

Saving 80,000 Gold in Another World for My Retirement

2

Story by
FUNA
Art by
Touzai



Mitsuha's Value

Then what is Mitsuha's value to our kingdom? I believe it to lie in her charisma, as well as her superlative knowledge and wisdom.

危机在山野县!

“P-Please, just come outside!”

Seeing the maid's distress, Mitsuha relented and went outside to have a look.

Oh, wow. Those are boats, all right!



Colette's Desires



Colette: "Here, take a look!"

Mitsuha: ...This girl's a genius!!

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Art by Touzai

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KODANSHA

Saving 80,000 Gold in Another World for My Retirement 2

A VERTICAL Book

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KODANSHA

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Chapter 21

To the Capital

“We’re going to the capital, Mitsuha. Please prepare yourself for the journey.”

“Wha...”

Mitsuha’s old friend Count Bozes had shown up unannounced at her Yamano County residence. Her servants no longer paid any mind to surprise appearances from members of the Bozes family, even the count himself. *I wonder if my servants are just used to the Bozeses at this point, or if they think I’m so far above them that no ceremony is necessary*, wondered Mitsuha.

“Ballroom season is upon us. With so many bandits still roaming free, in the interest of safety, I have decided you will travel to the capital with us,” the count announced.

“Wait, what? It hasn’t even been a year since the last one,” Mitsuha responded with surprise.

“Ballroom season comes more than once a year! It is far too important to be a merely annual event.”

“I had no idea!” Mitsuha had been convinced it was a once-a-year kind of a thing. “Well, this is sort of a crucial moment for my domain, so...I think I’m gonna pass this time.”



“What do you mean?! This is the first season since your elevation to the nobility! You cannot possibly miss it! Everyone, but everyone is looking forward to the chance to speak with you.”

That's exactly why I don't wanna go!

But Count Bozes showed no sign of backing down. “Hence my offer to lend you some of my vassals... In any event, we depart from my county seat in two days’ time. Drag your feet, and Iris and Beatrice will come looking for you personally.”

“Uh...”

Count Bozes appeared absolutely unbending, as if it were a matter being resolved between father and daughter. But Mitsuha couldn’t afford to leave her county for an extended period just now—there were too many important things she needed to do.

Once she arrived in the capital, of course, Mitsuha could just jump back to her land whenever she wanted; it wasn’t like she would be spending *all* her time with the Bozeses. And her own people wouldn’t even need to know she had made the trip—she could just give them the impression she was tied up with engagements closer to home. She doubted anyone in either location would be checking up on her whereabouts. The Bozeses would be seeing her every few days, after all, so why *would* they?

The eight days on the road are gonna suck, though. Wait, it might be even longer than that. They’re gonna load up the carriages with luggage and take the trip nice and slow, in which case it’ll probably take even longer than going by stagecoach...

“You know what, don’t worry about it,” Mitsuha said. “I can just get myself

there a little later on...”

“I cannot allow that! As I told you, there are still bandits abroad! And if you don’t accompany us, then we won’t be able to—er...” After his eminently reasonable opening, the count trailed off awkwardly. It seemed he had been looking forward to speaking with Mitsuha during the long journey to the capital. And the same was probably true of Lady Iris, Beatrice, and Theodore as well.

I just can’t afford to leave my county for that long. I could see this being a consistent problem, too... I can trust the count. It’ll be fine.

“Count Bozes, I’m going to let you in on a secret.” Mitsuha ordered her servants out of the room, then continued in a hushed voice. “To tell the truth, it seems I have a rare talent for the secret arts, of which I think you’re already aware. I can use my ‘traversal’ skill on myself and a few articles of luggage at such a small cost to my life force that I recover almost instantly... If that were to get out, however, I’d be inundated with requests to use traversal to facilitate trade with my homeland. The demands would escalate until I was forced to exceed my body’s tolerance. That’s why I greatly exaggerated the burden of using the skill. Basically, I can go to the capital on my own in the blink of an eye whenever I choose, so I’m going to remain here and manage my domain until I’m needed in the capital.”

“What...??” The count was astounded, though in Mitsuha’s estimation, it was less at her ability itself than at her decision to divulge the secret to him. *Guess he had already figured that out. Makes sense.*

“Hmm...” The count appeared to be at a loss as to what to do. Both of the arguments he had prepared—concerning the danger on the roads and the need to make it to ballroom season on time—were no longer relevant. He knew all too

well the importance of managing one's territory, and found it hard to press Mitsuha any further. But spending ten days on the road with her had been an impossibly attractive prospect for the Bozes family.

Mitsuha presumed it wasn't just her knowledge the count was after (though that was surely part of it); there would also have been great value in her spending time with Lady Iris and Beatrice. In fact, those two were demanding her presence on the journey, and the count was powerless to oppose their wishes. It was also likely that their eldest son, Alexis, would join them midway, and maybe the count was even hoping that Mitsuha and one of the boys...

That said, he can't fault me for prioritizing my county. And he definitely can't straight-up ignore my wishes after I shared my secret with him.

"Hmmmmm..." Count Bozes gave it some more thought, then made up his mind. "I understand. I will do my best to placate Iris and Beatrice, but on one condition: you must be in the capital to greet us when we arrive. The only way I can explain returning without you is to say that you had already left."

Mitsuha agreed to this, and saw Count Bozes off.

But what did he mean, I owe him "a great favor" for this?! That's ridiculous! Don't drag me into your family squabbles, Count!

Count Bozes's family would be departing in two days, and it would take them between ten and thirteen days to reach the capital. Many factors could slow down travel in this world: weather, damage to the carriage, bandits, landslides... You could never be certain of exactly how long a trip would take.

I should be fine if I go to the capital nine days from now...

Mitsuha then considered what to do once she was there. First, she wanted to find a chef. The son of the family who owned the eatery had started working for

his parents after she taught him how to make Yamano Cuisine, so she needed another chef for her residence. The current one would collapse from exhaustion if she didn't find him help soon!

Next, she needed carpenters and shipwrights, though it was unlikely she would find any of the latter in the capital. There wasn't enough demand for shipbuilding expertise, and if she couldn't find people with that skill set in *her* territory, which bordered the sea, how could she expect to find them in the distant, landlocked capital?

And so, determined to get as much done as possible before her duties in the capital constrained her, Mitsuha dove into the work of developing her county.

First up, trial production of soy sauce, miso, and tofu. She hoped that if she at least got the villagers started, they would improve the products on their own through trial and error. She planned to check up on them occasionally, too.

Wasabi cultivation was next. It was an absolute necessity for eating fish, and it could be used with other foods as well. Plus, its antibacterial properties could lengthen the shelf life of processed foods. Mitsuha might have been able to find wasabi in this world, but why bother when she could just bring it from Japan? She chose to use so-called "marsh wasabi," grown in freshwater, instead of "hill wasabi," which is grown in fields, and would begin not from seeds but by root division. Marsh wasabi grew best in clean water, so they would plant it in the upper courses of rivers, and in streams running through the foothills.

And, now that some of the villagers had become proficient with the boats Mitsuha had gotten from that small country back on Earth, they were finally able to start beach seine fishing. Maybe it was beginners' luck, but they brought in a larger haul than expected. There was no point in catching more fish than the

village could handle, though, so Mitsuha decided to limit the frequency until they could expand their market. Fortunately, they were mostly dealing with migratory fish, so it was unlikely the villagers would have to worry about overfishing.

Mitsuha held a sale with slightly discounted prices to commemorate the bounty, and began drying fish as well as using salt from the newly opened salt pans to pickle them. Petz, who had just arrived to peddle his wares, bought as much as he could to sell in the capital.

Mitsuha also started selling a little bit of salt to gauge how much she could charge for it. The salt pans themselves were small, so it wasn't like she could produce very much anyway. Partly, she just wanted to see how the rock salt traders would react.

Petz mentioned that he was considering increasing his number of horse carts from three to five. That wasn't all—his profits had risen significantly due to the Japanese goods he was reselling, and he was looking into upping the frequency of his trading visits.

Mitsuha only sold Japanese goods a little at a time, but she expected they would make for good business with noble customers. Negotiating directly with the nobility sounded like a pain in the butt, though, and she wanted no part of it. She was perfectly satisfied only engaging with the customers who came into her store.

My store in the capital offers goods from Earth, but only in small quantities and at exorbitant—ahem, luxury prices. I don't handle goods from this world, or things that spoil quickly or are sold in bulk. Though there are exceptions, of course.

Part of the reason is that I'm not open often enough. I would also feel guilty if my county's economy crashed instantly in the event of my death, so I want to make sure it can function entirely independently of me. I need to get production to a point where it can provide Petz a healthy revenue without the help of Japanese goods. I should introduce some light industry or nice handcrafted goods into the market... Yeah, things like processed foods, textiles, or papermaking might work.

The nine days of work passed by in a flash. Mitsuha told her people that she would be “leaving frequently on fact-finding trips to other regions,” and her story in the capital was that she would “often be gone from the store to sell her county’s products elsewhere.” She also visited her home in Japan to do chores and convince people she was taking care of herself.

It'll look bad if I don't get a job on Earth soon. Maybe I should set up a small import business to sell folk crafts and furniture and swords and stuff from this world as antiques? The taxes and registration seem like a real hassle, though... Maybe I should just move abroad... No, no, no, I have to take care of that house.

Mitsuha also had a feeling some of the major world powers were getting ready to approach her again. She had a hard time believing they’d sit idly by after watching those two small countries snatch the prize out from under them. At least they were likely to follow the rules she had set and go through the captain to contact her.

God, this sucks! I have duties in my county, the capital, Japan, plus I have to deal with the major powers through Wolf Fang... I can't be in four places at

once, damn it!

“Hey, Mitsuha. Would you consider entrusting the store to me?”

It’s the voice of the Devil, tempting me!

“Wh-What are you t-talking about, Sabine?”

Sabine had caught wind of Mitsuha’s presence in the capital with astounding speed and rushed right over to her store. This was more or less the first thing she said after arriving, and Mitsuha didn’t know how to react.

She hadn’t seen Sabine during any of her recent short trips to the capital. It would draw suspicion if anyone realized how often she visited, and she certainly wouldn’t get any work done with Sabine latching onto her.

“Your store’s always closed—I’ll run it for you while you’re away,” Sabine proposed. “I know how to use dee-vee-dees now, and I can look after the third floor. I could even house-sit for you while I was at it.”

Aha, there’s your true motive! You just want unlimited access to my DVDs and amenities!!

The first floor of the store had a DVD player, fridge, microwave, gas range and oven, a bath and shower, a heater and electric fan, and more. Sabine had apparently figured out there were more exciting appliances on the third floor as well. That wasn’t really surprising—if there was this much going on downstairs, it wasn’t a stretch to imagine that Mitsuha’s private living space might hold further wonders.

I don’t know about this...

“Wh-What if some shady customer shows up and gives you trouble...”

“Ahaha, no one would be brave enough to cause trouble at the Lightning

Archpriestess's store. Anyway, I won't be alone. My guards and maids will be here to help. How else would I be able to kick back and watch dee-vee-dees?"

Since when was she this shameless?! Wait, hold on. This isn't a bad idea... I would never consider entrusting the store to someone I didn't know, but Sabine—hey, don't let her fool you, Mitsuha! What kinda shopkeeper would let a princess run her store?! It wouldn't take long for her to usurp the third floor, and then I wouldn't be able to jump in and out of the store without her figuring out my secret. My life would be so much easier if I could leave it in her hands, though...

"Ha... Haha... I'll, uh, think about it," Mitsuha said, managing to resist the temptation. Sabine clicked her tongue in frustration.

Just then, a kid from the local orphanage raced into the shop.

"They're here, Archpriestess, ma'am!"

"Haven't I told you to stop calling me that?!" Even as Mitsuha scolded the boy, she slipped him a coin and some free sweets.

The orphans spent much of their time voluntarily running errands for people when they weren't working in the orphanage's fields or helping with the chickens, and Mitsuha occasionally hired them for odd jobs. The assignment this time around was to keep watch at the city gate and inform her when the Bozeses' carriage arrived. She had drawn a picture of the Bozes family crest and given it to the boy so he would recognize the carriage right away. Mitsuha offered candy in addition to coin as payment, which made her a popular employer among the orphans.

Actually, I think most of them just wanna brag to the other kids about how they worked for the Lightning Archpriestess. Seems there's a fair amount of

competition for the honor.

The boy accepted the coin and candy, thanked her, and ran out of the store. If Mitsuha had to guess, he was going to the Bozeses' capital mansion to inform them of the family's arrival, and also of the fact that the Archpriestess would be coming by. That would net him a nice reward, regardless of the fact that no one had asked him to do it—especially the part about Mitsuha. An elite orphan like him would never miss a chance to make that kind of money.

"Elite orphan"? What does that even mean?!"

Mitsuha closed up shop and headed for the Bozeses' mansion. Their carriages were surely moving slowly because of the luggage they were carrying, but she had to factor in the time it took the orphan to reach her store. The count's life could be in danger if she didn't fulfill her promise to meet the family at the mansion, thereby demonstrating that she had arrived in the capital before them.

Wait, why is Sabine following me? Oh, right. She's a friend of Beatrice's. I forgot.

By the time Mitsuha arrived at the mansion, a line of servants had already positioned themselves to greet the family. Ordinarily, only a handful would manage to make it to the door, while the rest scrambled to prepare tea and baths so the family could relax and wash off the sweat and dirt of the journey. And they could hardly be blamed for this—preparing in advance was next to impossible, given that the family could arrive any time within a dayslong window.

Looks like that orphan did them a real solid. Bet he got a handsome tip for it.

Rufus, the butler, guided Mitsuha and Sabine to a spot at the head of the line. Mitsuha was well known around the place, but all the Bozeses' servants knew who Sabine was as well—since she often accompanied Mitsuha, Rufus had sent every servant to the store to get a look at the princess's face in the hopes of minimizing the risk of unintentionally causing offense.

I was so confused when their servants kept showing up at my store one after another...

The Bozes family arrived shortly thereafter. Once they reached the capital, the carriage they were riding in had moved up from the middle of the caravan, which was the safest position, to the head of the procession. The first to alight was Beatrice, who sprinted excitedly toward Mitsuha, then froze in surprise when she noticed Sabine standing next to her.

“H...Huh?” was all she could manage.

“Long time no see, Beatrice.” Still clinging to Mitsuha’s arm, Sabine greeted the other girl with a smile.

“Grnh...” Beatrice growled, seeming strangely vexed.

Mitsuha could only smile weakly in response.

“Well, well, what have we here...”

“Hoo boy, here comes Lady Iris!” Mitsuha exclaimed, accidentally voicing her thoughts aloud in the face of Lady Iris’s somehow familiar-sounding words.

“Hnh...” Lady Iris puffed out her cheeks indignantly at being treated like some kind of final boss, then grabbed Mitsuha by the back of her collar. The men, Sabine, and Beatrice all sighed loudly as they watched Iris drag her away.

Don’t just stand there! Help me!

“So? What compelled you to leave for the capital alone, without a word to us? Explain yourself!” Lady Iris demanded.

Uh, I think she's angry. She must've really been looking forward to my company on the trip.

“W-Well, see, I'd just reached a good stopping place with my work, and—”

“Then you should have come right to us!”

Sh-Shoot! I need an excuse... Maybe I could tell her I have a faster method of transportation? Should I go with a car? A bike? Wait, crap, those are reasons to delay my departure, not to leave earlier... Gaah, I don't know what to say!

“She came at my request,” Sabine put in, throwing Mitsuha a surprise lifeline.

“Huh?!” Lady Iris and Count Bozes exclaimed in unison. Mitsuha very nearly joined them, but managed to catch herself.

“I sent multiple envoys to her county asking her to come as soon as possible. I admit, the letters I wrote were quite strongly worded.”

It wouldn't do for Lady Iris to continue being mad at Mitsuha after hearing that—it would mean blaming her for acquiescing to the demands of the princess. Furthermore, the fact that Mitsuha and Sabine were there together to greet the Bozes family upon their arrival bolstered the credibility of the story. Lady Iris had no choice but to drop the matter.

Mitsuha looked at Sabine to convey her thanks and saw a wicked grin on the girl's face. *O-Oh, crap! She's got dirt on me now!* Mitsuha was aghast. Sabine must have realized Mitsuha couldn't tell Lady Iris the truth. And, smart as she was, she probably also realized from the count's demeanor that he was in on it.

Sabine wouldn't pry into a secret she knew I couldn't tell anyone. But if someone else knows it, she must think it's okay for her to know it, too. That is, I'll bet she's livid that someone else knows something about me that she doesn't.

In other words, she's not going to leave me alone until I share my secret with her. Do I tell her, or do I offer her something of equal value instead...? Either way, I'm clearly getting waxed in this deal.

“So, Mitsuha. You’re telling me this secret, right?”

“Urgh...”

Yep, just like I thought. She’s not letting me off the hook.

“Uh, what if I offered you something else...?”

“Well then, I’ll accept full access to your store.”

“P-Please, anything but that...”

This is bad. I need to think of something... Oh yeah, what about that idea I’ve been kicking around? That other thing could work, too.

“I actually have a couple of good offers for you, Sabine. Wanna hear them?”

“I’d better like what I hear.”

“Don’t worry, you will! Pick whichever one appeals to you. First is a vehicle faster than a carriage and small enough to drive down narrow streets. It takes up almost no space, you can drive it by yourself, and it costs nothing to maintain! The second is a magic item that will allow us to talk even when I’m in my county and you’re in the capital. So, which’ll it be?”

“Uh...” Sabine stiffened in surprise. Her guard was standing in the corner of the shop doing his best to act casual, but Mitsuha could tell he was terrified.

Oh yeah, giving Sabine a vehicle that can fly down narrow streets faster than a carriage is gonna make his job a hell of a lot harder. Oops.

“C-Couldn’t I just have both...?” Sabine asked.

Don’t give me those doe eyes! I’m sure that look has every Prince Charming in the land fainting at your feet, but it won’t work on me!

“Nuh-uh! You have to choose one!”

After much moaning and groaning, Sabine picked the magic item that would allow her to speak to Mitsuha from a distance. That worked better for Mitsuha, too—she’d been thinking of implementing it as a safety measure anyway, and she couldn’t think of anyone more suitable to entrust it to. This made for the perfect excuse.

Relief washed over the face of the guard when he heard Sabine’s choice.

Sorry to scare you like that, buddy.

The next day, Mitsuha was allowed to survey Sabine’s room and the area around it in the royal palace. After getting permission from the king to install the equipment, she jumped to Japan.

First, she visited a solar panel company. This was her third visit, having installed solar panels at both her store in the capital and her county residence, so things went smoothly. She bought some equipment, including a generator and capacitors, on the spot. This time around, it was going to be a simple little setup.

Her next destination was Akihabara. The neighborhood was now the heartland of otaku culture, but there were still traces of its original identity as a hub for consumer electronics. The shop she visited was an amateur radio outlet. Mitsuha had actually gotten her amateur radio license while she was in middle

school. She went through the process mostly to spend time with her father, but still gained a relative mastery of the equipment. The amateur radio industry was on the decline now that nearly everyone who would've gotten into the hobby got into computers instead, but some elderly fanatics were still alive and kicking, and new devices were still being developed.

Man, I bought a ton of stuff. Bet they haven't seen a spending spree like that in forever.

Mitsuha purchased three each of the latest HF-band transceiver, VHF-band transceiver, and handheld VHF radio. She bought a ground plane antenna that covered eight bands from 3.5 MHz to 430 MHz, as well as three sets of antennas, coaxial cables, connectors, and more. She had tools at her house, so she didn't need to buy any of those.

Science really has come a long way, Mitsuha thought as she reflected on her father's old equipment. His HF transceiver only went up to 28 MHz, and he had separate devices for 50 MHz, 144 MHz, and 430 MHz. In his day, ground plane antennas could only be used at 144 MHz and above, so you also needed to set up a massive 21 MHz Yagi antenna, as well as 3.5 MHz and 7 MHz half-wave horizontal dipole antennas. Now you could cover all bands below 430 MHz with just two wireless transceivers, and one small ground plane antenna was all you needed.

Radio regulations wouldn't apply in the other world, so Mitsuha didn't hold back and chose an HF transceiver with an output of 200 watts. You would need a second-class license to operate such a big machine in Japan, but that wouldn't matter where she was going. The VHF transceiver had an output of 50 watts, and the handheld VHF radio was 5 watts.

Man, these are so different from the old TS-520X and TR-2200G I got from Dad. He said he used to use the Yaesu F-50B line back in the day, but...when were transmitters and receivers in separate housings, anyway? Was his gear from World War II? There's something to be said for taking care of your things, but that's ridiculous!

The other world seemed to be a planet similar to Earth, so it likely had an ionosphere, too. She wondered if there would be sporadic E propagation or atmospheric ducting, but decided not to count on it.

Mitsuha opted to use 144 MHz and 430 MHz for communication within the same city, and 3.5 MHz and 7 MHz for communication between the capital and Yamano County. The 50 MHz band...wouldn't see any action, at least for now.

She ended up buying too much to carry to somewhere she could jump from, so she designated a time for express delivery and headed home.

A few days later, Mitsuha had Kunz the carpenter install the antennas at her store in the capital. She could have handled it herself, but couldn't shake the vision of getting blown off the roof by a strong gust of wind. Kunz also installed the equipment at the royal palace—that involved setting up a solar generator and capacitors as well, so it was better left to a pro. Mitsuha did the wiring herself, of course. The equipment at her county residence she installed entirely on her own. She already had electricity, so the only real construction required was setting up the antennas, and installing the ground plane turned out to be nice and easy.

The only people Mitsuha taught how to use the radios were Sabine and Anton, the butler at her Yamano County residence. She only explained the bare minimum needed to use the machines, and told them not to touch anything they

didn't understand. She even gave them drawings of the proper positions for the switches and dials, just in case they screwed up the settings.

At her county residence, Mitsuha set up the transceiver in her study, and at the royal palace, she put it in Sabine's room, naturally. She made it clear to Sabine that no one else was to touch the equipment under any circumstances. She also went ahead and changed the frequency on both transceivers so they couldn't intercept one another's transmissions.

This meant that while Mitsuha was in the capital, she could check in with Anton at a scheduled time each day and make sure everything was okay back in her domain without needing to return there personally. Anton wouldn't know she was in the capital, and so wouldn't find it suspicious if she returned quickly in case of emergency.

Such scheduled contact would be unnecessary with Sabine for the time being, given that she was always at Mitsuha's store. They had already practiced using the radio multiple times, so she was sure the princess had a handle on it. Mitsuha was planning to begin daily scheduled contact with Sabine after ballroom season ended and she returned to her county, just to make sure nothing was wrong in the capital.

Being able to contact Anton and Sabine like this would ease Mitsuha's fears of a major incident in the capital or her domain while she was away. They were both well-informed people she could count on to let her know as soon as anything happened.

"Why won't you talk to me on the tran-see-ver at night, Mitsuha? It's not fair!"
Sabine whined.

“We’re together all day!” protested Mitsuha. “I need some time to relax at night...”

“A-Are you saying you don’t like talking to me?! That it’s an exhausting chore for you?!”

Oh, geez. Here we go again...

“I demand you apologize by giving me an electric kettle, a fan, a heater, and a dee-vee-dee player!”

“How many times do I have to tell you: No! I already gave you LED lights and a mini-fridge. You should be satisfied with that. People will start getting suspicious if you have too many conveniences, and besides, the divine power you collect from the sun wouldn’t be enough to power all that. Wireless transceivers don’t consume much energy when they’re on ‘receive,’ and no one’ll be using it if you’re not in your room, so if you keep it switched off, you should have enough divine power for the lights and the mini-fridge. Any more would be pushing it. Plus, I don’t want you to get too reliant on them. What if I—”

Shoot, I shouldn’t say that!

An awkward silence fell between them.

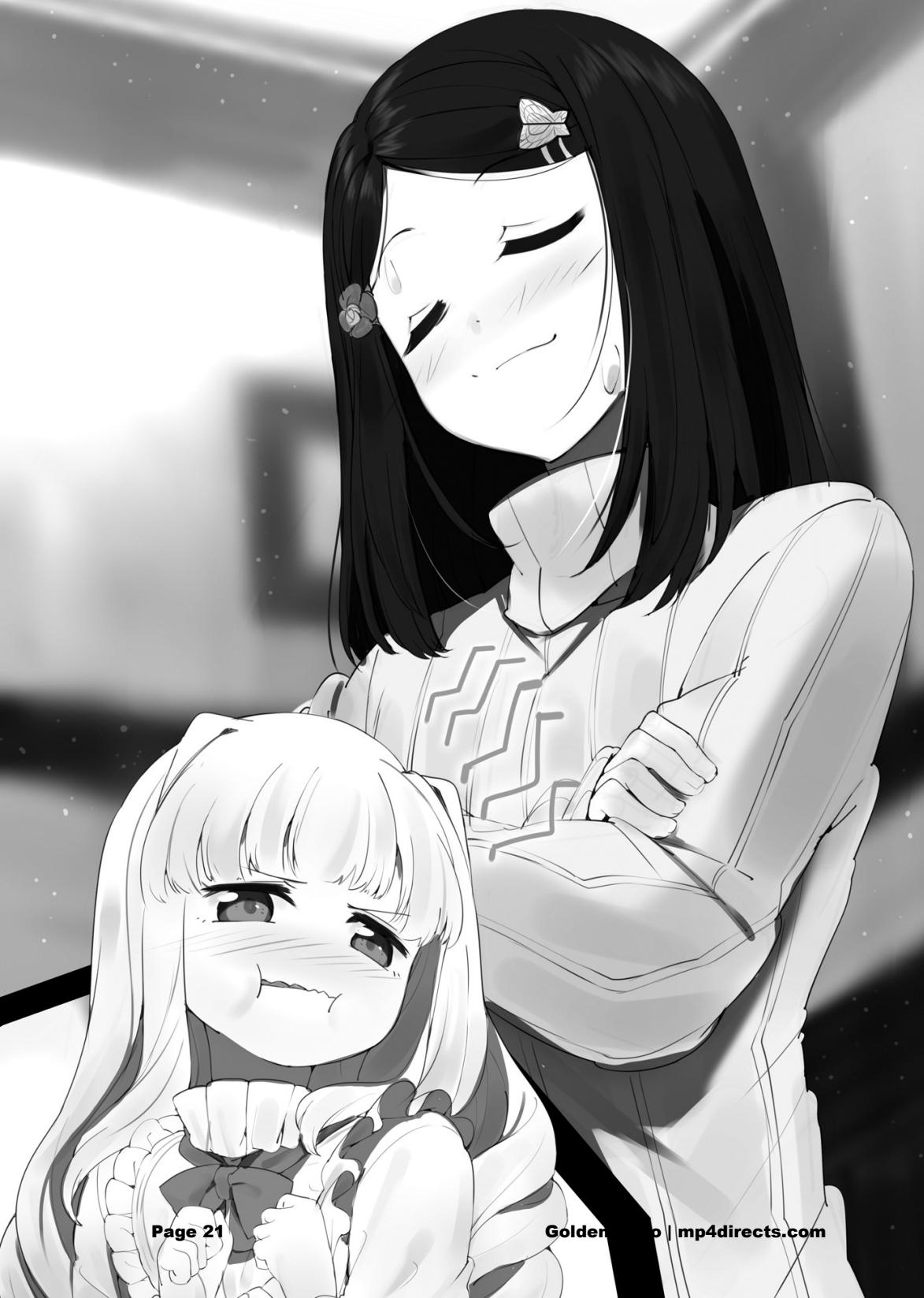
Too late. Sabine’s a smart cookie. That quick grimace must’ve meant she knew what I was going to say, but she let it pass.

What Mitsuha almost said was: “What if I disappear and suddenly you can’t use all these things I got you hooked on?” She decided to join Sabine in pretending it never happened.

“Listen here, Princess! Why do you think I gave you this divine power system in the first place?”

“Because you were in my debt, so we made a deal?”

“Grk... Okay, sure, but I’m hearing a lot of demands that go way beyond our deal. You can’t watch DVDs without me there to translate, anyway! You don’t understand Japanese!”



“Urgh...”

Ha, got her there!

