knight. That's what I think.

But that's not the case in this world, moreover, an organization called Apple gave an explanation with words like 'job branching', and in truth, there's a strange one way path in the jobs.

And then, there's the human-loving Root.

...

Is that how it is?

"But well. Haku Mokuren is called a dancer, but her job is actually Muse Dancer; it is a job that the adventurer guild has not been able to confirm, an unknown job. Ginebia-sama's job is similar in that sense, its name is Over Mash; the other members are also the same, and are said to possess incredible power." (Shougetsu)

Yeah, it is true that I have never heard about those.

Or more like, Ginebia-san is a priest, right?

Her job doesn't give me the image of praying though. Must be my imagination.

Iroha-chan did say that she is composed and kind after all.

"In that case, the abnormal presence of that Rokuya person, I should consider it a special skill? That technique that was on the level of changing perception itself. It was on a level I wanted to make it my own though." (Mio)

Mio talks about that stealth of Rokuya-san.

Don't joke around.

Please let it be a super special rare unique skill.

An ultimate attack would be perfect.

With only the imitation of Reft's reflect ability, Shiki and Tamaki are already in tears.

"Okay! Anyways, I will be counting on everyone to work hard in the grand labyrinth tomorrow! And so, I won't be able to take much care of you guys, so Shougetsu-san's group, be careful. The whole town reeks of danger after all." (Makoto)

"I will keep it to just the minimum information gathering. It is embarrassing to say, but we still haven't decided on our plan yet." (Shougetsu)

"Let's at least be grateful that the hotel is safe." (Makoto)

"That's true."

"Then, time to sleep—" (Makoto)

"It is obviously fine for us to be first to the bath, right Shougetsu?" (Tomoe)

Eh?

This pattern again?

"W-Well, of course. We are in your care after all." (Shougetsu)

“Good. Then, Waka.” (Tomoe)

“Let’s go, Waka-sama. We will be missing Iroha, so... Shii, you come. I will allow it.”
(Mio)

Huh?

“M-M-M-Me?!” (Shii)

Being suddenly thrown that, Shii fell into panick.

And I raised the white flag.

We two, who were being carried by Tomoe and Mio, were taken to the bath.

But Shii, if it were Eris who you respect so much, she would say ‘Yes, sir!’ without a single shred of hesitation.

As I thought, your roots are more similar to those of Akua.



“That face... did it not work, Rokuya-san?”

“Sorry there! He was an interesting guy, you know? You definitely gotta meet him! I have turned the Alt floors off for a few days, so take care of that, okay?!” (Rokuya)

“O-Off. No well, I’m okay with that though. Trying to seriously manage them is a pain anyways.”

20th floor of the grand labyrinth.

For the people living there, this place has been called Rosegarden.

First floor Entrance, tenth floor Palace, and the twentieth floor Rosegarden.

These floors are floors that only have one type.

The light is taken in from the outside with a special method, so those floors are bright.

By utilizing this, you can do farming and also hunting.

That's right. Rosegarden has no need for economic activity, it is completely self-sufficient.

If you wanted to, you would be able to continue living without influencing the world at all.

At a section of it, at the deep parts of the residential area, Rokuya was talking with someone.

"No well, I also think it is interesting. It has been a while since that has happened. But you know, at this time... it is just..."

"Even though he is a hyuman, he possesses power that surpasses that of humans. A pure breed Elf, a Superior Dragon and the Black Calamity disguised as hyumans, a child of the calamity, Iori's favorite sword, and an Elder Dwarf. On top of that, one princess of Kannaoui." (Rokuya)

"...Is this the feeling of a super big event?"

"I have stopped joking about those kind of things, but... well, in the past, I would have said that. The people above ground are in that state after all." (Rokuya)

"More than half of that is because of the hero, right? If that's the case, I am somewhat responsible for it, so I kind of want to do something about it though."

The tone of the man that was talking about his connection with the hero was somewhat heavy.

"...What's with that tone?" (Rokuya)

"If he is neutral, I would want to meet him, seriously. My standing right now is a bit complicated. Putting it plainly, if I were to meet Raidou, there's one girl who would snap."

"...I have not heard anything about that though." (Rokuya)

Rokuya narrows his eyes at the words of the man.

From what Rokuya knows, the Kuzunoha Company and their employees have no bad connections with the members here.

“Right. It seems like the habitual actions of Raidou are not that good. Just like me.”

“It didn’t look that way to me.” (Rokuya)

“Do you know Pione from Rosegarden?”

“If I remember correctly, I spoke with her a few times. She was a diligent girl.” (Rokuya)

Rokuya digs out the memory of a girl.

He met her recently; a bright, eager about everything, and an adventurer that has worked hard.

She entered the mercenary group, and has begun fitting into the residents of the 20th floor.

His impression of her was good.

“Yeah, her reputation around was good as well. Her ability was also decent. That girl’s close friend... got her head crushed by Raidou. Not that long ago.”

“...Oh. And that has been known by this Pione girl?” (Rokuya)

“That’s right. Pione herself brought that girl here, and asked me to release the charm of the Empire’s hero from her. And yet... she escaped in the middle together with her companions. The event with Raidou happened while Pione was in the middle of searching for them.”

“...”

“Aside from the person herself, her other two companions were killed in an instant as well. Ah, the other two weren’t close enough to be called friends, they were more like acquaintances. Right now, Pione is...”

“Are you saying, not only will they not talk, they will end up fighting?” (Rokuya)

“I won’t ask for the assistance of the people of Apple, and I also don’t have the

authority for that anyways. It will probably turn out as you say. We are at home here and the Marikosans have increased a lot in numbers. On top of that, Picnic Rosegarden and I will be meeting the enemy. I am sorry for them but... we won't lose."

"Are you and the Marikosans going to mobilize as well?" (Rokuya)

"When I was resting here, Pione took care of me after all. I am sorry for Raidou, but I will be taking her side."

The words were said lightly, but it didn't sound like a joke.

Even after hearing the battle force that Raidou possesses, he declared that he will be opposing Raidou.

"This must be what people call 'Fate.'" (Rokuya)

"It might be exactly that. If I didn't know her, this wouldn't have happened."

"...But this is interesting!" (Rokuya)

"Hah?"

"Wouldn't that mean I will be able to see something incredibly interesting?! I don't know about the others, but I will... right, let's take the disadvantageous side. Hahaha!" (Rokuya)

"You say that with such ease."

"I have been in worse situations than these after all. Also, I know about you, Raidou, and Vivi. Well, I don't know much about Raidou though. But I can somewhat tell, you know. That things will settle somewhat harmoniously." (Rokuya)

"You are saying things similar to Azu-san. Could it be, you have been influenced by that person? I have my hands full with just one, so please spare me more."

"Hahahaha!! You really have your way with words huh. But I feel the same way!" (Rokuya)

A conversation that Raidou wouldn't find amusing at all was being exchanged at the deepest parts of the grand labyrinth.

He will probably only notice that he was caught in an extra-large trap by the time he meets with his negotiation target who has already hardened their forces to attack.

The future of the Kusunoha Company's grand labyrinth exploration is still unclear.

Chapter 262

Danger is exactly one of the certain answers

-First floor, Entrance.

The place where all the divergences begin, and even though it is the starting place, it is also an important place that heavily influences the difficulty of the next floors.

As always, the venue is like a festival.

The variety of food is crazy, the number of people is also crazy.

If we are talking about a place in the grand labyrinth of Yaso-Katsui where the difficulty level is low and has a lot of tourists, it would be this place.

It is actually to the point that any mamono that appears is pitiful.

-Second floor, Garden.

Each one of the types are not as wide as Entrance, but looking around it, it felt like a space that resembled the outside.

The mamonos that appear and the terrain have their own traits, and the width of the difficulty degrees is incredibly wide.

The number one lowest difficulty is the introductory floor, its name is also pretty easy to understand: Beginner Garden.

In our second day, we left the guiding to Hokuto and the others, and the place we ran past through was the same as the day before, Drake Garden.

Well, if I had to put it in words, it would be like a nest of dragons.

-Third floor, Path.

This place is narrow.

But this floor is practically a highway, where avoiding battle itself is difficult.

The number of encounters increase and the exhaustion grows drastic as well, so they normally have the cooperation of several parties and the sharing of exp.

The denominator gets bigger, so the amount of deaths here is obviously a lot higher than in the previous floor, and it seems to be the first wall that the beginners hit.

According to the information of Hokuto, if you enter this floor from the Beginner Garden, this third floor will be the Beginner Path and becomes a dead end.

Because of the Alt floor, this was my first time in this place, but for Tomoe and the others, this would be their second time here. We passed through the floor called Tribe Path.

It was a straight path with a number of halls; a monotonous floor. At the straight parts, it was a continuous battle with weak mobs, and at the hall parts, you would fight with a boss.

-Fourth floor, Valley.

Just as the name states, a valley. It is a floor that you have to advance through the bottom of a valley, and the field of vision is slightly dark.

The extent of actions you can take are limited like in Path, just that the enemies and traps were coming from all directions.

It was an attack from the sky.

It was mainly mamonos that have wings, and at times, there would be worm type mamonos coming for surprise attacks. It was also mainly traps falling onto us. That's what I thought, but at the end, the valley itself was narrowing on us and that had quite the impact.

When I heard the name of the floor was Negligee Valley, I can't deny I wasn't interested in it.

By the way, there was no pink anywhere, and the whole floor itself had some sort of debuff effect that reduces all your abilities.

...Just what part of it is negligee.

-Fifth floor, Maze.

This was exactly a dungeon.

A maze.

It was a depressing floor, but the pathway and ceiling was pretty wide, so there wasn't a feeling of confinement. That part alone was a saving.

Also, Hokuto properly constructed a route to the next floor, so we simply had to follow him and didn't get lost which played a big part in making me feel better.

There were armed goblins and Orcs, Lizardmen and Beast type mamonos appearing here, and the moment they found us, they would attack us with all they had, which made this floor a pretty hostile floor.

The floor's named Sword Maze, so there weren't many with blunt weapons.

The Boss-like guy was also a big sword.

A sword that's floating in the air and swinging at you as if dancing is already close to being a horror movie.

-Sixth floor, Hill.

It wasn't a hill at all. This is already at the level of a mountain.

I felt like they should change the name to Mountain.

We endlessly climb the unpaved path that was leveled by the steps of previous visitors while surrounded by overgrown trees.

We were being constantly attacked by wriggly mamonos that hide their presence and go for surprise attacks.

Only the Forest Oni, Shii, was more elated than normal in the middle of this arbour space as she spearheads, or more like, bats her way through the mamonos, turning them into minced meat.

Hide Hide Hill.

Just like the name states, it is a floor where it is hard to grasp the presence of the enemies, and that must be why the Hide is repeated twice. It is an important part after all.

But Shii's compatibility with it was extraordinary.

For a Forest Oni that can forcefully gather information from the trees, even when the beasts try to hide their presence, it was totally visible in her eyes, or so it seems.

And so, tragedy unfolded upon them.

Now that I think about it, what did Gonzou experience in the fifth and sixth floor that made him feel despair?

It was also the same with the other floors we passed, I didn't really understand that feeling of his.

-Seventh Floor, Hole.

A floor where if you didn't buy a map, gathered information beforehand, it would partially destroy your party or even wipe them out.

Well, after reaching this far, there shouldn't be that many people who are like that.

The moment you enter, there's a big pitfall.

Nothing to grab onto, there's not even a portal.

You simply fall.

And you get attacked by flying mamonos.

If you don't control your fall in some sort of way, you can have luck in passing the mamonos and then go *splat* at the end of the fall.

There's no device floating around or placed at the walls that can assist you with that either.

Going by the information of the map, there's practically no Holes where you can find gimmicks that can make you float or scaffolds you can hold onto.

This Great Hole is a place where you totally have to manage on your own.

In my opinion, I feel like it would be a lot scarier to make someone jump on their own will by baiting them with fake scaffolds, compared to having them fall no questions asked.

At any rate, there's not much problems on our side.

And so, aside from falling into a big hole, there's nothing special to mention, and we all safely landed.

This time around, it did feel like a big wall you would hit -in a psychological sense.

-Eighth floor, Lake.

Location, a lake.

In other words, the romance of explorers.

I accept all objections you may have towards this statement.

This is a place that made me understand once again that we are deep underground. Ground and rocks in their natural splendor, and the bedrock ceiling that gave out a complete feeling of enclosed.

In that kind of space, the inside of the lake was releasing a gentle light like that of fireflies.

If we look at the whole space itself, it is on the level of being dim, and definitely not a light that you can define as dazzling.

But what was spreading from the lake was giving off a strong sense of presence.

There were a good amount of rocks, big enough for a person to jump on, floating on the lake.

Those were not the top parts of stone pillars, they were floating rocks.

If we take into account all the equipment, Shii, who is the heaviest in the party with weapon and all, would not sink. That's how much buoyancy it had.

The runner-ups Beren and Hokuto are obviously fine as well.

Just that, because of the size, it is hard to have two people jump on the same rock.

The portal is as always in a place close to the starting location, and at the center of the lake, there's a teleport formation leading to the next floor.

In these points, this is a simple floor.

It is easy to understand what you need to do.

Must mean that you need to trail the floating rocks and arrive at the center to continue on.

The mamonos were all aquatic type that live in the lake.

There were no attacks at land.

Leaving aside their presence, the mamonos that were jumping to the water surface as if aiming for flying bugs, their bodies were practically transparent.

Is it some sort of camouflage?

With that bad footing, and our actions limited a bit, handling the mamonos was quite the work. Moreover, at the middle of the stage, there were floating rocks that actually sunk the moment you jump on them, and you can't tell them apart from the others.

Tomoe wanted to go a lot deeper in one fell swoop, so she made a big jump, but the foothold couldn't stand it and Tomoe ended up dripping wet.

That probably pissed off Tomoe, she dove inside the lake and... after that, the underwater attacks had stopped completely.

Well, I can sympathize with that sentiment of hers, this is a floor that really stresses you out.

Clay Doll Lake.

If there's a next time, let's jump towards a correct foothold and finish it at once.

-Ninth floor, Gate.

In other words, a warping floor.

In this one as well, if you know the correct answer, the pathing is manageable.

Really have to be grateful towards the pioneers that cleared this place.

...Like, seriously.

This continuous warping that would make anyone go crazy, I don't have the intentions of testing every single one of them.

For some reason, Hokuto looked disappointed, but I completely ignore that.

The rooms aren't big by any means, and there's 4 teleport formations at the rooms, and each room isn't much different between each other.

It seems like a switch is what opens the door to the next area.

Name's Cube Gate, it is a simple floor, but that's exactly what makes it easy to get lost at and a troublesome place. Moreover, there's quite a lot of rooms where mamonos lie in wait, and after teleporting, it normally ends up in an instant fight.

It seems like Mio didn't find this place amusing. The mamonos that were waiting in ambush were mostly used to vent her stress.

After several tens of times, we found a corridor we haven't seen before, and when I saw that, I sighed in relief.

-Tenth floor, Palace.

This place's portal was filled with a number of teleport formations incomparable to the floors before.

It was an impressive sight.

It is not on the level of Entrance, but there were a number of groups divided and doing

talks and discussions at the portal.

What is going on?

As we got closer, all the people gathered there turned towards our direction at once, and I felt somewhat uncomfortable by it.

This is... it felt like the eyes of someone that was looking at something weird.

The image of the floor is also not like a dungeon at all.

No well, there have been floors like that before, but this place feels somewhat different.

That's right, we are indoors, and it is pretty luxurious.

If it is to take it relax, then this place is certainly good enough for people to gather.

Since these people were able to come all the way from the 10th floor, that must mean they have a decent amount of experience, so... they may have more useful information than in Entrance.

We register at the Portal as per usual.

And as per usual, the Obelisk emits a red light in return.

It is the sign that the registration was completed.

Okay, with this, we will be able to come to the tenth floor whenever we want.

We have also safely finished the task of Rokuya-san.

Everyone is... it doesn't seem like they are that tired, but with information gathering in mind as well, it should be okay to take a rest here.

It is already noon after all.

It should be a good time to have lunch.

"Welcome to the communal 10th floor, Palace. It is been awhile since I have seen new

faces here. Nice to meet you.”

From within the crowd of people that were looking at us, one of them welcomes us and extends his right hand for a handshake.

Ah I see, it was because it’s been awhile since new faces showed up huh.

I can understand that.

Since they know everyone’s faces here, it is as expected, not a place that prospers much in change.

Leaving aside when someone dies, it is rarer to have people increase huh.

Also, the word communal 10th floor and this many people at the vicinities of the portal, could it be...

I respond to the extended hand of the man and exchange a handshake with him.

At the same time, I send a gaze at Hokuto and he nodded.