Chapter 22

Gathering Personnel

As per her initial plan, Mitsuha got to work gathering personnel. First, she needed craftspeople to build wooden ships. Finding a whole team was going to be tough, though, and it would be pretty callous firing them as soon as the ships were finished. Considering that, it made the most sense to hire one expert and get the villagers to help them.

So it was that she paid a visit to Kunz's workshop. *It's always important to make full use of one's connections and networks. Why didn't I think of this last time...?*

"Hellooo," she called out. "Do you have any carpenters you can spare?"

"Oh, it's the Goddess! I was wonderin' who'd show up outta the blue yellin' like that..." Kunz emerged wearing an exasperated look. "This another rush job? I could gather up two or three young'uns and we could get on it right away, but..."

"No, I'm actually looking for someone who'd be willing to come live in my domain. Preferably a talented artisan who can make anything from farming tools and other small items to fishing boats and buildings."

"Huh..." Kunz's expression turned back to a troubled scowl. "I dunno 'bout that... It'd be a hard ask for anyone with a family to move all that way from the capital, and my promising young employees want to stay in the city to polish their skills and make a name for themselves. Not to mention that the majority of 'em are lookin' to specialize rather than become a jack-of-all-trades. I hate to

disappoint you, Goddess, but this'd mean turning them an' their family's lives upside down..."

Guess I'll have to look elsewhere...

"Hellooo," Mitsuha called out. "Do you have any chefs you can spare?"

"Oh, it's Mitsuha! I was wondering who would show up out of the blue yelling like that..." Bernd emerged wearing an exasperated look.

I'm getting déjà vu here... This probably isn't gonna end well. It goes without saying, but I'm at Paradise. Oh, it didn't go without saying? Guess I'm glad I said something, then... Anyway, I don't know where else to find a chef.

"Would you happen to know any chefs who might be willing to move to my domain?"

"Hmm. A lotta folks start working here to learn how to cook Yamano Cuisine, but most of them aren't serious about becoming chefs. They just want to learn enough to make some easy money, and they quit as soon as they've got a handle on it."

...That's not gonna cut it.

"Plus, your county is in the boonies at the edge of the kingdom. It might be different if you were looking to hire them to work at a noble's capital mansion or in a nearby domain, but no skilled cooks are going to want to move that far. Well, actually, I can think of a few that would be more than willing, but, uh..."

"Huh? Is there some kind of problem with them?"

Bernd hesitantly explained the situation: a certain number of the male chefs were feverishly in love with Mitsuha. Would a young girl like her feel safe eating food made for her by a man whose affection reached the level of

obsession?

“Aaaaaaaah! Gross, gross, gross!”

“See the issue?”

“Yeah...”

Mitsuha trudged away in defeat...

Oh yeah, I should get to work preparing that stall.

This was part of Mitsuha’s plan to aid her county’s development, which she had dubbed Operation Sell Local Specialties in the Capital.

What? It gets the point across! The Yamanos are bad at naming things, okay?! It’s in my blood!

The plan involved selling items in the capital that could only be found in Yamano County. Phase one had been the Grand Shiitake Campaign, and phase two was the Popcorn Project. She had left orders for dried shiitake mushrooms to be sent to the capital on the Petz Express as soon as they were ready. They were to be incorporated into the menu at Paradise.

Mitsuha’s General Store was going to offer a related service supplying noble parties with various dishes. No one would be able to turn that down...and there would be a fee, of course.

Mwahaha, it’s only a matter of time before the entire capital is under my control!

Mitsuha would have to wait until it was time to harvest the shiitake, but she was considering an advance popcorn sale. It would be a while before the popcorn she had planted was ready to be harvested, so she cheated and got some popcorn from Earth that was already dried and ready to go.

In other words, I'm gonna employ the Prepare the Completed Dishes Beforehand strategy they use on cooking shows as part of Operation Create Demand in Advance of the Harvest.

She should have plenty of time before other territories figured out that not just any corn could be used for popcorn, got their hands on the stuff she was selling, and began to cultivate it for export. All she had to do was establish popcorn as a Yamano County branded product before then... Fortunately, Yamano County could supply the salt and cooking oil as well, meaning she could advertise the popcorn as produced entirely in her domain.

Added value, baby!

First things first, Mitsuha set off to find salespeople for her stall. Her destination? The orphanage, of course.

“Look, it’s the Archpriestess! Pick me! It’s my turn, pick me this time!” A horde of small children rushed toward Mitsuha.

Damn, I just can’t help but be popular. Now, if only these were all refined older men...

“I’m here today to discuss a long-term contract. If things go well, there could be further commissions to follow. Is the director here?”

The children didn’t really seem to know what Mitsuha meant by all that, but sensing that it was going to be something good for them, they raced off toward the fields to fetch the director.

The director returned, wiping sweat from his brow, and invited Mitsuha into his office. Perhaps because the orphanage was short on money, the room was plain,

without a single decoration. Come to think of it, the whole orphanage was like that.

Before anything else, Mitsuha handed the director a basket of snacks. She always brought food when she came to the orphanage, and what she offered fell into two extremes. Sometimes she brought “proper” foods, filling staples like potatoes, biscuits, or onigiri. The lineup the rest of the time included candy, chocolate, shortcake—the kind of snacks that put smiles on the children’s faces, but made the grown-ups running the place want to say, “If you’ve got the money to spend on that crap, buy something more substantial.”

It wasn’t as if Mitsuha alternated; she chose what to bring totally at random—it would be way less exciting for the children if they could predict what they were going to get next. This time around it was the “proper” foods’ turn. She could already see the children’s disappointed faces. But the adults would be happy, at least.

“Thank you for your continued patronage, Archpriestess,” the director said. At this point, Mitsuha had given up asking the people at the orphanage to stop calling her that. “So, what brings you here today?”

“I’m thinking of setting up a stall to sell a certain product, and I thought I might hire some of the children to run it for me,” Mitsuha replied.

The director’s kind little eyes widened in astonishment. The orphanage subsisted on meager funding from the kingdom and meager donations, plus their meager fields and meager poultry farm. They couldn’t make the children perform anything beyond simple tasks, nor just leave them to work side jobs to bring in more money. The orphanage had never reached the point of catastrophe,

but they were constantly underfunded and the children were constantly undernourished. Their days felt like slow and arduous torture.

And now here was an opportunity for a steady source of income! Gold coins danced in the director's mind.

“Y-Yes, ma’am! Coming right up!”

What is he, a waiter?

“...So yeah, I was thinking of opening a stall to sell this new product of mine,” Mitsuha finished her explanation.

“You can count on us! I’ll set up a rotation so we can have multiple kids on the stall from morning to night, every day of the week!” the director responded enthusiastically.

No, you really don’t have to push the kids that hard... Is the orphanage doing that badly?

“I’d like three children running the stall. You can handle shifts however you want. Operating hours will be from late morning to dusk. As for pay, I’m offering a straight three tenths of net sales.”

“Three...tenths...?” The director was shocked.

That’s a reasonable response. It’s unheard of for a store to offer its salespeople thirty percent of its profits.

Selling one gold coin’s worth of popcorn would net a profit of about seven small gold coins after expenses. Thirty percent of that would be two small gold coins, which was the equivalent of twenty thousand yen. There was no shopkeeper in the land who would hire three kids part-time and pay them two small gold coins a day. That was enough for everyone at the orphanage to eat

their fill and have plenty left over.

Given the cheap cost of vegetables in this country, two small gold coins could buy two hundred daikon radishes or six hundred-plus small potatoes. And the orphanage would be bringing in that amount every day.

The children'll revolt if they're fed nothing but daikon and potatoes, though. That's also assuming a profit of one gold coin every day.

"All right, I'll be back once I have the stall and equipment ready," Mitsuha said, getting up to leave.

But: "W-Wait! We have a stall!" the director cried.

...You do?!

According to the director, the children had once decided to make a stall to help support themselves. They worked long and hard to build it out of scrap materials, but the project was abandoned because they didn't know what to sell. The nearly completed stall was currently in a storage shed.

Mitsuha had no desire to use an amateurish stall made by children, however. It would be one thing if she were just handing out samples, say... But she would have felt guilty if she didn't at least give the stall a look, so she allowed the director to show her to the storage room.

Holy crap! Kids made this?!

The stall was large and elegant, a far cry from the shabby little thing she had expected. It even had four wooden wheels, each independently attached to the body of the stall. Which isn't to say it had independent suspension, just that it wasn't a beam axle design. In fact, there were no axles at all. Still, it was well-made, and would survive being pulled slowly down the stone-paved streets on

the way to the public square.

The director summoned the eleven-year-old boy who'd taken charge of making the stall for an explanation of his creation. There was an extendable wooden counter, storage space on the inside, and even an overhanging roof that could be put out in case of rain.

He made this out of scrap wood, with only other children to help him?! This boy's a genius!

“W-Would you like to work for me?” Mitsuha asked.

Why didn't I think of this? If I can't find a full-fledged adult carpenter, I'll just train a promising young one! If I give him some Japanese carpentry tools and manuals, I'm sure he'll manage... Right? Mwahahahaha!

Suddenly, Mitsuha realized the director and the boy were staring at her open-mouthed.

The stall would do the trick. It wasn't like they were making ramen, so it didn't need to be too sturdy or complex. It wouldn't need to hold heavy containers of soup or hot water, accommodate huge stacks of bowls and ingredients, or bear the weight of donburi bowls and customers' elbows on its counter. There was no need to pull the stall at high speeds, either—so it just had to be sturdy enough to hold together. Unlike a ramen stand.

Ramen stalls really are a work of art, thought Mitsuha. A lot of people have been selling ramen out of tiny trucks recently, but nothing beats a good ol' ramen stall, if you ask me...

Mitsuha had considered buying a stall or asking Kunz to make one, but this lucky find had saved her the time and hassle. Fortunately, popcorn was light and

ready to go—they could open right away.

Yep! I'll set them up with a portable gas stove and we'll be in business! That'll be lighter and take up less space, and the kids'll be less likely to burn themselves. If I die suddenly, they can just switch to a regular old wood-burning stove. They'll also likely be receiving regular popcorn shipments from Yamano County by then, so there'll be no risk of the orphanage suddenly losing this source of revenue.

And the stall isn't my only find here—I can use this boy, too! I really hit the jackpot!

“So? Will you come work for me?” Mitsuha asked again, at which the boy and the director snapped out of it.

“Wh-What...kind of work are you...?” the boy stammered.

“Would he...be working at your store, Archpriestess?” the director inquired.

Right back into business mode, I see. Wisdom really does come with age.

“No, I’d like to hire him as a craftsman, not a salesperson. He’d be working in my domain,” Mitsuha answered, shifting her gaze to the stall. Understanding dawned on the director’s face. *He has enough life experience to know talent when he sees it.*

“What do you think, Loik?” he asked the boy.

Loik seemed to ponder the decision. *Wow, I figured he'd say yes in a heartbeat, given how these kids normally behave around me...*

After thinking it over for a while, Loik finally answered. “U-Um, as long as Manon and Nellie can come with me...”

Those are both girls' names! How does this eleven-year-old have more of a

life than me?!

According to Loik, Manon was a ten-year-old girl he was good friends with, who had served as his assistant while he was making the stall. She was good with her hands, and had made the majority of the few metal parts they used in its construction.

Wait, what? She spent hours painstakingly hammering scraps of iron into the shapes she wanted? You've gotta be... I mean, they may be crooked, but they're sure doing their job as nails... And she whittled down the wood around the wheels using a broken knife she found at a garbage dump?! Whoa, whoa, whoa, just how much patience does this girl have?!

Hey, this gives me an idea. Maybe I should make these two Randy's apprentices. No matter how much Randy learns about metalworking, one accident or illness would be all it took to send me back to square one... Yep, he needs a couple of apprentices. Preferably hearty young kids who seem like they'll outlive him...

The other girl, Nellie, turned out to be Loik's younger sister.

Phew, that's a relief. No sordid love triangles here.

She apparently liked to help with the cooking, so she could train to be a chef. She was only nine years old, but Westerners always looked older from Mitsuha's Japanese perspective. Either way, she was old enough that it wouldn't be long before she was able to make several dishes on her own. If she could make even one, Mitsuha's overworked chef would finally be able to take some days off. And once she learned how to give direction, she could also have the maids help out with prep and whatnot.

Sweet! How lucky was this?

“Okay. All three of you will have a place in Yamano County!” Mitsuha declared.

Loik and the director were thrilled.

Mitsuha was a little worried the orphanage would suffer from losing two such skilled children, but the director said there were some men who occasionally came by to help out, so they would be just fine. *That's news to me. I've only ever seen the women who look after the kids...* The director also said that finding jobs for the children so they can become independent took precedence over anything else.

Loik was certainly skilled enough to serve as a craftsman’s apprentice, but it was hard for an orphan with no connections to find an opportunity. Apprenticeships typically went to the child of someone the craftsman knew: a coworker, a person in the same business who didn’t own a store of their own, someone they were indebted to, a relative. *It's a cruel world...*

Manon and Nellie celebrated when they found out that they, too, were going to be able to support themselves. Mitsuha figured it was just because they would no longer have to worry about not having enough to eat, but apparently there was more to it. Their new employer was not only a viscountess—already a wildly enviable situation—but the Lightning Archpriestess herself, the living legend who had saved their kingdom. They were probably so happy they could die. *Not literally, I hope! They won't do me any good dead! I should really learn to expect this reaction. The people of Colette's village lost their minds when they found out I had become a viscountess, and who can forget the number of maid applicants I received...*

The director looked very pleased with himself indeed—he would now have three fewer mouths to feed, and he could expect the children to send money regularly after they became independent.

Er, no. I'm sure he's just proud that these kids are leaving the nest under such excellent circumstances. I'm gonna go with that. Though I'm sure they will be paid, even as apprentices. To be fair to him, this is probably the first time in the kingdom's history a noble has hired three orphans all at once. Can't blame him for being excited.

The three children would move to Yamano County after the current ballroom season came to an end, so for now they were going to perform final adjustments on the stall. Mitsuha would procure the corn and a portable gas stove, plus a spare. She headed back to the store with popcorn on her mind.

Mitsuha was pretty sure the wholesale price of popcorn in Japan was a little under 500 yen per kilogram. She had bought some for herself a few times in the past.

Making popcorn is simple. You just spread out the kernels on the bottom of a deep pot such that they don't overlap, pour in vegetable oil, and add salt. Put on the lid, agitate it gently over an open flame, and voilà—one *pop*, then another, then *pop-pop-pop-pop-pop-pop*. Once the popping starts to peter out, you're done, and you've got a pot full of beautifully popped corn. The popcorn burns if you keep going after the popping slows down, so you have to compromise and allow for some un-popped kernels.

The reason you don't want to put in more than one layer of kernels is that when they pop, they can expand to up to forty times their original size. Putting in too many means they'll push the lid right off and overflow the pot.

I'll never understand why people buy expensive popcorn at the store when they can just buy un-popped kernels and make it themselves. It's fun, it's cheap, and you get to eat it while it's hot... Whoops, probably shouldn't tell people that when I'm about to start a popcorn business. Anyway, I'm gonna go back to the store and then jump to Japan to stock up.

Or so she thought, but her plans were sidetracked when she entered the store only to be confronted by a raging demon.

“Mitsuha! Why didn’t you come to Count Pasteur’s party?!”

Uh, what?

According to Count Bozes, the nobility was buzzing with the news that Mitsuha had skipped the Pasteurs’ party the night before. Rumors were flying that there must be some kind of strife between the Pasteurs and the Archpriestess, that they’d done something to offend her.

No, seriously, I just didn’t know about it...

“Hold on, this is hardly my fault! I wasn’t invited! I didn’t know this party was even happening!” Mitsuha exclaimed.

“Wha...” The count looked flabbergasted. Then he seemed to come to a realization. “O-Oh dear... Please don’t tell me you failed to submit your notification informing the royal palace of your stay in the capital. The very notion is ridiculous, of course, but...” He trailed off with an imploring look still plastered on his face.

“Huh? Notification? I have no clue what you’re talking about,” Mitsuha responded with a smile.

The count went pale. “Y-You can’t be serious... You were with the

princess! And didn't you say you were going to the royal palace?!"

"Uh, yeah. I *went* to the royal palace. To Sabine's room. And I did see the king, but..."

"A-And the notification?! Did you submit it while you were there?!"

"Again, I don't know what you're talking about..."

Oh boy, he collapsed...

According to the count, nobles were supposed to submit a notification to a certain office in the royal palace when they arrived in the capital. Should something come up, this theoretically enabled the king to have an immediate grasp of which nobles were in the city and which were back in their domains. Apparently they kept a list posted on the wall.

Generally, however, this list was used for a different purpose: the nobility referenced it when inviting one another to their parties, so they could remove anyone who wasn't currently in the capital from the guest list.

The first party of each ballroom season was always a grand affair, as it presented the first chance in several months for most nobles to see one another. Everyone had assumed that the Lightning Archpriestess would be invited, as she was the talk of the kingdom, and a newly minted noble like her could hardly refuse.

Mitsuha's absence had shocked everyone, and there was rampant speculation as to why she would skip the party. The prosaic truth was that she had simply been removed from the invitation list because, according to the official posting, she wasn't in the capital. Plenty of nobles and their servants had seen her at the royal palace and around the city, though, and this was the basis

for all the wild conjecture.

I swear, I hadn't heard a word about this...

"Well, what about Count Lansen's party the day after tomorrow?" the count asked.

"Nope, didn't know about that one either," Mitsuha replied.

After another shocked silence, Count Bozes made it clear that she was to attend, then left in a hurry. He was probably rushing over to Count What's-His-Face to let him know she would be there.

What a pain... Though that said, ballroom season is kinda the whole reason I'm pretending to be staying in the capital in the first place... And what's "ballroom season" without a few balls? The real question is, why didn't I find it weird that I hadn't received any invitations? Hold on, no, this isn't my fault! I was an ordinary student in another world, like, yesterday! I don't know the first thing about high society!

Later that evening, a butler from the Lansen family showed up at Mitsuha's store to deliver an invitation. He was out of breath and dripping with sweat. Mitsuha felt bad for him and offered him some ice-cold barley tea from the fridge, which gave the man a real shock.

Oh, that's right. The people of this world don't know what fridges are. Sabine's always grabbing drinks out of it, so I totally forgot... Whoops.

Chapter 23

The Party

Two days later, Mitsuha put on a dress and went to the Lansens' capital mansion for the party. The dress she chose was one she had received when she swindled the nations of Earth into offering her tribute. It was a luxurious item crafted with the very best materials and techniques money could buy, so it goes without saying that it was bound to make quite an impression on the people of this other world.

Most of the dresses Mitsuha had been gifted showed more skin than was normal here. Whether that was simply due to cultural differences, or because the representatives thought she was a child and chose to give her dresses that were easy to move in, Mitsuha couldn't say. Maybe they thought she wanted to appear mature for her age...? Whatever the case, she chose the dress least likely to raise eyebrows, one that didn't take on the Herculean challenge of trying to emphasize her chest—

Hey, that's enough of that! ...There is one thing I don't get, though: why does this dress fit me so perfectly? I guess they could have figured out my height by taking surreptitious pictures and comparing me to other people in the shot, but even the bust and waist are exactly right... Those major intelligence agencies are nothing to sneeze at!

Mitsuha couldn't conceal weapons on her upper body while she was wearing a dress, so all she had for protection was the Walther PPS strapped to her thigh.

She doubted anyone at the party would flip up her skirt... Hopefully not, anyway. It wouldn't be a good look if anyone discovered she had brought a weapon to the party. On the off chance they did, she would just say it was a divine implement she had to wear at all times, like an amulet or talisman. She doubted anyone would take issue with that. That is, she wouldn't let them.

Mitsuha *could* just jump back to Earth to escape danger whenever she wanted, so there was no real need to wear a weapon at all times. And the gun wasn't going to do her any good if someone got her before she had a chance to jump anyway. The reason she wore the weapon was to protect others in case of a bandit attack. If it were just a few people, she could bring them along with her when she jumped, but if she tried to take too large a crowd, she was bound to leave someone behind. Plus, revealing her full capabilities would cause headaches for her down the line; it would be much easier in that scenario to just take the enemy out.

As far as anyone could tell, though, she was empty-handed, and the sharp-eyed nobles began to approach her as soon she entered the hall. But before anyone else could get to her, Count Bozes rushed over and grabbed her by the hand.

“You must first greet the hosts, Count Lansen and his family!” he said, dragging her away.

The count's always on top of things. He was ready to escort me to the hosts right away... Wait, this isn't how you escort someone! He's dragging me along like a father corralling a misbehaving daughter! Oh well, whatever...

Suddenly, she found Alexis holding her other hand.

W-Wait! Now I look like one of those photographs! You know, of an alien

with two CIA agents holding it by either arm...

“L-Let me go! I’m not gonna run away!” Mitsuha pleaded, but the two men simply dragged her across the room and deposited her in front of the party’s hosts.

The Lansen family consisted of the count, his wife, two sons, and two daughters.

“Th-Thank you very much for inviting me...” Mitsuha managed, standing awkwardly with her arms still held fast.

The Lansens look really taken aback. Can’t exactly blame them with the display we’re putting on here...

“Y-Yes... Thank you for coming. I welcome you to—” Count Lansen began, trying to suppress his surprise, but was interrupted when the older of the two sons, who looked about twenty, suddenly sprang forward and reached out a hand toward Mitsuha.

“You honor us with your presence. I am the eldest son of—hanh?”

Count Bozes and Alexis had lifted Mitsuha by the arms and yanked her backward, so that the young man’s hand grasped nothing but air. He stood there dumbfounded.

“We will occupy no more of your limited time. Please pardon us,” Count Bozes said before he and Alexis hustled away with Mitsuha dangling in the air between them.

Seriously?! I’m not even facing the right way! We’re attracting a lot of attention, damn it! Now I really do look like a captive space alien!!

“Count Lansen’s eldest son is a philanderer,” the count whispered in Mitsuha’s ear, in a bid to suppress her struggles. “Judging by the number of girls

he goes after, you would never know he's engaged. Don't talk to him, don't go near him, don't even look at him. He'll get you pregnant with just a touch..."

Ah, that explains their behavior. Is it okay for you to say that at the family's party, though? Also, my ear tickles!

"We'll greet Count Pasteur next. He was the host of the party you missed the other day. You caused quite a fuss by seeming to ignore the debut of his second-eldest daughter, so do your best to behave cordially and correct everyone's misunderstanding. Especially the girl—she was very much looking forward to debuting alongside you," the count explained.

"Sir, yes, sir..."

Damn, I feel bad about ruining that poor girl's party. I need to make it up to her...

This time, Count Bozes and Alexis let go of Mitsuha's hands before they approached the Pasteurs. *Makes sense. Otherwise it would've looked like they were forcing me to talk to them.*

"I am Viscountess Mitsuha von Yamano. It is a pleasure to finally meet you," Mitsuha said with a graceful curtsy. *I knew all those foreign movies would come in handy!* "I sincerely apologize for missing your party. I was not aware we were required to report our presence in the capital, and thus remained on the absent list."

Surprise registered on Count Pasteur's face as he finally learned the truth. He must have been suspicious of Mitsuha, what with all the rumors that had been swirling around since the party.

I mean it, though. I really am sorry!

The count's wife and children looked startled as well. One of the girls—the second daughter, Mitsuha assumed—began to tear up.

Oh no! She's going to cry! I'm sure she was really excited to learn that her own debut was going to double as the debut of the Lightning Archpriestess—she probably thought it meant we could become friends... That was all ruined when she heard I wasn't in the capital, but then, after doing her best to make the party a success anyway, she found out I'd been there all along? I'd want to cry too...

I need something to counteract my mistake... Get it? 'Cause her dad's a count? I'll show myself out.

“Here, please accept this as an apology for missing your debutante ball, and as a token of friendship,” Mitsuha said, impulsively pulling a diamond ring off her finger and holding it out for the girl. *I got this ring when I scamm—ahem, I mean, asked the countries of the world for tribute, same as this dress. I don't know how many carats it is, but I'm sure it would fetch a pretty penny. I'm not exactly hurting for money right now, so this is a fair price to pay for cleaning up this mess. It was a gift, anyway, so it's not like I'm losing money...*

Large, high-quality diamonds were not rare in this world. What set this one apart was not its size but the quality of its cut and polish. The value of a diamond is determined by its cut, color, carat weight, and clarity, and the cut was the component that demonstrated the difference in technology levels between the two worlds. An ideal cut gave a diamond the proper proportions to refract light to its full potential, increasing its sparkle significantly. Cutting techniques were far superior on Earth, so the same unpolished stone would end up differing significantly in quality depending on the world.

In short, this diamond's cut made it a product of unimaginable beauty in the

other world. Even a regular Western engagement ring back on Earth could sell for a great deal of money in this world, depending on the cut.

I specified “Western” because there’s plenty of precedent in Japan for diamonds being appraised too highly and sold for more than they’re worth. A lot of the time this happens because the appraisal companies are subsidiaries of the jewelry companies. Diamonds overseas will usually sell for eighty to ninety percent of their original purchase price, but in Japan it’s not uncommon for it to be less than twenty percent. In extreme cases the diamond will be worth nothing at all, and the only value will be in the raw metal of the ring itself.

The Pasteurs’ second daughter took the ring reflexively, then stared at it in wide-eyed amazement. The count and his wife were even more shocked. *Looks like her parents actually understand the value of this diamond... Guess that’s not a surprise.*

Huh? Count Bozes looks really shaken.

“M-Mitsuha, th-that...” he trailed off.

“I got the ring from my mother. Is there a problem?” Mitsuha responded.

“Whatever I may have said, I-I didn’t mean to give you the impression you needed to part with something so precious...”

Oh, so that’s what he’s worried about. Like most girls, Mitsuha was aware of the qualities on which diamonds were judged, but she had never spent much time around real gemstones and had no idea how much this one was actually worth. She just figured it was modestly valuable.

On Earth, I don’t think it would go for tens of millions of yen or anything like that. The diamond isn’t that big, and it was only meant to win the favor of a little girl. The gifts I received from the other countries weren’t jaw-droppingly

valuable either. In the tens of thousands of dollars, at most.

...Wait, “at most”? Who the hell do I think I am?! Anyway, it was a gift. I’ll readily part with it to stop a cute girl from crying.

Oh, her cuteness is irrelevant. Naturally. I don’t want to go around making any girls cry.

“V-Viscountess Yamano, we cannot possibly accept something so valuable,” Count Pasteur protested, terribly flustered. His wife and older daughter were staring fixedly at the ring in the younger daughter’s hands.

“No, this is the least I can do. The party would have been the perfect opportunity to strike up a friendship, but I wasted it due to my own inattentiveness,” Mitsuha responded. She turned toward the girl and smiled. “Will you please accept this? And will you be my friend?”

The girl nodded hurriedly. *I guess saying no wasn’t really an option.*

Mitsuha talked with the girl for a bit, and after the count and his wife had thanked her numerous times, she walked away. That would surely put an end to all rumors that there was discord between Mitsuha and the Pasteurs. Far from it; people would assume they were very close indeed, once they discovered she had given the Pasteur girl a memento of her mother.

Mission accomplished! Mitsuha thought with relief. But—

“...You went too far,” Count Bozes admonished her.

Oh, come on!

“Hey, that reminds me. Where are Lady Iris and Theodore?” Mitsuha asked.

“It’s just me and Alexis today. This is merely a birthday party for the second son of a count we don’t have much of a connection with. We weren’t

going to attend at all since Beatrice has yet to make her debut, but a certain someone made a mess I needed to clean up...”

Ah, that makes sense... Sorry...

“Mitsuha!” a voice called out from behind.

“Oh, Adelaide! Long time no see!” Mitsuha said after turning around.

It was Adelaide—the eldest daughter of Viscount Ryner, and the girl whose debutante ball Mitsuha had directed—surrounded by a crowd of boys and girls.

Man, she's popular. I'll bet she has the party I threw to thank for that!
Actually, Adelaide's a good kid. She was probably always gonna be popular...

Mitsuha had a nice, long chat with Adelaide, which turned into a lively conversation as the other children nervously joined in. This was the first time Mitsuha had talked with a group of children close to her age in a long time, and it took her right back to the fun of her middle and high school days.

Count Bozes had disappeared. He might have felt awkward hanging around a group of children, but he probably also had other nobles he needed to speak to; he couldn't just stick around Mitsuha the whole time. Alexis did remain by Mitsuha's side, but he didn't look like he was having much fun.

Alexis may be young, but he's a viscount in his own right, and one of the heroes of the battle to defend the capital. He should have girls hanging all over him! I've heard from the Bozes family servants that he used to chat up girls all the time, too. I wonder what's going on. Guess maybe he's just changed?

Alexis spoke up some time later. “Mitsuha, you're not the child of a lord, you're a viscountess. That means you need to go around and speak to the heads of the

other noble families.”

“Aww man...”

Just when I was finally having fun, Mitsuha thought, but what he said made sense. Her new friends looked at her with disappointed yet understanding faces. They were nobles, and knew she had to do her duty.

Welp, guess I don't have a choice. Time to go make myself seen. I'm really bad at remembering people, though... Shoot, I don't even remember the name of Count Pasteur's daughter. Wait, I never asked, did I... Better learn it before I see her again...

Count Bozes was a bit miffed. He thought of Mitsuha as his own daughter, and hoped she would formally enter the family by marrying one of his sons. Mitsuha had given his family many gifts without asking for anything in return—other than the pearl necklace she had sold them to raise money for her store—and he had been under the impression that they were the only ones who could boast of that privilege. He had just witnessed her give that ring to the Pasteurs' daughter, however.

That was clearly more valuable than the multi-purpose knife she gave me. I know she was just trying to do as I instructed, but I still can't help feeling irritated.

The count's family had a special relationship with Mitsuha. That was why he had been greatly offended when other nobles tried to interfere after his family volunteered to act as guardians and help the young—not to say immature—Mitsuha grow accustomed to the ways of the nobility. Some complained that Mitsuha had simply happened to come ashore in the Bozeses'

domain. And one count claimed that his own family would make better guardians because Mitsuha would have to pass through their territory to reach the capital. *That's all absurd! You all just want to use Mitsuha for your own gain!* Knowing what they did of Mitsuha's situation, however, the king and the chancellor paid the other nobles no mind and named the Bozes family her guardians, just as Count Bozes had arranged.

Besides, Mitsuha owes us a great deal. Our county was the first place she stayed after arriving in this kingdom. My citizens saved her life...though she did pay them back by saving the life of a little girl. But after that, I comforted Mitsuha as she cried, and told her she could call me Father...though she did pay me back by acting as a daughter and giving me profitable advice for my county. I gave her funds to open a store...for which she gave us a pearl necklace worth significantly more than our investment. Alexis sacrificed himself to save her...though she hardly owes us for that, given how she saved him from certain death and recommended he receive his own title. And now that I think about it, sacrificing yourself to protect the supreme commander would be expected of any noble. Well, as her guardians, we're doing much to help ensure her future...though admittedly, being the Lightning Archpriestess's guardian has increased my influence and substantially improved my relationships with the other nobles.

...Hold on. Do we owe her more than she owes us??

Eventually, Count Bozes's thoughts moved on to other things.

Mitsuha hadn't told him much about herself, but he had surmised the following from what little he did know:

She was the older sister of a young king from a distant country across the

sea. She got along well with her brother, but the majority of the citizenry wanted her to take the throne in his stead. The country had highly advanced technology, from everyday appliances to the mysterious “divine weaponry” that Mitsuha used. The existence of the “traversal” spell almost made him think it was some kind of realm of gods. She likely got the “Lightning Archpriestess” moniker after someone witnessed her using one of her divine weapons. He wondered if all her strange goods and bizarre armaments were truly delivered by friends via small, swift boats as she claimed, or if she brought them over using traversal...

Next, Count Bozes considered Mitsuha’s value to the royalty and nobility of the kingdom.

Mitsuha had denied any possibility of her country invading, saying, “The distance is too great to travel except by high-speed craft, which are stupid expensive to build and use for transport, and too small to carry soldiers and military equipment.”

She also denied any chance of establishing formal trade, saying, “My friends are sending me things without regard to profit or loss because they’re worried about my well-being, and I’m just selling the extras. My country would have to sell these products for more than ten times the prices I’m charging if they wanted to actually make a profit.” He’d had no choice but to drop the subject.

It was true that while her store carried incredible wares, most of them existed to satisfy everyday needs and would not have much impact on the kingdom as a whole. As such, none of her products were worth the time and money to research and produce imitations. There were some items that seemed useful for military purposes, such as a portable lamp without a flame, but they

were too complicated for anyone to figure out how to replicate. Mitsuha didn't sell them in bulk, and purchasing enough to supply an entire army would be too expensive anyway...

Her value to the kingdom could be in fostering diplomatic relations to facilitate an exchange of technology, but they didn't have any technology worth offering, so it wouldn't be much of an "exchange." Their position in negotiations would be rendered even more pathetic by having to rely on Mitsuha's country for transportation. The kingdom could just offer money, but the technological disparity and unfavorable exchange rate would simply result in a significant amount of gold and jewels flowing to Mitsuha's country.

Here's another question: would Mitsuha use traversal to save our kingdom again in the event of another crisis?

It was hard to believe her brother the king would, without hope of recompense, knowingly reduce the priestess's life force and drain the divine weaponry to save another country, even if his older sister did live there. She had left their kingdom for a land of strangers, after all, and what king could bring himself to empty the nation's coffers and send its citizens to their deaths for those people's sake? The count also doubted Mitsuha would be able to get her friends to help a second time...which meant that if it came to it, Mitsuha would probably choose to save herself alone...

In other words, it was unlikely this kingdom could gain anything from Mitsuha's status as older sister to a king. Quite the reverse, in fact—they stood to lose a great deal. If she were harmed here and her country found out about it, they might very well invade without regard for danger or cost, and that could spell the end for the kingdom. There was a good chance there were already

people from her country here, watching over her in secret and ready to report back the moment anything happened.

Then what is Mitsuha's value to our kingdom? I believe it to lie in her charisma, as well as her superlative knowledge and wisdom.

Mitsuha's charisma truly was something to behold. She was lively and kind beneath that charming exterior, and could be both dignified and fierce when the need arose. Everyone who witnessed these qualities firsthand felt a great reverence toward her. And the count had no doubt in his mind that she would summon those divine soldiers again in the event of another crisis.

Anyone would have much to gain by currying favor with her and convincing her to speak on their behalf...though I don't think Mitsuha can be so easily manipulated.

But even her charisma didn't match the value of her knowledge and wisdom. The count caught glimpses of it whenever she let slip intriguing ideas for territorial development during their conversations. She always caught herself before she got to the good part, saying that the rest would come with a fee, and he wondered just how much his county would benefit if he could hear the entirety of what she had to say.

According to the reports from the observers he had sent to Yamano County, Mitsuha had begun a variety of reforms and construction projects, and the villagers seemed happier as a result of her changes. It would probably be some time before these things were reflected in her domain's balance sheets, but he was going to continue investigating her every move so that he could swiftly imitate her reforms if they were indeed successful. *It's too bad she turned down my offer to lend her some of my vassals...*

He had also been told that people were beginning to move to Yamano County. Such an influx was vital to the development of a territory. The increased trade with Bozes County was no bad thing, either.

...But please, don't develop your domain in a way that siphons off any profit from our county. I'm begging you...

Count Bozes glanced toward Mitsuha and saw that she had left the group of youngsters to tour the party and greet all the noble families present.

He had made sure he was by Mitsuha's side when she greeted the Lansens and the Pasteurs because he wanted to convey to the attendees how close the Bozeses were with her, but monopolizing her too much would draw the other nobles' ire. That was why he had backed off and given her some time to act on her own. He was relieved to see her fulfilling her social duties, but he found himself growing irritated as he watched her act so cordially toward the other families.

She's ours, you fools! Alexis, don't let her get away!

Meanwhile, Mitsuha had taken Alexis's advice and was circulating around the party to talk to the lords of the other noble families. The lords themselves were thrilled by the long-awaited chance to finally meet her, and many even approached without waiting for her to come to them.

None dared complain about Alexis's constant attendance by her side. He had his own noble rank, after all, separate from his father's, and he and Mitsuha had joined the peerage at the same time. In addition, their counties bordered one another, and they had saved each other's lives. It all added up to more than

enough reason for them to spend a lot of time together.

People also quickly got the sense that Alexis was not a contender for her heart—he may have had feelings for her, but Mitsuha clearly treated him like a good friend or a brother, nothing more. Having come to this conclusion, the nobles with sons of a marriageable age were falling over themselves to get her attention, and Alexis's attempts to keep them in check went largely ignored. Seeing that Mitsuha clearly had no romantic interest in him, they pitied the boy, but had no reason to stay out of his way. He was simply a minor obstacle to their ambitions.

Mitsuha, for her part, was too focused on advertising her new Yamano County products to notice this war being waged over her.

Count Bozes grew depressed, and Alexis felt like he was developing an ulcer. For them, the night seemed to last an eternity...

Chapter 24

Popcorn

It's over! Somehow I made it through my first noble party! Mitsuha thought. As a guest anyway—Adelaide's debut didn't count. I was just on staff for that one. She had enjoyed the experience more than she expected to. She got to see Adelaide again, and it had been a lot of fun talking to people her age. She felt like she'd been interacting with no one but old men and little girls lately...

Hey, keep your comments to yourself! So what if they weren't actually my age? It's not my fault I look so young!

A lot of nobles had approached her with ulterior motives, but Mitsuha couldn't really blame them for that. They were all desperate to develop their domains, and it was only natural to approach someone they thought might be useful to them.

I get pissed when a biker gang wakes me up in the middle of the night, but not when an ambulance or a fire truck does the same. I know the driver is just doing whatever it takes to get the job done.

Besides, I'm no different—I used the opportunity to advertise the popcorn I'm gonna sell in the capital, and to make requests of the lords with territories located between the capital and my county.

I wonder if that killer upturned-eyes-and-cute-smile finishing move I learned from Sabine helped at all... I didn't debase myself too much, though—I didn't go around saying “Pleeeease, mister?” or anything. I still have some dignity I'd like to hold on to.

The count and Alexis did look down in the dumps when they thanked me at the end of the night... Were they in a bad mood because they had to go to a party they weren't planning on attending because of me? I need to make it up to them somehow...

Mitsuha had spent the two days before the party preparing her popcorn business. She started by buying popcorn online. Already dried, of course. Next she bought a nice big aluminum pot. It would only be used to make popcorn, so she didn't have to worry about details like durability or heat conduction. Stainless steel, titanium, or enamel would have been overkill. All she needed was a light pot that was easy for children to shake, so a cheap one would do just fine. If it got burnt or broken, she could just buy another. That was the advantage of buying cheap.

That reminds me, someone at a shoe store once told me that it was worth it to pay for high-quality shoes because they last so much longer than cheap ones. Personally, though, I'd rather buy ten pairs of 3,000-yen shoes that last for a year than one 30,000-yen pair that lasts for three. That lets me choose different shoes to match my outfits. And if a pair gets muddy or damaged, that's only one out of ten down the tubes, rather than my only pair.

Don't get me wrong, I do understand that quality matters. I would never buy anything but a good, Japanese-made computer, and I realize that high-quality shoes have their advantages, too. I've heard that hotel workers judge the guests by the shoes they're wearing, for instance. I'm not interested in staying at a hotel that treats people differently based on the quality of their shoes, though! Shouldn't you be grateful to less affluent customers for going a little out of their comfort zone to stay at your hotel?!

...Shoot, what was I talking about? Pots? Whoops, got way off track there.

Mitsuha had also bought paper sacks and food-grade oilproof bags for about four yen each to use when serving customers. The two portable gas stoves, the fuel, and everything else they would need were already taken care of. The stall had been more or less ready to go, too—there had just been a few final checks to make, and those were already done.

She was now ready to launch the business...

“Okay, let’s practice making popcorn!”

That’s right, we can’t skip the dress rehearsal! And the kids need to try the popcorn before we take it to market. No one would trust a salesperson who doesn’t know the first thing about the product they’re offering.

“First, I’ll show you how to do it. Watch carefully,” she said, before spreading a thin layer of popcorn kernels across the bottom of the pot.

“Whuh? Izzat all you’re gonna make?” one child asked.

“I know this is just for practice, but you don’t gotta be *that* stingy, Archpriestess...” another added.

Hey, just wait and see! I’m about to knock your socks off!

Mitsuha poured in some vegetable oil, added salt, then turned on the stove. She put the pot on the burner and began agitating it gently. The pot was big, light, cheap, and had only one handle. Popcorn wasn’t heavy enough to necessitate a two-handled pot, and holding it with only one hand made it easier to shake. Plus, it meant you didn’t have to lean over the stove; she had to consider the children’s safety.

Not long after she began agitating the pot, the fun began.

Pop.

Pop.

Pop-pop-pop.

Pop-pop-pop-pop-pop-pop.

“Wow!”

“What is that?!”

“So cooooool!!”

Surprise was quickly replaced by excitement on the children’s faces.

“What’s that sound? What’s going on in there?”

The children wanted to look inside the pot, but removing the lid now would result in disaster. Mitsuha resisted their glittering eyes and continued shaking the pot.

Pop-pop-pop-pop-pop...

Pop-pop-pop...

Pop-pop...

Pop...

And...NOW!

The popcorn would burn if you stubbornly waited for every last kernel to pop, which meant you had to allow for at least a few unpopped kernels. Mitsuha, being the proper young lady she was, knew this well. She turned off the stove and removed the lid to reveal that familiar white and fluffy food... Likely the first of its kind in this world... POPCORN!

“Whooooaa! What is that?!”

“How did those tiny thingies fill the whole pot? Did you use your magic, Archpriestess? If you teach us this spell, we’ll never go hungry again!!”

Uh, awkward...



“This is ‘popcorn,’ the food you’ll all be selling. Go ahead, try it!” Mitsuha urged.

“Wowww, it’s so good!”

“It’s delectable. They’re fluffy yet crispy at the same time, and the salt does a lot to draw out the gentle flavor...”

Is this kid a food critic?!

“Lemme make it next!”

“I call next after that!”

“I wanna try too!!”

Yes, that’s what I wanna hear! Popcorn isn’t just fun to eat, it’s fun to make! It’s almost impossible to screw up, and hearing the kernels pop and fill up the pot is a real blast. Not only are the kernels cheap, but any household is likely to have all the other ingredients—and the pot—already.

“Don’t worry, you’re all gonna get a turn! Be careful not to burn yourself. I’ll have to temporarily revoke your popcorn-making privileges if you do!”

“Yes, ma’am!”

Okay, preparations complete!

The day after the party, it was finally time to begin test sales in the public square. The stall was already loaded with the equipment and ingredients by the time Mitsuha arrived at the orphanage. They departed right away, with three orphans leading the stall. Loik may have been a genius, but the stall was still made by children out of scrap wood—it had to be handled carefully. They moved it slowly, with one kid pulling and the other two pushing from behind.

The three children chosen for the first day were Loik and Manon, who were

there in case something went wrong with the stall, and Philip, who at fourteen was the oldest child in the orphanage. If the crew had all been little kids, they would've been more likely to get trouble from hoodlums and other bad actors.

For the first day, Mitsuha was going to keep an eye on things from behind the stall. She had jumped back to her county to collect the salt and vegetable oil. The pot and paper bags were from Japan, but she wanted the food itself to be entirely from Yamano County.

Now that I think about it, the kids would be able to buy another pot in the capital even if I disappeared—it would be heavier and harder to use, but it would work. The same can't be said of paper bags, though. I'll have to figure out a way for them to acquire paper bags or some substitute on their own.

Mitsuha had considered buying them a few hundred plastic containers to use in case she got sick or hurt in an accident and was gone for a while. Her thinking was that the children could pay customers to get the containers back and then reuse them, but that probably wouldn't go well.

In truth, Mitsuha had already tried this at her store. She wanted to avoid polluting the environment with plastic containers, cringing at the thought of future archaeologists fainting when they found piles of them at excavation sites, so she put notices on certain products that she would buy them back after they were used up. While some commoners brought back their shampoo bottles and such, however, most didn't, and neither did the nobles. She asked around and discovered that people were using the empty containers as decoration, or filling them with soapy water to reuse them. She also found out that some were reselling them at prices well above her own. Hell, people were even decorating their shelves with ramen bags and the like.

Well, as long as people don't throw them away. I'll have to think of something so all this packaging doesn't eventually end up as trash, though...

The children couldn't offer much to buy back the plastic containers if they were charging only two or three small silver coins for the popcorn itself, so it was unlikely any customers would bother to bring them back. Those light, waterproof containers were handy, too, so people would naturally want to keep them. There was even a chance someone would start buying up all the popcorn just to get their hands on the containers.

As things are now, the kids would run out of paper bags as soon as the supply from Japan was cut off. That would leave them with everything they needed to make popcorn in this world, but no way to sell it, which would be beyond dumb. Maybe they could tell customers to bring their own pots and bowls to use as containers? No, that would be annoying enough to drastically decrease sales. Should I hurry along paper development in my domain, then? Hmm...

The walk to the public square seemed to pass in a flash. Mitsuha had been truly lost in thought. Loik, Manon, and Philip parked the stall in a suitable spot, pulled out the counter, and began setting up the equipment.

Man, they're quick... Huh? They're putting up two wooden signs now. Just how much work did they put into this? What do they say... Oh, you've gotta be kidding!

One of the signs was fine. It read:

POPCORN

MADE IN YAMANO COUNTY

3 SMALL SILVER

Nothing wrong with that. The other sign was the issue. Instead of words, it showed a silhouette of a girl standing on what looked like a tank, her skirt fluttering in the breeze.

“Wh-What is that?” Mitsuha asked.

“It’s our logo. We all thought it up together. This way, even people who can’t read will immediately know that this stall belongs to the Archpriestess,” Loik responded nonchalantly.

Well, crap. I can’t just tell them to get rid of it after they went to all the trouble of making it... Whatever. I’ll just hide behind the stall.

...I have to admit, though, it’s really good. I wonder who drew it.

Anyway, the stall’s all set to open! We spent plenty of time yesterday practicing making popcorn, so we should be good to go. The third branch of Mitsuha’s General Store opens now!

Business was already booming at the popcorn stand.

I feel kinda dirty, Mitsuha thought.

The biggest hurdle with a new product was just getting people to try it. You could have the best product in the world, but it wouldn’t sell if no one gave it a chance. Drawing interest and getting the product into the hands of potential customers was always the most difficult step in the process. If you could accomplish that, a good-quality product would sell. Something low-quality still wouldn’t, but that was the fault of whoever made it.

That's why it's common for authors at zine fairs and the like to encourage passersby to pick up their books and look through them. No one would buy them otherwise, and it's easier for an author to accept defeat after watching someone at least give their book a try. Authors often thank people even if they walk away without a purchase, because they're grateful just to have someone pick up their work and flip through it. There's nothing harder than having people ignore your creation altogether.

I always try food samples at supermarkets for the same reason. And no, that's not just because I can't pass up a chance for free food! Occasionally I buy the product, if I like it.

That's why Mitsuha was so anxious about getting people to try the popcorn, but her concern couldn't have been more misplaced. First of all, they weren't selling something like kebabs that you could find at countless other stalls—this was a new food that no one had ever even seen before. That alone would have been advantageous enough, but people who could read the sign saw that it was "Made in Yamano County," which meant it was from the Archpriestess's land, which meant it was Yamano Cuisine. The children also told any illiterate people who asked about the logo that the stall was "directly managed by the Archpriestess herself." There was no way the popcorn wasn't going to sell.

Dirty is the only way to describe it! I feel bad for the people running the other stalls. They're trying their best, but...

The cheery sound of the popcorn popping was itself attracting customers. There was little point in hiding how to make it since people would figure it out anyway, so the children were making it right out in the open. It appeared so simple that Mitsuha was sure lots of people would try to make some at home.

And because they didn't know any better, they would use regular corn.

Mwahahaha, then they shall know true despair! Don't take that "Made in Yamano County" label lightly!

Mitsuha could never have predicted what a whirlwind the first day was going to be. She didn't think anyone had ever sold popcorn at such a rate. They were so busy that when the next shift of children arrived, Loik, Manon, and Philip were forced to stay and keep making popcorn using the spare stove. Mitsuha was glad she had thought to pick up an extra pot as well.

You're wondering if we reached our goal of one gold coin's worth of sales? Do you even need to ask? We got so many customers we ran out of popcorn completely. It was insane.

Philip spent the whole day working the pot, saying that he didn't want the younger kids to have to push themselves too hard. He was near tears by the time we ran out, and his arms were like jelly. Who's pushing himself too hard now, Philip...?

Popcorn stand, day two. Mitsuha decided to accompany the children again—she couldn't help but worry that something would go wrong, so she planned to observe them for at least a few days. Even if she got invited to another noble family's party, they usually took place at night, so this wouldn't interfere.

The children told Mitsuha on the way to the square that the director was so ecstatic to hear how good sales had been, he decided on the spot to add another dish to their dinner. *I'm glad he's happy, but I hope sales don't dip once most people have already tried the product... Given yesterday's craze, though, I'm*

sure everything will be just fine.

The children for today's shift were on the whole older than the ones yesterday. Mitsuha also increased the size of the team to five because the labor had been more physically demanding than she'd expected. Their pay remained thirty percent of profits, though. Sales had surpassed expectations so far, and since the wages were going directly into the orphanage's budget rather than the children's pockets, the size of the team didn't make a difference.

For the second day in a row, Philip came along. Mitsuha would've been worried about bringing a whole new team; everyone had practiced making popcorn, but handling customers was another matter. Since his arms hadn't fully recovered from yesterday's ordeal, he was going to serve as a supervisor. He was a reliable kid.

Being almost fifteen years old, Philip would have to leave the orphanage soon. Mitsuha couldn't hire every child at the orphanage to come work for her. She would consider any of them with appropriate skills, but she wasn't running a charity. Also, if people knew she hired everyone who came out of the orphanage, it could lead to problems: people harassing the orphans out of jealousy, or older kids trying to force their way into the orphanage just before they came of age. She would continue hiring people as she saw fit, rather than accept just anyone who came begging for a job.

Adults could not be considered "orphans," even if they had lost their parents. At that age, you were expected to be a functioning member of society and support yourself. She would hire anyone who came to her looking for a job *if* they were qualified, of course, though she would most likely scout them for the domain rather than hire them as a direct retainer to her household.

Mitsuha and the children arrived at the public square. Under Philip's direction, the children quickly set up the stall and opened for business.

Popcorn isn't the kind of thing nobles would disguise themselves as commoners and stand in line to get their hands on, but you do get a hankering for it, and once you start eating it, you can't stop. It may not be the most delicious thing you've ever tasted, but somehow you end up buying it anyway.

The novel popcorn beguiled the citizens of the capital, and for the second day in a row, sales were excellent.

Whoops, must've dozed off. Mitsuha awoke behind the stall to some kind of racket.

“You deaf or somethin’? I’m askin’ who gave you twerps permission to set up shop here!”

Ooh, we've got trouble! Should I intervene? Mitsuha reached for the pistol-shaped stun gun in her bag, but...

“Uh, the Lightning Archpriestess?”

“Wha?” three voices replied in unison.

Huh, did something change? I'll just take a peek...

“This stand is here to advertise a special new product from Yamano County, and as such, it’s directly managed by Viscountess Yamano, the one and only Lightning Archpriestess herself. We’re her loyal servants!!” Philip declared, at which the five children crossed their arms and struck a pose.

Bwuh?! What the hell?! Did they practice that? I-I can’t... My stomach hurts...

“So? What can we do for you today?”

“Uh, well, see...”

Philip’s brazenness had left the three ruffians speechless. The orphans they had thought would be easy targets were running a business, selling food no one had ever seen before, and claiming to be the Archpriestess’s servants to boot. Even children had to know what it would mean to falsely claim the name of the Archpriestess in this kingdom.

They got through this situation all on their own! Gold star! The delinquents will probably leave on their own, but lemme make doubly sure I won’t be needed here anymore.

“Is something wrong?” Mitsuha asked, emerging from behind the stall.

“Lightning Archpriestess!” the five children shouted in unison.

They didn’t practice that too, did they?

“And you are?” she asked, turning to the ruffians.

“W-We’re members of the Abalo Clan, ma’am! We run things round these parts, ma’am!” one of them replied frantically.

“Philip, give me four servings of popcorn, please.” Philip quickly filled four bags with popcorn and gave them to Mitsuha, who smiled as she handed one to each of the three ruffians, keeping one for herself. “Help these kids out if they need anything, okay?” The men nodded, blushing furiously. “I thought up this snack myself. Good, isn’t it?”

The delinquents left, apologizing over and over again as they backed away.

They’ll probably tell the rest of this “Abalo Clan” about what just happened, which’ll ensure that no one else messes with the stall. Sweet.

...Wait, where'd this huge line come from?!

“A-Archpriestess, look what you’ve done… Please, help us,” Philip begged.

Is that really the best idea? I’m pretty sure the line would only get longer if I did.

The children lived through hell as they raced to serve the rush of customers. People flooded the town square from all the surrounding neighborhoods after word spread that the Archpriestess was personally serving a snack she had invented.

I told you it would be a bad idea…

The speed at which the orphans worked through the line wasn’t going to affect sales, as they could only continue until they ran out of popcorn. The only difference was whether they worked for seven leisurely hours or two miserable ones.

I recommend the former, personally, but if they prefer the latter, I won’t stop them.

When Mitsuha expressed this to the orphans, they complained that she should have said something earlier and tried to stop them.

Whoops…

One of the children spoke up on the way back to the orphanage.

“Okay, if we bring three times the popcorn we did today and sell it at the same pace—”

“SHUT UP!” the other four cried.

They're working on commission, so I'll let them decide how much they want to sell per day. And starting tomorrow, they can handle it all on their own. I'll use the day to pay a visit to my county and my house back in Japan.

Mitsuha jumped home the next morning. She took care of her email and snail mail, showed her face around the neighborhood, then bought copies of reversi and shogi, as well as a bicycle (the kind of hybrid they call a “cross bike,” to be precise). After spending the rest of the morning doing chores and eating lunch, she jumped to her county with her purchases in hand.

“Hello, Randy. Do you think you could make one of these?” Mitsuha asked.

Randy looked back and forth between Mitsuha and the bike, flustered by the sudden visit and the strange vehicle she had shoved into his hands.

“Wh-What is this?!” he cried.

By way of explanation, Mitsuha rode it around the backyard a little and gave him a primer on bicycles in general.

“I won’t ask you to make one from scratch, but do you think you could fix it if it broke?” she asked.

Randy answered with a dispirited shake of the head. “Not a chance. Look at this hollow pipe, for instance. I couldn’t possibly achieve this level of strength with such thin walls. In fact, I couldn’t make a pipe this thin, period. I could try to repair that part by reinforcing it with an iron rod, but it would be too heavy, and the vehicle as a whole wouldn’t hold together.

“This ‘gear’ thing is an even bigger problem. I can’t make something so thin yet so strong. The teeth would chip, warp, or get worn down more or less right away, and it would be tough to get it to mesh properly. Plus, there’s no way

I could make this chain-type part, either.”

Damn, guess it's a lost cause...

Even if Randy couldn't make a bike from scratch, Mitsuha had hoped he would at least be able to make the individual parts to repair one. That would have enabled her to bring bikes into this world.

With a cross bike, a person could cruise at about fifteen to eighteen miles per hour on paved roads. Around eighteen miles per hour the energy loss due to air resistance starts to increase rapidly, though, so it's best not to go much above fifteen.

There were no paved roads in this world, but there were main thoroughfares that people traversed by carriage. A person on a bike would be able to travel at a decent speed on such roads, so long as they weren't muddied by rain. At the party, Mitsuha had even made requests regarding road maintenance to a few of the lords who possessed land between her county and the capital. She was expecting increased traffic to her domain, so the roads had to be maintained regardless.

Transporting fish from her county to the capital by bike would be possible if she placed relief riders at the halfway point. A rider departing Yamano County in the evening would be able to reach the halfway point by dawn, after which the next rider would be able to reach the capital by evening. If each rider traveled at an average of 8.5 miles per hour, they would each be able to cover eighty-five miles in twelve hours, including a one-hour meal break, two thirty-minute breaks, and other smaller breaks. That way they could transport fresh fish (about forty could be stored in panniers on the sides or back of a bicycle) from her county to the capital in just twenty-four hours, in time for dinner the next day.