In other words, this Palace is a place where no matter what route you take in the previous floor, you will always end up here.

That’s why this is a floor where people gather from every route.

“Nice to meet you. I am the representative of the Kuzunoha Company, name’s Raidou. My companions are all employees, and they are: Tomoe, Mio, Beren, Hokuto, and Shii. It took us time, but we were somehow able to arrive here. Nice to meet you as well.”
(Makoto)

“Company? No, that doesn’t matter, you made it all the way here, so you must have actual skills. If you came all the way here in order to do business...”

“No, they don’t have those intentions. Right, Raidou-kun?”

Right after I began the conversation with the man that seemed to have the strongest standing within these adventurers, a person that came from the crowd of people who opened the way for that person to pass, cut into the conversation.

It is a voice I am familiar with.

It is him.

“That’s right. Today I didn’t come here to do business. I didn’t expect you to be waiting for me here, Rokuya-san.” (Makoto)

“...Rokuya?! The one from Apple? You must be kidding, right? He looks exactly the same as the picture I saw when I was a kid. Is he the real deal?”

From what I see, the man that was looking at Rokuya-san with wide open eyes is at least 40 years old.

Rokuya-san’s outward appearance seriously hasn’t changed at all.

Because of Rokuya-san’s arrival, the surroundings get even more rowdy.

“Nah, I arrived just now. I was thinking about coming here early and notify the people here of you guys. It was completely out of my expectations that you would be able to clear all in half a day. Truly abnormal beings, monsters.” (Rokuya)

Rokuya-san seemed like he didn’t care about anyone aside from us as he continues our conversation.

“Haha...” (Makoto)

“It is certainly true that with that level, not only would it be hard for normal adventurers, even the seasoned adventurers that challenge the World’s Border would find it hard to learn from you guys. Even if you were to slowly guide them, instead of them having a strong spirit to learn and reach the level, it would most likely damage them. I see, I see. Now I understand.” (Rokuya)

“...”

For a second there, a light of pity showed in the eyes of Rokuya-san. And on top of that... a small dose of sympathy?

As expected, it is hard to read the emotions of the mild smile of Rokuya-san.

“Now then, you being here is proof enough that you have passed the task, but can you

tell me about the floors you passed to reach here? Just as reference.” (Rokuya)

“Understood. Drake Garden, Tribe Path, Negligee Valley, Sword Maze, Hide Hide Hill, Great Hole, Clay Doll Lake, and Cube Gate.” (Makoto)

The surrounding noise gets lower and lower as I tell Rokuya-san the floor names.

“...Was the one who set up this route you, Raidou?” (Rokuya)

“No, it was Hokuto.” (Makoto)

“I see. Was there some sort of *meaning* when he set it up? Ah, I am not talking about *thread*, okay?” (Rokuya) <The two words are said as Ito, but are written differently.>

Hokuto looks at me to confirm if it is okay for him to talk.

I silently nod.

We have already finished our task and can obtain his cooperation.

I don’t think there’s any problem.

But, that Rokuya-san... was he indirectly telling us that he knows Hokuto is an Arke?

How scary.

Even at his first meeting with Tomoe, it seemed like he already knew her identity.

“...I noticed that, in this dungeon, the higher the floor’s difficulty, the higher the possibility of that floor leading to lower ones. Of course, we could have moved through the floors that are not as dangerous, but it is more certain it connects to the next one the higher the danger; in that case, if it’s Waka-sama and us, going through those would be the shortest and best option, that’s all.” (Hokuto)

“So that’s why huh. There were also routes where the main theme is solving riddles and avoiding traps though. Is that a weak point of your group? More than half of the people here arrived here through those kind of routes, you know?” (Rokuya)

Rokuya-san continues on the answer of Hokuto as if he was having fun.

“It is not like it is a weak point of us. But if we were to choose those routes, the amount of times we have to go back and forth is too much; a waste of time. For example, passing four types of second floors and gathering slates in order to challenge a special third floor, and after that, you would have to clear four types of seventh floors as well. In that fashion, we would have to do things like that more than 10 times before arriving here. The amount of floors we would have to pass would be too much. If it’s the route I set on, we would only need to advance and pass the floor once. If we were to choose the route you talk about, it would have been practically impossible to arrive here in 1 day time.” (Hokuto)

“...Well, I am speechless. It was a perfect answer. That is one of the ways to completely clear this labyrinth of Yaso-Maga—I mean, Yaso-Katsui. It seems like you guys will be able to safely arrive at the 20th floor without the need of our advice.” (Rokuya)

Hokuto answered discouraged knowing that he was being tested by Rokuya.

There’s no real problem in that, so I didn’t say anything.

“Well then, Rokuya-san, Just as you promised last night, you will be our ally at the time of the negotiations, right?” (Makoto)

I confirm just in case.

“Of course, I’m okay with that. I will keep my promise. But you see, after our last meeting, I learned about the details of the problem, and I gotta say... this will be tough. Of course, at the *negotiation*, I will be taking your side. I will, but... I don’t think I will be able to help you in creating the opportunity for that said negotiation.” (Rokuya)

“What do you mean by that?” (Makoto)

A bitter smile comes up from Rokuya-san as if he was troubled, he is stuck in what to reply.

We can only wait for his answer.

Beginning with Tomoe and Mio, I could tell that my companions were slowly getting pissed.

Maybe his side has fallen into some sort of irregular situation.

“Hah... this is no good. No matter how I look at it, this will be difficult. The time is right, so how about lending me some of your time while we have a meal?” (Rokuya)

“...Understood. It is already time for lunch anyways, so okay.” (Makoto)

One person outside our plans has joined the group.

We moved to a corner at the vicinities of the portal and began our preparations for lunch while being poured the fiery gazes of interest from the other parties.

We decided to take a rest as we have lunch.

Chapter 263

Gift from the departed Dragon Slayer

“Are you talking about those girls?”

I hold my head.

The problem that Rokuya-san was talking about was heavily involved with me.

It was something that happened not that long ago.

At the time when I had my first proper talk with Shougetsu-san and his group, I was attacked by what looked like spies of the Empire.

And to my surprise, the three were girls I knew of before.

At the time when I visited Gritonia, those were the girls Tomoki offered me for Tomoe. They were all already at the brim with his charm power. They didn't oppose at all the fact that they were being treated as objects.

I heard from Tomoki that their levels were decent.

Even if I recently learned that their class was actually assassin, there was one thing I could tell, after looking at those eyes, I knew..... it was already too late.

That's why I eliminated them.

There were a number of people there aside from me, and leaving aside the moves they showed at the initial stage, looking at the sharp movements those three showed when they attacked me, they might have become a threat to Shougetsu-san and his group.

Even now, I still think that it was the correct choice to quickly kill them.

That's what I think, but... who would have known that one of those girls was a close friend of someone at the lower floors here.

That really got me, and it is problematic.

In other words, the first impression the mercenary group has towards me is the worst.

“Must be. I heard you crushed her head?”

“...Did I? If I remember correctly, I snapped the neck of one... ah, I did crush the head of one too. The last one, I flashily opened holes in her chest.” (Makoto)

Don't remember that well, but it was probably like that.

I restrained them with my Magic Armor and popped both of them, then finished it with Brid.

Yeah, that's right.

Relying on the memories I recalled, I respond to the question of Rokuya-san.

Now that I think about it, thanks to being used to this kind of things already, I have become able to respond to this kind of conversations even when I am in the middle of a meal.

“You were attacked by a group of high leveled Shadowless, so I don't think your way of handling the situation was to be blamed though. But that part, it seems like the concerned party is... unable to accept it. Fumu, it's been awhile since I have eaten such good food. Where did you get it?” (Rokuya)

Rokuya-san covers for my actions.

In this matter, I think anyone with the perspective of an adventurer would be able to understand me.

The person killed was a close friend, and on top of that, she went through the pains of separating that friend of hers from her companions and drag her all the way to get treatment, but in a second of negligence, that friend managed to escape, and right after, this incident happened.

It is not like I don't understand her for not wanting to accept it.

“I'm grateful to hear that. Ah, today's bento was made by us at the kitchen of the hotel,

Rokuya-san.” (Makoto)

“It’s a handmade of the Kuzunoha huh...” (Rokuya)

Rokuya-san suddenly fell silent and looks at the others beside me.

“And so, who was it specifically?” (Rokuya)

He asks me with a smile.

Looks like he liked it.

There’s no person aside from the residents of Asora that have tasted the menu of Japanese-styled food made with things like soy sauce and dashi.

That’s why I was a bit uneasy, but it seems it was an unnecessary.

Because of the Wise of Lorel, the Japanese culture is thicker here than in other countries, and yet, for some reason, the food is drowned in chinese style.

There’s a seasoning here that’s similar to soy sauce, but if I had to talk about it, I would say they are not the same.

In those points, Asora’s ability to replicate is high.

This is not preferential view, I really think that’s how it is.

“Most of it was done by Mio. Shii also helped out well.” (Makoto)

“Hoh, Mio-dono. Excuse me for a bit.” (Rokuya)

Rokuya-san who was at my left side, moves to the right side where Mio was sitting, and when he places his face at around her shoulder, he suddenly began smelling her.

I could tell his nose was twitching.

“Truly a nice smell. Nostalgic even.” (Rokuya)

On the other hand, the emotionless face of Mio instantly changed into an absolute zero smile and was going to stand up.

I hurriedly place a hand on her shoulder and stopped her.

With a bit of strength, I had her sit back.

It would be another issue if it were in a conversation, but violence in the middle of a meal would be troublesome.

“Rokuya-san, what are you doing so suddenly?” (Makoto)

I ask his intentions.

It is not like he suddenly wants a wife that’s good at cooking.

“No well, it was such splendid dashi, I ended doing this unintentionally. Just as I thought, you are an excellent cook. You have that characteristic fragrance of many ingredients which good cooks possess. Truly splendid.” (Rokuya)

“Fragrance, is it.” (Makoto)

Did Mio have that kind of scent?

Sadly to say, I didn’t sense that much.

But calling it fragrance piques my interest. Must be a nice scent.

Yeah.

“Ara. Leaving aside that you are a rude fellow, it seems like you are a knowledgeable one. If that was an action to confirm my cooking skills, I can turn a blind eye once.” (Mio)

The anger of Mio was extinguished in an instant.

Maybe because there haven’t been much chances for her cooking to be praised by people from the outside.

And in truth, her skills have increased quite a lot, and if she were to be blessed by chances to show them out, the number of times she will be praised in this way will most likely increase.

At any rate, she looks happy.

It felt like, the moment she lets her guard down, her expression would loosen.

“No, I was impolite there. I am relieved that you have forgiven me. So Raidou-kun prefers it slightly strong, instead of kombu, you are more of the katsuobushi type huh. Having someone like her who would cook the things you like. You are truly a lucky man.” (Rokuya)

Rokuya-san directed those incredibly kind eyes, he sometimes shows, towards me.

He was saying this while looking straight at me.

That’s true, but...

“Yeah, I am truly grateful.” (Makoto)

Now that I think about it, Rokuya-san called himself an assassin.

He greeted us with something dangerous like a bladed weapon last night, and yet, why is it that he gives such a calming feeling?

Is it a trait of people that have surpassed their occupation?

“We don’t have anyone in our comrades that’s main job is cooking, you see. We do make our own food with individual quirks, but the basics are really important after all...” (Rokuya)

“...”

It is probably a topic that I shouldn’t touch much.

In cooking, basics should come before individual quirks.

If not, terrifying things might occur.

It is like in Nabes <hot pots>.

Nabe is delicious, sweet things are delicious, cream is delicious; even so, that doesn’t mean combining the three of them will make it better.

That's not how it works.

That is in no way an improvement.

"Oops, let's put my matters aside for now. Anyways, sad to say but, the girl that had her close friend killed by you -her name's Pione by the way-she is planning on having revenge on you. And so, the designer of this labyrinth, the Marikosan, and on top of that, the Picnic Rosegarden members from all sides are gathering in order to mediate this." (Rokuya)

"...I see." (Makoto)

A number of adventurers on the level of Rokuya-san, the designer of the dungeon, and the Marikosan... let's leave those aside for now. Since we have come here with an objective, we can't kill the mercenary group.

...But the chances it will end up in an unavoidable fight are high.

Hah... Isn't the difficulty way too high? In a lot of meanings.

Pione-san, why did you have to be inside such an important place? Seriously.

"...The girl called Pione has been a real help when this place lost Doma and a lot of things happened. Raidou-kun, you have been born under an unlucky star." (Rokuya)

Lost Doma and a lot of things happened?

That means... it is her, Sofia is the root of all this.

Gunununu, she really only does unnecessary things.

"That damn Sofia." (Makoto)

"That was a woman whose presence felt somewhat like Root's. Are you acquainted with her?" (Rokuya)

"She picked a fight with me, twice. There... won't be a next time though." (Makoto)

"I see. By the time she devoured Doma, she already had the power of several Superior Dragons though... Raidou-kun defeated her huh." (Rokuya)

“Just like in the matter with the Shadowless, she was the one picking a fight, so I had no choice.” (Makoto)

“She was in part, a pitiful woman. If she has already died, I will at least pray for her happiness in the otherworld.” (Rokuya)

“You are kind, Rokuya-san.” (Makoto)

Whether it was Doma being killed or devoured, it still created a lot of problems here, and yet, he still mourns over Sofia’s death?

“Wait.” (Tomoe)

“Hm? Is something the matter, Tomoe-dono?” (Rokuya)

“Why is it that you know the name Root, and why is it you are saying it as if it were natural? Is it okay to question you about that?” (Tomoe)

“Fumu, it isn’t really something that needs to be hidden anyways. I don’t mind. I am an acquaintance of that girl, Root.” (Rokuya)

“Girl?” (Makoto)

I unintentionally cut into their conversation.

Root is currently a man mainly.

He did tell me that if I undress, he will become a woman anytime I want. By the way, I have no intentions of doing that in my lifetime.

But... Root has been a man ‘for a short while’ which is in the time sense of a Superior Dragon.

In other words...

“Looks like your relationship with the Myriad Colors Root dates pretty far in the past-ja na. In that case, I wonder how much of the legends about the Adventurers of Origin is actually true. I kind of want to hear it now.” (Tomoe)

“...What that Shougetsu boy told you guys, is... well, the truth. Fufu, I wonder why,

when you guys arrive at the 20th floor, we will probably clash blades, it will most likely be a disadvantageous fight for you guys, and it doesn't seem like our relationship will last for long. That's how I think, but... a part of my heart currently is confident about something: 'we will continue our relationship with Raidou-kun, now and in the future'. How mysterious." (Rokuya)

"We don't intend to lose either. No matter the situation, we plan on bringing it to a negotiation." (Makoto)

"Even that recklessness, there's a part of me that is looking forward to it, and that's surprising. In that case, I will answer in kind as well. Of course, I will also answer to the question of Tomoe-dono just now." (Rokuya)

And then, Rokuya-san sips on his after-meal tea.

The story of the Adventurers of Origin.

The origin.

Just what in the world are they really, just who this Rokuya-san in front of us actually is.

For a tea time, this was tackling quite the topic of conversation.

I decided to obediently listen to what Rokuya-san had to say.

Chapter 264

The transient braves

The Adventurers of Origin.

That was something talked about all around the world. It refers to the people that are called the ancestors of the currently existing adventurers.

They travelled through the whole world and helped out the people, and became the role model for the brave that came after. Of humans and demi-humans alike.

However, their names currently remain only in a small part of the Lorel Union.

Why is that? That kind of question popped.

Just like how Rokuya-san said about it not being anything hidden about, he spoke about it fluently.

But he also said that this is not something we need to talk about in a room filled with people, so he began the talk after guiding us to a space that seemed to be a secret room in this floor.

When we entered the room, I felt something strange, as if we passed through a thin film. It was something slight that doesn't warrant much attention though.

It is probably something to make it so that even if we were to come here on our own, we won't be able to find it or won't be able to enter it.

Well, let's leave aside the topic of the hidden room for now.

I am still half in doubt, but it seems like this Rokuya is actually the one from the legendary Adventurers of Origin.

In other words, immortal.

It is not that they are always awake and active, they live in a style where they wake up

every now and then and move, and have been living like that for a long time.

Honestly speaking, I wouldn't be able to imagine a life like that.

At this moment, I felt like Rokuya-san and the other people called the Adventurers of Origin are existences I wouldn't be able to comprehend.

Living for eternity.

How does that feel?

If I were forced to choose between death or immortality, the current me would probably... choose death.

If it were longevity, it would be a different story, but immortality...

Even if I become immortal, my surroundings will definitely continue dying.

I kind of don't like that.