This method of transportation might not work in the summer, but the fish would keep just fine from fall to early spring if they wrapped it in cloth, placed it in a container full of water, and used capillary action and the wind from the bike's own motion to create an evaporative cooler. Without Earth-dependent maintenance, however, the bikes would be useless after they broke down.

Damn it, this was such a good idea... Oh no, I'm making Randy sad!

"It's all good. Technology is just more advanced in my country, so don't blame yourself!" Mitsuha said.

Oh no, that made him feel even worse! Quick, I need something to cheer him up... Oh yeah, that'll work!

"Guess what, Randy? I hired some children from the capital to help out in your workshop as apprentices. Do me a favor and look out for 'em!"

News of some new apprentices is bound to make him happy!

"Wha..."

"It's an eleven-year-old boy and a ten-year-old girl. They're good friends and both seem really talented. You're gonna love them!"

Huh? Why does he look even more depressed now?

Mitsuha's next destination was one of the mountain villages. Before going to Randy's workshop, she had sent a messenger to ask the heads of both mountain villages to gather together all the available adults. If she started walking now, she'd arrive exactly on time. At first she'd thought about taking the bike, but had decided against it. It would have attracted a lot of attention, and riding up the hills to the village would have been miserable.

An electric-assist bike is what I really need right now!

Mitsuha arrived at the village head's house to find close to thirty people gathered. The two villages had twenty-one households combined, so this averaged out to one or two people from each. That was a good turnout, considering there were likely some people who had gone into the mountains to work.

"Thank you all for meeting me like this. I came to talk to you about a job I would like the people of your two villages to perform for me," Mitsuha said, not wasting any time. Everyone there was older than her, so she had to catch herself to keep from speaking overly politely. It wouldn't do for a lord to debase herself in front of her subjects like that, but on the other hand, a haughty tone didn't suit her at all, so she landed somewhere in the middle.

Huh? The villagers look kind of uneasy. Oh, that's what they're worried about...

"Don't worry, I'm not talking about some kind of forced labor. I'm going to pay you."

The villagers looked instantly relieved.

Yep, that's what they were afraid of... All work in Yamano County is paid, except for compulsory military service.

"It'll be piecework—what I want you to do is make copies of these for me, and you'll be paid for each set you complete."

Mitsuha showed them the board games she had bought in Japan and explained both. Reversi was simple, but shogi was more complicated because of the differently sized pieces and the characters written on them. She was going to write the characters herself later, though, so the villagers didn't have to worry about that part.

“These are...games?”

The mayor and the villagers were looking dubious again. Their kingdom did have board games—even on Earth, the history of board games went back to ancient times—but the games of this land couldn’t hold a candle to the big four: chess, go, reversi, and backgammon. Or to shogi, Japan’s great battle of wits.

I didn’t pick chess because I don’t know how to play it, plus I could just use shogi instead. Go is hard and I don’t know the rules for that very well either. I passed on backgammon ’cause I’ve never even seen it, let alone played it. So basically, I picked shogi and reversi because they’re the only two I’m familiar with.

“Yep, that’s right! I guarantee they’re gonna be a hit. I’ll buy all the games you make regardless of sales, so there’s no risk to you!” Mitsuha told them.

It was only then that the villagers at last agreed to take on the work. They must’ve been waiting for such a reassurance. As long as Mitsuha was guaranteeing she would buy everything they produced, this would make a great part-time job for women and children. The smiles appearing one by one on the villagers’ faces suggested they had finally realized that, too.

“Try making cheaper versions for common folk and a few high-quality copies for the nobility. You know, with nicer materials and extra carvings and whatnot to make them more expensive.”

All right, looks like everyone’s realizing how much money they’ll be able to make off this. But wait, there’s more!

Mitsuha produced some printed pieces of paper from her bag.

“Do any of these plants grow around here?”

There were photographs of four different kinds of plants. In Japan they

were known as *gampi*, *kozo*, *kajinoki*, and *mitsumata*, the four most common plants used to make Japanese washi paper.

At last, we're going to start making paper! Western paper seemed like it would be more difficult to produce, so I'm starting with washi. You make washi by boiling, beating, and dissolving branches into a pulp, which is then sheeted, drained of water, and dried...I think. Whatever, I can just look up the details online!

“Hmm, this one and this one are pretty common. I’ve never seen that one. What about the rest of you?”

“Well, I feel like I’ve seen that one, too, but it might justa been somethin’ that looked like it...”

So there's a lot of kozo and mitsumata? All right, let's get this little experiment started!

Mitsuha asked them to gather samples of kozo and mitsumata, then returned to her county residence.

“Mitsuha, why won’t you spend more time with mee?”

Colette's getting kind of annoying... Maybe I left her alone for too long. I'll spend the rest of the day with her to make up for it.

Chapter 25

Let's Play Reversi!

“I’ve called you both here for a strategy meeting,” Mitsuha said.

“Whaaat? I thought you were going to play with me!” Colette wailed.

Hey, I just said I would spend the rest of the day with her. I made no promises about playing.

The three members of the committee were Mitsuha, Colette, and Miriam, Platidus’s former student whom Mitsuha employed as an advisor. As for the agenda...

“I want you to come up with ideas for how to make these two board games popular and marketable,” Mitsuha announced.

Huh? You normally come up with a sales strategy before placing an order for production? Whoops.

Mitsuha had given up on the idea of making playing cards for now. This world lacked the technology to create pieces of paper that looked completely identical, and damage over time would make the cards even easier to tell apart. Plus, the flimsiness and rough texture of the cards would make shuffling difficult.

I’ll try cards somewhere down the line... But the villagers haven’t even tried their hand at making paper yet, so who knows when that’ll be. Let’s just focus on reversi and shogi for now.

“We need to show people the games first. No amount of advertising will do any good otherwise,” Miriam said, getting right to the heart of the matter. “This

‘shogi’ seems like a difficult game to learn, so it would be best to start with nobles and high-ranking military officers, then let the game trickle down to the public from there. Reversi, on the other hand, will be easy for anyone to pick up and play. It’s so simple, yet deep at the same time. Seems fascinating...”

Miriam got really into reversi when I was showing her how to play. I didn’t think she’d ever want to stop...

“People won’t know if the games are fun or not without trying them first, which will make it hard to get them to buy. We could let people try them for free in the hopes of making a sale, or perhaps...” Miriam trailed off.

“Yeah?” Mitsuha prodded her.

“Perhaps we could convince people they have something to gain by buying these games.”

Interesting... Miriam sure is smart.

“And what would that be?” Mitsuha asked.

“You’ll need to figure that out yourself. Sociology is my specialty, not business.”

I take it back! Miriam’s not as useful as I thought!

Colette, who had been listening in silence, suddenly spoke up. “Make it a contest, Mitsuha!”

Huh?

“My village always has contests at festivals, like arm wrestling and log-cutting! They’re super exciting, and the winner gets a great prize! Once the prize for the log cutting contest was a whole baby boar. People wanted to win sooo badly!”

“Oh, I get it. We could hold a reversi tournament and entice people with a

reward,” Mitsuha said. “Everyone who entered would be a total beginner, and since it has nothing to do with physical strength, anyone could win. Maybe we can even get people to buy the game beforehand so they can practice... Way to go, Colette! That’s a great idea!”

Aww, look at that bashful giggle! So cute!

“What should the prize be, though,” Mitsuha wondered aloud. “Something too expensive would eat into our profits, but we won’t attract players with anything too cheap...”

After some deliberation, Colette held out a wooden board she’d been scribbling on.

“Here, take a look!”

Uh huh, your writing’s really improving. That’s impressive and all, but I don’t have time to help you study right now...

“Would this work for the prizes, Mitsuha? It wouldn’t cost any money, and everyone would be thrilled!”

Oh, this is her idea for the prizes? Let’s see...

1st: Treat Mitsuha to a meal

2nd: Buy Mitsuha an outfit

3rd: Go for a walk with Mitsuha

4th: Pat Mitsuha’s head

5th: Hold hands with Mitsuha

...This girl’s a genius!! I’m a little worried about her future, though... And why would anyone want the first and second prizes? Those only benefit me. The

winner actually has to spend money.

“Don’t worry, this will absolutely work!” Miriam declared.

Well, if she’s giving it her seal of approval, I guess it must be a good idea...?

In the end, they decided that fifth through eighth place would receive the hand-holding privilege. *Whatever. Not like it’s something I can run out of.*

I wonder if Colette thinks that patting my head is a better prize than a handshake because she likes it when I do it to her. Not that I mind. I’ve been getting head pats all my life, from my dad, my brother, Micchan, and everyone else under the sun. Such is the plight of being short. And now that I have my healing powers, there’s no risk of going bald from all the rubbing, so I’ve really got no reason to complain. Not that I’m 100% thrilled about the idea of some strange man patting my head, but whatever, this is work! Responsible members of society have to put up with things they don’t enjoy all the time! I can suffer some head pats for the sake of my domain...

Next, to prevent people from making their own copies of reversi or using someone else’s, they decided to make it a requirement for entering the tournament that everyone bring their own copy. All copies without the Yamano County brand would be considered ineligible. Forging a noble’s brand was a serious crime on the level of misrepresenting yourself as a noble, so it was unlikely anyone would attempt it. This would also ensure that everyone would buy a copy of reversi for themselves, even though one board was plenty for two people.

These girls are evil. Well, if it drives home the notion that reversi

originated in Yamano County and that it would be shameful to buy a copy without my brand, I'm all for it.

Mitsuha decided to end the meeting there. All that remained was to hammer out the details.

She had been sleeping at her store in the capital for the last few days, so she decided to sleep at her residence tonight. As far as anyone in her county knew, she wasn't traveling far for whatever business she was performing. It might raise questions if she never slept at home.

All right, I'll sleep with Colette tonight. That'll make her happy. I'm gonna return to the capital and check on the stall first, though.

“...You sold out today, too?”

“Yes, even though we brought extra this time. The line wasn't nearly as bad as yesterday, but...” Philip trailed off. He had joined the team again today.

“What happened?”

“We got a lot of complaints about the Archpriestess not being here. And there were some people who just stood off to the side staring into the stall...”

This was pretty much as Mitsuha had expected. There was nothing the kids could do about complaints of her absence, and the people watching the stall were likely trying to figure out the secrets of making popcorn after trying and failing to do it on their own. Unfortunately for those suckers, they weren't going to learn anything from watching the children. Other varieties of corn wouldn't pop because they lacked the tough hull of popcorn, and even then it needed to be dried first.

Even if someone did pick up a few dropped kernels of popcorn and planted

them, then harvested those seeds and planted them, and so on, it would take a long time for them to build up a steady supply. By then, popcorn would already be cemented as a Yamano County brand product, and any competitors would be seen as cheap imitations.

Regardless, Mitsuha had never set out to monopolize the sale of popcorn. All she wanted was to make popcorn popular so that eventually the crop grown in Yamano County would make good money. The popcorn stall would never make enough on its own to have an impact on the economy—it was just an advertisement for popcorn. It was her own county's product that she wanted to make into a brand, not this stuff.

Mitsuha was aware that some people would start planting the popcorn kernels they bought once she put it on the market, but there was nothing she could do about that. She just had to maintain her share of the market using her brand's status as the original. The distance between her county and the capital might become an issue, though.

What, you're worried the stall's sales will drop once popcorn is available elsewhere? I mean, I never planned to turn a huge profit from the stall. The orphanage will still make enough for daily food expenses even if sales drop a little, and besides, I ain't running a charity. Our interests just happened to align in this case.

“This is today’s total sales for lightning corn,” Philip said.

Let’s see here... Wait, what did he say?

“Wh-What kind of corn, now?”

“Lightning corn. All of a sudden everyone was just calling it that. People have decided this corn must have come from a field you blasted with lightning.

‘Lightning corn’ is short for ‘Lightning Archpriestess corn.’”

Too short! What, I’m just “Lightning” now?!

Whatever. I’m going to bed.

Mitsuha decided to get to work on her plan to popularize reversi.

Papermaking and other endeavors could wait until after ballroom season was over. Given the distance from her county, it would be unnatural for her to come to the capital too often. Anyone she met with would assume she was exhausted from the journey, and she couldn’t meet with everyone every time she jumped here lest they realize how often she visited. That made ballroom season the perfect opportunity to meet with as many people as possible in her efforts to popularize reversi.

Mitsuha just had to begin preparations for the tournament and announce it before the season ended, then she wouldn’t need to think about it for a while. It would take time for the copies of reversi to be produced, shipped, and put on the market, and they would sell decently on their own without Mitsuha having to shove the game down anyone’s throat. She was planning on holding the tournament during the next ballroom season.

“So, Petz. In addition to our prepared fish, can you please pick up all the finished copies of reversi and shogi when you come to my county from now on? I’d like you to take care of selling them, as well,” Mitsuha said.

“S-Sure, I don’t mind, but...are you sure those are gonna sell?” Petz replied.

“Absolutely! I swear it on old lady Otane from the candy store!”

“Who the heck is that?!”

Petz gladly accepted Mitsuha's request, but on one condition.

"I'll do as you ask, but I have one request..."

"What is it?"

"You know that illustration the kids are using at the popcorn stall in the square? I'd like to put it on my carriages. Would you be okay with that?"

"Huh? Uh, sure, doesn't bother me... If you want, I can introduce you to the kid who drew it."

"That would be amazing! Thank you!"

It was a strange request, but Mitsuha didn't mind granting it. Plus, it would be a great opportunity for the orphan who drew the logo to make some money and form a connection with a merchant. Mitsuha couldn't possibly bring herself to stand in the way of the child's potential career as an artist.

She told Petz she would have the child contact him, then departed his store.

Mitsuha had already written up explanations of how to play both reversi and shogi. Reversi's rules were easy to explain, but shogi was a pain and a half. She wrote the instructions by hand, and supplemented them with pictures downloaded from the internet.

Thank goodness I have a multifunction printer that can make copies. If anyone saw me at a convenience store copying sheets of paper covered in strange writing from another world, they'd either think I was a total nerd or some kind of cult member. I live in a rural area where everyone knows each other, so any unsavory rumors would spread like wildfire. I don't even wanna think about it!

Mitsuha was going to wait to distribute the instructions and start advertising until after the supplies of reversi arrived from her county. There would be no point in advertising a product that didn't exist yet. Even if Petz departed for Yamano County in a few days, he was going to stop in every town along the way to sell his wares, so it was going to take him a while to complete the round trip. She would just focus on advertising to the upper class in the meantime.

Huh? Why am I not just using world-jumping to bring the games here? I can't rely on my ability if I want to establish permanent trade between my county and the capital. I don't know when I might get in an accident or fall ill, or god forbid have to flee this kingdom, and if Yamano County's economy required my presence to function, it would collapse. I need to see that my people can manage without me, so that if I disappear, they'll be able to maintain their quality of life under the next lord... Even if that lord returns the tax rate to its former level.

So other than a few sets from Japan to introduce the games to the upper class, I'll let the rest be delivered by normal means. What's the big deal if I cheat with a few sets? Loosen up a little! Also, it's only been a day. It's not like using the ones produced in my county is an option yet.

Mitsuha went right to the orphanage to take care of the matter of the logo. The artist turned out to be a nine-year-old girl; she had even come up with the design herself.

I already knew that a kid drew it, but holy cow. What is up with this orphanage?! I'm starting to believe it's some kind of training facility for a secret organization that gathers talented kids from all over the land.

Before returning to her store, Mitsuha dropped by Japan to buy a few more copies of reversi and shogi. *Could've saved myself some effort if I'd just bought a bunch last time, but oh well...*

Sabine was waiting for her in front of the store when she returned.

“Mitsuha, you’re laaaaate!” Sabine whined.

What, are you my boss?

“This is why I’ve been telling you to give me a key!”

No way! It’s really dangerous for her to be around the store when it’s closed and the security system is on! I could teach her how to change the security setting, but that would give her free rein of the store. Then I’d have to tell her (most of) the truth about my world-jumping ability, and make her an accomplice to all my bald-faced lies.

“No!” Mitsuha said firmly. Sabine looked dejected.

Man, Sabine’s impish side is cute, but she’s adorable when she’s down, too... Wait, hold on! That makes me sound like a sadist! Come on, I’m a viscountess, not a marquis, and I’ve never been in an insane asylum, I swear!

Mitsuha turned off the security and opened the store. She had hardly reached her seat at the register before Sabine asked to watch a DVD. *Wait, what if she only likes me for my DVDs... No, don’t think like that! I’ll lose my faith in humanity!*

“Hey, how about we play a fun game instead?” Mitsuha suggested.

“A game?” Sabine repeated.

“Yep. This one here,” Mitsuha said, showing her a copy of reversi. “It’s so easy, an ancient dragon could learn to play it in thirty seconds!”

“But ancient dragons are smarter than humans!”

Oh yeah, I forgot. I guess “ancient dragon” doesn’t work... Maybe “goblin” would make more sense?

“If you beat me, I’ll do anything you ask. It can’t have anything to do with the store, though,” Mitsuha said.

“Let’s do it!” Sabine exclaimed immediately.

Heh heh, that was too easy!

...I lost. She wiped me down. Er, wiped the floor with me. I’ve played so many times with my friends, though—how could this happen?!

“That was pretty fun, Mitsuha! I’m a natural, aren’t I?” Sabine said with a smug grin.

D-Damn it! She’s gonna be insufferable after this!!

“You really didn’t think you were going to lose, did you? You were smart enough to say I couldn’t ask for anything related to the store, though, huh. Oh well...”



Th-Thank goodness I thought to say that! This could've been a disaster!!

“Okay. Remember the other option you gave me when I chose the thingy that lets me talk to you when you’re back in your domain? I want that, too.”

Oh no...

Mitsuha glanced at the guard standing by the wall and quickly looked away. The man was deathly pale. He looked like he might cry at any moment.

Sorry...

Afterward, Mitsuha asked Sabine for her thoughts on reversi, which only served to confirm her hunch that it would sell well here. Part of the reason it had a good chance of success was that this world had no decent pastimes. And reversi was beloved even on Earth, which was overflowing with ways to amuse oneself. Simple yet deep and refined, it was guaranteed to be a hit as long as word spread of how fun it was to play.

I shouldn’t have made that stupid bet with Sabine, though. It’s gonna lead to a lot of pain and suffering. And the poor old dude standing by the wall is gonna bear the brunt of it. I really am sorry!

Trying to make the best of her blunder, Mitsuha handed Sabine copies of both reversi and shogi, as well as the instructions for both, and asked her to challenge the king and chancellor. If Sabine beat them and got them both hooked, Mitsuha wouldn’t have to do any convincing of her own when it came time to make the sale.

A little later, as Mitsuha was measuring Sabine for the purposes of buying her a bike, she had a sudden realization. *Shit, I’ve really done it now. She’s gonna follow my example and get the king and chancellor to make some*

outrageous wager over these games, isn't she? Glancing up at Sabine as she measured her legs, Mitsuha saw that the princess had a smile on her face. A truly wicked one. This is bad! Really bad! I'll keep the king and the chancellor in my prayers... Good luck, guys!

The next morning, Mitsuha went to a bike shop. Sabine was never going to stop pestering her until she followed through on her promise, and it's best not to procrastinate with things you don't want to do.

Safety is of utmost importance when buying a bicycle, so Mitsuha wanted to go with a quality Japanese-made bike instead of something cheap. *A granny bike would technically be within the bounds of our agreement, but she'd probably push it too hard and break it. Maybe I oughta get her a mountain bike, then? Hmm...*

What about a road bike? No, bad idea. The roads in that world aren't good enough. Road bikes only really make sense on well-paved roads, and they aren't meant to stand up to kids' rough treatment.

A cross bike, then? No, no way in hell. Think of the consequences of giving her an all-purpose vehicle like that! Do I really want Sabine showing up at my residence unannounced the day after I return to my county? That's a terrifying thought!! Sprinting aside, not even a horse would be able to keep up with the average speed of a cross bike. If Sabine ran away and the guards didn't notice until a few hours later, they'd never find her again!

A sturdy mountain bike would be the best choice after all, then. She'd be able to reach my county using that, too, but at least it would take a little longer... I'll sleep a tiny bit better, anyway...

Mitsuha asked one of the experts at the bike shop for advice, and after sharing Sabine's measurements and telling them it was for a growing girl, they brought out a few candidates. Mitsuha picked the one she thought Sabine would like best, and also bought panniers, a helmet, and some knee and elbow pads. She elected not to buy training wheels—they didn't go with a mountain bike, and knowing Sabine, she would master riding it in a day anyway.

You have no idea how sorry I am, Mr. Sabine's Guard, sir.

It was the day after her embarrassing defeat against Sabine at reversi. Mitsuha had said she would be gone in the morning, so Sabine showed up first thing in the afternoon. *No one's surprised...*

Mitsuha pushed the mountain bike along as she and the princess, who was practically glowing with excitement, made their way to the royal palace. There would be more space to practice there, what with all the courtyards and so forth. Sabine's guard trudged gloomily behind them, sharing none of the girl's joy.

Once again, I'm sorry! I'll bring you some whiskey or brandy next time! I promise!

Naturally, they were let through the gate at the royal palace without question, and went straight to the courtyard Sabine suggested. Mitsuha began by explaining how bikes work and how to ride them. Sabine nodded along with the explanation, seeming to properly understand everything. *I knew she'd pick it up right away...*

Next, Mitsuha demonstrated how to ride it.

I got really good at riding a bike after three years of commuting to a high

school in the mountains. Most girls pushed their bikes up that hill, but I always rode all the way to the top! I had to stand up and use all my weight, or the pedals wouldn't even turn. That morning commute got me in really good shape, so while I may not have much stamina, I'm good at short-distance races. I'm a pro at pull-ups, too.

Oh, the reason I'm good at pull-ups is that I'm light and my short arms mean I don't have to pull myself very far? I see. Well, I'm still good at biking!

Mitsuha grabbed the handles, did a wheelie, and spun around to show her full mastery of the bike. Sabine's eyes were shining; her guard seemed nearly catatonic.

I'm so, so sorry! I hope you can forgive me! Aaand he's down...

Once she had her helmet and pads on, it was time for Sabine to give it a try. She fell a few times, but mastered the bicycle with impressive speed.

Yep, that's what I expected.

After watching Sabine practice for a while, Mitsuha suddenly realized that the king was standing behind her. And he wasn't the only one—when Mitsuha looked around, she saw that a whole crowd of spectators had gathered while she was too focused on the princess's lesson to notice. One of them must have informed the king.

Yeah, he's probably gonna want an explanation, Mitsuha thought. But—

“Mitsuha, please teach me how to win at reversi,” was all the king said.

Ah, she beat him...

“I wish I could help you, but Sabine crushed me, too. That bike is her spoils.”

The king hung his head. *I wonder what Sabine got from him...*

“How about you challenge her to a game of shogi? Not even she should be able to beat an adult knowledgeable in the ways of battle.”

The king looked like he was about to cry. *Oh, he lost at shogi, too. Woof.*

While Mitsuha was patting him consolingly on the shoulder, the chancellor raced up.

“Lady Mitsuha, please teach me the secrets of reversi and shogi!”

You too, chancellor? Join the club...

Mitsuha ended up going with the story that her friends from back home sent her the mountain bike, and Sabine won it from her in a game. The king looked like he wanted to give her a piece of his mind, but seemingly decided he was in no position to do so, having made a similar mistake himself. *What exactly did you promise her, Your Majesty?*

Well, you know what they say: when life gives you lemons, make lemonade. I can benefit from this situation. The people of the capital will get used to bikes from watching Sabine ride hers around the city, and no one's going to complain to the princess or press her for the secrets of her new vehicle. This means no one will bat an eye if I eventually start riding a bike, too! Being able to bike around the capital would be so convenient. This is great!

I'm really good at finding the silver lining in any situation! You know what, I'm GLAD this happened!

...No. No I'm not.

That night, Mitsuha received a certain visitor at her store.

Five days later, Sabine jumped on her mountain bike, shook off her guard, and raced into the city. This had become her new routine.

He knows where I'm going, so what does it matter if I race ahead? Sabine thought giddily. He'll show up drenched in sweat before long, and until then, I'll be able to relax with Mitsuha away from his watchful eye.

When she reached Mitsuha's General Store, however, she was shocked to find the guard waiting for her, his arms crossed and a smug look on his face. Behind him stood a cross bike.

A young girl on a mountain bike had no chance of outracing a grown man on a cross bike, especially not someone as fit as this guard. He was going to trail Sabine starting tomorrow, but just for today, he had wanted to reach the store first and get a little revenge for the stress she'd been putting him through over the course of the last week. He was only human, after all.

“Mitsuha, you JERK!!” Sabine screamed.

When the guard visited Mitsuha's store in the middle of the night to beg for a bike of his own, Mitsuha couldn't bring herself to turn him down. She felt responsible for the situation, and despite the contradictions the presence of another bike would create with her story, she granted his request. She figured the chancellor suspected how she had actually obtained the bike anyway, even if he didn't say it outright.

There was also the fact that the guard knew quite a lot about Mitsuha, thanks to his constant presence at Sabine's side. It was implicitly understood that guards were to be treated as if they weren't there, and that they would never

share anything they saw or heard while on duty, even with their employer. Without this assurance, people would have to keep their guards at a distance when discussing important or secretive matters, leaving them undefended in the event of an attack.

Mitsuha knew all this, and always spoke freely with Sabine when the guard was around. As such, the guard knew that Mitsuha had gotten Sabine's mountain bike within a day of the princess demanding it. He was afraid he would be unable to fulfill his duty of protecting her unless he did *something*, and even though he was well aware it was against the rules, he opted to beg Mitsuha for a bike anyway in order to keep Her Highness safe.

Mitsuha's guilt rendered her unable to refuse. It was her own dumb mistake that put the guard in that impossible situation, after all. Giving him a bike would also be the best thing for Sabine's safety. It wasn't a guarantee Mitsuha's store would be Sabine's destination every time she sped out of the castle, and even if she did go to the store, she would be unguarded for the short period of time before the guard caught up. Mitsuha hadn't forgotten the event that precipitated the first appearance of the Lightning Archpriestess.

It took five days in total to obtain the cross bike and then for the guard to practice feverishly during his off-hours until he had surpassed Sabine in riding ability. It helped that he remembered the entire explanation Mitsuha had given Sabine—it was, after all, his duty as the princess's guard to understand the vehicle she was to ride.

That night, after he returned home, the guard treated himself to a rare drink. It was a liquor from a distant land, which he had received from Mitsuha along with

the cross bike. This “brandee” was a strong drink with a wonderful aroma and flavor. He enjoyed it very much.

Meanwhile, Mitsuha visited the Bozeses’ capital mansion. The count had invited her to dinner when she made the appointment, but she would have felt bad intruding on their meal with the business she wanted to discuss, so she’d asked to meet him later in the evening. She didn’t want to stay *too* late, though, so she got right down to business.

“Count, I’ve come here tonight to show you something I made. I’d like it to catch on so it can become a new cash cow for me,” Mitsuha said. *Wow, that came out really direct! The count and I are just that close, so I try to keep it real with him.*

“What is it?” Count Bozes asked.

“It’s a game. I’ll show you how to play...”

The count nodded along as Mitsuha explained the rules of reversi. Lady Iris, Beatrice, Alexis, and Theodore listened, too, of course. They were all concentrating very hard, as if they were afraid they wouldn’t be able to play with Mitsuha if they didn’t memorize the rules. *Well, they wouldn’t.*

Mitsuha played a practice round with the count while she explained. Once that was done, they played their first real match. Mitsuha went easy on him and won a close game. She played more seriously in the second match, but somehow, the count won. She gave her all in the third match...and wound up infuriated!

I’m not the one who’s supposed to be getting worked up! I should’ve known the count would be good once he grasped the game... I wonder who would win

between him and Sabine.

Mitsuha gritted her teeth through another infuriating defeat in match four. *I can't believe I went 2-3 against a beginner*, she thought, then noticed Lady Iris's hand on her shoulder. *Guess I'm playing her next...*

Lady Iris was good right from the start, having closely studied Mitsuha's matches against her husband. Mitsuha could see the older woman was trying to secure the corners, but she didn't seem to be trying to flip over that many of Mitsuha's pieces. Just as she began to wonder if Lady Iris understood the rules, Mitsuha realized she had nowhere to play! She was forced to skip her turn, and watched in horror as her overwhelming advantage disappeared in no time. *I-Is this how people who are actually good at the game play? Arrgggh!*

Mitsuha ended up going a shocking 1-4 against Lady Iris, a rank beginner.

Shut up! Sure I've played this game a lot, but it was always with my middle school friends! I don't know any pro strats, I haven't joined a reversi league, I haven't devoted my life to the game, and I'm definitely not part of a secret reversi society that's trying to conquer the world! I don't even know the standard sequences! Mitsuha sobbed softly inside her head.

Next came Beatrice. Their matches were good back-and-forth affairs. *This is more like it!* They had a fun time, and Mitsuha ended up going 4-1 thanks to her experience. Despite the lopsided outcome, though, the matches were close; there were no Lady Iris-style beatdowns.

“Well, there you have it. That’s reversi! I brought another game called shogi, but the rules are much more complicated. I’ll leave the instructions, so just read

them when you get a chance. I'll be back to test you guys!" Mitsuha said.

"Hmm... This was quite enjoyable. So, what is it you want from me?" Count Bozes asked.

The count sure doesn't beat around the bush, either!

"My plan is to market reversi to everyone, while for shogi I'll start with the nobility and military brass, then go from there. Reversi is simple and easy to get into, which makes it a perfect introductory board game. Once people are hooked on reversi, I'll introduce them to the fun of shogi. If you could show off these games at social engagements and whatnot, convey how enjoyable and healthy for the military mind they are, I would greatly appreciate it."

"But how can I do that without anyone to play against?"

"If you need an opponent, the king, the chancellor, and Sabine all know how to play. They know shogi as well. Sabine is the best of the lot, though, so be careful if she asks you to make a wager."

"Wha..." The count caught his breath, but whether that was because of who she had named or because Sabine was the best among them, Mitsuha couldn't say.

"It'll be another twenty days or so before I receive more stock, so be discreet for now and stick to influential people. Introduce it to a few people at a time—we don't want to be obnoxious with it. After about fifteen days, I'd like you to be more aggressive in showing it to as many people as you can."

"It sounds like you're preparing to usurp the throne..."

"Hahaha, don't worry. The king is in on it."

The count gave a wry smile. *I'll never get tired of seeing refined middle-aged men smile like that.*

“Um, Mitsuha...”

Mitsuha turned around to see Alexis and Theodore standing there with the reversi board.

“Oh, it’s getting late, I’d better head home. I’ll leave these reversi and shogi sets here, so feel free to play against each other. Good night, you all,” Mitsuha said.

“Th-That’s not...”

“Come on...”

They were both aghast. *Did they want to play me that badly? Whatever, they can play each other all they want. It’s late, I’m outta here.*

Oh yeah, Alexis is a viscount now, shouldn’t he be off on his own? Was he just visiting his family today? Or maybe he’s staying with his parents because he doesn’t have enough money to buy a mansion in the capital... Life’s tough sometimes, huh...

Mitsuha meant to just say her goodbyes and leave, but Count Bozes and Lady Iris accompanied her to the gate. The count even offered to drive her back to her store, but she turned him down and walked. He let her go without a fight because he knew she could escape instantly if she was in danger. Lady Iris disapproved but didn’t say anything. She was not privy to Mitsuha’s secret, but she must have figured there was a reason the overprotective count let her leave alone. *Maybe she thinks I have secret guards who follow me around?*

The last thing Mitsuha heard as she walked away was Lady Iris shouting, “I challenge you, Klaus!”

Sweet, they’re hooked!

Mitsuha's next move would be to visit Adelaide's place (in other words the Ryner mansion), then the Pasteurs—the family whose party she didn't go to—then the residences of other nobles who had seemed like good people. They *had* all told her she could visit any time she needed something, after all. This would all be during the day, of course; she only felt able to visit the Bozeses at night because of their close relationship.

And by “good people,” I mean just that. I’m not talking about “people” who are “good” for my business... Probably.

Oh, and by the way, I’ve been to a few more parties since the one hosted by... What was their name? The family with the philandering son. Anyway, none of them impact my daily activities because they’re all in the evening. They’ve all been exactly the same, too, so they didn’t really stick in my memory. Occasionally I meet talented or useful people, or people to be wary of, and those names I write down, then enter into my computer later. Nope, “talented” and “useful” aren’t the same thing. Totally different beasts.

A talented person isn’t necessarily useful, and a person with no special talent can still be immensely helpful. There are exponentially more people who are neither talented nor useful, though, and only a very few people fit both categories. Ultimately, “useful” is the baseline I look for.

Mitsuha liked to project herself as a “person who is difficult to use,” so she hardly ever had to deal with unwanted approaches. That was why she chose a small and remote domain as well: it was such an unattractive territory that not even a third or fourth son with no title to inherit would want to marry into her family. She thought it would be an effective way to repel pests.

A lot of nobles have been trying to push their sons onto me lately, though.

They may not be malicious unwanted approaches, but that doesn't mean they aren't unwanted... I wonder if people have caught wind of my plans to develop my domain...

Mitsuha spent the next few days visiting the noble families on her list to lay the groundwork for her reversi and shogi takeover. She ended up needing to return to Japan again to buy more of each game. It had been her plan to ask the nobles to spread word about the games, but that proved unnecessary. All of the families were thrilled to receive a visit from Mitsuha, and beyond excited about the games. Many of them began to venture out of their own accord, board and pieces in hand, looking for worthy opponents to teach and play against.

Sixteen days after Mitsuha visited Count Bozes's mansion, a small crowd had gathered in the capital's main square.

“What’re all these people here for...?”

“To watch a couple o’ mercenary girls play some kinda game, apparently. It’s simple but fun, from what I hear. The crowd’s been here since mornin’.”

“Huh... Sounds interestin’. Are the girls cute?”

“One’s cute and the other’s a babe.”

“...I’m gonna check it out.”

Mitsuha had hired mercenaries to play reversi in public throughout the capital, though she’d had to go to the mercenary guild, since she’d hired Sven’s party to work in her own domain. Some were dressed in ordinary civilian clothes, and while she’d put out the call for both men and women, the majority of her hires

were women. She'd picked the mercenaries personally rather than leaving it to the guild because they would be advertising her game; appearances were important.

Hardly any mercenaries turned the job down, and that wasn't just due to Mitsuha's reputation—there was also a rumor that good luck came to any who accepted a job from her. Though it's also true that Mitsuha prioritized people who seemed like they were struggling to make a living.

The square was crowded with spectators sitting on the stone steps, lightning corn in hand, watching excitedly as the mercenaries played. Word about the game began to spread.

One afternoon after a meeting in the royal palace, the attendees were about to leave when the king made a sudden invitation.

“Anybody want to play shogi or reversi with me?”

Sho-gi? Ruh-ver-see?

The attendees shared puzzled looks. They weren't ready for what happened next.

“That sounds great! I'll play with you, Your Majesty!”

“Hey, no fair! I need my rematch first!”

“I brought both games. We can set up two tables!”

“You carry them with you everywhere you go, Count...?”

The king, the chancellor, and some of the highest-ranking nobles began talking excitedly.

Wh-What are they talking about?!

Could this be a chance to enter the king's inner circle? What is this “sho-

gi"?

Damn it, I don't understand a word anyone's saying!

The nobles who weren't in the know panicked, rushing to find someone who could fill them in. Word about the games spread rapidly from there.

Four days later, posters had been put up all over the capital.

A NEW WAY TO PLAY! REVERSI AND SHOGI, NOW AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE!

TOURNAMENTS WILL BE HELD FOR BOTH GAMES! THE WINNERS WILL EARN THE PRIVILEGE OF DRESSING UP THE LIGHTNING ARCHPRIESTESS HOWEVER THEY LIKE, PATTING HER HEAD, AND EATING DINNER WITH HER!

One person can't actually win multiple prizes, Mitsuha thought. What a scam.

The night Petz arrived in the capital with his cargo, Mitsuha put up posters advertising reversi and shogi in all the places she had gotten permission to do so. She had complained about the false advertising, but Miriam insisted on sticking with it, saying it was important to build excitement and that people wouldn't sweat the details.

Well, she's the sociology expert, so I guess I'll trust her on that. She's dealing with any complaints we get, though!

They decided not to make flyers in addition to the posters because of the prohibitive cost of paper. This world had paper, but it was poor in quality and ridiculously expensive. That was exactly why Mitsuha was entering the papermaking market—she never would've done so if there had been an abundance of cheap and high-quality paper already available.

The paper of this world didn't feel like it was made from wood, but whether it was straw, linen, or cotton, Mitsuha couldn't say. Technically, the trial paper being made in Yamano County didn't come from wood either, but bark.

Straw paper... Now that takes back. Well, what we call “straw paper” in Japan isn't actually made of straw anymore. It's just lower-quality or recycled paper that inherited the old name. You can't even find straw paper in Japanese stores anymore; it's all high-quality paper nowadays. To be fair, I wouldn't buy it even if I could. The sheets would jam my printer, and mechanical pencils wouldn't work with the rough texture... Oh, that's probably why you never see it anymore... Makes sense...

Customers rushed to Petz's store at the first sign of daybreak.

“Is this where reversi and shogi are being sold?!”

Petz's stock sold at a breakneck pace until there wasn't a single game left. *All six hundred copies that the seventy-nine people of the two mountain villages spent fifteen days making sold out just like that,* Mitsuha thought in disbelief.

Petz had paid 1,800 silver coins to purchase the games, the equivalent of eighteen gold coins. The majority had been reversi, with only a few copies of shogi mixed in. Shogi took longer to make, and Mitsuha didn't think it would sell much anyway because she was targeting the nobility and military brass before the general public. Plus, some were deluxe editions, which took even longer to make.

The villages ended up making 1,800 silver coins in fifteen days, which was about eighty-six coins per household. That was more cash than a couple of small, self-sufficient villages would know what to do with...

How in the world did they make so many?! The provider in each household works in the mountains, and the housewives have to spend time on chores and working in the fields. How hard did the old people and children work to make these?! Did they sleep?!

The games ended up selling for a total of 2,880 silver coins. It might have seemed like Petz was taking too large a share of the profits for himself, but Mitsuha didn't think so. The round trip took him over twenty days, and he also had to deal with personnel expenses, the cost of consumables, escort fees, the depreciation of his carriages, and the risk of losing everything to bandits. Considering all that, it was a fair price—regardless of how much additional stock he also carried on the way there and back. Apparently, Petz had also worked every night of the return journey writing characters on the shogi pieces personally.

Mitsuha had adjusted the names of the pieces so they'd be easier for the people of this world to understand. Some pieces, like the king, could be translated directly into the equivalent word in the local language, while others had to be changed. A few of them had given her real headaches.

Oh, I shaved the characters off the pieces from the sets I bought in Japan to give to the king and the other nobles I visited. That's why I chose copies with wooden pieces instead of plastic. Also I just wanted to avoid bringing more plastic into this world.

“What should we do, Mitsuha...” Petz groaned.

Yeah, we're squandering a huge sales opportunity by not having any more stock right now. “Send another carriage, posthaste! Head straight for Bozes

County and Yamano County with minimal stops, and pick up all finished copies! You can bring along goods to sell when you get there, and then consign whatever's left at my county store," Mitsuha said.

"Understood. I'll send my fastest carriage! It'll get there faster than a stagecoach!" Petz declared. He sounded very motivated, though Mitsuha wasn't sure exactly where his enthusiasm was coming from. This was a lot of money for the twenty-one households of the mountain villages, but Petz had a store in the capital and sold goods all throughout the kingdom, so the earnings likely wouldn't be that significant for him.

"What are you talking about? This isn't about the amount of money I'm making. No merchant worth his salt would pass up a chance to take part in the joy of such a commercial success!"

Ah, that makes sense.

Petz sent a carriage later that same day, though he himself didn't go along.

Is he sure an evening departure is such a good idea? He didn't even hire an escort.

Mitsuha asked him about it.

"Ah, bandits won't be a concern. That's why I asked for permission to use your coat of arms," Petz responded, pointing at his remaining carriages. They all bore the logo designed by the girl from the orphanage.

What the...?

"We actually encountered bandits on the way back to the capital. When they approached my carriages, I yelled out, 'Do none of you see this crest?! We are merchants delivering cargo for the Lightning Archpriestess! If you attack us,

the Archpriestess herself will punish every bandit in the land with her divine lightning!' They fled right away. No bandits will even think of attacking a carriage carrying your crest."

Good lord... Fine, do whatever you want with that logo! I don't care!

Afterward, Mitsuha jumped to her county and ordered an emergency increase in production. She told the villagers to put aside any work that could wait and focus on making reversi and shogi for now. She also enlisted the aid of the farming and fishing villages to help with the time-consuming process of making shogi pieces. The mountain villagers made the deluxe versions aimed at the nobility, while the other villages made the cheap versions meant for the general public. They still made far more copies of reversi, however.

Mitsuha also subcontracted work to the town. That meant profits that would normally have gone to the mountain villages ended up with the town instead, but it was better than passing up a business opportunity. The popularity of the games would surely spread beyond the capital, too, ensuring long-term sales.

The villagers ended up having to use different materials for the reversi pieces to keep up with demand. They used painted wood for the pieces in the early versions, but eventually they started sticking shells together and painting them, and even tried leather. Anything would do. *Let's just call it variation. Anyway, this is an emergency increase in production! We're doing our best!*

Woof, I probably shouldn't have started selling these games until we had a good stock built up. But that would've required the villagers to continue making them without the assurance that they would sell, and it would've been a while before they saw any real income. I could've purchased the copies they made to

compensate, but their motivation would've suffered...

Anyway, what's past is past! All I can do now is ride this tidal wave!

“Mitsuha, do you have any more copies of reversi and shogi?! The lack of available stock is causing an uproar among the nobility. Everyone is afraid that being unfamiliar with the games will be a social impediment, so they’re desperate to get their hands on them.”

Count Bozes had come to see Mitsuha at her shop.

Yeah, the games did sell out right away... The nobles aren't the only ones in an uproar, though. The commoners are just as desperate. I'm sorry about all this...

Mitsuha decided to jump to her county and bring back all the deluxe versions that were ready. *I know this is cheating, but it's an emergency! I can make an exception!*

Petz’s carriage returned in just thirteen days.

How could they have made the journey so quickly?! Huh? He loaded the outbound carriage with non-breakable items instead of prioritizing profit, and ordered the driver to travel as fast as possible? The driver continued even after dark, so long as he could see the road? They changed horses on the way and then switched back to the original horses on the return journey? That's intense...

The carriage had arrived in Yamano County about twenty days after Petz bought the first batch of games. The county had been in emergency production mode for the last seven days of that period, and the number of workers involved

had increased from the seventy-nine people of the mountain villages to six hundred and eighty-four across the whole county—over eight times as many people!

Not literally everyone in the county was involved with production; the cooks were still cooking, for one. But the extra hands increased production dramatically. Plus, they made the reversi pieces with much greater efficiency once they started using materials other than wood, and Randy's suggestion of die cutting was very helpful as well.

Wait, how many did they make?! 5,800?! Holy moly... I need to make sure I don't wait too long to call an end to the emergency production order. They're pushing themselves so hard.

Huh? You're gonna send another carriage tomorrow? Oh, yeah, I guess you'd better...

Meanwhile, over at the Bozes mansion, Iris was training against the count with her eyes on the prize, but he was desperately trying to talk her out of entering.

“You don’t need any of those prizes! You can eat with Mitsuha any time you want, or dress her up, go on a walk with her, pat her head, hold her hand... As nobles, we should concede these chances to others!”

Iris puffed out her cheeks and slammed a piece onto the board. “Check!”

Beatrice and Theodore were beside them, training at reversi. Alexis hovered over the table, studying their game intently. They were all determined to win a prize.

At the Ryner mansion, Adelaide was playing reversi against her younger brother.

Their father had taken the board Mitsuha gave them, so Adelaide was borrowing a copy her maid had succeeded in obtaining, on the promise that she would only use it while the maid was working.

“Half my snacks per day is a total rip-off just to borrow it, though,” Adelaide grumbled. She wasn’t happy with the arrangement, but there was no way she was going to turn down the bargain. *I need to get my own copy as soon as possible.*

There was still demand after the second shipment of games arrived, but the market had calmed considerably. People had realized that it was only necessary to obtain an official Yamano County board by the time the tournaments began, and that they could practice however they wanted until then. Some were even drawing grids on the ground and using various objects in place of the disks... *That can’t be an easy way to play, though.*

Oh, by “disks,” I mean the black and white pieces you use to play reversi. That’s what they’re called.

The reversi and shogi tournaments wouldn’t be held until the next ballroom season, so everyone had plenty of time. Delightfully, many who started playing solely for the tournament prizes were realizing how fun the games actually were, and getting hooked. *All according to plan!*

To help drum up excitement, Mitsuha started visiting nobles and challenging them to matches. She gave prizes to those who beat her—disposable lighters for the men, and feminine hygiene products for the women (these she demonstrated how to use in a different room). She hardly beat anyone, though; her only experience playing these games had been with her friends, and she had

never practiced as seriously as the people of the capital were doing.

I don't care that I'm not winning! All I'm doing is promoting products from my store! I want to give out these prizes! Grr...

Well, word's getting around that the Archpriestess is visiting the homes of nobles who are playing reversi and shogi, so the fad is only taking off even more. Mission accomplished, I guess...

I can't beat anyone anymore, so I'm done with touring the noble mansions!

With some free time on her hands, Mitsuha made her first visit to the mercenary base in quite a while.

“...So I just felt like popping on by,” Mitsuha finished.

“Do you make a point of bein’ unpredictable, li’l lady?” the captain asked, looking tired. “You’ve got letters from all over the world. Here ya go.”

“Gwaa...”

The captain dumped a massive pile of letters into Mitsuha’s arms. *Do I need to read and respond to all of these? I wonder if I can send emails...*

“Also, do you wanna open a bank account somewhere? You’ve got cash comin’ in from the dragon parts and such.”

Oh, sweet! That dragon’s finally making me some money! I wonder if they sold the scales or something. It hasn’t been long enough to expect any profit from the research.

There’s only one place I want to open an account, though.

“Deposit the money into a Swiss bank account.” Mitsuha tried to look as enigmatic as possible and spoke in a deep voice, doing her best Golgo 13 imitation.

“That an impression or something...?”

“Don’t stand behind me!”

“Still not gettin’ it...”

If I make a bunch of money here, should I stop bringing gold coins to Earth? No, I can always make money in the other world using my knowledge from home, even if I end up having to move to a distant land all by myself. On Earth, though, I’ll be broke and jobless once I use up the money I inherited from my parents. Yep, I should transport some gold coins here. I can skip converting them and put them straight into my “deep pocket,” then transport them back to the other world if I ever get a decent enough cash income going here.



First I need to set up a bank account, and deal with all these letters...

As Mitsuha told the captain, she wanted to put the money into a Swiss bank account. Swiss banks were known for keeping the identities of their clients anonymous. They used this secrecy to attract deposits from wealthy people, politicians, dictators, and criminals all over the world, which was said to protect Switzerland from any threat of invasion by other countries. That was one of the major pillars supporting Switzerland's permanent neutrality, in addition to universal conscription and a powerful military. A country couldn't achieve permanent neutrality simply by declaring it so; it still needed the means to protect itself. Its supposed neutrality would be over the moment another country decided to invade.

Mitsuha wasn't referring to any one bank when she said "Swiss bank," but rather to any bank that abided by Swiss banking laws. *It's like how Yamano Cuisine refers to any dish that uses Yamano techniques. Kind of.* There were a variety of banks in Switzerland, but when a "Swiss bank" was mentioned in novels or manga, it referred to a private bank that not only didn't pay interest on savings deposited there, but actually required an account maintenance fee. You couldn't just walk in and make an account at one of these banks; you needed to pass an interview and an evaluation of your finances.

Huh? You don't think one of these banks would even let me in the front door? Yeah, there's no way a mysterious little girl would pass muster. Hmm...

Mitsuha looked at the pile of letters as she pondered.

Ah, maybe I could open an account if someone introduced me. Someone with proper gravitas. I don't wanna involve myself with any major world powers, though... I want a good person from a small country, someone a little

eccentric, but well-known and influential.

Oh, that kind of person doesn't exist? Fine. I'll just pick one at random, then.

Most of the letters turned out to be invitations to parties and events, many of which had already happened since Mitsuha had been away so long. Others were requests for ore and animal samples, or offers of weaponry and technological guidance.

They're probably just trying to sell me the outdated weapons sitting around in their warehouses. As for the technological guidance, I'll bet they're just hoping to send people to the other world to gather information. Well, I'd consider hiring any engineer who might be able to make a bike that could cover a hundred and seventy miles on unpaved roads in a single day, using only materials from the other world.

She continued to look through the letters hoping to find someone who could introduce her to a Swiss bank, finally reaching the last two envelopes. They were from the two small countries she had provided with biological samples. According to the captain, they had been delivered directly by those nations' agents rather than through the postal service.

First, she opened the letter from the country to which she had given various types of medicinal plants. Huh? Two of the samples I gave them are almost exactly the same as species that already exist on Earth? Three of them have medicinal components already discovered here? Oh, they found one ingredient they didn't understand, and they're continuing their research? That's good, at least. I feel bad they didn't learn much... Maybe I should give them more plants and animals...?

The other letter was from the country to which she had given a collection of small animals in exchange for those wooden ships. *Whoa, that's interesting. The slime turned hard and elastic like rubber when they exposed it to acetic acid. I haven't found rubber trees in the other world yet! Now that I think about it, we can't make bike tires without rubber, or any of the other necessary additives. This might be a huge discovery. Normally flesh gets softer when you add vinegar...*

Wait, they tried eating the slime?! No one even does that in the other world! It gets larger when they feed it food waste? That sounds like a feng!!

Whew, okay, they ended up concluding that slimes aren't fit for consumption. Don't scare me like that...

Mitsuha decided to ask them to continue research on the elasticity effect. She would fund their research if they couldn't get any money for it on Earth. *I should give them another animal, too. Something worth studying...*

Not long ago, someone from the fishing village in her domain had caught a strange creature out at sea. Mitsuha posted a picture of it on the internet and got a lot of responses like, "It's an anomalocarid duh LOL." Apparently it had existed on Earth, but went extinct long ago. *Well, that sucks...*

When the time came, Mitsuha passed muster and successfully opened a Swiss bank account. The letter of introduction had worked like a charm. The person who wrote it didn't accompany her to the interview, of course; they had to be secretive, and it wasn't easy for them to travel abroad. They simply wrote the letter and confirmed that it was genuine when the bank inquired about it.

The major world powers hadn't gone beyond sending Mitsuha invitations, but she felt like they were going to begin approaching her more assertively before long. She doubted they would do anything hasty as long as she made it look like she didn't come to Earth often, though, so it wasn't a pressing concern.

What else do I need to take care of on Earth... Oh yeah, I should get a carriage!

Not having a carriage was problematic for Mitsuha. She needed to at least *appear* as if she used one to travel between the capital and her county, and she needed a way to get to parties, too. So far she had walked, gotten a ride from the count, or hired a stagecoach, but she needed to find a better way to go about it. Biking wasn't going to cut it, since she always wore a dress. *Not that I would ever go to a party on a bike anyway! Come on, give me some credit here!*

Why can't I just buy a carriage in the other world, you ask? No way, that ain't happening. They don't have springs over there, and I'm not putting my butt through that kind of torture. I need a carriage that's comfortable to ride in.

It's also important to prioritize safety when buying a vehicle, since an accident can mean injury or even death. An Earth-made carriage will minimize the risk, as well as being lighter and therefore faster.

There are still a lot of countries where carriages are made. I'll be sure to order a quality one. I suspect it'll be really expensive, but there's nothing I can do about that. It's a better idea than asking Randy to do it, anyway.

And so Mitsuha took care of her business on Earth as a princess from another world, then returned to the capital. Ballroom season was almost over.

Chapter 26

Busy Times in Yamano County

Ballroom season eventually came to an end, and the various nobles began to return to their own domains. This included Mitsuha, of course...who, much to her chagrin, was going back with Lady Iris and the Bozeses.

There was no escape. She wouldn't listen to any of my excuses. I may as well have been trying to play reversi blindfolded!

The carriage she ordered on Earth hadn't arrived in time, either, so she ended up riding along in the Bozeses' carriage. It was a luxurious carriage made for nobility, complete with cushioned seats and everything, but Mitsuha was still miserable from the pain in her butt and the feeling of her intestines being scrambled. She wondered how in the world everyone else handled it.

Oh, they're just used to it. I see.

The three orphans Mitsuha was taking back to her county were riding with the servants in a different carriage. They lacked the status to ride with nobility, even if there had been space for them. She doubted their carriage had much in the way of cushioning or other such luxuries. *Guess I don't have any right to complain...*

Mitsuha was anxious at the idea of not being able to check on her county for ten whole days, so she slipped away and jumped there for just a moment when they reached an inn.

"You were in the bathroom forever, Mitsuha... You constipated?"

Sh-Shut up, Beatrice!!

While she was back, Mitsuha called an end to the increased production of reversi and shogi. Even the men in the mountain villages had been working on the games, putting a halt to papermaking prep, hunting, and all their other duties. In the farming villages, the fishing village, and the town, the women and children had abandoned everything else to make the games.

That explains how they could make so many. They went way too far, though! People with no job or with some time on their hands can continue working on the games, but I forbid anyone else from doing so!

Mitsuha also put a restriction on the amount of time children and the elderly could work. Otherwise they would've kept making the games until they collapsed. Some people protested, saying that they wanted to help the Archpriestess, or that they wanted to use this opportunity to make money, but Mitsuha wasn't having it. She lowered the price she paid for completed sets, claiming that she had only been paying extra during the emergency production period.

Finding the right number is really difficult... Even if I pay what I think is a nice high price, problems can still arise.

She gave orders for all games produced to be checked to ensure they met quality standards, and requested increased production of the deluxe versions meant for the nobility and the wealthy. Mitsuha had pushed her people pretty hard at first to make up for the lack of product, but from now on, she wanted this to be a steady source of income under reasonable working conditions.

Before leaving the capital, Mitsuha had reviewed how to use the radio with Sabine, and it seemed like the princess would be able to handle it. She was

counting on the radio as a way to prevent Sabine from showing up unannounced on her new bike; hopefully being able to speak long-distance would be enough to mollify her.

Mitsuha wasn't checking in daily just to keep Sabine happy, though. Such scheduled contact would function in place of an alarm, so that if another crisis ever occurred in the capital, or if something happened to the store or Sabine, Mitsuha would be able to respond right away. She would no longer need to jump to the capital regularly to check on things. Doing so didn't take much time, but she didn't want to be seen there too often.

“...ing to me?”

Huh?

“Are you listening to me, Mitsuha?!”

Eek, Lady Iris is glaring at me!

After ten days of travel on land and ten seconds on water, Mitsuha finally arrived at Yamano County.

Now that I think about it, Yamano sounds kinda like the ancient kingdom of Yamatai. They had a female ruler, too: the legendary Himiko... Nope, better nip that thought in the bud! I'm just the ruler of a little backwater county, not a whole kingdom! And I'd like it to stay that way.

Actually, Mitsuha hadn't yet reached Yamano County—Lady Iris didn't let her get out of the carriage at the fork in the road that led to her territory. It was hard to blame her for that, though. There was no way she was going to be okay with the idea of Mitsuha walking the rest of the way. As a result, Mitsuha was staying at the Bozeses' mansion for the first time in a while.

Huh? You want me to pay more attention to you, Beatrice? We just spent ten whole days together! You want to play reversi? We played until the sun came up every night at the inn! That's why you were always so dead in the carriage during the day! Wait, you want to play me now, Stefan? You're a butler! Do your job!

I've had it with this game! I'm just gonna bring a ton of copies to Bozes County and tank their productivity!

It was three days later when Mitsuha was finally allowed to leave and return home with an armed escort.

Crap, I need to call Sabine!

It wasn't rare for an accident to extend a journey for a few days, but the very possibility of an accident would be plenty of reason to be concerned. It wasn't time for their scheduled contact yet, but figuring that Sabine might be waiting for her, Mitsuha decided she should reach out.

Turning on the transceiver, she checked the frequency and matched the antenna impedance. She had opted to use the 3.5 MHz band, which was popular for nighttime communications and could be used during the day, too, over shorter distances.