"Well, and so, we ended up cooperating, and that guy Munemori not only got the trust of Root, he even married her, and founded one of the nations that would be counted as one of the five major powers, Elysion." (Rokuya)

"There's still quite a lot of anecdotes remaining about the foundation of Elysion, and the dragon princess that appears in those, I could somewhat understand that it referred to Root from the talks the person himself told me, but... there was no mention about Apfel(Apple), you know?" (Makoto)

By the way, this is my first time hearing that his husband was a person named Sou Mamoru.

If I remember correctly, he was a swordsman.

And after building up his country, he began liking love affairs.

...I feel like this part of his subtly overlaps with Tomoki.

But well, there was no information regarding charm, and Root said his husband didn't have those kind of powers.

“Yeah, we were erased from history after all.”

In those days, it seems Rokuya-san’s group called themselves Apfel, which is written as Apple.

It is a name I have no recollections whatsoever.

It seems like Lorel remembered them as Apple instead of Apfel, and called them Apple and people of Apple.

“Era... sed?” (Makoto)

It sounded conspiracy-like. Ominous words.

Moreover, Rokuya-san is one of the affected parties, and yet, he doesn’t seem to be blaming anyone.

“You see, Munemori revealed it to Root. About us... more accurately speaking, about the power of our master.” (Rokuya)

“Your master’s...” (Makoto)

It seems like Rokuya-san’s group, the Adventurers of Origin, have a leader they call master.

But rather than a relationship of one being in higher standing than the other, it sounded more like another word denoting a friend.

What’s with this.

I myself... feel like I have a relationship like this.

“Not only Munemori, us as well, the heroes, and also you; when coming here, you received a power, right?” (Rokuya)

“Yes... eh?” (Makoto)

“For example; Munemori received ‘the Sword of Ambition, Desire’ and ‘the Sword of Oath, Damocles’. A cheat sword that responds to his will and becomes stronger without the need of a blacksmith, and... the sword of resolution that you make an oath

and as long as you protect it, all of your abilities are raised. The second one, in the case that he broke the oath, he receives a big wound, so it wasn't all merits though."
(Rokuya)

"Ehm..." (Makoto)

"And in my case, it is a bit special, you see. I can't talk in detail about the second one, but the first one is a bit different from norm, an ability that links my comrades."
(Rokuya)

"..."

In other words, Rokuya-san is –no, all the Adventurers of Origin are... Wise?

And as if natural, it seems he also sees through me as well.

But what is this second one he is talking about?

In my case, I was summoned by a God, and at that time, I received [Sakai] from Tsukuyomi-sama. That's the only one I got.

Don't tell me, is the language comprehension of the Goddess that she jammed inside of me also counted?

Is that the second one?

...Seriously?

"Us six came here at the same time, and noticed that we had acquired an ability. And the one who was able to exercise that ability was master. That's why... yeah, link would be the correct understanding of it." (Rokuya)

"Link ability." (Makoto)

Six.

If that's the case, at least they wouldn't be lonely. Even if they had come to a terrible world.

But this link ability, I don't really understand it well.

“Ah, that’s the ‘Blood Pledge, Guild Verse’. Don’t know what sort of fate this is, but we were companions in an MMO -or so to speak, an online game- we played in those days. And our abilities were connected with it. What a joke.” (Rokuya)

“...Ah, a net game.” (Makoto)

So that’s what it is.

Rokuya-san and his companions, and then there’s the master <*Guild Master*>.

Guild comrades in an online game.

I see.

“The details of it are... to put it in an easy to understand way for you, it would be the reproduction of the online game system. Well, strictly speaking, it is different though. In other words, from a novice, I can hunt mamonos and change my job to thief, and after that, assassin, and further after, I can decide on a specialized job... it is that kind of setup. There’s also a shared warehouse that other people can’t see, side quests, and other fine details in the ability.” (Rokuya)

It is truly a guild.

And this entered the ears of Root, and that’s how the current guild was established.

They are truly the adventurers of origin.

No lies in their name.

But from what I have heard until now, I don’t understand the meaning behind them being erased from history.

It doesn’t explain the point about the immortality either.

“In other words, it is that right? Root took the idea of the Adventurer Guild from the ability of you guys? If the information of Root’s husband was about that ability, that’s plausible but...” (Tomoe)

It seemed like Tomoe was putting it all together, but at the same time, her eyes were saying there’s more to it.

Rokuya-san silently nods.

He continues.

“Yeah. Root took an interest in the structure called a guild, and tried to replicate it. It is certainly true that she heard about Guild Verse from Munemori and got the idea. But the part that would serve as the core, in the end, she was unable to create it.” (Rokuya)

“Eh?” (Makoto)

That’s strange. In the end, he did create the guild and is the guild master.

And in present, Root is still the guild master.

“Even if she is the heavenly dragon Root that governs over a percent of the world, as expected, there’s no way she would be able to grasp the essentials of the Earth’s pc online games. She desperately gathered information from me, master, and the other members.” (Rokuya)

“That... must have been annoying.” (Makoto)

To the point you would want to call the police.

“Nah. Even if she was a dragon on the inside, her appearance was that of a peerless beauty. The three men counting me actually enjoyed it, you know. Root was aggressive, she wasn’t as stubborn towards one person like Munemori, she let us enjoy without any hesitation.” (Rokuya)

“I... I see.” (Makoto)

Eh?

Could it be, I’m quite the herbivorous?

Or is it that, Root had quite the appeal in the past?

Judging from the atmosphere in the story, not only Rokuya-san, the other two members also enjoyed it.

I am currently receiving a culture shock here.

Rokuya-san is a Wise -though I don't know from what era he is- he must be a japanese person.

If he is a person of the Showa era, were the men of that era this indiscriminate?

In that era, did they dig in when a woman made advances on you?

Seriously?

"...By the way, I was born at the end of the Showa era. I don't think our perceptions are that different, Raidou-kun." (Rokuya)

"A... Ahahaha..." (Makoto)

Did he master mind reading?

I am blocking the magic type, and there's no signs of him probing.

My expression as well, I have lately been able to hide the things that show on my face.

"It looks like you are not self-aware of it, so this might be a good chance to tell you. You are a late bloomer. There's a limit to being herbivorous. It has been several years since you came to this world, right? In age... you are already over twenty huh. 'Sleeping with somebody will only be with the person I have decided to marry for the rest of my life', that kind of ideal is so far from reality it is close to being a delusion, you know? If you are being desired, it is fine to desire as well. That's all there is to it, and there's no need to think too deeply about it." (Rokuya)

He looks at Tomoe, looks at Mio, and even looks at Shii, and then, sighs and points a finger straight at me as he said that to me.

Shii is also okay with you, Rokuya-san?

It is true that I am an adult, but that's clearly already crimina—no, let's leave it at that.

"No well, you see, it is been a while already, so there's things that are just hard to advance towards..." (Makoto)

"...Are you seriously saying that? Going through the trouble of finding a partner for one night would be just... there's two women at both your sides that are practically

shouting that they are ready anytime you want, right? If you are at a lost, if it's those two, even if it is the two at the same time, they would probably not complain, you know?" (Rokuya)

"Rokuya-san! You are going too far." (Makoto)

"..."

What is this person saying.

I hurriedly object as I look at the two.

Tomoe and Mio are obviously angered... or not?

Oh.

...

On the contrary, Mio was stealthily giving a thumbs up to Rokuya-san. Her face is slightly red.

Tomoe didn't say anything, but she was nodding and going 'Umu Umu'.

No well, it isn't as if I didn't know, but... in the past, the figures of Hasegawa and Higashi were definitely bigger than Tomoe and Mio.

Then, if asked now, it would be about the same, or actually...

But if we were to cross the line, I feel like a variety of restrains will be broken.

Thinking about my determination of returning to Japan wavering and disappearing... honestly speaking, I am scared.

And in reality, whether it is Rokuya-san, that Munemori person, and the Adventurers of Origin; they have all stayed in this world without returning.

"...Fuh... Sorry. It was probably not something for me to talk about. Let's return to the main topic." (Rokuya)

"...Sorry." (Makoto)

“It is fine. And so, Root thoroughly researched about us and Guild Verse, but it didn’t bear fruit. However, Root thought that an adventurer guild was a necessary existence in the future of the world. Just as her attitude showed, she wasn’t the type who would obey the Goddess after all.” (Rokuya)

“Yeah, Root is like that. I think his stance is different from that of the Goddess.” (Makoto)

I can tell by the fact that he is thinking of things like thinning out the humans.

So Root has been like that in the past too, and Rokuya-san had noticed that way of thinking Root had.

“That’s why...” (Rokuya)

“...”

Rokuya-san slightly narrows his eyes.

“Root has already diverged from the Guild Verse system, and she is trying to make it a permanent existence in this world.” (Rokuya)

“In other words, it means that Root is trying to make it possible for the Adventurer Guild to have your ability as well?” (Makoto)

“Yeah. But for the sake of that, he needs the cooperation of the Goddess, and more than that, there’s the need for our cooperation as well.” (Rokuya)

“Right. Leaving aside the Goddess, the cooperation of you guys would definitely be a necessary.” (Makoto)

“However, the price that was asked for was way too big. You probably already have an idea but... for the sake of that, all the people related to the Guild Verse ability are required to live forever. If the Wise die, the ability goes with them after all.” (Rokuya)

“?!”

“That’s why, a lot happened, Raidou-kun. By the Goddess, Guild Verse became the core of the Adventurer Guild, and we became immortal. But you see, a problem was born in this.” (Rokuya)

“Problem?” (Makoto)

‘Yeah’, Rokuya answers with a bitter smile.

“At that rate, our achievements would be way too big. Moreover, the Adventurers of Origin are immortal. I was a charismatic person in those days, you see. If I wanted to, I would have been able to become the king of a major power.” (Rokuya)

“Obviously. Receiving immortality, bringing the Adventurer Guild to this world; those are achievements that would surpass a king of a major power.” (Makoto)

“That’s why it was inconvenient for Root. Her unyielding wish was for Munemori to be the greatest brave of that time. Fufu, in the end, she beared the child of Munemori. Even if she was a Superior Dragon, it was her first time having a child. She went wild probably because of the maternal instincts that were suddenly born in her.” (Rokuya)

“Maternal instincts have nothing to do with that. That’s way too much of a selfish wish.” (Makoto)

“Hahaha, right. It is just as you say, Raidou. But this is not something that’s happening now, it is all history that was settled thousands of years already. Also, it is not the history of winners, you know? It is the history of people that are fading away. It is not something for you to be so riled up about. In the first place, I who am one of the related parties don’t feel anger towards Root.” (Rokuya)

“Why?! If what you have done is true, then that bad treatment of Root would be similar to what the Goddess did to m—!!” (Makoto)

“No matter the sequence of events and the conclusion of it, the Adventurers of Origin became a minor fairy tale of Lorel, but Root has been able to properly maintain the Adventurer Guild in this thousands of years.” (Rokuya)

“ ... ”

“The humans growing haughty was in part the Goddess’ fault, and even Root wouldn’t be able to stop that, but a diverse amount of demi-humans and a narrow amount of demons have been able to survive until today. It is certain that she has been able to carry out her role in the Adventurer Guild which she fervently spoke of in the past.” (Rokuya)

“...”

Even so, there are things that can't be forgiven as well.

Being forced immortality, and have your existence erased, that's just...

“That's why, the Adventurers of Origin, as well as I, have accepted most of our circumstances already.” (Rokuya)

“Most'?” (Makoto)

“As troublesome as it is, the one man that has to accept it the most, is still fighting against it. And so, at that time in the past, there was one kind dragon that was enraged by this, just like how you are, Raidou-kun -no, that rage was even higher than yours.” (Rokuya)

Dragon.

Could that be...

“A dragon, you say? I don't think there was anyone who would be able to fight against Root in the past. At the very least, I don't know of one.” (Tomoe)

Tomoe tilts her head.

I see.

Leaving aside if both of them have met before, Tomoe was alive at that time as well.

She learned about the Guild when she heard of it from Root, so she was probably asleep at that time anyways.

“No surprise. In those days, the other Superior Dragons aside from Root and Futsu didn't boast much strength after all.” (Rokuya)

“As I have said, I don't know of a dragon named Futsu-ja. It seems like it is known widely in this country, but who in the world is that-ja?” (Tomoe)

After a brief silence, Tomoe seeks an answer from Rokuya-san.

It is certainly true that the name Doma is spread in Lorel Union as well, but the name of Futsu surpassed that.

And Doma is being seen as a dungeon's Superior Dragon, but it felt as if Futsu was being directed something like reverence.

It felt like the kind of reverence they direct to Spirits and the Goddess.

"The Ancestral Dragon of Heavens, Heavenly Dragon Root; directly opposite, the Ancestral Dragon of the Land, Land Dragon Futsu. The matchless Superior Dragons that possess the highest of powers, however, Futsu was against the creation of the Adventurer Guild, and... as a result, its power was snatched away by Root and was terminated." (Rokuya)

"?!!"

"This is a matter of Superior Dragons. It is a top secret matter that would be bad if Root knew, so Raidou, please keep it a secret as well, okay? After that, its existence was thoroughly erased by the hands of Root, even more thoroughly than in our case. That was way too pitiful you see. We saved it." (Rokuya)

"As I thought, I don't know of it. If we are talking about a land dragon, it would be Grount, right?" (Tomoe)

"More accurately speaking, that girl is a Sand Dragon. Can't be helped, we are talking about Root here. She probably persistently chipped off the memories of Futsu from the other Superior Dragons every time they were dormant or were reincarnating. It was probably easier than erasing the Adventurers of Origin from the history of people." (Rokuya)

"That damn Root..." (Tomoe)

"If Futsu had acted as how it normally acts, the situation wouldn't have gotten so screwed. In the end, whether it is people or dragons, what decides things is most likely emotions over logic. Fufu." (Rokuya)

Rokuya-san was probably reminiscing the events of one thousand years ago, he laughs.

Even though this was their defeat.

Receiving the curse of immortality and having their existence erased from history; that's right, it is supposed to be a defeat.

And yet, is this really something that one can look back at it a thousand years after and laugh?

I... probably will end up fighting them at the floors below the tenth.

Since they are immortal, there's only one way to beat Rokuya-san and the others, I have no choice but to break their will.

No, Tomoe and Mio are probably already investigating this immortality of Rokuya-san.

If possible, his memories of it as well.

That's probably the reason why the two aren't speaking much and simply look like they are listening to the story.

There's the possibility that there will be some sort of way to break through this situation from what they might figure out.

But... the will of people that are able to accept defeat in this manner, if I have no choice but to break it, just how am I going to?

Is it breakable?

I currently... don't know.

I felt something heavy slowly accumulating in my stomach.

Chapter 265

The despicable acts of the sleepless city

“Oops, we ended up talking quite a lot. Well then, let’s continue the conversation when you arrive at the lower floor. But well, that’s only if it still ends up that way even after trying to do our best to kill each other. Hahaha, anyways, I will be waiting in anticipation.” (Rokuya)

Rokuya-san said this and leaves.

It is true that we talked about a variety of things.

But how to say it... the important parts were made vague.

That’s the impression I got from his story.

I sweep away this feeling of mine.

He probably hinted to it when he said that we would be continuing at a later time.

Right now, there’s one thing I can say for sure, my impression of Root worsened quite a lot.

...By the way, it wasn’t good to begin with.

“I am sorry, Waka. Just like before, I couldn’t read his memories.” (Tomoe)

Tomoe reports to me mortified.

It seems like it somewhat succeeded with Tomoki, but as I thought, it doesn’t work on everyone.

There’s people with high resistance towards it, and there’s a variety of spells that serve as countermeasure against this.

Senpai and Tomoki should be getting stronger by the day.

In that case, in the future, the memory vacuum probably won't work that much on the Japanese people.

In a sense, the only way for her to get information of Japan will be from my memories, and that will most likely depress her.

...I see.

We can't confirm how much of what Rokuya-san said was true huh.

It brings me down a bit.

But everyone has surplus in their stamina, so let's continue a bit further for today.

We don't know how accurate the map will be in the floors that follow, and we also don't know how much we can progress.

No matter how my mental state is in, we should continue on.

Since we will be mapping on the way, our speed won't be the same.

"It is fine, don't worry about it. But this is a problem. Telling us to do our best in killing Japanese people that have become immortals. This is a situation I wouldn't have been able to imagine at all before coming to Lorel." (Makoto)

"At worst, we would have to go against five people with strength on the level of Waka. This certainly wasn't in our plans. Depending on the situation, we might have to make you guys return to the 19th floor." (Tomoe)

The first half was directed at me, the latter half was directed at Beren and the others as she lets out a slightly heavy sigh.