“Checkmate King Seven, Checkmate King Seven, this is White Rook, over.”

Now there's an old reference for you.

“King Seven” was Sabine’s call sign because she was seventh in line for the throne. Leuhen was younger than her, but just like with lions in the wild, males took precedence. “King Two,” which Mitsuha had based the name on, referred

to the second platoon of K Company on *Combat!* She figured “Checkmate” must’ve been the general call sign for the entire battalion.

Fun fact: “White Rook” was actually mistranslated into Japanese as “White Rock,” until it was fixed in season five, and lots of people still remember it as White Rock to this day. The battalion’s call sign was “Checkmate,” though, so it only makes sense for the squads to have call signs related to chess.

“Are you okay, Mitsuha?” Sabine responded the moment Mitsuha tried to raise her.

She was waiting by the radio the whole time, wasn’t she... Guess I’ll talk to her for a while.

Mitsuha managed to end the call after about thirty minutes, which was no easy task. Sabine had wanted to keep talking forever. It was going to be a daily struggle trying to prevent these scheduled contacts from dragging on too long.

Oh, about the amateur radios: I’m planning on taking them with me if I ever have to disappear, along with all the power systems I’ve installed. It won’t be a big deal even if I don’t have time to collect them, though. They’re way too advanced for the people of this world to figure out how to use, so they’ll just end up getting lost to history. My only concern is for the mental well-being of the archaeologists that dig them up in the future...

All right, back to cheating at county affairs! Well, I was coming back all the time to give orders while I was in the capital, but I didn’t want to work on anything too important since I was pretending to be over there full time. Time to get started on all the projects I’ve been planning!

Her first destination was Randy's workshop. "How's it going, Randy?" Mitsuha asked.

"Oh, Viscountess Yamano..." Randy responded stiffly. He had only met Mitsuha *after* she became a viscountess, so he was more formal around her than her older acquaintances.

"What's the latest?"

"I tried making the fishing tools you requested, and I'm fairly sure there'll be no problems on that front. As for the bicycles, well..."

He was having a hard time, which came as no surprise. Mitsuha wanted him to try making a simple bike without gears, but he would need to strengthen the components and improve manufacturing precision to achieve that. She had already taught him about carbon content and firing so that he could make high-quality steel.

There was no need to start with those dangerous, hard-to-ride bikes with the giant front wheels—she would have Randy skip right to a modern bike design. Tires with inner tubes were still a ways down the line, though; for now, he could just wrap something around the metal wheels in place of tires. Mitsuha had been considering using animal pelts and just taking the loss, but if they could use slimes in place of rubber...

Mitsuha wanted a functional chain in the prototype. Otherwise you'd just have to kick off the ground to propel yourself forward. Problem was, the bicycle chain wasn't invented until 1879, and the modern bicycle with equally sized front and back wheels didn't come around until 1885. Making one was going to be a difficult task with this world's current level of technology.

Well, we'll take it slow. Randy would probably get bored making nothing

but everyday items anyway. Having a lofty goal to shoot for will make him feel more fulfilled in his job... Oh, I totally forgot!

Mitsuha ushered forward the three children who were standing behind her. “These are the kids I recruited in the capital. Loik is eleven, Manon is ten, and Nellie, Loik’s little sister, is nine. It’s only Loik and Manon who’ll be your apprentices—Nellie’s going to train as a chef at my residence, but I thought I’d introduce her too because she’ll be visiting your workshop from time to time. Take good care of them for me, okay?”

“It’s nice to meet you!” the children said in unison.

“U-Uh, you...too...” Randy responded, behaving rather oddly.

Hmm, I thought he was just socially awkward and out of step with other people, but he seems bad around kids, too...

Now that the introductions were out of the way, the five of them looked at the fishing implements Randy had made. The fishing hooks were sturdy and properly barbed, and the harpoons and tridents looked good, too.

Man, I’d love to be able to put rubber bands on the tridents, though. Attach it to the base of the shaft and you can fire it off without a windup, which is great for taking fish by surprise.

...Use slimes for that, too? That could work! Now we’re getting somewhere!

Why do Loik and Manon look so excited? Did they think of some major invention?

Oh, they were just daydreaming about eating some delicious fish? Gotcha. Yeah, they’re not gonna come up with a revolutionary idea just like that.

Mitsuha told Randy she would be sending Loik and Manon to work with him starting tomorrow, and they left the workshop. The three children were going to live with the servants in her residence. Mitsuha didn't want to split up the siblings, and while asking Randy to instruct them as engineers was one thing, she didn't think he would be capable of fully supporting the children. Knowing Randy, there was even the chance that they would end up taking care of him, rather than the other way around. Regardless, she couldn't foist the responsibility entirely onto him, so she was going to look after them at her home.

Colette just gained a few potential friends, didn't she... These genius kids are gonna take the place over if I'm not careful...

Mitsuha returned the children to her residence and headed next to the fishing village. Angling and net fishing were going well, but she was aware they were having some problems with the salt production.

Mitsuha had trusted something she'd read that claimed vertical salt farms drastically cut down on labor compared to previous salt-making methods, but the villagers were struggling. She investigated the situation and found that, while this method had removed the necessity of raking salt sand and washing and stirring it with seawater, having to repeatedly draw seawater had been more exhausting than expected. They couldn't just use the tide like you would with flood-based salt ponds.

After some research, Mitsuha discovered that vertical salt farming was really only beneficial if you had a water pump. That gave her an idea that she called the "treadmill waterwheel." Unlike a typical waterwheel, it would be

operated by stepping on the paddles of the wheel. As being able to walk was the only prerequisite, even women and children would be able to operate it. You could even do it while carrying a baby on your back. *In fact, the baby's weight would only increase the efficiency! On that note, I guess people who don't weigh much are gonna have a harder time. If I want it to provide work for women and children, I suppose we'll need to design the mechanism with lighter people in mind from the start.*

Working the waterwheels would provide some nice extra income, and it would even make good exercise for the elderly.

This'll be a great first job for the new team at the workshop. Working together on it should help them get to know each other. I'll decide on a good place for the waterwheel and then dump—ahem, outsource the project to Randy and his new apprentices.

Everything else at the fishing village was progressing nicely. Mitsuha was satisfied with the progress of both the seaweed and the new dried fish they were selling.

Next up, the farming villages.

Hmm, the farming villages are actually falling behind, now that the fishing and mountain villages have gained new sources of revenue. It's really hard to pay attention to all these places at once... Plus, farming projects take anywhere from a few months to a few years to come to fruition, so it's important that people keep laboring diligently even if they don't see immediate results. All right, nothing for it. I'll try something someone told me about on the internet.

Sweet foods were almost entirely a luxury in this world. Even sugar was

expensive because it had to be imported from other lands. Mitsuha considered making sugar, but quickly dismissed the idea—there were no beets or sugarcane, and it would take a long time to get them growing. They'd have to be cultivated in the proper season, and with agriculture, there was always the chance something would go wrong, no matter how much research you did on the internet. Any new venture like that would need to start small and go through various trials.

They could produce honey, but beekeeping would present its own challenges. Trying to dive right into the delicate business of raising bees sans protective gear and with only books and the internet to rely on was asking for trouble. Honeybees weren't particularly aggressive, but they could still sting you and cause anaphylactic shock. *Nope, not happening. I don't wanna put my citizens in danger.*

Honey was also already sold in the capital, albeit at exorbitant prices. Entering that market might be worth it if they were going to mass-produce sugar and become a serious competitor, but she didn't want to start fights over existing trade routes for a small amount of honey.

After eliminating beekeeping, Mitsuha turned her mind to something simple: *mizuame* made from potato starch. She thought about searching for maple trees to make maple syrup, but that would require sending farmers into the mountain villages' territory, which would almost certainly cause friction.

As such, she decided to go with mizuame. She would have the farming villages start trial production by mixing potatoes or corn with malt. If the end product didn't meet the capital's high standards, they could sell it in the rural areas around Yamano County. The people of the surrounding territories likely

couldn't afford to buy luxurious goods in the capital, and would be glad of the chance for a taste of luxury at a cheaper price and closer to home.

Yep, this has a good chance of success.

Mitsuha's next stop was the mountain villages, which at this point had practically become board game factories.

What about their primary industries? Are they keeping up with hunting and logging? And what about the shiitake farming and drying? Well, the drying part isn't particularly labor intensive, to be fair—you just dry them.

Mitsuha thought it would be best not to bring up her maple syrup idea just yet; she couldn't have them starting too many projects at once. She was just going to find out if there were maple trees in the county and hold onto the plan until game sales dipped. There was also the issue of maple syrup competing with the mizuame from the farming villages.

Hey, wait a sec, they've stopped working on papermaking entirely! It's supposed to become one of their main industries, they can't just abandon it because of some stopgap! Should I limit game production? No, maybe not. It's not gonna be long before imitations start cropping up. I don't know what share of the market we'll be able to maintain with the tournaments and the Yamano County brand alone... We don't wanna leave any money on the table while we've got no competition.

All right, they can keep making games at the same pace until the tournaments! I'll save any new projects for afterward, when imitations start eating into our sales.

Hmm, I wonder if I'm trying to do too much at once... But I don't want

certain villages to prosper and others not. I need to develop them all equally.

Oh, crap! I've been so focused on the villages that I totally neglected the town!

Mitsuha's store, the eatery-turned-diner, the simple lodging house-turned-inn, and other businesses that served customers from nearby territories were enjoying increased sales, but she was unsure of how the bakers, cargo handlers, and other townsfolk were doing. *Oh, their sales are increasing, too? Good to hear.*

There were also skilled artisans in the town making incredibly elaborate shogi pieces. *Whoa, that piece is three dimensional?! It looks like a chess piece! Ooh, if you turn this lance piece over, it looks like a knight? They're geniuses!!*

Man, everyone's been so reliable. We'll definitely be able to sell these to the nobility at a high price.

Lastly, Mitsuha visited the Yamano County Army base. As supreme commander, she had to stop by every now and then, though Willem was actually in charge most of the time.

“How’s it going, Willem?” Mitsuha asked.

“Oh, you know, coming along...”

Mitsuha had provided the soldiers with spears and short swords. Weapons with a long reach were best for beginners, and it didn’t take much experience to use a spear competently. All the soldiers would have to do was form up, point their spears at the enemy, and charge. The army was prioritizing defense, so no one was going to be asked to do anything as dangerous as attack an enemy camp alone. She gave them the short swords just in case their spear tip got stuck or

they had to fight a nimble enemy in close quarters.

Mitsuha hadn't given them crossbows yet. The weapons were simple and had been around on Earth for ages, so she didn't think there would be any problem with introducing them into this world, but she was afraid that if the soldiers got them first, they wouldn't be interested in training with the spear and short sword. There was also the fear of people accidentally shooting each other. Plus, they'd take a while to make anyway. She would supply the crossbows once her people had finished their training and become proper soldiers.

Mitsuha had bought the spears and short swords in this world. Making dozens of them would have been a pain, and the thought of using weapons that didn't come from a professional weaponsmith made her nervous. She used the county budget to pay for them. The previous lord didn't take all the domain's money when he left, only the assets of his own noble house. The domain would have gone bankrupt otherwise, so the kingdom made sure of it. Still, it seemed he had spent quite a lot of the budget on himself during his tenure as baron.

Not all of the conscriptees had received their training yet, but Willem had already identified some enthusiastic and talented men as candidates to become permanent soldiers.

Sven's group of former mercenaries was working hard, too. Being a spear specialist, Szep in particular was greatly enjoying his work as an instructor. He had never really stood out to Mitsuha before, but she was glad he was showing his worth now. Maybe he would even find a girlfriend.

Oh yeah, I should implement the Emergency Firepower Cheat Plan with Willem and Sven's group.

The plan was to teach the five of them how to handle SMGs in case of

emergency. Mitsuha only showed them how to remove the safety, shoot, and change the magazines, leaving out maintenance entirely. They were only to be used to get through a crisis, after all.

Mitsuha was going to store the guns and ammunition in a secure place that could only be opened with the approval of at least three of the following four: the butler Anton, her advisor Miriam, County Army commander Willem, and Colette. These guns would be accessed only in her absence. If Mitsuha was around, she would jump to Wolf Fang's base and grab weapons from the emergency arsenal she had set up there.

She chose SMGs because she didn't want anything too powerful falling into other hands. The guns and ammo were also small and light, making them easy to handle. Submachine guns are much weaker than machine guns, hence the "sub" prefix. The bullets are the same size as pistol ammunition, without the big load of gunpowder packed into a large casing you get with a full-size rifle or assault rifle. They aren't shaped for long-distance shots, either; SMGs are used for firing a rapid volley at close-proximity targets, rather than taking carefully aimed shots. As the nickname "spray gun" implies, they're not meant for bringing down an opponent with a single bullet.

All right, with this setup, I think we can take it easy for now. I'm not gonna start any more new projects in my county until things settle down with the current ones, or earnings drop. Changing too many things at once might cause problems... Though I feel like it's already more than a little late for that.

But I'm sure everything will work out! I'm not gonna think too hard about it. That'll be best for my peace of mind. I doubt there'll be any major incidents for a while, so it's time to relax. All I want is to have paper and corn ready to

ship before the next ballroom season comes around...

The sad thing is, Mitsuha truly did believe that. She had picked a territory on the sea far from the kingdom's border in order to avoid getting caught up in any disputes, and never in a million years did she expect anyone to come from the *other* direction...

Chapter 27

Visitors from Overseas

“My lady, we’ve got trouble!”

I had been spending my evening checking over some documents and enjoying a cup of tea when Paulette, a maid originally from one of the mountain villages, rushed into my office in a frenzy.

Oh, I guess for most people “evening” refers to the time around sunset, but for me it means between 3:00 PM and 6:00 PM. That’s how Japanese weather forecasters use the word, and when I studied meteorology for a bit because of my mom, I just got used to the terminology.

Paulette was always getting worked up like this, so Mitsuha waited for her to continue without much of a reaction.

“I have news from the fishing village! Boats! Th-Th-There are boats at sea!”

Um, that’s kinda where boats belong? If they were in the mountains, then maybe I could see getting so hyped up about it.

“P-Please, just come outside!”

Seeing the maid’s distress, Mitsuha relented and went out to have a look.

Oh, wow. Those are boats, all right!

There were three wooden sailing ships on the water. She couldn’t be sure, but they looked to be two or three hundred tons. For comparison, Columbus’s ship was about a hundred tons, and Francis Drake’s Golden Hind was more like three hundred. To Mitsuha’s people, citizens of a kingdom that seemingly hadn’t

gotten very far with shipbuilding, they probably looked gargantuan.

“This is an emergency! Gather all Yamano County Army troops at once!”
At Mitsuha’s command, all her servants within earshot dashed off.

Mitsuha returned to her room to grab a pair of binoculars and take a better look at the vessels. They had dropped anchor and showed no sign of sending smaller boats to shore. That was no surprise—it was less than two hours to sunset, and they likely wanted to avoid spending the night in an unknown land. They would probably come in the morning. There was little hope of them raising anchor and leaving—if they didn’t intend to come ashore, they would’ve simply kept sailing through the night.

Mitsuha had heard from the count and others that this continent had never received overseas visitors. The people here had never even seen a ship that could make that kind of voyage. That made the occupants of these ships the kingdom’s first such guests.

There was no doubt they would come ashore, whether they just wanted to replenish their supplies or because they had some other purpose in mind. That “other purpose” was what Mitsuha was worried about. It would be fine and dandy if they were friendly, but if Earth’s history was anything to go by, at this level of civilization it was unlikely anyone building ships to seek other lands had the best intentions at heart. They could be like the Europeans, setting out with the support of the Crown, risking their lives on a dangerous voyage with the promise of a huge payout waiting for them when they returned. Their goal? To plunder and exploit new lands, and to take the people as slaves.

You know, when you think about it, it’s not particularly likely that anyone who would take such a huge gamble is going to be a kind and virtuous person.

Oh, but I'm not talking about the Antarctic expeditions and such. Those weren't undertaken for plunder or slaves, and while they may have been a gamble, money wasn't the object.

One thing stuck in Mitsuha's craw: why did the ships drop anchor in her domain, when there was significantly more coastline in Bozes County? A little thought provided the answer: The fishing village in Bozes County was just as underdeveloped as the one here, but because it was located in a bay, it wasn't visible from the open sea. And the Bozeses' county seat was far inland, so it wouldn't be visible either. By contrast, Yamano County's fishing village was right on the coast, and what's more, the town was relatively near the ocean *and* on somewhat elevated land. A ship would be able to see some of the buildings, including Mitsuha's own residence. The clear presence of people made Yamano County a good place to come ashore, especially if the goal was plunder. Perhaps they came up the coast on the other side of her domain from Bozes County, or had simply happened to sail directly to Yamano County—there were plenty of conceivable reasons they might choose to drop anchor here.

Should I send a messenger to the count? Mitsuha wondered. Worst-case scenario, she could be forced to get ugly. She didn't want anyone outside her county to see that. She would still have plenty of time before anyone from Bozes County arrived, though. It would take the messenger a day to reach the Bozeses' mansion, after which the count would need half a day to ready his soldiers, and it would be another day before the soldiers arrived in Yamano County. By that point, her work would be done. Plus, there was the matter of how to deal with any captives she took. She had no idea what she would do if she ended up with a few hundred prisoners of war, given that the population of her county wasn't that

much bigger...

All right, if I capture any prisoners of war, I'll dump them all on the count! And if our new guests are peaceful, the count can deal with that, too! Good plan! There's no way I can represent the whole kingdom if they wanna establish diplomatic relations and trade, anyway. The count holds a higher position than me, and everyone in the royal palace will need to get involved, too.

There was one thing Mitsuha needed to do before sending a messenger to the count: report to the king. There was a chance she could end up fighting the people on the ships, so she needed permission from the king before acting, since any hostilities could lead to war with another country. *I am a member of the nobility...however that happened. And I need to be careful about how I represent the kingdom.*

“Checkmate King Seven, Checkmate King Seven, this is White Rook, over,” Mitsuha said into her radio.

“Hey, you’re early today. Is something wrong, Mitsuha?” Sabine replied immediately, just like always.

What time does she start waiting in front of that radio every day?

“We have an emergency. Open envelope number five.”

“Wha... Okay. I’ll be right back.”

Sabine was a smart girl. She was always messing around and acting spoiled, but she could be serious when the situation called for it.

Thirty seconds later, Sabine’s voice came through the radio again.
“Mitsuha, does this mean...”

“Yep, I’m relaxing the restrictions on who can use the magic

communication device. Put the king on right away. I don't care if he's in a meeting or entertaining a guest, don't take no for an answer."

"Leave it to me!"

Mitsuha heard Sabine rush out of the room. She would be back with the king in no time.

All right, it's scheming time again. Been a while...

"U-Uh, like this?" It was the king's voice.

"Yeah. Let go of that part," Sabine replied.

That was fast.

"Your Majesty, we have an emergency. Is anyone else there?" Mitsuha asked.

"H-Hey, Mitsuha's voice is coming from this box! Is she really in her domain? Is she speaking to us from there?"

Yeah, guess I should've known he'd have trouble believing it. But I can't worry about that right now.

"I don't have much time, Your Majesty, so I'll get right to the point. First, please let me know everyone who's present in the room with you."

"Of course. It's me, Sabine, Chancellor Saar, Marquis Eiblinger, and Prince Lionel."

Good, they're all people the king can trust to keep a secret. I needed to confirm that first.

"Three large ships have anchored off the coast of my county. It's likely they came from a distant land. In the annals of my homeland's history, such voyages were typically made to conquer, plunder, and capture slaves. If that turns out to be their goal, do you object to me killing them all?"

Huh? They're not responding.

“Do you know the strength of the enemy forces?” the king finally asked after a long silence.

“To be clear, I don’t even know if they’re enemies yet,” Mitsuha replied. “But if I had to guess, I’d say there’s probably somewhere between two and six hundred people across all three ships.”

She had no way of knowing for sure, but she figured there were between seventy and two hundred people on each ship. She gave such a large range because she could only guess whether they brought fewer people to obviate the need for resupply on the long journey, or more people to prioritize military strength.

“Can you surmise anything about their weaponry? How do you think their fighting strength compares to that of your homeland?”

That’s a good question... I can’t say for sure, but using Earth as a reference...

“What I’m about to tell you is just conjecture. There’s a chance I could be wildly off base. Please bear that in mind.”

“Of course, I understand. Go ahead.”

“First, given that their civilization has progressed to the point where they’re sending out a trio of ships to pioneer new sea routes, I assume they have cannons and guns. Cannons are weapons that fire heavy balls of iron, though I doubt theirs have a range of more than a mile, which means they’ll only be able to hit fishing villages on the coast. Guns, well, guns resemble the divine weaponry of my homeland, but these won’t be remotely so dangerous, partly because they’ll need to be reloaded between every shot.”

“We’ll be no match for them with swords, though, I take it?”

“Don’t be so sure. If I’m right and there are only a few hundred of them, we’ll have the advantage of the terrain. We can ambush them, take them by surprise, attack under cover of night... Whatever we need to do to get the upper hand. Even with their guns, they’ll be helpless if we shower them with arrows from the trees or clifftops, or attack with fire. Burning their food and poisoning their water would be good options, too.”

Huh? He’s gone silent again...

The king ended up giving Mitsuha full authority in the matter.

Why would he foist full authority on a lowly viscountess like me? I’ve been a noble for, like, five minutes! Damn it...

Despite her complaining, Mitsuha couldn’t deny the king’s assertion that no one understood the situation and the power dynamic between the two sides better than her. She didn’t want to do anything too crazy without permission, though, so she made flowcharts for a variety of scenarios and discussed her plans for each eventuality.

...The plans we worked out are pretty extreme. Well, at least I won’t have to show mercy if we discover their purpose is to invade. I’m just gonna hope they’re peaceful, unlikely as that is.

Marquis Eiblinger was going to lead his troops out of the capital the following day, but even traveling on horseback without a supply train, they would arrive in four days at best.

Okay, I need to prepare the Yamano County Army. I wonder if they’ve mustered everyone by now.

“Brave soldiers!” Mitsuha exclaimed. “The time for battle has come!”

Forty-one people stood gathered before her: all five commanders of the Yamano County Army, plus the thirty-six soldiers on active duty. The situation wasn’t grave enough to require the county’s full military strength.

“As you can see, ships from another land have anchored off our coast. They’ll likely come ashore tomorrow morning. If they send a friendly emissary, so much the better, but if they intend to invade or make outrageous demands, it’s possible we’ll have to use force. We have received permission from the king to do as we must. But remember one thing: we cannot make the first move. We have to let them attack first. I want them to be the bad guys here. Understood?”

Her soldiers nodded silently. The recruits were being taught as part of their training that war was about more than just military might—things like public opinion, one’s justification for fighting, and how things appeared to outside parties were also important.

“Do not, under any circumstances, attack until I give the order. If I become unable to do so for whatever reason, Major Willem will assume command. Until you receive such orders, your only purpose is to show the enemy that we have soldiers, too. If anything happens, stay cool. Don’t let yourself get flustered and do something careless. Understood?”

“Yes, ma’am!” the soldiers responded enthusiastically.

That’s what I like to hear.

“That’s all for today. Be here again tomorrow before sunrise. Dismissed!”

The soldiers dispersed, appearing slightly anxious but mostly excited.

Are they not scared? Well, it’s not like I have any intention of actually

making them fight to the death. All right, time for a briefing with Willem and the four former mercenaries.

Mitsuha awoke two hours before sunrise the next morning. A lord couldn't set a bad example to her soldiers by looking drowsy.

Most of the troops were already assembled within the next hour, looking plenty motivated.

I was playing it safe by telling them to get here before sunrise. I highly doubt the enemy will move that early.

Wait, now I'm calling them "the enemy," too. What should I call them? "Visitors"? Whatever. Like it matters.

It seemed like most of the soldiers hadn't eaten, so Mitsuha decided she should get them some food. The chef and Nellie were already up and making breakfast, but were dismayed when Mitsuha suddenly asked them to make twice as much.

It's okay, it doesn't have to be a proper meal! I'll send maids to help, too! Don't worry about side dishes or anything, I just want something in their stomachs. Even just some warm broth would do! And I'll eat whatever they have—it's important that a commander in the field eat the same food as her soldiers.

Mitsuha ordered the residents of the fishing village to evacuate to town at sunrise. She had given them advance notice the night before, so the process went smoothly. The villagers traveled light, which kept chaos to a minimum—it wasn't like they were fleeing to another territory, and depending on how talks went with

the visitors, they could be back home by noon.

It was now about two hours after sunrise. Mitsuha, looking at the ships through her binoculars, finally saw activity. They were lowering small boats into the water, and there were a number of openings in the broadsides of the ships.

Yep, they've got cannons all right. Just as I thought... If they're threatening us with those before even sending envoys to make first contact, there's a good chance they're hostile. Not that it comes as a big surprise.

I'd better let the capital know. Sharing information is important. If anything happens to me, I want them to be able to respond as quickly as possible...

“Checkmate King One, Checkmate King One, this is White Rook, over,” Mitsuha said into her transceiver.

“What’s going on, Mitsuha?” responded Sabine’s voice.

You’re not the king! You’re just “King Seven”!

“Where’s the king?” Mitsuha asked.

“I’m here. We’re all present.”

Oh, I guess Sabine’s room has become a sort of operations center...

“There’s activity on the ships. They’re lowering small boats into the water to reach the shore—and just as I suspected, they have cannons. There are about twenty on each side, and they’re pointed right at us. Clearly it’s meant as a threat.”

“So you were right...” The king trailed off, but then continued in a firmer tone. **“Well then, proceed as we agreed yesterday. But don’t put yourself in danger! Those ships will surely return to their homeland before long, and I doubt they will leave behind sufficient troops for an occupation. Even if you**

let them seize your county, we can take it back before long.”

Mitsuha couldn't allow that, though. Even a temporary seizure would allow them to return home in triumph with food, treasure, and holds full of slaves.

You want treasure? Not mine, pal! Slaves? Not my people! Not on my watch!

“Oh trust me, we're not the ones in danger. I won't let a single person in my county be enslaved.”

They're not responding again... Are they conferring about something? Eh, I'll just keep talking.

“Your Majesty, I want you to refer to me by a code name from now on. Please use it when we're talking through this device, and when you're talking *about* me there in the capital. That will prevent anyone who overhears you from knowing who you're talking to or about.

“V-Very well... What should I call you?”

A black-and-white DVD Mitsuha had watched with her brother—of the same show she took “King Seven” and “White Rook” from, in fact—popped into her head. It told the story of a group of rugged-yet-refined men who fought for their homeland.

I heard the lead actor died in a helicopter crash years later, while filming a battle scene for a movie. People call his death an accident, but that's not how I see it. I like to think that he died a heroic death in battle, fighting for his homeland. In order to demonstrate my will to protect this kingdom, I'll combine the rank of his most famous role with my Lightning Archpriestess alias to form my codename.

“Call me Sergeant... Sergeant Thunder.”

Mitsuha left Anton in charge of the radio and went outside.

Da da da dun da da~!

The only weapons Mitsuha brought this time were the Walther PPS she wore on her thigh, and another under her arm. She would have a host of guards for protection, and having visible weapons would spoil the image of a noble lady that she wanted to project. There was also a chance the visitors would attack at the first sign of anyone using a weapon. Even old-fashioned guns were dangerous, so caution was a necessity. It was even possible they had matchlock or flintlock pistols. Mitsuha was planning on seizing whatever opportunity presented itself to take care of the situation, but you could never be too careful.

In addition to her guns, she also had two IC voice recorders in her pockets to capture evidence. And she had trained some of her servants in the use of cameras to take photos and video, just like she did for Adelaide's debut. She would station them behind her soldiers—it would be bad news if the visitors mistook the cameras for weapons and attacked. But newer cameras had incredible magnification and sensitivity, so they would be able to record quality footage even at a distance. Probably.

Mitsuha also had a portable VHF radio slung across her shoulder. She had instructed Anton to turn the fixed HF and VHF radios in her residence toward each other and press the transmission switch. She deemed it unlikely the visitors would think her radio was a weapon, so it wouldn't put them on their guard or cause potential problems.

Her soldiers were already in formation when she exited her residence. Looking toward the sea, she saw that the visitors' small boats had left the ships

and were heading directly for them. There was one boat from each ship, each holding about twenty people. Half of them were rowing, but she was sure they were capable fighters, too.