"Rather than on my level, they might even surpass me. Right... it is true that having Beren and the others fight together with us would be a bit..." (Makoto)

"I have been prepared since long. The Adventurers of Origin are certainly higher than us, but who knows how strong the mercenary group and the dungeon administrator will be. We are three here. We will definitely serve for something. Please let us stay this way." (Beren)

Beren does one step forward and interrupts my words.

Right.

There's other people aside from Rokuya-san's group, like the dungeon administrator -or wait, was it dungeon designer?- on top of that, there's a big number of Marikosans.

From what I saw, these three are plenty enough to fight against the Marikosan.

For example; even if we look at Beren alone, he is a skilled craftsman even within the Elder Dwarfs. There's a lot of combatants that are attached to their equipment. The trust he has between his comrades is also deep, and he has a good relationship with the other races as well. He is also beginning to become an irreplaceable existence in the company.

Shii as well, if we were to exclude the problematic part about her admiring Eris, she is a dependable Forest Oni. Her fighting skills, forestry skills, and her agricultural skills regarding bananas are high. She is one of the few power fighting styles within the Forest Onis which is important too.

Regarding Hokuto, he was a powerful Arke to begin with, and at present, the things he can't do are less than the things he can. He himself has a hand-to-hand combat style that utilizes strings and is researching in order to reach higher heights in it, but in the process, he has created several byproducts. All the Arkes are immersed in the field they themselves have decided on, and the work they are given are reliably done. No need to say, he is an important man of talent.

I don't want to lose them.

...Now that I think about it, I suddenly remembered something that Shiki told me quite a long time ago.

It was when we fought together at the Limia capital.

'If you are about to be too entranced in a fight, please have the people of Asora in a corner of your mind', is what I think he said.

This will certainly be a tough fight incomparable to the one at that time.

I think I am able to control myself quite better now, but who knows what will happen.

Daikokuten-sama also told me something unreasonable. 'Don't incline too much on your emotions and logic'.

But I wonder what he actually meant. Maybe he meant that as long as I live a normal life, it will not incline to any of those, so don't worry. Or it might be that if I am not careful, without noticing, I will end up inclining in either of those, so watch out.

As expected of a God, the things he says are complicated.

"Calm down. The right person in the right place, that's all there is to it. Tomoe-san as well, what worthless things are you saying. Even if we bring Hokuto and the others, they won't get in our way, and just like they said, they will do their best. If that's the case, they will definitely show one or two results that will bring a 'well done' from Waka-sama-desu wa. Right?" (Mio)

I won't let them die.

"It is as if you are telling them to become meat shields if it comes to the worst, Mio." (Tomoe)

"Don't jest. I am simply saying that they should show Waka-sama how the weak ones can also fight in their own way-desu wa." (Mio)

"Honestly speaking, just thinking about being attacked by a presence concealment on the level of that Rokuya in a group battle, I know that even I can't let my guard down." (Tomoe)

"Fufufu, like we would let him." (Mio)

Oh, Mio, did you think up something?

"Hoh? Are you saying you have some sort of plan?" (Tomoe)

"No." (Mio)

So you don't...

"What, so you are planless. That confidence without basis of yours, is it that? Is your instinct telling you that?" (Tomoe)

“I haven’t thought of anything special, but there’s no way Waka-sama will let his companions die in the same battlefield he stands in. He definitely won’t forgive that.”
(Mio)

...Yeah.

“...”

For some reason, Mio was filled with confidence.

On the other hand, Tomoe didn’t say anything and was at a loss for words.

Right after hearing what Mio said, Beren and the others straightened their backs and their faces turned meek.

Wait, I am the one who will be doing it?

Well, she is right though.

I did decide already that I won’t be letting them die.

I am a bit embarrassed knowing that she saw through me though.

...Yeah, it is just as Mio said.

Beren, Hokuto, Shii, and Tomoe and Mio as well; I... wouldn’t want the people that are fighting for my sake dying in a battlefield where I am in.

Even if the fight below is unavoidable, this will not change.

My objective was not ‘making the immortal Japanese yield’.

It was something a lot different.

Bring back the mercenaries to Tsige without losing anyone.

Yeah, the fight below will have that objective.

Things like our opponents being immortals, japanese, the owner of the dungeon, or designer, or administrator; well, whatever it is, that's not a big problem.

I am even thinking about fighting against the Goddess -a God-, so why am I getting worried here.

If we win this fight, we will get one step closer to checkmate.

"Fufu, ahahahaha!! Right, it is just as Mio said. Let's all go. I won't let anyone die. Now then, first we gotta get there or we won't advance at all! Mapping, exploration; honestly speaking, I am bad at both of those, so I am counting on you guys!" (Makoto)

Curse of immortality, long experience, and companions that most likely trust each other.

I was subconsciously held down by the things that Rokuya-san was shouldering.

But then, what about me?

I have Asora, Tomoe, Mio, Shiki... and there's Tamaki too.

Also, even in the long experience of Rokuya-san's group, I don't think they have experience in challenging the Goddess.

And haven't been overpowered.

Just like always, if they point their swords at us, we just have to sweep it all away.

"My my, you are making me jealous here. It seems like I will have to let all these out in our afternoon exploration. Let's depart. You guys, put some spirit into it... but well, looks like I don't even need to say it-ja na. From now on, the amount of labour division will increase. You understand, right?!" (Tomoe)

"Yes!!"

A response with good strength.

They have faces that ooze motivation.

Looks like there's no need to motivate them again.

First, let's gather information regarding the three teleport formations that lead to the 11th floor and then discuss about it.

In the end, Rokuya-san didn't tell me a single thing about a method to advance in the lower floors after all.

Please, let there be no confined and damp place.

Thinking about something shameful that differs a lot in temperature compared to the determination just now, we resumed our exploration.



In the end, we continued our exploration till before evening and arrived at the entrance of the 14th floor.

We divided the labor and explored the different types of the floor, the strength of the mamonos, its size, the traps that are set up, and after gathering the information, Hokuto, Tomoe, and Mio analyzed it and decided on the course to take.

We advanced in that way, so we didn't go as far as we expected.

At this rate, if we count any irregulars that might happen, the X day will probably be the day after tomorrow, or the day after that one.

The motivation of everyone was pretty high, and the divided labour was finished without delay.

Everyone, thanks.

"Even so, this city is mostly sleepless. Tsige and Rotsgard were the same as well."
(Makoto)

In this world, it is truly rare to see a town where the hustle and bustle doesn't die out late at night and there's no lack of lights on.

The nights are dark, inconvenient, and dangerous.

That's why, a while after dinner time passing, the towns enter silence waiting for the next day to come and is enveloped in darkness.

That's the usual.

Tsige is at a wasteland, Rotsgard has an academy, and here, a grand labyrinth.

When there's something special about the place, it ends up in an uncommon place like this?

But well, in Rotsgard's case, the one that didn't have its lights off was the Academy, so if I were to choose, I would say that the liveliness here resembles that of Tsige.

Right now it is... around 2:00 a.m.

It is late in the night.

And yet, the doors of the store are open and receiving customers.

I could hear the noise of people in good mood at the inside.

Now that I think about it, the World's Border and the Grand Labyrinth are always there, so it is probably natural that it turns out this way.

By the way, the reason why I am walking alone at this time is... not that big of a reason.

I opened my eyes not that long ago and noticed that there were several people missing in the room.

And well, after searching with Sakai, I learned that a number of them were at the grand labyrinth.

I was wondering what was going on, so I decided to go and see.

...It is not like I was agitated because the moment I opened my eyes, the sleeping face of Mio was right in front of me, or that the leg of Tomoe was on top of my thighs.

Definitely not.

Now then, the ones who were gone from the room were Beren, Hokuto and Shii, and

there's also the bodyguards Akashi-san and Yudoku-san.

But Akashi-san and Yudoku-san were investigating in the city, so maybe they simply haven't returned yet.

That's why, the ones currently at the room are Tomoe, Mio, Iroha-chan, Shougetsu-san, and the maids.

We will be exploring tomorrow, so what are Beren and the others doing this late in the night.

We have already paid for the entrance fee of today, so there's no problem—hm?

Now that I think about it, how are the days set in this place?

Is midnight the mark for the next day?

At sunrise?

What a problem. I currently don't have money at ha—ah, it is fine.

I do have a decent amount.

Even if they ask me to pay, there's no problem.

We will be entering tomorrow anyways, so this will be a simple pay in advance.

Well then, let's chase after the three that disappeared inside.

Oh?

Are those... Akashi-san and Yudoku-san?

At a slightly further road that's connected to the grand labyrinth, I coincidentally saw those two.

If I remember correctly, that direction is the area where the rich live in, Blue Jewel Zone.

I guess the place by comparing with the map of Kannaoui in my mind.

Those girls are the bodyguards of Iroha-chan to begin with, and Iroha-chan herself is the daughter of a family in the ruling strata of this city, so going to a place like that shouldn't be strange.

The Osakabe household is like the feudal lord of this whole city after all.

I look at the grand labyrinth.

It is certainly true that I am bothered by Beren and the others.

...But I don't feel that uneasy about it.

I look at the bodyguards.

They are giving off an atmosphere differing from usual. The two move towards a place that doesn't have much people.

...I am uneasy.

Can't be helped.

Let's grasp the movements of those two.

My first time walking this path in a city I don't know. Moreover, it is late at night.

If I didn't have Sakai and wasn't confident about my skills, I definitely wouldn't have thought about following them.

Looks like Akashi-san is guiding Yudoku-san somewhere.

I observe the state of the two and try to grasp the situation.

This is something that I should be reporting immediately to Shougetsu-san, but... my relationship with Akashi-san and Yudoku-san is not that deep, and there's a lot of things I don't know about them.

Because of my face and appearance, I was caught in what seemed to be people trying to rob me, but I politely had them rest.

"A bar huh. It is an establishment that reeks of suspicious." (Makoto)

I mutter this in front of the door where the two entered.

It seems like it is still open, but the door is not open.

This place doesn't give me the atmosphere the sign is telling me.

"Hm?"

The scent inside the bar reached my nose.

A deep and strong fragrance that reeks of a night store.

But this is... not only that!

"It really doesn't make me happy that my instincts hit the mark in this kind of things, seriously!" (Makoto)

Being certain that my uneasiness wouldn't end with unnecessary worry, I resolve myself and opened the door.

Chapter 266

The identity of the scent

Ugh.

A thin layer of smoke hangs over the store's interior.

As I thought, an unpleasant smell is spreading.

It is an atmosphere that makes me wince a little.

For now, I ignore the mostly negative gazes that were being poured on me and search for the two I came here for.

It is not a big store, so I was soon able to find the back figure of the familiar two.

But it looks like I will have to hurry.

As I approach the two in fast steps, the more I could tell the state of the two.

This is bad!

Akashi-san is trying to open a small bottle for Yudoku-san!

...She opened it!!

Damn it, I didn't make it in time.

...Now that it has come to this, might as well...

Go with the plan I previously had in mind.

"Azusa."

I mutter in a low voice and call for my habitual bow.

At that moment, a sense of touch was born from my left palm, and I grab it.

No arrow prepared.

Without giving time for the customers to panic, I take stance with my bow, enhance it with magic power, and pluck the string.

“?!!”

With me as the centre, the smoke and smell that was hanging over the place was blown away.

A whirling wind spread while leaving the store’s interior.

Looks like I managed to do it well.

Since the time at the Demon race territory, I haven’t held back much, so I didn’t know how much to hold back here. Well, as long as the result is fine, it is okay, I suppose.

The bottle that Akashi-san had in her hand fell and broke.

The liquid that was staining the wooden table made one long strand down and quickly evaporated in a thin smoke.

From what I can sense, there’s no ‘smell’ remaining there.

Of course, in the interior of this store as well, and of course, it disappeared from the ‘inside’ of these customers and employees too.

Good grief.

That guy is beginning quite the outrageous thing.

So he doesn’t care about my warning.

The matter with the guns, and now this.

I remember the insides of the bottle and the smell inside the store.

Leaving aside the concept of it, it is the dangerous type.

...That damn Tomoki.

“Hey there, Akashi-san, Yudoku-san, what a coincidence.” (Makoto)

Even I know there’s no coincidence in this.

But still, I thought that there was no choice but to do so in this place.

Smoothing things over is not in my list of skills, so please forgive me on that one.

Akashi-san had a dumbfounded face as she looked at me.

...After looking at what happened, it can’t be helped.

It seems like Yudoku-san is trying to hold back her agitation.

She is looking at me with a somewhat stern face.

Looking at her tightened lips, she probably has noticed something already.

“...Boss Raidou, why are you here?” (Akashi)

“Yeah. You can’t fool us with that coincidence talk. I heard that you would be busy with the labyrinth for a while.” (Yudoku)

“Yes. In truth, more than half of it can be called a coincidence though.” (Makoto)

“That means there’s a part that doesn’t apply in the coincidence, right?” (Yudoku)

Yudoku-san still has that stern face.

At present, I have become somewhat knowledgeable about things like medicines and magic medications.

However, just like how charms serve the same purpose as talismans and amulets—wait no, the comparison wasn’t that good there. Charms are mostly turned into amulets and talismans are—wait, why am I beginning a lecture here.

What’s important here is that the magic medication that Akashi-san had in her hands was not the type for medical treatment and it was a type I still wasn’t familiar with.

I can understand it roughly, and I know the objective of Tomoki, so as long as they don't ask for a deep explanation about it, there's no problem.

The problem is, how am I going to tell them.

On top of that...

I look around the establishment.

Everyone was making a face as if they had been tricked by a *fox or a racoon* as they were trying to grasp the situation. *<fox and raccoons are seen as the scheming type that play dirty tricks on people>*

Doesn't seem to be a good place to continue our conversation.

It enters in the area of private talk, so... at this moment... that place would be best.

It would be two birds with one stone after all.

"Yeah. Looks like I will have to get involved in the trouble of the top brass. Now then, it is already this late, so how about you two accompany me to the labyrinth?" (Makoto)

I can protect the secret, and if there's anyone following us, we can easily lose them.

And while at it, I can search for Beren and the others as well.

It should be okay to talk in the grand labyrinth.

"I see. A place suitable for private talks, right?" (Yuduki)

"Y-Yeah..." (Makoto)

Yuduki-san slightly widens her eyes and whispers as if impressed.

She is nodding, so it should be fine to take it as her accepting.

Akashi-san was looking alternately at Yuduki-san and I as if she was half asleep.

"Then, let's go." (Makoto)

“Understood. Akashi, we are going.” (Yuduki)

Yuduki-san had Akashi-san stand, and leaves the store as if dragging her.

I leave some change at the store and depart as well.

At any rate... that Tomoki, to think he would turn his charm into a drug.

What an outrageous thing to think of.

If Senpai learns of this, a war between humans might occur before the war with the demons ends.

Hibiki-senpai would probably try her damndest to stop it after all.

However, it is an incredible idea.

If you are not at his side, the charm will have no effect to begin with, and if you know of its existence, there's ways to go against it.

Of course, completely shutting it out will depend on a battle of strength though.

It is strong, but in a sense, it is an ability that has its restrictions. That's how I thought.

But putting the charm ability in a tool and spread it around in that way will dramatically increase the effective range. Moreover, that tool is a perfume. It diffuses around the area like incense.

The compatibility with the charm is quite good.

For the side that tries to prevent it, that's a lot worse than placing an accessory on the target.

You can't just stop breathing, and you will have to take in mind the direction of the wind at all times.

In the first place, there's quite a lot of spells that can control the wind.

That guy... seriously only has brains for the most hopeless stuff.

I am impressed.

Leaving aside the fight between Naoi and Kannaoui, and the competition between all the Osakabe; right now, the currently occurring fight of the Osakabe has Tomoki or the Empire involved in it.

In the end, it seems like I will have to get involved with this city.

My head is already hurting with matters of the 20th floor. Good grief.

Without being able to find a solution for it yet, I follow the two and enter the labyrinth.



Fourth floor of the grand labyrinth.

In the deepest place that the two bodyguards can go to, we take one big breath.

There's no trace of Beren and the others.

At this rate, I can see that they are at a lower floor than this.

Just what in the world are they doing?

The three don't seem like they needed to increase their level though.

Even in the floors after the tenth, they worked pretty well.

"Now then, if it's around here, there should be no one to hear us. You two, it seems like you didn't return to Iroha-chan's place all day long. What were you two investigating?"
(Makoto)

Leaving aside Yudoku-san, I am interested in what Akashi-san has to say.

The origin of that bottle.

I don't think Sairitz-san is involved in it, but I am interested in how far of the Osakabe household this has spread.

"...We were... investigating about a certain influential person that has the highest

probability of aiming for Iroha-sama's life." (Yuduki)

"So, an opposing faction of Iroha-chan huh. I see. And who is this person?" (Makoto)

"How to say it, rather than calling it an opposing faction, it is more like that person is the one who holds the true authority at the Osakabe household at present. Iroha-sama doesn't really hold that much authority." (Yuduki)

Now that I think about it, I did hear that they are unrelated with the matter of the successor.

There's already a political marriage settled.

She is being married off, so I thought she would be treated somewhat importantly, but it looks like that's not the case.

And Yuduki-san, you are not going to tell me the name?

Well, if that person has that much authority, I can learn who it is by investigating, but... going through the trouble of doing that is a pain.

"And, who is it?" (Makoto)

"I would be grateful if you catch on that it is hard to speak of." (Yuduki)

"Now now, it is Boss Raidou here, so isn't it fine? The one that Yuduki was investigating was Tatsuki Kougetsu. He is one of the people serving long at a responsible position called chief minister in the Osakabe household. In words that a foreigner could understand... it is like a cabinet minister? Ah, Boss is a Wise, so maybe you understand it already?" (Akashi)

Chief minister...

I don't know how much of it is the same chief minister I know of, but if it's what I think of, I can tell that he has quite the authority.

However, he is not a person from the Osakabe household?

"Akashi!" (Yuduki)

“It seems like he saved us there in some way. We have to return the favor. There’s no need to be frugal about the information we currently hold.” (Akashi)

It is a saving that Akashi-san has a light mouth, in a good meaning,

It seems like Yudoku-san already doesn’t mind it much.

In Lorel, you first say the family name and then your first name, so... there’s a high chance that this Kougetsu-san is the one pulling the wires.

Hm? Kougetsu?

“Kougetsu...” (Makoto)

I mutter the name as a question pops in my mind.

Looking at my state, Yudoku-san sighs as if she gave up and speaks.

“He is the brother of Iroha-sama’s retainer, Shougetsu-sama. And then... it seems like he has his attention on the Kuzunoha Company as well. Be careful.” (Yudoku)

“Even us?” (Makoto)

“You entered the country with such an extravagant promissory note, so it most likely caught his eye. The name of Kahara-sama and power of influence reaches even Kannaoui plenty enough.” (Yudoku)

“The promissory note huh...” (Makoto)

I didn’t expect this to have power on the level of a **seal case**. *<a reference to Koumon’s seal>*

Speaking seriously, with that, I can walk around in joy inside the country even without a wallet.

I feel like it will turn into a big debt towards Sairitz-san, so I will never do it though.

So that made him lock onto us huh.

No, since there’s Tomoki, I can’t just assume that was the reason why.

Let's tread carefully.

But the one that actually had the bottle was Akashi-san, so the chances of Kougetsu-san and Tomoki joining arms is a bit weak, probably.

"Akashi-san, who were you investigating, and... where did you obtain that perfume-like bottle from?" (Makoto)

"Me? To tell you the truth, I don't remember well. A part of my memories are hazy." (Akashi)

"Hah? Akashi, what are you saying? Didn't you say that you had caught on a connection that would definitely overturn the current situation of Iroha-sama?" (Yuduki)

She doesn't remember.

In other words, she had become a puppet of that incense in the middle.

"Eh? Did I say that? Or more like, Yuduki, having a meeting at such an establishment, you have bad taste." (Akashi)

"I'm shocked. You said you had found a place that we could use as a safe hiding spot. Saying that, you brought me to that establishment." (Yuduki)

"Eh?!" (Akashi)

Akashi-san's memories have turned vague.

Is it because of the after-effects, or maybe self-defense?

If it's the latter, I am sorry for this, but I will have her remember it in order.

With Yuduki-san's cooperation, that should be possible.

"Yuduki-san, you remember that Akashi-san was the one who invited you to that establishment and entered it, right?" (Makoto)

In this cases, you shouldn't think about opportune moments and just go straight for the jugular.

“Of course. It is true that it is a place that doesn’t have much people, but it also didn’t strike me as having a good clientele.” (Yuduki)

“You also remember the bottle?” (Makoto)

“Yeah. She said that it was some sort of symbolic incense somewhere and that there was the need to make copies of it for investigation.” (Yuduki)

“But Akashi-san doesn’t remember.” (Makoto)

“Y-Yeah... By the time I came to, Boss Raidou was calling to me..... That’s certainly weird.” (Akashi)

The charm of Tomoki shouldn’t be able to alter the memories.

At the very least, that perfume and scent didn’t have such power.

Then, she should be able to remember.

“Yuduki-san, what were the plans for Akashi-san today?” (Makoto)

For now, I leave Akashi-san who is in confusion, and ask Yuduki-san.

The two were investigating as they contacted each other.

In that case, she would be able to know the actions of the other side.

“The major point was that she was going to create a connection with a certain someone. An incredibly important person for Iroha-sama and is currently—” (Yuduki)

“In short, who is it?” (Makoto)

“...The state of Akashi was certainly strange. It is certain that a turbulent movement is approaching us. It is not the time to be keeping secrets.” (Yuduki)

“I share the same sentiment.” (Makoto)

Maybe because of her character as an information gatherer, she has a principle of keeping secrets tightly.

But currently in this city, I don't think there's much meaning in keeping secrets from me.

Good grief. Trust is complicated.

"Haruka-sama; Iroha-sama's mother." (Yuduki)

"...That's right. I... had caught on the whereabouts of Haruka-sama, and then... she invited me to the Kishimo temple." (Akashi)

Invited?

No, right now the priority is to have her remember her memories in order.

Let's keep silent.

"What did you say?! You met madam?!" (Yuduki)

"Yeah... And then, I was led to a room with a nice scent. And I think there was also a chamberlain that had skills that that were not average..." (Akashi)

...Hey hey.

An even worse presentiment surfaced in my mind.

"Where?! Which Kishimo temple?!" (Yuduki)

"Uhm... At a place of the Osakabe branch family where there's several houses, in a place that was being used as a family temple. The one that's at the Silkwork street, right, it was there." (Akashi)

"Akashi! Well done! You are a genius!! With this, Iroha-sama will be happy as well! I see, so that scent was the symbol of that place!!" (Yuduki)

...

This is bad.

This is incredibly bad.

A bad presentiment is steadily growing.

It is like the time when I saw the wife of Rembrandt and his daughters. It felt as if that melancholic feeling would overflow through my throat.

If possible, I felt like running away from this place.

“And so, I was told... by Haruka-sama. She said that there’s something she wanted to give to Iroha-sama and that she was asking of me to do it. And then, she entrusted me a small bottle. That’s why, I... for the sake of master, I thought that I had to tell Yudoku as well. Wait, who is master?” (Akashi)

“Akashi?” (Yudoku)

...

There’s no doubt that the source of the charm incense is the Empire.

Even if we still don’t know where and how far it has been spread to.

In that case, the reason for the dispute in the household, and the puppets of Tomoki I killed; the reason they escaped from the treatment in the middle of it as well, maybe it has something to do with that incense.

If a patient for drug poisoning is given the drug once more even if only a little, it is clear that it would be as certain as the sun rising that the treatment wouldn’t progress properly.

And then, this incense is currently, at the very least, invading the mother of Iroha-chan.

From what I have heard of Akashi-san, there’s no doubt that the spreading side is also affected by it.

From what I see, I think Akashi-san is somewhat safe.

But that Haruka person, it sounds like bad news.

The word ‘too late’ surfaced in my mind.

“What a disgusting feeling. I feel like I might puke out all my happy memories.”

(Makoto)

After recalling my memories for a while, Akashi-san who had an ashen face was muttering contradicting words as she staggered to a wall.

And then, an expected sound rang out.

But it probably won't end with just that.

She will probably have a hangover with self-disgust added to it, and will taste what will probably make even a three day hangover look cute.

But it is probably a blessing that she was spared with 'only that much'.

"Kugh... Raidou-dono, did anything come to mind?" (Yuduki)

"Yeah, a number of things. First of all, that bottle Akashi-san had and the scent that was hanging over that store was a scent that had a charm power packed in it. Smoke and perfume, to make it easy, let's call it charm incense." (Makoto)

"Charm incense..." (Yuduki)

"It seems like it was packed with a strong charm power that makes anyone who smelled it into a slave of a certain man." (Makoto)

"Could it be that was the reason why Akashi said something as foolish as master?! I see, Kougetsu!!" (Yuduki)

"No, he is not the one the charm incense enslaves you to." (Makoto)

"...Eh?" (Yuduki)

"Iwahashi Tomoki; the Empire's hero. The charm incense is... a tool to create his slaves." (Makoto)

"Hero?! T-Then, are you saying this matter was not a simple dispute of the household?! Is that what you are saying, Raidou-dono?!" (Yuduki)

"Probably. I still don't know what he is planning though." (Makoto)

“I remembered one other thing...” (Akashi)

Akashi-san returns to the conversation still with her ashen expression.

If it's information about that temple, anything would be fine.

It would help out.

“At that place, I think... there was Kougetsu-sama and a number of the princesses as well. Ugh...” (Akashi)

Don't you have any information that might change the situation for the better?

At the lower floors, there's a girl that hates me lying in wait.

And above ground, the charm of Tomoki has become the seed of strife.

What a time to come to Kannaoui.

I wonder if I can go with everyone to the grand labyrinth in the morning.

Maybe I should just call Lime or the Forest Onis as well?

Even if I call them, it doesn't mean that it will erase the fact that it is already too late, and in the end, things will turn out as they will.

At the very least, we can stop the victims from expanding.

Hah... what a loser's thought.

DAMN IT!

Tomoki, and Sofia; they just do unnecessary things all the time!

Especially Tomoki!

Doing something as stupid as charming people you don't even know. I'm impressed he even thought of it.

AAAHH, my head is hurting!

Chapter 267

It was preparation

“The sky is already graying. Hah... looks like this was an all-nighter.” (Makoto)

At a place a little further away from the entrance of the grand labyrinth, returning to the portal that let's you go to the floors you have already been to, the far away sky was faintly changing in color.

It might be a bit fast to call it gray.

The main point is that it was an all-nighter.

Now, I will return to the hotel, arrange my thoughts on the current situation, and practice with the bow for recreation... yeah, there's no doubt it will be morning by then.

It is true that I can go without sleeping for several days though.

Must be thanks to my youth.

In just this kind of times, I honestly think it is great that I am young.

Normally, there's quite a lot of times where I feel like I am lacking in experience and lacking in ability as well, so there's not many times where I get happy about being young.

“Well then, let's return to the hote—huh?” (Makoto)

I call both Akashi-san and Yudoku-san who used the portal together with me.

Before, Akashi-san had an ashen face and had a hand on the wall with her face facing down breathing heavily. Then, how is she now. Her face is ghastly pale and Yudoku-san is lending her a shoulder.

Can't be helped.

Since then, her muddy memories were slowly returning, and had remembered what she did and for whose sake after all.

For the sake of a master that she has not seen yet, Akashi-san was trying to increase the amount of comrades. Trying to reel in Yudoku-san, Iroha-chan, Shougetsu-san and the others.

Moreover, as if rubbing salt to the wound, the one who ordered this was the person that seemed like she would become a strong and dependable ally, Iroha-chan's mother, Haruka-san.

There's a lot she can't simply swallow.

She was looking for her in order to have her become their strength, and yet, not only was she lured, she was forced to change sides.

"I... what have I done..." (Akashi)

"Akashi, just think about returning and getting rest." (Yudoku)

But Akashi-san is still the better one.

Even when looking back at her memories, the time she was charmed was not that long.

She hasn't hurt people willingly for the sake of Tomoki, or killed anyone yet.

That's why... she probably can still return.

I think it is fine.

Those three that I killed have long since killed people for his sake.

If those three were trash to begin with and didn't think anything about it... I probably would have thought they were still saveable.

But those girls were not.

They were all girls that had strong conviction and ideals.

That's why it was 'too late'.

There's no point in dispelling the charm.

Even if it is dispelled, as long as there's no miracle occurring, in the end, they will just...

...

Eh?

Why was I able to tell all that in that one instant?

Hmm... did the power of Tomoe flow into me again?

It happens every now and then.

Even though it would be pretty useful if I were able to activate it at will, I still am not able to.

Yeah, I could tell.

When I once again look back, I could roughly grasp the memories -or maybe it was the knowledge- of those three and also their upbringing.

If I had to put it in words, it would be as if a drawer I didn't know of had been stealthily added in my own room. A strange sensation.

Those three were originally the daughters of nobles in the Empire.

They held deep concerns towards the current situation of the Empire, especially in the relationship with the surrounding countries, and did their best to try and bring their points to the center of the Empire in a fair and square manner.

But it was the misfortune of them that Tomoki was in the Empire at that time.

Ah, so this is the Pione person.

It is certainly true that if she is like this, she would definitely hate me.

I have killed a close friend of hers after all.

Or more like, to think I would see the face of the woman called Pione in such a manner.

Even though I haven't met her in person, her figure was already inside my head, and have already seen her laugh, cry, and get angry.

Truly a strange feeling.

"Monster huh. It is true that I am steadily straying from the boundaries of a human being. Even I can tell that." (Makoto)

"Eh?"

"It is nothing. Let's go—hm?" (Makoto)

I unintentionally mutter the word that the gazes that are normally directed at me say.

Yuduki-san sharply reacts to it, but I just wash it away.

It is not really something to tell others after all.

The moment I was going to urge them to return, familiar presences appeared from the portal.

Oh, it really is the two birds one stone.

"Now, let's return. If we don't return to our beds while it is still dark, we will create unnecessary worry."

"We somehow made it."

"Sniff sniff, this is black. A black hole, you know? A bottomless pit, you know?" *<black as in wrong>*

It seems like the three are in a hurry.

One of them looks incredibly reluctant.

"Beren, Hokuto, Shii, what are you guys doing so late?" (Makoto)

"Geh, Waka-sama!"

...

He seriously went 'Geh'.

"You're not gonna say you went to the labyrinth to train, right?" (Makoto)

"Ah, no. Uhm, you see..." (Beren)

Unclear words came out from Beren.

"How should I explain it..." (Hokuto)

Hokuto is the same.

"In my case, it was practically kidnapping." (Shii)

Shii's words were clear, but it is not the answer I am looking for.

"Beren?" (Makoto)

I once again ask.

I am not really angry. I simply want to hear what they were doing.

My tone is not severe since the beginning.

"If I had to put it in words... it is embarrassing to say, but it is like preparation." (Beren)

Preparation?

Hokuto also nodded at the words of Beren.

Shii was discouraged and sighed.

I should try asking the continuation from her.

"Shii, what were you guys doing?" (Makoto)

"Thanks for asking, Waka-sama! Those two were cruel. They tied the opposing me in a tortoise shell style and kidnapped me into the dungeon." (Shii)

"?!!"

“Hoh hoh, and?” (Makoto)

For now, let’s leave aside the talk about tortoise shell and kidnap, and see what she has to say.

From what I see of the gazes Beren and Hokuto direct at her, there must be some sort of reason behind this.

“From what I saw... the last part today was... pretty tough for us. Mainly for me and Beren-dono. But from tomorrow on—wait, that’s today? Ah, my sleep time!” (Shii)

“Continue.” (Makoto)

“Even so, if we were to bring the masterpiece series of Beren-dono, we might damage the labyrinth, so we decided on gaining experience first by going beforehand.” (Shii)

“Uhu.” (Makoto)

“Beren said that we should prepare ourselves beforehand in order to accompany Waka-sama and the others. And so, it ended up in us leaving at night.” (Shii)

I see.

Well then, let’s hear about the kidnapping and the tortoise shell since I have the chance.

“I see, I understand. And so, about the kidnapping...” (Makoto)

“I said ‘I haven’t gotten serious yet, so it will be fine’ and tried to go back to sleep! I would probably be able to manage somehow tomorrow after all. And yet, Hokuto-cchi used some sort of tying technique, tied me up in an instant, and forced me to go to the labyrinth!” (Shii)

“Shii, it is fine. It seems like you were bothered by it, but you were plenty slim and light, you know. There’s no need to get anxious about your muscles. I think it is attractive.” (Hokuto)

“Shut up! I don’t know whose suggestion it was, but repeating the same thing over and over again doesn’t work, okay?!” (Shii)

...So Hokuto was the one who carried her there.

And he made a follow-up by saying she was light.

He has said those words several times already, moreover, Shii should be angry about the kidnapping.

This is derailing.

Well, in this kind of aspects, I can't say much about others.

"Waka-sama! We are truly sorry for doing something like this without your forgiveness! But please, please bring us to the labyrinth as well. We will definitely—" (Beren)

"Of course, that's what I was intending to do, Beren. My feelings have not changed at all." (Makoto)

"!"

"I am looking forward to the results of your preparation. However! I won't forgive any recklessness that might affect your health. Understood?" (Makoto)

But well, looks like it was my misunderstanding. I thought we had easily arrived at the lower floors.