Sixty people, huh? Guess that's a solid number to send to an unexplored land where the people are unlikely to speak your language. Sixty should be enough to overwhelm the locals, but not so many as to keep the ships from proceeding if the landing party were wiped out.

Most of what Mitsuha knew about this level of civilization—sailing ships, the weapons they carried, the way people thought—came from reading the Hornblower Saga, pirate novels, and high-seas adventure stories when she was in middle school. Her conjectures had been based entirely on the knowledge she gained from those fictional works, so there was a good chance she was totally wrong about some of it. Fortunately, her world-jumping ability meant she had nothing to worry about. At least, she hoped that was the case.

All right, time to go down to the shore. If they're friendly, I'll invite them to my residence. If not...this will be the final stop on their journey.

On the beach outside the sole fishing village in Yamano County, the young Viscountess Mitsuha von Yamano waited with feet planted and arms crossed. Thirty-six soldiers stood in formation behind her, with the officers and servants on camera duty standing surreptitiously behind the men on either wing.

Despite his strong objections, Willem had retreated behind the line of troops as well. When Mitsuha pointed out that “we’d be in big trouble if they killed both our top commanders at once,” he’d had no choice but to relent. He couldn’t fathom what she meant when she said, “If my body appears to blur,

hold firm. You won't have to worry about them attacking," however.

Mitsuha studied the slowly approaching boats with her binoculars. As she had suspected, they had guns, as well as swords at their hips. The guns were the type of smoothbore muzzleloader commonly known as muskets, which used spherical bullets and had no rifling in the barrel, though she couldn't tell if they were matchlock or flintlock.

The commander seemed to be in the rearmost boat. *He's not in the front... I guess that's normal. It's relatively simple to train soldiers, but it takes time and money to train a commander, and few people have what it takes. Not that all people who end up as commanders are actually qualified... It's more complicated than that.*

Going by Earth's history, the commander might not even be a proper military man. He could just be a shrewd sailor or merchant who curried favor with the king and received financial support to pay for ships and crew. There was no guarantee his men were soldiers, either. They might just as easily be sailors for hire, regular citizens pressed into service against their will, or prisoners who joined the expedition for the chance at a pardon.

It seemed the visitors had noticed that the locals didn't have guns, judging from their inscrutable expressions that could be evincing either relief or mockery. They also appeared surprised to see a little girl standing at the head of the welcoming committee.



The first two boats finally reached shore, and after the soldiers had jumped out and formed a human wall, the third one joined them. A soldier quickly hopped out of the last boat and got down on all fours, forming a step stool for the commander.

This man—the one Mitsuha assumed to be the commander—approached with a soldier on either side, addressing his subordinates with a nasty smile on his face. “Oh hoh, so they’ve sent out a little girl to greet us? Guess it beats some old geezer. How thoughtful.”

Mwahaha, you think I can’t understand you? “I’m disappointed, personally. I was hoping the commander would be a handsome young man,” Mitsuha shot back.

“Wha...” The man’s face went crimson. She couldn’t tell if he was angry, or just shocked that she understood his comment. “Y-You speak our tongue...?”

“Why, of course. As commander, it’s my duty to learn the languages of all the savage lands we might come into contact with.”

“Y-You’re a commander?!”

That revelation had such an impact on him that he seemed to miss Mitsuha’s insult altogether.

“Yes. I am Viscountess Yamano. His Majesty the King has entrusted me with the management and defense of this county, and has given me full authority in military and diplomatic matters. Therefore, as representative of this kingdom, I have a question for you. What is your purpose in trespassing on our shores without prior notice or permission? I demand you explain yourself at once.”

“Huh? What are you talking about? We discovered this continent, which

makes it ours. Its indigenous peoples will hereafter submit to our rule. First, you will hand over all the treasure this land has to offer. Then you will supply us with food and water!"

Yep, that's about what I expected.

The man had been thrown off initially, but his arrogant attitude had quickly returned. He probably thought Mitsuha was a child, and had no intention of taking her seriously—conveniently ignoring Mitsuha's statement that there was already a sovereign nation on this land. His plan had clearly been to occupy an undeveloped land and acquire treasure and slaves, but entering official negotiations with an established polity would render him unable to do so. He hoped to just take what he wanted, figuring that the particulars wouldn't reach his homeland anyway, and assumed that he could threaten the natives into doing whatever he wanted using his guns and cannons.

That decides it. These guys are our enemies after all. That means no more need for courtesy, and no need to hold back. Just like when that empire attacked the capital...

"So you're invading our kingdom? You don't mind if I take that as a declaration of war, do you? And is that coming from your fleet alone, or from your entire country?"

"I am a governor-general of the Kingdom of Vanel! I speak for the Crown!" the man replied, raising his voice in anger. He didn't take too well to this little girl responding so casually to his demand.

Sure, sure, your king promised you could be the governor-general of any new territory you acquired, just like Christopher Columbus... Which means you aren't a governor-general of the Kingdom of Whatever itself. Someone who

already held that kind of position wouldn't embark on a dangerous voyage at the head of only three ships. Also, you can hardly call yourself governor-general when you haven't even conquered anything yet. Not like that matters to me, though. I got you to declare your intent to invade as a representative of your kingdom. That's all I needed.

“You think you can conquer our kingdom with a measly three ships? Don’t make me laugh,” Mitsuha snorted.

The commander glared at Mitsuha, then smiled faintly and turned to a soldier. “Shoot that goat over there.”

What?! No! Not our valuable livestock! But...I guess I have to let this happen. Sorry, goat number 27... How come I always recognize goats and horses right away when I can't remember a human face to save my life?

The soldier fiddled around for a while preparing his gun, then aimed it at goat number 27. Mitsuha could tell from the odor when the men approached that their guns were matchlock style, with a burning fuse to ignite the gunpowder.

Pow!

Goat number 27 collapsed to the ground. The man who had shot it looked smug.

Mitsuha spoke with what Micchan called her “truly angry voice,” cool and composed.

“You owe me one gold coin for the goat.”

“Huh?”

The commander and his soldiers were all dumbfounded. *You think a lackluster gunshot like that is gonna scare me?*

“You owe me one gold coin for the goat.”

“Y-You saw that, right?! These weapons are mightier than anything you’ve ever imagined! If you don’t want to die, you’d better—”

“You owe me one gold coin for the goat.”

“N-No, see, if you try to resist, you’ll end up like that goat—”

“You owe me one gold coin for the goat.”

“I’m serious!”

“You owe me one gold coin for the goat.”

“Will you listen to me?!”

“You owe me one gold coin for the goat.”

Realizing their conversation wasn’t going anywhere, the man reluctantly pulled a gold coin out of his purse and handed it to Mitsuha.

Hell yeah! I won!

“S-So? What do you think of our mighty guns?! They are weapons that can kill from a great distance! You’re as good as dead once the muzzle is pointed your way.” The commander seemed to sorely regret the loss of the gold coin, but he had regained his composure now that Mitsuha was finally letting him talk.

He probably thinks he’s gonna get the coin back later, right after he steals all our treasure. I hope their coins have a higher gold content than the ones here. And that there’s a bunch more on their ships.

“Hmm… Looks like you’d have a hard time using them on rainy days,” Mitsuha said, visibly startling the man. She was right, of course: it would be difficult to ignite the fuse in the rain. “I feel like tall grass would mitigate some of their power, too, and I can imagine they’d be hard to use in forests with poor visibility. Plus, it seems like they take a long time to reload after each shot.”

“H-How do you...” the commander stammered, looking a little pale. He

had apparently expected the natives to be shocked at his incredible weapons and prostrate themselves before him. Instead, a girl who had supposedly never seen a gun before was pointing out the weapon's weaknesses one by one. It was no surprise he was flustered.

"That's enough time spent showing off your toys. Given your earlier declaration, our countries are now at war. I hope you know what that means," Mitsuha said.

"W-Wait! I will give you a demonstration of my country's overwhelming strength! You will undoubtedly submit to our rule after you see this!" the commander declared, before giving one of the soldiers some kind of signal. He clearly still believed he had the upper hand.

The soldier returned to one of the small boats and pulled out something red and white—a pair of signal flags. He signaled to the ships just as the commander instructed.

FACE VILLAGE AND FIRE FIVE TIMES.

Wait, what?! The translator in my head can even handle semaphore?!

After a long wait while the cannons were prepared, a signal finally came from the ship that they were ready to shoot.

Okay, I'm gonna jump the moment they do.

BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM!

The sound of the cannonfire was almost pathetically lackluster compared to modern-day Japan's heavy weaponry. Mitsuha jumped to Earth and back as fast as she possibly could. To anyone who was watching, it probably looked like her body blurred for a moment. Everyone had been too distracted by the sound of

the cannons to notice, though, except perhaps for Willem. She was gone for less than a second, so the cannonballs were still in flight when she returned.

Please don't hit any houses... It would make the people who live in them so sad! Not like these cannonballs blow up, though. They'd just make a big hole in the roof and maybe smash some furniture. Anyway, fingers crossed.

Ooh, one of them hit something! Wait, noooooooo!! Not the vertical salt farm! What'll I do if it hit the vertical racks or the waterwheel?!

Snap!

That wasn't a good sound!

“Hahaha, how do you like that? Feast your eyes on the power of my country's shipboard cannons!”

“Shut up already! They're not even strong enough to sink an enemy ship!”

“Wha...?”

Mitsuha ignored the slack-jawed commander and grabbed the portable radio.

“Anton, connect me. Transmit!”

“Understood.”

Mitsuha had instructed Anton to put the HF radio's microphone in front of the VHF radio's speaker and press the transmit switch when she gave that command.

“Your Majesty, our visitors have expressed intent to invade and have as good as declared war. I recorded it all. They also killed a goat with a gun and fired five cannonballs into the fishing village, destroying part of my salt farm. I'm going to counterattack. Anton, switch to receive!”

“I grant permission for the counterattack! Be careful. If anything

happened to you, Mits... Sergeant Thunder, Sabine would kill me.”

Sweet. He already gave me discretion to do as I please in the event I couldn't contact him, but this clinches it. Now I can go all out.

...Restraint? Never heard of it. Is it tasty? There's no need to show mercy to an opponent who would rather overpower you with force than even attempt to have a logical conversation and come to an understanding.

Oh, I was going to broadcast our negotiations live to the royal palace, but once I actually thought about it, I realized there'd be no point. We're speaking the language of the enemy, so no one would've been able to understand us... Talk about a senior moment.

“Wh-What’s that box? A person’s voice was coming out of it!” the commander cried.

“I was speaking to the king back in the capital,” Mitsuha explained. “I informed him that you attacked us, and he gave me the order to counterattack.”

“Th-That’s absurd! How can you possibly speak to someone who’s not here?!”

“Huh? You don’t have that capability where you’re from?”

Mitsuha looked at him with as much pity as she could muster. The commander and his men flinched, their eyes darting about in panic as if they’d finally realized the situation wasn’t quite what they’d thought.

Man, I scare myself sometimes...

“All right. I’m taking you all as prisoners of war,” Mitsuha said to the enemy soldiers.

“Wh-What are you...? Fire! Shoot down their soldiers and take this girl prisoner!” the commander yelled, overcome by a sense of unease.

Any counterattack became justifiable as self-defense the moment they declared war and fired their cannons, but this order to directly inflict harm removed all doubt. They could no longer use the excuse that they were simply trying to intimidate Mitsuha and her people.

The soldiers hurriedly raised their guns to shoot, but try as they might, the guns would not fire—Mitsuha had taken all their gunpowder with her when she jumped to Earth earlier.

“What are you doing?! Use your swords!”

The soldiers quickly put down their guns and drew their swords, but their blades only extended an inch or so past the handle. Mitsuha had also taken a quarter inch of each of their swords when she jumped. If she took the entire blade, the decrease in weight would’ve given her away, so she only took a small portion. When the men drew their swords, the larger part of each blade remained in the scabbard.

The flabbergasted soldiers stared at their useless swords, and the commander opened and closed his mouth like a fish out of water.

“Huh? Don’t tell me you guys came to this continent without the Goddess’s protection?” Mitsuha said with a shocked expression. The enemy was terribly agitated by the implications of her question; a lot of sailors are deeply religious, after all. “And not that we didn’t appreciate the little show you put on, but did you really think you could fight us with those toys? Sven, Szep, Gritt, Ilse.”

The four former mercenaries stepped forward. They were holding slightly outdated submachine guns.

“Over there,” Mitsuha said, pointing to a small tree. The former mercenaries aimed their SMGs and let loose.

Ra-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-tat!

The bullets kicked up a cloud of dust and sent splintered wood flying every which way.

“Wh-Wha...”

The enemy soldiers were speechless.

“Th-The ships will begin bombardment if I don’t return! This village won’t survive that!” the commander cried, at long last realizing that the men on the beach didn’t stand a chance against Mitsuha’s forces, and trying to use the threat of the shipboard cannons to cover his escape. But it was useless. No matter how strong the ships were, they weren’t going to help him and his men evade capture. In fact, Mitsuha doubted the ships would ever be useful again. To the invaders, at least...

“You just don’t know when to quit, do you... Fine. I guess I’ll have to destroy your ships,” Mitsuha responded.

Whoosh!



Mitsuha jumped to Earth and then to the deck of one of the ships. She gave the surprised sailors a smile, then jumped again with all three ships in tow.

“You guys stay here!”

The three ships abruptly disappeared from beneath the sailors' feet, leaving them to tumble into the ocean below. Naked. Taking their clothes was actually a kindness, as anyone wearing armor or a military uniform would've had no chance of reaching the beach before they drowned. The poor souls who were below sea level when the ships disappeared would be mercilessly battered by the water rushing in to fill the space, but there was nothing Mitsuha could do for them. They were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time.

When Mitsuha returned to the beach, the commander had fallen to his knees in the sand. Not a scrap of his former haughty confidence remained as he gaped at the unbelievable scene, trembling with fear and awe. His spirit was broken.

The man was now nothing more than a prisoner of war, and lacked the status to speak to Mitsuha on equal terms. All that remained was to hand him and his men over to the king. They could pick someone more reasonable from among the officers for questioning.

The other enemy soldiers just stood and stared at the place where the ships had been.

Mitsuha confirmed that the men who had fallen into the ocean were swimming toward shore, then gave orders for the sixty soldiers on the beach to be tied up. She had made sure to bring plenty of rope. The enemy soldiers didn't even try to resist; their spirits were broken as well.

That's exactly why I had Sven's group perform the SMG demonstration. That wasn't a waste of bullets—I was trying to cow the invaders. The

disappearance of the ships was probably what really did them in, though.

It must have been a shock for the invaders to learn that the natives they had assumed to be a primitive people actually possessed far more advanced technology than themselves. Their worldview had been turned upside down. The regular soldiers—that is, the men who had been press-ganged into service—had completely lost the will to resist, and would likely do as they were told.

They were going to need more rope and manpower to tie up the rest of the enemy soldiers when they reached the shore, though. Mitsuha could have sent a messenger to the town, but she decided to let Sven's group take care of the situation. Her officers needed to be able to recognize an issue and deal with it themselves. *I mean, the whole reason I'm paying them is to make my life easier.*

Mitsuha would let Count Bozes and Marquis Eiblinger take over when they arrived. Just figuring out how to feed that many prisoners would be a nightmare.

Oh yeah, I need to retrieve the ships, too.

If she had transported the ships too close to the shore, the enemy soldiers would have swum toward them instead, and if she had transported them anywhere else where people could see them, there was a chance someone would board them. That meant the only choice was to set them adrift in the open sea.

Mitsuha could transport anything to Earth and back that was within her field of vision. The soldiers in the water had a lower viewpoint than those on land, so she didn't have to move the ships out very far to make sure that they couldn't see them, but if she didn't retrieve the ships soon, they would drift out of sight. She needed the soldiers to reach the shore quickly so she could return the ships to their original positions. Then their anchors, which were currently swinging free in the water, would be back on the ocean floor serving their

intended purpose.

Okay, then I have to figure out what to do with the prisoners and the ships. And how to deal with the country these people came from. Oh, but first I need to report back to the king.

“...In short, I don’t yet know how many people there are in total, but I’m taking them all as prisoners of war,” Mitsuha said into the transceiver.

“You pushed yourself too hard again, Mitsuha! What about your life force?!” Sabine must have snatched the microphone from the king.

Whoops, I got her all worried about me... But I can’t tell her the truth. I need them to think that I once again decided to sacrifice some of my life force to save the kingdom, or else they’ll realize I can zip around and move big objects like that for nothing.

“Sabine, we have an expression in my country: ‘If not now, when?’”

“But... But...”

Oh no, she sounds like she’s gonna cry...

“We are in your debt, Sergeant Thunder...” The king also sounded distressed. Mitsuha wasn’t sure if he was worried about her, or just scared of getting it from Sabine later.

“There was no way around it. I did it for the kingdom, of course, but I also couldn’t let my people die for such a stupid reason. Don’t blame yourself, Your Majesty.”

“Still, I feel unbearable shame that we’ve made you pay so dearly on our behalf...”

We’re talking in circles... “Please, don’t worry about it. You can make it

up to me later. We have more important matters to discuss right now. I've broken the spirits of the commander and his soldiers, so I expect they'll answer any questions you ask. The lower-ranking soldiers and those who were forced to enlist might even come over to our side. They have essentially no chance of returning home, and I doubt they're particularly loyal to their homeland.

"And since their country sent out the fleet knowing the mission was likely to fail, they'll just assume it didn't work out and leave it at that. A fleet can go missing for any number reasons: maybe they sank in stormy weather, or ran out of food and water before reaching land. Even if another fleet were dispatched to find them, that would be years down the line. Although that does mean more of their people could show up in the future."

"So we need to prepare ourselves before then..."

"That's right. Let's shelve this discussion for now. I'll discuss matters with Marquis Eiblinger, and you and I will talk again when we next meet in person," Mitsuha said.

"Understood. Thank you for your service."

That was all Mitsuha needed to report for now. Next on the agenda was securing the enemy soldiers, returning the ships to their original positions and anchoring them, then waiting for Marquis Eiblinger's arrival. The language barrier meant she was the only person who could carry out the questioning, but she was going to wait for Marquis Eiblinger anyway because she didn't want to have to do it twice. The enemy soldiers would also be more likely to speak the longer she left them alone.

Mitsuha decided they would divide the officers into small, isolated groups,

and split up the rank and file into a few groups as well. That would prevent the soldiers from getting their stories straight, and allow Mitsuha to torment them psychologically by promising to reward those who were honest while threatening to execute anyone who turned out to be lying after she compared their testimonies. She was going to surveil their conversations, too, obviously.

Oh yeah, now that I think about it, I'm gonna need a massive amount of food for the prisoners! That could be a real burden to my people... And it's only gonna get worse—once Count Bozes and Marquis Eiblinger get here with their soldiers, we'll have more guests than there are citizens of this county!

Worst-case scenario, I might have to bring food from Japan and pretend it's from an emergency reserve at my residence... Welp, nothing I can do about it now. I couldn't have predicted this would happen, and it's not like it'll affect my people's independence.

I think the count ought to arrive in two days, and the marquis in three.

Mitsuha went back to the beach to check on things, and found that most of the enemy soldiers had come ashore and were already tied up. Sven's group had ordered fishing boats dispatched to collect those who ran out of energy before they reached the shore, as well as those who had tried to swim in another direction to escape capture. *Nice, they're thinking and acting for themselves. And good thing too—I wouldn't have thought to do that!*

There were 456 prisoners, which fell within Mitsuha's expectations. That number provided the enemy with sufficient fighting strength while also cutting down on the number of mouths to feed on a long journey. She was well acquainted with the difficulty of balancing the number of passengers with the

amount of food and water on a ship thanks to a video game she had played where you had to manage a fleet of trading vessels. She didn't want to think about how many undermanned fleets she'd ended up setting adrift...

Each ship had been manned by about a hundred and fifty people, including five or six officers. There were no buildings in the county that could come close to holding that many people, so she would have to split them up into multiple outdoor locations and bind them hand and foot. She didn't have many soldiers to keep watch, which meant trouble if the prisoners revolted. Their living conditions would improve in two days when Count Bozes arrived; they would just have to endure the situation until then.

Mitsuha had the commander put in his own prison cell, and grouped the three officers who came ashore with the three small boats in another. She'd thought this county might be too rural to even have a jail, but Anton surprised her by saying there were two: one beneath the lord's residence and one in the town.

The jail in town was used to confine outsiders who committed crimes in the county or already had elsewhere, as well as to keep citizens for a night when they got drunk and caused trouble. The one under the official residence, well... Mitsuha was sure there must have been plenty of reasons to use it throughout the long history of the region.

The commander was put in the subterranean prison, while the three officers were put in the town jail. The sixty bound soldiers who had come ashore with them were placed in the residence's courtyard. Mitsuha didn't want that group interacting with the rest of the prisoners under any circumstances.

She divided those who had swum ashore into seven groups, excluding the

officers. They were left outside still bound as well, and put far enough away from each other that they couldn't hear each other's voices. She had the officers split up into groups and confined in vacant rooms.

That night, Mitsuha visited a room occupied by five of the captive officers who had been on the ships, unaware of what was happening on shore until they were suddenly dumped naked in the ocean. She brought a pitcher of water and some cups, all made of wood for safety reasons. The five men were sitting on the floor with their hands and feet bound, two guards in chairs watching over them. The guards hurried to stand when Mitsuha entered the room, but sat back down without a word when she put a finger to her lips. *Looks like their training is paying off. Okay, keep pretending not to know who I am, boys.*

“Um, I brought water...” Mitsuha said hesitantly. The prisoners’ faces lit up with joy.

“Thank you so much! We haven’t had a single drop to drink since breakfast. My throat is so dry!”

“Sorry, but we can’t move. Can you bring the water to us?”

“...Hold on, you know our language, miss?!”

At the third man’s comment, the other officers all realized that Mitsuha had indeed spoken in the tongue of their homeland.

“How do... No, I guess it really doesn’t matter. Please interpret for us!”

“Wow, you really are from Vanel!” Mitsuha exclaimed. “My late father was a Vanelese sailor who washed ashore in this country after a shipwreck. After he met my mother, he married her and settled down here. He taught me his native tongue because he thought other ships might arrive from Vanel

someday..."

"Incredible! This must be divine providence... Your father is to be praised for his foresight and loyalty to his homeland. He must have been a brilliant sailor," one of the officers replied.

Just the response I was looking for. I'm the one glimmer of hope they've had in this confounding situation where they can't even communicate with the locals. Go ahead, put all your faith in me!

"Let me start by explaining the situation," Mitsuha began. "Your commander claimed to be a governor-general of the Kingdom of Vanel and demanded we submit to his rule. He followed by firing a gun as a threat, destroying important facilities with a fusillade from his shipboard cannons, and finally declaring war. Our king ordered a counterattack, and we utterly defeated you in mere seconds. As things stand, your entire kingdom will meet the same fate as your ships in retaliation for invading and starting this war."

The prisoners' faces went pale. To them, "the same fate as your ships" meant instant annihilation at the hands of some unknown power.

"N-No! That man does not represent our kingdom! He's just a slave trader who wangled aid from the king and organized an exploratory fleet. He was only given military rank temporarily to grant him the authority of a commander. If he falsely represented our country and started a war, his rank and authority are forfeit, and by rights pass to Captain Amoros, his first mate and our original commanding officer. Please, let us see Captain Amoros right away!"

Yeah, that's about what I expected...

"But the commander said he has full authority. He's even saying that he'll help us invade Vanel if we spare him."

“Th-That filthy traitor!!”

“I’m the only interpreter, and I have connections who can speak directly with the top brass. Can you please tell me everything in detail?”

“Y-Yes, certainly! Please make sure to pass it all on to your superiors!”

That’s one down! I have a lot of places I need to be, so let’s move things along.

Count Bozes arrived a day earlier than expected with five hundred of his soldiers in tow.

Geez, that was fast! I’m pretty sure the messenger I sent arrived in the middle of the night—did the count and his soldiers leave just a few hours later? More importantly, how am I gonna feed that many people?!

Wait, what? The count’s main force is still on the way? Please, send them back! Oh, a supply train from the Transport Corps is with them? I see...

Yamano County wasn’t capable of managing a large amount of prisoners for very long, so Mitsuha was going to have them sent to Bozes County. That would be better for all involved, including the prisoners. Trying to send them to the capital probably wouldn’t work out. It would be a while before they could be transported there, and the majority would end up getting left behind in Yamano County anyway, as they would be needed to teach the people of this kingdom how to operate the first three warships they had ever seen.

Marquis Eiblinger arrived with his soldiers on the evening of the following day.

There’s no way anyone should be able to get here from the capital in just two and a half days! Just how hard did they push themselves...?

Huh? Marquis Eiblinger brought part of the royal army instead of his own? They rushed all the way here on horseback without a supply train, stopping at towns and villages on the way for food and water? The soldiers were okay with the pace because they wanted to return the favor for when I saved the capital from that empire? I guess that makes sense...

Well, please, rest your soldiers and their horses! The enemy? They've all been captured. Hey, don't look so disappointed.

After giving Marquis Eiblinger a chance to rest, Mitsuha met with him and Count Bozes to fill them in. She had gained a pretty good understanding of the enemy country from the information she'd collected from the officers who had remained aboard ship, the various groups of soldiers, and the listening devices she'd placed in the officers' cells.

“...In short, the Kingdom of Vanel is a typical aggressive maritime nation.”

“This kind of aggression is...typical?”

“Very. Countries like Vanel colonize weaker nations and establish trade with equal ones. If they find an undeveloped land, they pillage it and enslave the people. That's how it typically goes.”

Marquis Eiblinger and Count Bozes fell silent.

“Normally our kingdom would be colonized, but the commander of this fleet tried to treat us as an undeveloped land because he wanted to return home in triumph with treasure and slaves.”

“So our kingdom is...weak?” Marquis Eiblinger said.

“Seems that way...” the count agreed.

They both lapsed back into silence.

It just got gloomy in here... “Well, yeah, but that doesn’t mean this country is some backwater, or that its people are frail!” Mitsuha exclaimed. “You just lack ships, guns, and cannons!”

“That’s no minor deficit...” the marquis mumbled.

Shoot, I failed to cheer them up...

“How much time do you think we have?” the count asked. It was a difficult question to answer.

“Hmm, they’ll send out another expedition once they forget the pain of the heavy losses they suffered from this failure. I give that two or three years at the least, and maybe seven or eight at most... Ten if we’re really lucky. Honestly, it depends on a number of factors, like the state of their government, their finances, and the political situation with neighboring countries, so I really can’t predict...”

The count and marquis furrowed their brows in thought.

Mitsuha decided to throw them a lifeline. “It’ll all be fine! We just have to get our navy ready by then!”

“Our navy?” the two repeated in unison.

“Sure, we have one now. Our first three warships are anchored off my coast even as we speak.”

“Huh...?” Once again, their reaction was exactly the same.

Mitsuha explained what she had in mind. She, Count Bozes, and the kingdom would each take ownership of one of the three ships. They would send them out on trading voyages as a means of training crewmen, then split the profits three ways. Meanwhile, they would construct a shipyard and harbor in Bozes County and begin to build their own warships. Finally, they would develop weapons stronger than what the enemy possessed.

In truth, Mitsuha didn't want to contribute to the advancement of weaponry in this world, but if she didn't, the kingdom would be invaded, most likely just as Colette and Sabine were entering adulthood. She was worried about how the invaders would treat young girls like them... *No, no, no, no, no! There's no way in hell I'm letting that happen!*

Besides, if people didn't have guns, they would fight with swords, and if they didn't have swords, they would fight with clubs. Having more primitive weapons didn't mean there would be fewer battles and less death. There were already guns and cannons in this world. Mitsuha wouldn't be introducing them. She couldn't take responsibility for what would happen after her death, but she wanted to do all she could to protect those dear to her so long as she was alive.

“Huh...” the two men said together once more. *These two are so close—that’s the third time in a row they’ve had the same reaction.*

“Are you sure you want to concede so much power to me?” the count asked.

“And I don’t get a piece of this pie?” the marquis grumbled.

Aaand the streak ends. Marquis Eiblinger was a capable, high-ranking noble. He was a good person, but also a shrewd and sturdy leader.