Beren and Shii were actually beginning to feel it tough.

If I believe in the words of Shii, apparently, she can still manage in the next exploration without any preparation though.

And Beren as well, if he were to bring his treasured equipment without any restraint, he would have plenty leeway.

He has quite the outrageous equipment, so even I can tell.

But it is probably difficult to use them around this place.

To take into consideration the well-being of the labyrinth, or take into consideration the well-being of Beren; there's no need to place a balance in which one is more

important.

I will have him redo the selection of the equipment he will be bringing, and have him do his best as Beren ver. 1.1.

I wouldn't want him get injured by doing too much of those preparations.

From what I have heard while we were walking to the Chihiro Man Rai restaurant, Hokuto doesn't really have much difficulties in battle, but it seems the high pace exploration and mapping at the same time was beginning to prove difficult.

It seems he also thought that Shii required the preparation for tomorrow.

Looks like the three had their own places of concern.

I am probably the one who should notice these kind of things and do follow-ups for it.

We can have Mio help in the mapping, and regarding the weapons, we can reselect it to the ones that are best suited for the labyrinth.

And about Shii, we can have her get some advice from Akua and Eris.

The cordial backup of Asora is one of our big strengths.

Inside the labyrinth, a part of that strength is restricted, but it is not like we are always inside the labyrinth anyways.

We have to properly make use of it.

"Thank you very much!!"

"Same here, it is a big help that you guys are doing your best. Thanks." (Makoto)

As I grew aware that my consideration towards the company's employees was not enough, we returned to the hotel.

Even though it is this time of the day, the moment we entered, quite a good amount of people welcomed us which surprised me a bit.

Chihiro Man Rai restaurant is impressive.

Are they active at full force 24/7?

Temple Avenue.

When going to the deep parts, you will find quite a good amount of temples of Lorel's Spirit religion, and there's one Kishimo temple there as well.

This underground area, where there's no average temple, was currently being used for something different from religion.

But for the people that use this place as a stronghold, it is not that it is different from religion, it might be called a new religion.

A new existence that should be loved and revered.

It is the headquarters for the people that have been taught and are spreading the existence of the Empire's hero, Iwahashi Tomoki.

"Looks like Akashi has failed. I still don't know the particulars, but the communication with Manju was severed."

At an underground hall where there's purple smoke floating around, a report was being relayed.

Manju is the suspicious bar that Makoto had stepped into not that long ago.

The woman that was listening to the report shook her head to the sides in sadness.

"I thought that I would finally be able to teach Iroha about that person. As I thought, it wasn't something to leave in the hands of the inexperienced Akashi."

"Haruka-sama..."

"Look for a chance, in as peaceable manner as possible. There's no need to hurry. It is not like there's anything that girl, who has not stepped into a ruling position and doesn't know left from right, can do. And, if Akashi is not dead, retrieve her. She should still have her uses." (Haruka)

“Understood.”

“Seriously, if we offer the people and the control to Tomoki-sama, everyone would be able to live in happiness. My daughter is really a troublesome one. Not knowing is truly pitiful. Don’t you think so as well?” (Haruka)

“Yes. A life without knowing of Tomoki-sama is just worthless.”

The informant responds to the words of Haruka as if it was obvious.

There was no hesitation in her eyes and no doubt in her words.

Words that came from her innermost depths.

As if saying she was also of the same opinion, Haruka smiles.

“Is this what they call ‘the pleasures of subordination’, Haruka?”

“...That’s unrefined, Kougetsu-sama.” (Haruka)

“If I don’t interject here, it will once again end in foolish racket.” (Kougetsu)

“Are you denying the love of Tomoki-sama?” (Haruka)

The eyes of Haruka that had been gentle until now, were now showing sharp hostility and bloodlust.

The man that had just entered the place, Kougetsu, shrug his shoulders and shakes his head to the sides.

“No way. You have heard already, right? I am the one cooperating with Tomoki-sama. In other words, your ally. What I wanted to say was that you should do what needs to be done before drowning as much as you want in that love of yours.” (Kougetsu)

“What has to be done, huh. This city, the settlements in the surroundings, the real power of the Osakabe household; isn’t it almost all in your hands now? I as well, for the sake of showing my love to Tomoki-sama, won’t be frugal about my cooperation with you, Kougetsu-sama.” (Haruka)

“That’s what I am talking about, Haruka. The problem is that it is ‘almost’. It is not

complete yet.” (Kougetsu)

“Men are always hurried in that way. If we continue further, as long as the father of Iroha doesn’t die, it cannot proceed. We have to make him die in a natural-looking death so that even Sairitz doesn’t suspect anything, or it will turn troublesome.” (Haruka)

“...The father of Iroha, huh.” (Kougetsu)

Haruka’s manner of speaking makes Kougetsu narrow his eyes.

Because he felt two meanings behind her not calling him her husband.

The first one is that he is not the ‘true father’ of Iroha; and the other is that he was certainly one of the people she loved, and yet, she said it as if her relationship with him was far away.

(In those days, everyone in the Osakabe’s authorities knew of their blighted love, but... the charm of the hero is truly scary. Once she fell to it, she happily did things like revealing the father of Iroha was the current head, and continuously prescribed medicine that was actually poison and would definitely not be discovered.) (Kougetsu)

Kougetsu himself doesn’t wish to cooperate with the Empire.

He is currently resisting the charm of the hero and is utilizing the Empire. After grasping the real power of the Osakabe household, he plans on eliminating everyone, beginning with Haruka.

The effect that the power called charm brings about, Kougetsu properly felt it as a threat.

“Yeah, her father. Wait for only a few months. And then, feel free to make the children that you have influenced into the head of the family. You can take one of the princesses here and make her the successor for you to control. The problematic thing has been dealt with, since they have already been taught to love Tomoki-sama.” (Haruka)

“Haruka, you also know about the irregulars called the Kuzunoha Company, right? Thinking about his connection with Sairitz, there’s no doubt that they have some sort of aim with the Osakabe.” (Kougetsu)

“Is that your reason for hurrying? You can just leave those kind of guys alone. The circumstances of Iroha are well known. And in turn, the things that Kuzunoha Company can do are also limited.” (Haruka)

“So you are telling me that it was a complete coincidence that the only girl in the Osakabe household, who has not been caught in the charm, has come in contact with a foreign company that is connected with Sairitz, and that I shouldn’t worry at all about it?” (Kougetsu)

“Yes. The situation has advanced plenty. We have already won. There’s no need to involve ourselves in it and have people die pointlessly, like the time with the Shadowless girls.” (Haruka)

“...I see.” (Kougetsu)

The assassination attempt with the Shadowless class assassins that ended in failure.

Moreover, not only did they not hunt Iroha, for some reason, they headed towards the company’s representative, Raidou, and got disposed of instead.

To be exact, it was them doing what they wanted, and it wasn’t the error of Kougetsu, but a failure is a failure.

It is also true that important pawns were pointlessly lost.

The biting words of Haruka had enough effect to stop the pressing of Kougetsu.

Kougetsu had a bitter expression surface and only gestured in response as he turned on his heels.

“Are you leaving?” (Haruka)

“Yeah, I will be coming back another time.” (Kougetsu)

“Tread carefully, okay? I am, in outline, an unknown factor after all.” (Haruka)

Haruka laughs sweetly.

Kougetsu doesn’t respond to it and only his steps were heard as he left the place.

(I'm impressed at how thoroughly that strong spirited woman was broken. A hero that shows no hesitation in using a power that maddens people to this extent. Was it okay to utilize it? No, don't waver. Everything is for the sake of the Osakabe, for the sake of my own justice. At any rate, there's no room to return.) (Kougetsu)

Remembering the original nature of Haruka who he knew well in the past and has now been changed by the power of Tomoki, Kougetsu felt his conviction waiver.

But he immediately throws away the doubts that were being born while thinking about his next move against the Kuzunoha Company.

He went his way back in a dark morning.

Chapter 268

An impossible reunion

White as always.

After the night passed, I had come to a place I wouldn't even imagine I would be a few hours ago.

The outside is pure white.

That place is, to my surprise...

"I am truly sorry, Waka-sama! I am aware that you are in the middle of clearing the labyrinth of Lorel, but..."

The one who is lowering his head is Shiki.

Actually, tomorrow is lecture day in the Academy.

At evening, I was planning on going to Rotsgard in order to have a preparatory meeting, so meeting with Shiki today was within schedule.

I simply didn't expect it to turn into meeting in the morning.

Because of the sudden call of Shiki, I am currently at Kaleneon, a place I haven't been to for a while.

"And so, how's Jin?" (Makoto)

"He has regained consciousness, but he is still in a state of extreme agitation. I didn't expect Jin to lose control in such a manner. It was my blunder." (Shiki)

"...He is still alive. You don't have to be bothered so much by it, Shiki. You must have estimated the amount he could handle when you had him train after all." (Makoto)

That's right.

Apparently, Shiki was training Jin, who was burning with desire to be employed by us, in a separate curriculum from that of the classes and had him take some work to see.

Of course, he wasn't alone. The company staff was also with him.

The training itself was just as I said, not something that was too dangerous.

Regarding Jin, Amelia, and the students, I have given a relative amount of material for Shiki and have left it to him, and from what I have heard, there's no problems.

By nature, it was a situation where there's no need to call for me.

'I am truly sorry, Jin has been seriously wounded. Please come to Kaleneon posthaste', is the report I received in my sleep, and so, that's why I am currently in Kaleneon.

From what Shiki has said, the treatment has been safely done and has shown the best results where no scars are left.

However, because Jin was about to die -not in a class, but in actual combat- he fell into a state of agitation.

...Well, at the classes, no matter how much they are conscious of death, lately, they have seriously understood somewhere in their minds that they won't die.

Even if we corner them right at the borders of death, we wouldn't go as far as actually killing them after all.

But actual combat is different.

For the sake of stealing, protecting, eating; they will fight the enemy and kill it.

Of course, only one side will survive and the other will die.

In other words, Jin has experienced the fear of actual borderline death that he has not experienced in a while, and his state of mind is currently unstable.

In terms of strength, he has plenty enough to work as an adventurer, but -fufufu- looks like he has finally stepped into the starting line of becoming a warrior in the real sense of the word.

He probably remembered the time with the lesser dragon and that has made him even more mortified and agitated.

That was also actual combat, but he was in a party, moreover, they had countermeasures before fighting, and they also had tenacity that surpassed their fear.

Now then... why was Jin on the verge of dying this time?

“...Actually, I am expecting Jin to act in Kaleneon’s matters. And so, I was thinking about having him experience fighting in a snow country and the way to fight there, so I brought him here with the intentions of having him learn in actual practice.” (Shiki)

“And there was an unexpected factor that even Shiki was unable to predict. Is that how it is?” (Makoto)

“...Yes.” (Shiki)

Shiki’s bitter smile was heavy.

Maybe he thinks he has planted a trauma in his student.

Being honest here, I don’t feel like Shiki needs to feel so responsible about it.

I also have no intentions of blaming him at all for the injury of Jin.

After this, I plan on saying this to Jin when he gets somewhat better: ‘Don’t make Shiki worry’, ‘are you a weakling?’, ‘are your limbs decorations?’, which is just some light abuse.

I don’t know for what sake he did it, but he came to our place seeking strength, and said he desired to be employed in the Kuzunoha Company.

He should have known of its danger.

He himself has taken the lessons and has been watching us, so he should have known that there’s no way he would obtain power and money by sipping tea while watching the sunset.

If that wasn’t the case, he would have dropped out of class.

On top of that, he was suggested training by Shiki and he accepted it, and splendidly failed in it.

That's right, he failed expectations.

At the very least, that how I have to think as the representative of the company.

Everyone from Asora is also going outside and doing their best as part of the company with pride, so the responsibility is heavier.

If it were simply about the class, it would be another story, but when it is about Jin and Amelia, I must make sure to act the part.

"Shiki, in this time's matter, Jin betrayed your expectations and you were disappointed. That's all there's to it." (Makoto)

"But I—! Am in part their teacher as well." (Shiki)

"At the same time -for now, at least- you are the company superior of those two. Right?" (Makoto)

"That's... yes, it is exactly as you say, but..." (Shiki)

"Then, let's go with expecting the same as everyone at Asora in terms of work. Without the partiality that they are students. You are focusing too much on it." (Makoto)

"Am I... really focusing too much on it? I admit that because he is under my tutelage and inexperienced, I have been soft." (Shiki)

"That's how I see it. No matter if he is a student under your tutelage, as long as he wants to work in the Kusunoha Company, inexperience doesn't matter. If we are going to hire them, it would be troublesome if they don't properly show the strength we seek from them." (Makoto)

"...Right. It is just as you say. If we are soft with only them, it wouldn't be a good example for the people of Asora that have crossed the gate and working hard at the outside for the company. You are completely right." (Shiki)

"I am leagues away from preaching Shiki though. Hahaha." (Makoto)

“No, that’s not true. This is not good, I just end up treating them as students rather than acting as a superior. If they are going to be involved with the company, I have to properly do things.” (Shiki)

“That’s right, that’s the way to go. Now then, Jin should have calmed down by now. Maybe I should go with the: ‘hey, wimp’. And so, why did Jin end up that way?” (Makoto)

The mysterious factor that overturned the expectation of Shiki.

It interests me.

“That’s probably me~!”

“Uwa?!”

From the other side of the room’s door, a response suddenly came in place of a knock.

What?!

Who?!

No, this voice...

I have heard it before?!

“Is it okay to enter?!”

An energetic voice resonates in the room.

Obviously, I look at Shiki.

“There’s probably no mistake. Because of that person’s influence, Jin chased the mamonos too far and received an injury.” (Shiki)

“Heh~.”

I see.

It is a voice I have heard before, but... at the same time, there’s a sense of discomfort

for remembering.

It is as if something is out of place. A strange sensation.

Who is it?

Well, for now, it seems like the other side doesn't hold any hostility, so let's have it enter.

"Please, go ahead." (Makoto)

"Excuse my intrusion!!"

Energetic.

At any rate, it seems to be an energetic person.

I could tell before that person came in but, she is a girl.

She is in her teens and...

...

Around the same age as Jin and the others...

But...

Hah?!

Haaaaaah?!!!

"Nice to meet you! It is an honor to make your acquaintance, Raidou-sama! At the orders of my father, Falz, I am on duty at the Adventurer Guild of Kaleneon, my name's Sofia!!"

Short blue hair, both eyes not showing a single irregularity, and her energy is the same as before entering the room.

The dragon slayer that Root supposedly dealt the finishing blow to... has, for some reason, rejuvenated, and is standing in front of me.

...Father?

Father, you say?!

“And that’s how it is. Because of me, it seems I made the apprentice-san there get injured. I am sorry.” (Sofia)

“...”

The young Sofia explained the situation for me, and lowered her head deeply —at me.

With no stiffness and no uneasiness showing.

No, that’s not on that level. This is... yeah, she clearly doesn’t know me.

It looks like she really doesn’t know.

For some reason, she seems to be incredibly interested in me and that part is eerie, but there’s not a single trace of her faking.

Sofia.

I don’t know everything that happened in her past.

But... if -and only IF-she didn’t have the objective of devouring Superior Dragons to be on the same level as Root, and didn’t have any sort of factor that distorted her into darkness as she grew up, she might have ended up being a woman like this.

Of course, that’s only an if.

But the young Sofia in front of me isn’t some sort of residual spirit of her or an undead, she has clear presence. Moreover, she is calling that Root as father.

...No, it wasn’t Root.

Falz.

That’s how she called him.

“Raidou-sama?” (Sofia)

“Ah, right. I understand. It is nothing you should apologize for. It just means that our Jin is inexperienced.” (Makoto)

“Inexperienced?! It is true that he is a bit of a weird guy, but his skills were quite high. Ah! Could it be that in the Kuzunoha Company, even that is considered inexperienced?!” (Sofia)

The young Sofia talks to me with glittering eyes.

A bit of a weird guy. It is not like Jin is a weird guy.

But from what I hear of young Sofia, he is indeed weird.

I have also confirmed with Shiki, and it seems like what she says is true.

Sister Miranda, huh.

It seems like that’s what Jin shouted when he coincidentally met Sofia in the middle of his training and ran to her.

It wasn’t on the level of resembling an acquaintance, he was completely sure that this young Sofia was this person called Miranda.

Hm...

Doesn’t sound like he went crazy from the cold.

In the first place, the current Sofia is clearly strange.

She is younger, doesn’t remember me, and her impression of the Kuzunoha Company is overwhelmingly good.

And that girl looks similar to someone else?

No good, I don’t understand.

“Can’t say he is skilled when he ended up injured just because his strength was not fitting for the place. It is true that if I am asked whether Jin is weak or strong in the

Kuzunoha Company, I would say that he is an apprentice. He is still weak.” (Makoto)

“Uwaa~~! As expected of the world’s strongest war potential, the Kuzunoha Company! You are exactly how father said!!” (Sofia)

...

As I thought, even here she mentions Root.

Geez.

This Sofia being here, or more like, everything about this is a scheme of his.

Going through the trouble of leaving this girl in Kaleneon, must mean that he was looking forward to me finding her and be taken aback by it.

And also, he expects me to go flying to his place asking for the circumstances of this.

...That’s exactly what I will be doing though.

That irritates me.

In the first place, what’s that about being the world’s strongest war potential.

That’s not an evaluation you give to a company.

“War potential, is it. Seriously, how ill-natured of Falz-dono.” (Makoto)

“No! My father always says this frequently. That being able to cooperate with the Kuzunoha Company is a big benefit for the Adventurer Guild. He said that Raidou-sama is an important and irreplaceable existence.” (Sofia)

“ ... ”

“T-That’s why he said that you are his ‘most trusted person’ and send me to Kaleneon. I was looking forward to the day I meet you like this. That’s the truth.” (Sofia)

...Sofia.

She looks happy.

Yeah, there's no doubt about that.

There's no doubt in her words.

Let's start over. I will give her the chance.

It is certainly great.

But... that innocence, that pure way of her bringing the conversation to me, looking at her who is happy about this moving meeting of hers... for some reason, it was painful for me.

I still don't understand the reason why.

The figure of Sofia enjoying life... looked pitiful.

I don't know how, but Root has given her a life opposite of hatred, a life of happiness.

That's how it is, and yet...

I can't read the emotions of Shiki who is standing at my side.

He is simply showing a gentle expression as a superior of the company and at times, gesturing comprehension to the words of Sofia.

"Ah, he told me to keep this a secret, but I can't lie to father and Raidou-sama, so I am telling you this, okay?" (Sofia)

"Hm?"

The young Sofia made a troubled expression and then soon returned to the smile she showed until now as she said this.

Shiki's eyebrow moves slightly.

...New information huh.

That 'he' she mentioned just now, is she referring to the person that rescued Jin at the base of the snow mountain?

That's what Sofia said.

That there was a man who wiped out the mamonos that cornered Jin.

It is questionable for a person that's challenging the snow mountain, but apparently, it was a knight-looking person that sported a full plate armor. Moreover, he was riding a strong horse.

There's so many things to retort to that I don't even know where to begin.

Being told this is some new sort of illusion magic would be more believable.

"He introduced himself as Aznoval. It seems like he saved the apprentice there, and when I arrived at the place, he said: 'I am Aznoval... is the alias I go by as a knight -no I mean, an adventurer of ori- no, not that either, I am just passing by. By the way, where's Tsige?'" (Sofia)

Aznoval?

I know that name though.

"From the looks of it, I don't think it was an alias but his real name. He was wandering Kaleneon, and was asking the directions for Tsige. That's clearly weird." (Sofia)

...That's true. It is way too far.

It is like being in China, and asking the way to Finland.

If it's from Silk Road to Middle East, that's barely realistic.

Even if this world has teleport formations, the standard way of transportation in this world is at the level of the Middle Ages.

Anyways, Tsige huh.

If he is from the Adventurers of Origin, I can't ignore that the name Tsige came out from his mouth.

First of all, let's look at the state of Jin, and then, return to Tsige.

...I will leave the labyrinth exploration for the afternoon, and in that time, I will have everyone investigate about the things related to Iroha-chan.

Now that I think about it, Mio wanted to inspect the miso production.

It is dull but, as a small reward, let's make it free time this morning with the pretext of investigation.

"At any rate, what should we do about that boy? I am not Miranda-san, and am not that boy's sister though. Today is our first time meeting. If this were a new type of flirting, I would have been able to reject it..." (Sofia)

"I will be asking him that after this, so it may take a bit of time, but if you are okay with it..." (Makoto)

"If Raidou-sama says so. Also, please don't use formal speech with someone like me. It seems like you are busy today, but it would make me happy if you were to lend me your time in the near future! Well then, I would feel bad taking so much of your time, so I will be leaving now!" (Sofia)

She doesn't intend to meet Jin, huh.

But that's true.

It would make me feel more at ease if this were simply Jin fallin' in love at first sight with Sofia and him trying some nonsensical flirting.

Now then, let's hurry.

I have to finish the business here and in Tsige while it is morning, and return to Kannaoui by the afternoon.

Tsige huh. It would be nice if there's someone who knows about the objective of this Aznoval person though.

Chapter 269

Mummy Jin and Sweetheart Raidou

“Ooh, a splendid mummy look you have there. How are you feeling, mummy Jin?”

I heard that his external wound treatment had been finished, but when we entered the room where he is resting, I saw Jin with his whole body wrapped in bandages.

Now then, because it was such a comical look, I unintentionally called him a mummy man before a wimp.

But if he is already recovered, there’s no need for bandages.

“...Sensei... Shiki-san.” (Jin)

Then why is Jin currently being packaged to such an extent with bandages.

For keep him in check.

I decide to ignore the voice of the mummy that was groaning.

Oooh.

The bandages continue on at the ends of the bed, and even those are tightly wrapped. Also at the legs of the thick and strong-looking wooden legs.

In other words, someone physically restrained him with bandages so that he wouldn’t rampage in his agitation.

Fumu, splendid medical treatment.

From what I have seen of the patient, he looks somewhat calm.

But with this, I feel like the report of him being silent was because the restraining had finished.

“Okay, I see now. And so, the wimp-kun that got confused, went out of control, and was almost at the verge of death—I mean, Jin-kun, let’s hear your report.” (Makoto)

Now then, let’s act as a teacher and a superior.

Objective view.

“Uh, a report?” (Jin)

“That’s right, a report. You came here as training for the Kuzunoha Company after all. Isn’t that right, Shiki?” (Makoto)

“...Yeah. I would also like to hear the explanation of why it turned out this way from the person himself.” (Shiki)

While placing slight thorns in it, I urge him to give me a report with a smile.

On the other hand, Shiki looks down at him with quite the anger.

“That’s... uhm, how should I begin explaining...” (Jin)

It is unusual to see Jin in disarray.

It is a face I haven’t seen lately at the Academy.

“First of all, why did you chase the mamonos too far? From what I understood of your job this time, it was at most... like carrying luggage.” (Makoto)

“On top of that, I gave you a strict order, didn’t I, Jin? That you shouldn’t move on your own accord. That the strength of the mamonos deep in the snowy region are too much for the current you.” (Shiki)

“...That’s true, I was indeed told that. This time’s injury was not the fault of Shiki-san.” (Jin)

With his head hung down, Jin admits his own fault.

He muttered weakly that it wasn’t the fault of Shiki.

...Is he an idiot?

From the very beginning I didn't think Shiki was at fault.

Also, injury?

It looks like he is misunderstanding what I am asking here.

"There's no need to tell me something so obvious. Everything is your just desserts."
(Makoto)

"Uh."

"Shiki, what was the state of Jin when he encountered Sofia?" (Makoto)

When I spoke the name of Sofia, the body of Jin stiffened.

The main cause of his disarray huh.

But I think we first need to make him notice the misunderstanding he has.

It is fine to just ask about this thing of Miranda and Sofia later.

"He was already out cold and his whole body was covered in blood. It seems the surrounding snow was also dyed in red. From what we investigated when the treatment was underway, there was half a fistful of insects swarming in his body... and that he lost his consciousness most likely because of his external wounds made by the bitten off meat and his lost of blood. I also think there's no mistake in it." (Shiki)

"Any other thing?" (Makoto)

"At the same time, he was injected poison. It takes away the freedom of their prey, and serves to prolong the time its prey is alive... no, it is a resourceful poison that weakens the resistance and prolongs the freshness of the meat. But this time, that served as a saving. Thanks to that, Jin's treatment made it in time after all." (Shiki)

"On top of that, it was also thanks to that mysterious knight who swept away the insects." (Makoto)

"Yes." (Shiki)

"Jin, just now, you said 'this time's wound', didn't you? Are you seriously saying that?"

(Makoto)

Hearing the report of Shiki again, I could tell that Jin's life was saved by a heavy luck that would make anyone envious.

This time's injury?

Don't joke around.

In normal circumstances, it would have been almost certain that he would have died.

"Eh?"

"The type of poison the insects used, the knight's help; if even one of those were missing, you would be dead by now." (Makoto)

"?!!"

The word dead made the eyes of Jin open wide.

This is why I can't handle lucky people.

Makes me want to shout: 'give me a bit of it!'

"Yeah, no doubt about it. The words 'injured' and 'seriously wounded' are just too lukewarm. You were saved purely by luck. If this were based on ability, you would have long been the preserved food of those insects. What was its name again... Snow Dung Beetle, maybe?" (Makoto)

"Yes, around these parts, as long as you don't chase them too far, they are not that dangerous creatures. However, if you chase them too far, the danger level increases in an instant though." (Shiki)

Because they lure you in and devour you with numbers in an instant.

It is a creature that's exactly as Shiki explained.

It is an opponent that you can ignore its danger with certainty as long as you are careful.

Seriously, how pathetic.

“Your actions this time around, frankly speaking, there’s a lot to retort to, and regarding the training, we will obviously have you stay put for a while. Have this clear in your mind, Jin, in terms of ability, you have already died once.” (Makoto)

“!! That’s not it! It is true that I let my guard down a bit! I also admit that I wasn’t calm for a bit! But–!!” (Jin)

“...And forget that all those ‘bits’ are what link you to death? Can’t even make conversation with you. Like this, your life that was barely saved will only end up being layed down again in the near future. Shiki, whatever the case, have Jin return to the Academy. Having him here will only be an annoyance.” (Makoto)

“Yes, looks like there’s the need for quite the lecture.” (Shiki)

Shiki nods at my words.

At any rate, leaving Jin here on the pretext of training would only be a bother for the people of Kaleneon.

Also, leaving him with the reason of this -Sofia- doesn’t seem like it will be a plus for Jin at all.

“Please wait!! I want to do my best here for a bit more, just a bit more!!” (Jin)

“Rejected. As a teacher and as a superior, this decision won’t change. Hah... hey, Jin, the reason for that zeal of yours, is it as expected... the Dragon Slayer Sofia?” (Makoto)

How I should describe that younger Sofia.

For now, I decide to go with Dragon Slayer.

That’s right, I have to properly hear about this from that pervert.

Even though I have to go to Tsige regarding the matter with Aznoval-san...

“That person’s name... is not Sofia. She is my first sword mentor, close friend, and the first person I respected...” (Jin)

Hey hey.

A mentor, a close friend, and a person you respected, you say... They had quite the deep relationship?

But from what I see in the atmosphere of that Sofia, even if I were to imagine her past and present, I feel like it was all a one-way from Jin...

Please spare me from her being a past girlfriend.

Even if I met her after, it would make me feel bad.

“I wasn’t able to confess, but I think she was also my first love.” (Jin)

Are you an esper?

But she wasn’t his girlfriend.

Hm?

No, if I had to choose between both, it is probably worse than being a past girlfriend?

“And so... she is probably the woman I hurt the most in my life. Sister Miranda. In the past, she looked a bit more mature, but there’s no way I would mistake that person. She is the person who I intended to search for life, apologize, and atone for!!” (Jin)

I killed her once.

S-Sorry about that, Jin.

Looks like she is somewhat alive now, so is it fine to say it doesn’t count?

Ah... I now have one more secret I will definitely carry to my grave.

Since he has stated it with such certainty, I don’t think he has the wrong person... so just in case, let’s investigate the past of Sofia.

It would be nice if Root tells us about it honestly, but for now, let’s investigate over here as well.

Hah...

“...But the person herself is without doubt saying her name is Sofia. By the way, you who’s spreading trouble for the people around, haven’t given her a good impression. Not only did you ignore her direct warning about controlling yourself, you also acted in that way.” (Makoto)

“Hah?!” (Jin)

“Coming back another time would be the correct decision. We are not fiends, Jin. We will make it so that you understand her tendencies.” (Shiki)

Shiki is doing a follow-up.

Well, it is Sofia.

Even without Jin’s matter, I would have wanted information.

If it’s only that, there’s no problem.

“But I heard that this place is lacking personnel!” (Jin)

So he still intends to cling on huh.

Definitely no.

“About that, we will have Amelia and the other employees come here in shifts. At the very least, it will be better than you who only increased the workload.” (Makoto)

“Kugh... I...” (Jin)

“That’s how it is. Rest here for today. No need to work either. I will have Shiki come pick you up tomorrow. Jin, reflect upon the worth of the life you have been blessed with today.” (Makoto)

“...”

Oh, he grew obedient.

“Sensei...” (Jin)

Or not.

“What is it?” (Makoto)

“I am truly sorry... for troubling you with my own matters.” (Jin)

“Yeah, reflect plenty. Worrying is tiring. It would make me incredibly happy if you don’t do that often.” (Makoto)

“Totally agree.” (Shiki)

“Okay...” (Jin)

I get an agree from Shiki along with a big nod.

Jin also grew obedient this time for sure and returns a response while still tied to the bed.

I leave him as mummy Jin and depart from the room.

Okay, one task done!

Next is Tsige, to confirm if there’s information regarding Aznoval from Rembrandt-san or someone else.

Maybe I should also ask the adventurers to see if they have an idea. It seems he is like the pioneer of adventurers after all.

“Waka-sama, thank you for going through the trouble tod–” (Shiki)

“It’s fine. It is a boy that has high chances of working officially in our company, and also...” (Makoto)

“ ... ”

“The matter of Sofia surfaced anyways. I will confirm with that pervert about what in the world is going on, and if possible, I want to wrap up the matter without having Jin hate me. Shiki, it might be troublesome, but I am counting on you for a while.” (Makoto)

“Yes, please leave it to me.” (Shiki)

“Well then, I will be heading to Tsige. After that, I will have to hurry and return to Rotsgard and Lorel. Is this kind of busy something to be happy about as a merchant?”
(Makoto)

“Yeah, it must be.” (Shiki)

Waving at Shiki who is smiling gently and nodding, I cross through the mist gate that has the destination set to Tsige.

The location changes.

In an instant, hot and dry air circulates through my lungs.

It is the air of Tsige.

Until just a few moments ago, I was at a deep snowy northern region breathing out white air, so I got bewildered for a second.

Leaving the office room of the company, I greet everyone that’s working and depart.

As always, it is a town which sight changes every time I come, but this is not the time to enjoy it.

I hurriedly head to the Adventurer Guild.

On the way, the adventurers, merchants, and the residents turned to look at me again, but I didn’t respond to them.

How to say it... I have become quite the celebrity in this town.

It is fine when there’s nothing to do, but in times when I am in a hurry, I can’t just stop to chat each time.

“Hm? Isn’t that Raidou-kun? If I remember correctly, I heard you had gone to Lorel though?”

“Long time no see, Rembrandt-san. Because of business, I have returned for a bit. It looks like the town is operating as usual, but is the war the same?” (Makoto)

I promptly meet with Rembrandt-san and jump to the topic.

Looks like he is... a bit tired.

His exhaustion is showing more than normal. But contrary to that, his eyes are shining, and he seems to have higher motivation than before though.

Could it be the war has gotten worse, or it is about to get worse?

If that's the case, I will have to tranquilize that one first.

It seems this is more of priorities first after all.

Seriously, things come one after the other.

“Umu. The war situation, or more like, the negotiations are going kind of... well. To the point that it is a bit eerie. There were stealth corps trying to infiltrate the town a number of times, but we have been able to intercept them without letting them get close.” (Rembrandt)

Oh, that's unexpected.

Looks like it is actually going well.

“We have also made a secret agreement with the surrounding towns about maintaining the status quo when the matter of the independence was announced. If Raidou-kun brings corps that will serve as protection, Tsige can shift into the stage that's as good as succeeded.” (Rembrandt)

“As expected of Rembrandt-san.” (Makoto)

“The people that caused a coup d'etat are beginning to calm down, so the ones that we have to be cautious about would be the royal family. Before that ‘something’, that was able to overturn the situation when the capital was about to fall, is turned towards us, as long as you return, we will be firm as a rock.” (Rembrandt)

Rembrandt-san nods at my words of ‘as expected’ as if saying ‘leave it to me’ and

continues speaking.

As I thought, he did have a lot of influence in the political area as well.

In order to survive the world of commerce, you will end up gaining those kind of things on the way.

Especially when you have surpassed a certain scale.

“Understood. We will also hurry as much as possible. We will try to succeed in a few days from now.” (Makoto)

“...You are the one that is truly dependable. And so, what’s this business? If it’s something I can be of help, I will lend you a hand.” (Rembrandt)

“I want information regarding a certain someone. It is a person by the name Aznoval. Do you know if he has some sort of connection with this town?” (Makoto)

“Aznoval... I do think I have heard of him before though. If I remember correctly, he is a legendary knight that appears in the fairy tales of Lorel.” (Rembrandt)

“Y-Yeah. So you knew.” (Makoto)

“The name at least. However, I can’t find any connection with Tsige and the name Aznoval. In the first place, I don’t remember hearing his name in anywhere but Lorel.” (Rembrandt)

“Is that so...” (Makoto)

I thought that maybe it wasn’t strange for him to come to the World’s Border, but at the very least, it seems like there’s no stories or records remaining that point to that.

“But well, it is a request from none other than you. I will try to investigate about it. If I learn of something, I will contact the Kuzunoha Company.” (Rembrandt)

“Thanks. By the way, Rembrandt-san...” (Makoto)

“Hm?”

“The situation seems to have turned pretty well, and yet, it looks like you are quite

exhausted. Did something happen?" (Makoto)

"Ah, so it showed in my face huh. Sorry to worry you. This is a different matter. There's a few things I was thinking regarding the layout of the town, you see. I am stuck in a variety of things. In the near future, I will most likely need you to get involved as well."
(Rembrandt)

As if enjoying it from the bottom of his heart and as if he was a child finding a secret base, he gave a broad smile.

Looks like this really is a different matter from the independence.

He looks like he is having crazy fun.

This person is incredible as always.

In this situation of grave importance where they are trying to gain the independence of a town from a country, he is already aiming for something new, even though he is a central part of it.

And he is gleeful about it.

His vitality is on the genius level.

It makes me sad that only one thing is already too much for me.

But even if I have those negative thoughts, it won't increase my ability.

I have to treasure the fact that I am able to see the work of this person and his way of thinking from up close.

If I am able to take in even a bit of it, it would be most satisfactory.

"Please do so. If I am able to work with Rembrandt-san, I will definitely participate. Well then, I am slightly busy, so I will be excusing myself now." (Makoto)

"Alright. I as well have earned a lot of ideas thanks to you. Come whenever you please."
(Rembrandt)

I am truly grateful.

I lower my head deeply and bid my farewells to Rembrandt-san.

At any rate, he has completely turned the Adventurer Guild into his work office.

I leave to the area where normal adventurers can't enter and head to the hall, and in an instant, the amount of people increase.

The hall that's enveloped in heat, is covered with hustle and bustle, and there's a great amount of adventurers.

Must mean there are groups that are getting ready to go exploring or hunting.

Or more like, the current Tsige might be like this in all times of the day.

It looks like the wasteland related requests are being taken pretty actively as well.

Looks like the seed spread by Tomoe and Mio has properly sprouted.

...Nice.

But in this congestion, it will be pretty hard to ask about Aznoval-san.

Seems like I will have to leave that for later and prioritize asking that pervert about the matter of Sofia.

"Heh~. Then Vegan-san went through the trouble of coming all the way here from Rotsgard for the sake of your sweetheart? That's incredibly passionate!"

"In long distance relationships, the emotions burn stronger for both sides than when they are close to each other. There's no assurance that person is still here, but the rumors of Tsige have been amazing lately. Even if my sweetheart is not here, this can still serve as a conversation topic. After that, it was all about going with the momentum." (Vegan)

...

I am hearing a familiar voice?

Moving my head as if a *'gigigi'* sound was coming out of it, I direct my gaze at the source. <metallic sound>

“This town itself is practically a sightseeing location, so I think Vegan-san won’t regret it.”

“I was suddenly able to meet a member of the number one party of the town, Toa-san, so just the fact that I was able to become an acquaintance of yours is already enough for a conversation topic. Honestly speaking, I didn’t think you would be such a beautiful lady.” (Vegan)

“Don’t joke around now. And, about that sweetheart of yours, did you get to know her at Rotsgard?” (Toa)

I also thought this at the time with Sofia but, why the hell are you here?

Acting as if you are a harmless handsome man.

“Actually, it was late at night you see, at his room.” (Vegan)

“Eh? ‘His’?” (Toa)

Toa makes a puzzled expression.

Well, of course she would.

The person that she guided here is a... man after all.

“That’s right. At Raidou-kun’s—” (Vegan)

The moment I heard that name coming out from his mouth... the disgust and many other things that were born of Root’s dark sides I have heard from a variety of places, and the sides he hasn’t shown me, I could feel it flooding out from my body.

“Who...” (Makoto)

“Eh?”

“To think we would actually meet—eh?”

Without making a sound, I closed the distance to the two and spoke.

Root instantly noticed me and was surprised, and was then surprised that my

movements were not stopping.

“Is your damn sweetheart, idiooooot!!!!” (Makoto)

Swinging widely, but properly sealing Root’s defense and evasion routes with the Magic Armor...

“Geh, you are kidding, right? R-Raidou-bugh!”

I smash a terrifying telegraphed punch.

Ah, I forgot to cancel the Magic Armor.

Not only was he send flying, my fist had caved in the face of the silver haired handsome boy as he stood up.

I have created quite the picturesque face.

“R-Raidou-san. Uhm, so you have returned.” (Toa)

“I will be saying this for future’s sake as well, I am not in a relationship with him, and I am a straight man that loves women!” (Makoto)

In the first place, your name is not Vegan.

Just how many false names do you have?!

Even though it saved me the trouble of going to Rotsgard, for some reason, this doesn’t make me happy at all!

Chapter 270

A long time ago

Root had that usual friendly smile and was showing good will without hiding it.

However, for some mysterious reason, now that I have obtained a variety of information I didn't know until now regarding him, I could feel some sort of fuzziness inside my chest.

Being involved with the Adventurers of Origin, learning of the Adventurer Guild, and about Sofia this morning; everything of these had some sort of 'I can't accept it' kind of feeling.

I don't know about the other members yet, but it seems like Rokuya-san accepts the past even now.

Sofia also... looked happy.

And yet, an unrelated party like me was feeling something that I didn't like.

Rokuya-san and the others are Wise, in other words, Japanese people, so a part of me does feel like it not just someone else's business.

Regarding Sofia, considering her relationship with Root, I am an outsider, but I am pretty related to that attachment she had and the end of her life as well.

"Anyways, come to my room. I have something to talk to you about." (Makoto)

"...Hey, Raidou-kun..." (Root)

"What?" (Makoto)

For now, I don't intend to follow your will, you know.

"Thinking about the experience of us both, I think bondage play is a bit too fast. Actually, I should be the one leading at first. To tell you the truth, I coincidentally have

a blindfold... are you interested?" (Root)

Root who is restrained in midair for now, was cheerfully saying rotten things while blushing.

Right, he is this kind of guy.

Yeah, I am beginning to remember now.

"Not at all! And by the way, this isn't something to say in the Adventurer Guild!" (Makoto)

"Eh?! This place is practically my house, so it is fine, it is fine." (Root)

He is the Guild Master after all...

Whatever.

Let's bring him to the company quickly.

Ah right, before that, let's ask Toa-san about Aznoval-san while I am here, and if possible, ask her to investigate about it.

"Uhm, it seems like you are in the middle of something, so I will be excusing myself now, okay?" (Toa)

"Please wait. Actually, there's one thing that I want to ask you." (Makoto)

"Raidou-san, to me? Of course, go ahead and ask anything." (Toa)

Toa made a surprised face as she accepted to answer my question.

Well, she currently has no need to hide anything from me after all; including the matter of her ancestors' dagger.

It helps me out.

Right now there's other people here that can listen, but... well, even if the name Aznoval is spread from my mouth, it feels like it would have a lot of merits.

No need to care.

I will ask Root later, and in the first place, he is acquainted with them, and not only that, he also knows about their immortality.

“It is about a knight going by the name Aznoval. Do you have some sort of connection with him, or maybe you know someone that is connected with him?” (Makoto)

“!!”

“?!”

Hm?

Both Toa and Root did quite the reaction.

It felt as if they had heard an unexpected name.

But this... it looks like not only Root, even Toa also knows about the name Aznoval.

Rembrandt-san also knew about it, and it might be possible it is only that.

No, this way of getting surprised is strange.

It is different from the time with Rembrandt-san.

“Raidou-kun, you... brought out quite the name again. Well, in Lorel, it is indeed a name that you would hear though.” (Root)

Root was making a hard to describe face as he brings out his voice as if squeezing it out.

He is the very person that made them immortal.

It probably revived some bitter memories and nostalgic memories as well.

“Aznoval... The standard-bearer of the Adventurers of Origin. Knight Aznoval?” (Toa)

“Looks like you know him.” (Makoto)

“My origins are from there. There’s no person in Lorel who hates the priestess or Apple. Same goes for me.” (Toa)

“...Ooh.”

It seems like Root took interest in the nostalgic words of Toa, he voiced it out.

“Before the Union came into existence, they were supporting the people without being double-faced about it. Legendary existences that left their mark in history. Is that what you know?” (Makoto)

“That as well. But for me, Aznoval is actually a bit special. Within the Adventurers of Origin, he is a heroic person that’s described as the representation of muscle and recklessness. And his stories are mostly within those types.” (Toa)

He is the standard bearer, right?

In a leader way.

I am also a top that can’t say much of others, but is that really okay?

Root is smiling in glee.

Does that mean that really is the description of this Aznoval person?

“But he was by no means a stupid man. In a long past, when Lorel had the objective of raising their national prestige by slaying a certain Superior Dragon that slept in the wasteland, the knight Aznoval suddenly appeared at the center of the country and warned them to stop that.” (Toa)

Toa-san speaks as if reminiscing a long past.

Well, it is actually a long past though.

However, for her, that challenge to this Superior Dragon and the stopping of it has warped her life heavily.

That certain Superior Dragon, Shen.

Called invincible, and indulging in sleep... well, it is Tomoe.

She didn't even remember it until she was asked about it, but it seems the result was a big failure.

Quite the amount of elites had fallen at the wasteland.

Toa's ancestors as well.

Their heirloom that was an important dagger was lost there, their family chased down to every place and had to move around repeatedly, and because of that, Toa became an adventurer and came to the wasteland to search for the dagger of her ancestors. And as she was about to die, her sister, Rinon, got acquainted with me, and after some twists and turns, Toa and her on the verge to death party members are currently the top team in Tsige.

Well, you really don't know what life might bring you.

Right now, that dagger has safely returned to her hands, and she has decided to make Tsige her home, continuing to contribute to the town as an adventurer and further polishing her skills.

In its own way, this is a good ending.

"In the end, the grand labyrinth of Yaso-Katsui had erupted at that time, so he had to head there to reduce the damage it would cause, and in that space of time, the foolish expedition was carried out, and... in the end, well, that's how I am here now in a sense. Because there's that part as well, within the Adventurers of Origin, Aznoval is the one I like the most." (Toa)

I see, I see.

So there was that kind of connection huh.

But looking that far in the past and the far future that is now, I don't think it would be a reason why Aznoval would come to Tsige.

Well, at least it is deeper than her simply knowing, but I feel like it is a bit weak.

Wait, she said something incredible in such a nonchalant manner.

What did she say about the labyrinth?

Erupted?

Isn't that supposed to be what volcanoes do?

"Please wait there. That labyrinth can erupt?" (Makoto)

I tried asking about it.

There's no way that's the case.

In the lines of common sense, that is. But that place doesn't apply common sense...

"I haven't lived that long in Lorel, so I don't have much knowledge about it. But it seems like it is a place where those kind of things happen as well. At that time, he ate two Board Fruits, which are his source of power, pushed through the lava, and opened a deep hole to calm it down." (Toa)

I do remember hearing that Toa and Rinon were born in a place close to the Empire.

Since they were born, they haven't gone to Lorel Union once.

So even if I ask her more about it, she wouldn't know.

It would be dangerous if it erupts while we are inside.

Let's try asking everyone regarding that when I return.

If there's any signs of it, we would have to hurry.

Even so, doing things like stopping eruptions, just like Serwhale-san.

Looks like he is quite the person.

The last part about some sort of fruit was probably added in the story, so leaving aside the details, there's no doubt he did some sort of big exploit to stop the damage.

For some reason, it reminded me of the classic hero that ate spinach from a can to get buffed up. <*Popeye the Sailor!*>

"I see..." (Makoto)

“...It feels as if Raidou-san gets involved in the mysteries of the world one after the other. I feel like you are having more of an adventure than adventurers.” (Toa)

“It is certainly true that that’s how it ends up as a result. It is not to my liking, but I can’t deny it.” (Makoto)

“...In those days, there was a Superior Dragon called Waterfall in Limia Kingdom that provided the lake’s blessings; in Gritonia Empire, there’s one named Grount that lived at the desert and provided trials, and anyone that passed those received a blessing; on the other hand, Lorel and Aion were one head lower than the other two within the major powers, but they were in a delicate line that was still enough to consider them major powers, and... because they were in such a delicate line, they were desperate to obtain the power of a Superior Dragon. Really... what a stupid story.” (Toa)

Toa knows about this pretty well.

Is it because it was passed down in the past of his family, or maybe she herself took interest in it and investigated?

Since we are talking about Toa, who personally came to the wasteland in order to recover the dagger, it might be possible.

Anyways, so the reason of that expedition in the past was because they were planning on beating up Shen and bringing her back to the country?

If that’s true, then it really is a foolish story.

If I was there at that time, I might have told them to stop it as well.

Even in Limia, it was only because the lake was within the boundaries of their country; in Gritonia as well, it is not like the White Desert was prepared by the Empire to call Grount there, it was simply Grount being there since the beginning.

Lorel also had Futsu since the beginning, and the labyrinth also should have had Doma as well.

And yet, why did they go through the trouble of going to the wasteland for Shen?

Wait, it seems like the labyrinth already existed by that time.

And yet, Lorel didn't know that there was a Superior Dragon within their own country?

Is that even possible?

!

Or it could be that, at that time, Doma was not a Superior Dragon...

No wait, that's questionable too.

“*Whistle~*” (Root)

Root blatantly evades my gaze of suspicion.

He is trying to avoid it.

No, I won't let you escape.

You are also involved in this?

In the future, whenever it is related to Superior Dragons, I will just place this guy as the number one suspect.

“Is that so. It is not such a pleasant story for you, and yet, I made you speak of it. I am really sorry. Even so, if there's any other thing you remember of him, can you please contact the company? I want to know about the knight Aznoval and the Adventurers of Origin as much as possible since it is connected to the matter I am involved in.”
(Makoto)

“It is already all in the past anyways. I don't mind. When I return to my house, I will investigate about it again!” (Toa)

Past huh.

I am probably the weird one here.

It is true that this is a past that has already concluded.

There's nothing I can do this late in the game.

At the very least, Toa, who has already accomplished her own objective, is probably living her life now.

That's not wrong. It even feels dazzling.

"Thank you very much." (Makoto)

"Well then, with this, I will be excusing myself. Vegan-san as well, see you later." (Toa)

"Yeah, thanks for guiding me. Also, sorry. That name is actually fake." (Root)

"Eh?"

"It was for the sake of safety. There was not a shred of intent to deceive you. I am glad I met you, Toa. The staff of the Adventurer Guild in Tsige and the top adventurers in Tsige are splendid. If every place had this amount of liveliness and tension, I wouldn't have any complains. As the Guild Master, Falz, I consider this my pride." (Root)

"Fal—eeeeh?!" (Toa)

"Ahaha. If you want to, I can make the preparations to hire you under the direct staff of the Adventurer Guild. If you are in the mood to, tell the people in charge anytime you want, okay? Well then, Raidou-kun, let's go to the Kuzunoha Company." (Root)

What's that about Falz. That's also a fake name.

Root really does lie as easy as breathing.

Is he actually the same type as Rona?

However, even if you try to look proper when you are being restrained in midair, your dignity right now is zero.

He said 'Let's go', but he himself can't even move.

On top of that, Root, your nose is running.

Ah, that's not it.

You have a nosebleed.

“...Hah...” (Makoto)

“Wait, Raidou-kun, what’s that sigh for? Eh, why does my head feel funny? Ah, it kind of stung. Is this nosebleed? It is nosebleed, isn’t it? Raidou-kun, my nose is bleeding!!”
(Root)

Well, your face was punched in after all.

Of course you would get some sort of injury from that, even if it is you.

“Now, everyone, sorry for the trouble here.” (Makoto)

I bow my head once.

I could tell there was an uncontrollable atmosphere in the air.

I won’t take responsibility for this.

Cause I have to talk with this Root now after all.

I will probably not be refreshed with this.

But it would be nice, if even a little bit of this fuzziness inside of me is cleared.



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