“You can take charge of the kingdom’s side of the navy. I’m sure His Majesty will grant you that if I ask. I trust you’ll lend us your cooperation?” Mitsuha said.

“Naturally!”

It would have been problematic if that position went to a greedy noble who was only after money and power, so that worked out well. Marquis Eiblinger had

sufficient rank, as well as the king's complete trust.

"I'll bet these ships are second class at best. Vanel wouldn't use their very best ships for such a dangerous gamble. The ships we build are going to be of much higher quality. You can leave the design to me. There's probably a shipwright among the prisoners who was brought along to make repairs. I'll look into it. And if not, we'll have to make do with our kingdom's own shipbuilders..."

Count Bozes nodded stiffly, probably thinking of the troubles ahead.

Mitsuha got permission from the count for a few other projects, including performing maintenance on the road linking Yamano County and Bozes County. His county was about to see dramatic development as a naval port and become a major market—there was no way she was going to miss out on an opportunity like that. The trip currently took a day on foot, but improving the roads would enable the use of a rudimentary bike with a trailer, cutting down on travel time significantly.

Reaching the capital in twenty-four hours might still be impossible, but Randy could probably handle making a bike able to reach Bozes County in a matter of hours. If making a chain proved difficult, they could use slime rubber or a leather belt in its place, or just make shaft-driven bicycles.

The count also gave her permission to establish a trading route between her fishing village and the new Bozes County harbor using small trading boats. She would have her people make small, quick sailing ships as practice before they moved on to the bigger ones.

Why not put the naval port in my own county, you ask? We don't have a high enough population to support the rapid development that would bring. I

also want no part of the stream of ruffians it'll bring in, and while it would make me filthy rich, I don't care about that either. I just want to live a fun life with my friends, make enough money for my retirement, and keep myself in delicious food. Losing my free time and pleasant lifestyle in exchange for money I don't even need would defeat the whole purpose.

So the extra work, the ruffians, the decrease in public safety, and the destruction of the environment are all my gift to the count! Bozes County is large, with a much higher population than mine, and I'm sure he'll spread around the profit from the naval port to improve the lives of all his citizens. He'll just have to put up with a few minor drawbacks. Mwahaha!

“Oh, one more thing,” Mitsuha said. “Please take the prisoners of war to Bozes County! I don’t have anywhere to keep them indoors, and I feel bad leaving them out in the open... We need those sailors to teach us how to sail the ships.”

In the end, they decided that Marquis Eiblinger would transport the commander and the members of the landing party to the capital, while Count Bozes would take the rest to his domain. Mitsuha wanted to keep the former group separate from the rest because they had seen both her special powers and the SMGs. The commander had to take responsibility for the war, so he would likely be thrown in a dungeon in the capital.

I mean, technically we’re still at war with the Kingdom of Vanel, even if the people there don’t know that. Until I go to the capital, he’ll spend his days getting interrogated in a language he doesn’t understand then sent back to his jail cell alone. It’ll be lonely and disheartening, but he brought it on himself.

Afterward, Mitsuha, Count Bozes, and Marquis Eiblinger took a fishing boat out to one of the ships anchored off the coast. They found various documents, logs, and nautical charts, from which they learned things like the location and size of the Kingdom of Vanel and the positions of its neighboring countries. Mitsuha also used her world-jumping power to steal the contents of the safe while the count and marquis were in a different room. There was a decent haul of gold coins, likely intended for paying the crew's wages and laying in supplies at ports along the way.

I'll be keeping these. Please let the gold content be decent, Mitsuha prayed.

Chapter 28

Wartime Prosperity

Marquis Eiblinger and Count Bozes took their respective prisoners and departed for home. The count's journey was short enough that they would be back before nightfall if they left first thing in the morning, but the marquis was in for a much rougher time. His troops had made the trip there on horseback, but the prisoners were going to have to walk, which would slow down the return journey significantly.

That's gonna suck. Oh, he's gonna let his subordinates deal with escorting the prisoners and get himself back to the capital as fast as possible? I see.

I'll tell the king during our next scheduled contact that the marquis is on his way.

Mitsuha didn't tell the count and marquis this, but the truth was that Vanel's next arrival wasn't really anything to be afraid of as long as she was alive. First of all, they wouldn't attack without warning. It was more likely that another fleet of survey vessels would arrive, and they wouldn't turn aggressive unless they had another wingnut in charge. After all, Vanel would receive no word of what had happened to this last fleet. The ships could easily have sunk in a storm, or the crews could have perished after running out of food and water.

It would take months for the next fleet that arrived to return to their homeland and report back about this kingdom. Another fleet would arrive months later carrying envoys, and that fleet would require more months to return

home. Mitsuha and her compatriots would have plenty of time to prepare before the Kingdom of Vanel announced any intention to subjugate them. They would get even more time if the new fleet disappeared due to an “unfortunate accident.”

“Diplomats, you say? No such people ever arrived. Perhaps their ship sank in a storm or some such. Awful, just awful...” Yeah, that could work. The distance between our kingdoms is our greatest defense.

Even if it did come to war, they still had nothing to worry about. Mitsuha could think of plenty of ways to give the enemy a clear taste of defeat—as opposed to this time, when they didn’t even understand what had happened to them.

The first was world-jumping bombardment. This would involve preparing a ship’s cannons, jumping the entire ship next to an enemy vessel to fire at point-blank range, then immediately jumping away. Rinse and repeat.

Her next idea was dive bombing, which she could pull off by jumping above an enemy ship with cannonballs, then immediately jumping away and leaving them there to fall. If she heated up the cannonballs until they were red hot, they would cause a fire when they struck the ship. She could even fill pots with oil, seal them with cloth, and light them on fire instead of using cannonballs. Setting a ship’s sails and masts aflame would turn it into a big target, and the whole ship would end up catching fire.

Mitsuha could also make a ship “inexplicably” sink by removing a massive amount of the seawater directly beneath it, or by doing the same to the bottom of the vessel. Enemy ships stood no chance against her world-jumping power.

As an extreme last resort, she could ask a country on Earth to supply her with a small warship equipped with a rapid-fire cannon. They would probably

give her at least a few hours in exchange for a goblin or orc corpse. *That would seriously be the last last resort, though.*

The real question was whether the kingdom could protect itself if Mitsuha wasn't around, either because she died, got seriously injured, fell ill, became unable to world-jump, or had to disappear. They would need to construct new sailing ships and produce weaponry superior to the enemy's to hedge against such a situation.

Mitsuha thought it would be a little premature to introduce cannon shells packed with explosives to this world. The enemy was using smoothbore guns with round bullets, so cannons with rifling and cylindro-conoidal ammunition would do just fine.

Gun-wise, Mitsuha was leaning toward Minié rifles. Despite still being muzzle-loaded, their rifling and cylindro-conoidal bullets put them in a different class than all previous firearms. Breechloaders would be too much, however.

Mitsuha felt uncomfortable asking for help regarding this matter on her blog, **Help Me Out! Running Your Land as a Viscountess**. She was talking about real war in which real people would die. She didn't want to put anyone off, or even worse, have the military enthusiasts get excited and offer her a bunch of crazy ideas. The thought freaked her out.

There wasn't as much resistance to killing in this world as there was on Earth. No one valued the life of an enemy or a criminal enough to put themselves in danger. It was kill or be killed.

Mitsuha had killed people in this other world. She had read a lot of hard-boiled novels and watched a lot of war dramas in her life, but had never once thought the day would come when she herself would actually kill someone. That

was simply the nature of this other world, though. The definition of legitimate self-defense was infinitely broader here than back on Earth, and when she killed marauding bandits it didn't feel much different from pinching the hand of a groper.

I'm only able to kill because I'm here in this world, though. I don't want to make my blog readers stuck back on Earth complicit in the taking of life. I'll just rely on them for helping people and improving the economy. I'll handle the dark side all on my own.

“We’re going to build a harbor,” Mitsuha announced.

“Huh?”

The citizens of the fishing village stared at her open-mouthed.

“Um, Lady Mitsuha, what exactly do you...?” The village head trailed off nervously.

“I just think we’re going to need one. I want somewhere to keep those three ships until the harbor in Bozes County is complete, and we’re gonna have a lot of boats traveling between here and there that will need somewhere to moor. One of these days I’m going to want to start making fishing ships with sails, too.

“Construction work will be paid, of course, though I’ll be handling most of it myself. What I’ll need your help with is the final leveling of the ground. Though I’d also like your input on where might be a good place to put a pier...”

The villagers’ eyes lit up at the mention of being paid. *The power of money.*

Mitsuha was inclined to build a floating pier. They were convenient because the difference in elevation between the boats and the pier didn’t change with the tide. The lack of land reclamation would be better for the environment

as well.

The mountain villagers would probably be happy to work on something other than board games for a while, too. No matter how lucrative it was, the men had to be bored to death with the fiddly work of crafting the boards and pieces.

A few days later, Mitsuha snuck out to the shore in the middle of the night and stood on a rocky strand a little ways away from the sandy beach. She had already surveyed the terrain and the seafloor.

She jumped, taking many of the rocks from the seafloor with her, then jumped back with them to the place where she wanted her new breakwater. She jumped again, taking the uneven parts of the coastline, and returned to drop off another round of rocks at the breakwater. Another jump, this time clearing rocks to create a sufficiently wide road from the coast to the village.

The next morning the villagers awoke to find that a breakwater had been constructed, the ground at the coast had been leveled, and there was now a road leading from the harbor site to the village. Needless to say, this caused a bit of a commotion. It wasn't hard to figure out who was responsible for it, though, so they simply offered a prayer toward Mitsuha's residence before going about their usual business.

They're all used to it by now. Even if they don't know anything about the state of the seafloor. I might fiddle a little with the road to Bozes County tonight. I want to flatten the land and stamp out a straight path. Tunnels would be a bad idea, though—I'd be scared of cave-ins. Oh, I guess I could just remove everything above it and make a valley...

“Mitsuha!!”

Count Bozes visited Yamano County five days later.

“What’s wrong?” Mitsuha asked. “You’re all out of breath...”

“‘What’s wrong?!’ What do you *think* is wrong?! I rushed here as soon as I received word from my subordinates,” the count responded, panting. Mitsuha had no idea what he was so worked up about. “Where did that highway come from?! When in the world did you perform all that construction?!”

Oh, I see...

“Well, traffic between our counties is about to increase, you know? So I figured I should do some maintenance...”

“What I want to know is *how* you did it! Don’t tell me—”

“Yeah, I used a little bit of my life force...”

“Foolish girl!”

Yikes, he’s really mad...

“I just really wanted to fix the road. People will be able to rely on it even if I die—”

Count Bozes slapped Mitsuha on the cheek. *Ow. That was hard...*

“Y-You need to place more value on your own life, you...you imbecile!!”

Fixing the road had been the right call. Yamano County lacked the labor force to perform such a large-scale construction project by normal means. They also lacked the money to hire people from other regions, and the production output and lodging to support them. Mitsuha could have tried to chip away at the construction little by little, but she would have been found out eventually. She thought she may as well take advantage of all the hubbub and do it all at once.

The county would be receiving a lot of visitors from now on, and it would've caused an even bigger fuss if she had done this *after* they started showing up. Mitsuha also figured that the state of the highway would feel trivial right now compared to the turmoil surrounding the invasion. So now was the time, even if it exposed her capabilities more than she would have liked.

I don't regret that decision. But...

"I-I'b zo zorrerrry..."

Mitsuha cried. She cried and cried and cried. Not because of the pain in her cheek—she was just overwhelmed that the count had gotten angry for her sake. That he cared enough to scold her.

She squeezed him tight.

Oh no, I did it again! I cried into the count's chest! I was full-on weeping, too! I'm so embarrassed, I can't look at him!!

Mitsuha needed to think of an excuse for the next time she decided not to hold back with her power. She had said that using traversal cost some of her life force, but she had never once said that losing life force shortened her life *span*. That gave her wiggle room to claim that sacrificing life force only stunted her growth rather than inching her closer to the grave. She could also say that her people were long-lived, so shortening her life a little didn't matter much because she would still live far longer than the average person.

Wait, that could cause other problems. People might pester me for the secret to longevity, or spread rumors that drinking my blood restores youth or something. I don't want people to start pressuring me to use traversal, either, thinking that "a little bit isn't a big deal."

Hmm, maybe I should tell the count alone that it stunts my growth. He's gonna find out that I'm done growing soon enough, anyway. I think my growth ended when I was seventeen... I can't tell him I'm actually eighteen. That's way too old to cry my eyes out like that right in front of him! Moving on for now...



Count Bozes told her that he was going on to Alexis's county from there, then departed. Mitsuha wondered if he was planning on giving Alexis a piece of the navy pie as well. Alexis's domain had a much higher population than Yamano County because, unlike this former barony, it had been a viscount's territory all along. Its close proximity to Bozes County—it was a relatively short journey if you crossed through Yamano County—would make it a good source of workers, and it also bordered the ocean. Involving Alexis now could pay off down the line.

Mitsuha felt like people might complain about nepotism with so much of the navy being run by Count Bozes's intimate circle, but there was really no helping it. Landlocked territories wouldn't be able to contribute, and the nobility had long ignored those on the coast because of their rural character and distance from the capital. Count Bozes was the lone influential noble among the puny maritime domains, and he had done so much to take care of the surrounding nobles that they would be forever in his debt. Plus, the nearby territories were sure to get at least a taste of the prosperity the naval port would bring.

And so begins the wartime boom. Personally, I'm perfectly content to just sit back and snatch my little share of the profits if it means avoiding the tumult, decreased public safety, and destruction of the environment. As long as my people and I can live in relative comfort, I'll be happy. Looking for any more than that is just begging for misfortune to strike. No thanks.

You know what religious people say: believe and thou shalt be slaved.

Wait, that doesn't sound quite right...

According to Sabine, the capital was in a tizzy. Now that the immediate danger

had passed, the royal palace decided to publicly announce the existence of this powerful enemy. This was a necessary step for investing budget and personnel in the establishment of the navy and uniting the people as one. The only problem was the rumor that the Lightning Archpriestess had wiped out the enemy and seized three gigantic battleships without so much as scratching them.

“Gigantic battleships?” Who are we fighting here, the Galactic Empire?

Sabine also said the orphans were selling a strange, expensive new product: a doll of the Lightning Archpriestess containing some of her hair, to be used as a good luck charm.

The last time Mitsuha had quietly gone to the orphanage to replenish the stock of popcorn and paper bags, the orphans had asked if they could make and sell wooden dolls of her. She'd said yes without much thought. They'd also said her hair was getting long and had kindly offered to cut it, which she had taken them up on.

Those little devils! They've really done it now!! Their stall is directly managed by my county, too, so I'm sure everyone believes that it's my hair. I mean, it is, but...how can their business acumen be so much better than mine, damn it!

At this rate, people are gonna start making the dolls in my county, too... Or go for something novel and make color figurines, tapestries, body pillow—EW, NOOOOOOOOO!

Mitsuha had to take a moment to collect herself.

I'm just gonna put that out of my mind. Anyway, it feels like Archpriestessmania is heating up again. I might wanna avoid the capital for a while...

“Mitsuha, please sell me some products! Anything will do!”

“Whoa, it’s Petz! Where’d you come from?” Mitsuha replied.

“Never mind that! I’m telling you, I’ll buy anything!” Petz cried. “Stones, sticks, even clumps of dirt! We can put a price on literally anything as long as it’s from Yamano County!”

“No way! I don’t want anything to do with that kind of business. Get ahold of yourself, Petz!!” Even as she said this, Mitsuha realized that the merchant was staring intently at her hair.

...H-He knows about those wooden dolls! Give me a break, for the love of...

Petz told Mitsuha that carpenters, blacksmiths, metalworkers, and other artisans from the capital had been gathered up and sent to Bozes County. The ships were still anchored off Yamano County’s coast, but temporary accommodation was apparently going to be prepared for them in Bozes County. *Sorry we’re not capable of handling it, everyone...*

The least Mitsuha could do was get the floating pier built as quickly as possible so as to make examining the ships easier. They would only be in her county until the harbor in Bozes County was finished and people learned how to sail the enormous vessels... *Which is going to take a while. I need to order increased production of fast-growing crops.*

Oh, I wonder if we could tow the ships with fishing boats. That would mean we’d only have to wait until the Bozes County harbor was complete... Would that really work? If we used every fishing boat in both Yamano and Bozes

County, maybe...?

Petz had rushed to Yamano County by direct express coach, passing groups of artisans along the way. He said they weren't all necessarily going to settle down in Bozes County. After they had thoroughly examined the ships, some would return to the capital to research the foreign technology, while others would stay and continue to analyze the ships. It sounded as if actually constructing their own ships was still a ways off.

Mitsuha wasn't terribly surprised. They couldn't just use any old wood to make the ships, and they also had to figure out waterproofing, how to produce the necessary curvature, how to ensure the ships were sturdy enough, and more. Even if Mitsuha supplied blueprints and models, it would still be a while before the workers would be able to start building. Besides, they needed to construct a shipyard first.

I guess it was unreasonable to expect we could start making large ships right away. Faithfully reproducing the ships they captured was an option, but then they wouldn't be able to contend with the enemy's newer designs. One option was to forget about size and produce smaller warships that prioritized mobility. They could use long-range guns to attack from outside of the enemy's range, then speed away. The larger, slower enemy ships would be sitting ducks.

You think those sound like the Matsushima-class cruisers? No, those were ultimately a failure. I don't want to equip small warships with unreasonably large guns—I'm talking about small cannons with long range. To pull it off we'll need rifling and cylindro-conoidal bullets, though, and I don't know if either is possible with this world's technology... If not, I'll think of something else. Or get help from Earth, which I really don't want to do.

Oh yeah, didn't they have rockets in ancient China that were kind of like glorified fireworks? We could use those to burn the sails of enemy ships... Or not. It would be difficult to hit anything from over a mile away.

What about a wheel-like weapon that uses fireworks as propulsion to zoom forward over the water? Oh wait, that sounds like the Great Panjandrum. Those could end up hitting our own ships instead, so that's a no.

Most of my knowledge of how modern ships are constructed doesn't apply to wooden sailing ships. We're not gonna use high tensile strength steel or modular design, obviously. Hmm...

If the wooden seams and waterproofing measures are unable to prevent leaks, we could attach treadmill waterwheels inside the ships to continuously bail water out of the bilge... No, that's ridiculous! Ships don't have waterwheels! Well, there are paddle steamers... But those aren't waterwheels! They just look similar!!

Crud, I can't come up with any good ideas. Maybe I'm just tired... I don't need to rush this. We have plenty of time. The experts of this world will come up with much better ideas than I ever could, so I'll support them to the best of my ability. I don't need to do it all by myself... At least, I hope not.

Mitsuha decided she would go to Bozes County the next day and speak to the prisoners. They probably felt anxious not being able to speak to anyone, and they might have some requests. She had also forgotten to look for a shipwright among the prisoners, and it would be nice if she could find some other useful craftsmen, not to mention people who could teach the citizens of this kingdom how to operate the ships and cannons.

The commander had turned out to be a bad person, but that wouldn't

necessarily be true of the rest of the crew. Coming from an enemy country didn't make them criminals. They were just normal people who had happened to become soldiers and sailors. There was no reason to make them suffer unnecessarily.

Oh, I suppose there are some criminals who joined the journey hoping for a pardon... Well, they haven't committed any crimes in this kingdom, so I'll let that slide.

A month passed. The three captured ships were moored at the floating pier, which had been finished for some time now, and craftsmen of all sorts were constantly flowing in and out of them. Kunz, the carpenter who had remodeled her store in the capital, was among them.

There was no way he wasn't gonna be here, now that I think about it. He can't help himself when it comes to new technology. These ships are from another country, and not only that, they're stationed in my domain. This is heaven for the guy.

They had built temporary lodging facilities at the harbor, where meals could also be had for a fee. Citizens of Yamano County were doing the cooking, but the ingredients were being supplied on the cheap by Bozes County. Mitsuha got the count to do her this favor, knowing the massive profits he would be raking in later on.

Some of the former prisoners had come back from Bozes County to help explain their technology to the locals. They had trouble communicating without Mitsuha around, but they managed by pointing and gesturing, and they were working hard to learn the language. Conversely, some of the people from this

kingdom were even learning a few words from the invaders' language.

Craftsmen know no borders...

There had been two shipwrights on each ship, making six in total. Two of them had died—one of illness on the voyage, and the other because he was near the bottom of his ship when it vanished. The other four wished to become naturalized citizens of this kingdom. And they were far from alone—most of the crew, aside from some of the soldiers, decided they would rather live a regular life with a decent salary in this kingdom than remain prisoners with no hope of returning home.

It was possible they were worried that the Kingdom of Vanel would disavow their existence. In that case, they would have no chance of returning home in the first place. As long as she was alive and well, Mitsuha would be able to prove conclusively that Vanel had been the ones to start the war, but if she wasn't, there was indeed a good chance they would refuse to acknowledge the expedition. Given that risk, becoming citizens of this land was the best option for these men. The soldiers may have realized this too, but were unwilling to give up their loyalty to the homeland. *And I can't say I don't understand how they feel.*

Mitsuha made a simple dictionary for the former prisoners, who were giving their all to learn the local language. They seemed to believe they could have a happier life in this kingdom than they'd had at home. Those who left behind families or sweethearts were probably struggling, but they knew they would all be dead if it weren't for Mitsuha's kindness, and as such didn't seem to have too much in the way of hard feelings toward the kingdom. They were well aware that they had shown up uninvited and started bombarding the fishing

village without provocation.

It would be a huge help if anyone who actually piloted the ships came over to their side. Mitsuha could read all the books she wanted about sailing and tactics, but reading about how to handle sails and ropes was very different from actually being able to do it.

Even some of the officers offered their cooperation. Given its lack of decent ships and guns, they probably believed this country to be incapable of invading their homeland—the successful defense of Yamano County had only been thanks to the Goddess's protection, and any fleet sent against Vanel would be wiped out in a heartbeat.

Yep, the “Goddess’s protection” is the story I went with. Anyone who inflicts harm upon this land without permission from the Goddess will be visited with divine punishment. The Goddess punished the invaders this time by taking the ships out from under their crews and bestowing them on this kingdom. If anyone tried to steal one of the ships and flee, they would only be able to get so far before the ship disappeared again and was returned to the harbor. The passengers would be left at sea, naturally. Clever, right?

Mitsuha wondered how many of them would still consider stealing a ship and fleeing after hearing that. Every sailor knew the fear of being abandoned in the middle of the ocean with no land in sight.

Even without the threat of the Goddess's protection, it was unlikely anyone would try it. The voyage would be long with no harbors to stop at, meaning it wouldn't be possible without sufficient water, food, and crew. Any small group of patriots who actually managed to steal a ship would never make it home in one piece.

The crewmen who offered their cooperation had no reason to flee, as they were treated much better here than they had been back in Vanel. They were paid well and respected as teachers, with young pupils who were eager to learn. That was much better than being constantly belittled as worthless bilge rats. If the officers who had treated them like slaves enjoined them to aid in their escape, there was no way they'd go along with it. No one would willingly leave a place where they could be free and happy in favor of becoming a slave again. They couldn't expect better treatment if they fled to a neighboring country, either.

In other words, we can use the low-ranking sailors, the forced enlistees, and the criminals seeking pardon.

Mitsuha couldn't just trust the new arrivals blindly, of course. She had bugged all their rooms, and had hired a number of them as spies while leading each to believe they were the only one. She was keeping a particularly close eye on the officers who had decided to cooperate.

I s'pose the ones who learn the language and find a cute girlfriend truly will want to settle down in this kingdom. They kinda have it made here.

The new arrivals were being paid very well for instructing the locals in how to handle a ship, and no one would stop them if they wanted to give up the sailor's life. They could join their girlfriend's family business, be that agriculture, fishing, or forestry. Any family would be happy to gain a robust sailor as a son-in-law.

They're all working so hard to learn the language. They're even using their free time to practice by...speaking to women... Wait, is that their whole motivation?!

Hey, you! That girl's only ten!

Construction was proceeding apace on the naval port and shipyard in Bozes County. Training facilities were also being built for prospective sailors.

People were flooding to Bozes County, and not just from the neighboring territories. They came from all over the kingdom, including the capital, regardless of whether or not they had their local lord's permission to do so legally. Some were looking for jobs as construction workers, while others saw a chance to profit off the burgeoning population. Still others sought to become sailors or join the navy.

With the full support of the kingdom came a steady supply of people and funds, which only invited more people and funds, along with food, daily necessities, luxuries, alcohol, women... This rapid development was accompanied by a deterioration of public safety, of course. *This is all gonna give the count a never-ending headache...*

By comparison, things in Yamano County were moving along nicely. The fishing haul had grown dramatically thanks to the fishing boats and nets, and the repairs to the roads had made delivering fresh fish to neighboring territories a snap. A great variety of manufactured goods were being delivered to the capital as well.

The mizuame got a better reception than Mitsuha could have hoped for, and she was shipping it to the capital as well. It had a long shelf life, which helped. And the popcorn was finally ready for harvest. Now it just needed to be dried and delivered to the capital. There was now a steady supply of popcorn in this world, which meant it would no longer need to be brought from Japan. That was a relief; having anyone's livelihood depend on an enterprise that couldn't

continue without her was bad for Mitsuha's heart.

The board games, meanwhile, were now being produced at a more relaxed pace. Mitsuha had forbidden the mountain villagers from pushing themselves too hard or prioritizing it over other work. The dried shiitake were ready as well, and Mitsuha was satisfied with the taste. She planned to take them with her the next time she "officially" went to the capital.

The villagers had also finally succeeded at making some paper. It was still a little rough to write on, but they could improve that over time. Trial production was going to continue for a while, but the finish line was in sight. Unfortunately, it still wasn't a particularly profitable option to use for the lightning corn. They would also need an adhesive if they wanted to make bags. *I wonder what would work... Starch glue, I guess?*

Next, she visited Randy. When she told him to forget about crossbows and move on to researching guns, he collapsed to the floor with the crossbow part he was currently making clutched in his hands. Despite this initial reaction, however, he had now devoted himself wholeheartedly to studying the guns they had captured. His biggest concern was the durability of his recreations. *I wonder if it's a problem with the iron composition?*

Making Minié rifles using smoothbore guns as a reference would be difficult. The increased pressure in the barrel caused the metal to wear down significantly faster. At least they still had years to figure this out. The guns would be less difficult than the ships and cannons. The rifling might be a challenge to produce, but the guns didn't need to be as revolutionary as Minié rifles had been on Earth. Worst-case scenario, they could just use Minié bullets in a smoothbore gun or decrease the amount of gunpowder to place less of a

burden on the barrel.

If they simply replicated the captured ships and guns, Vanel's superior technology and strength would come into play—decisively so. Mitsuha hoped that using more advanced methods of production would make up for this, and her adoptive homeland could improve its technological prowess over time.

All of this would increase her people's incomes, which would in turn increase her tax revenue. Once papermaking began in earnest and her agricultural reforms began to produce greater yields, Mitsuha would be done with reforms for the time being. They could expect increased sales to Bozes County, and once the sailing ships were up and running, Mitsuha would start receiving one third of the profits from trade.

Oh, will that count toward my earnings as a viscountess, or my personal earnings? I guess I'll be getting that money as a result of defending my domain, so it should probably go to the county budget...

Either way, the kingdom was entering a turbulent new era. The economic development from the naval port had brought both light and dark into Bozes County, throwing the territory into chaos. The capital, meanwhile, was in a festive mood as the people celebrated their initial victory in the face of an unprecedented crisis. The nobles of low and medium rank who lived north of the capital were giddy with excitement at the whiff of increased financial prosperity. Other nobles with good sense remained wary of the present crisis and relied on Mitsuha to prepare for the worst. And some in the royal palace wanted to drag Mitsuha along on diplomatic missions to other countries in the hopes of forming a united front against the enemy.

Amidst all that, a message arrived from Count Bozes: "I can't possibly

make it to the capital for the next ballroom season. Please go by yourself.”

All right, the carriage I ordered from Earth is ready, so I'll practice driving it and get to the capital on my own! Though I'll skip most of the journey by jumping, of course.

And I'm gonna need a coachman when I get to the capital...

“You kids have really done it now!!” Mitsuha shouted.

I'm gonna find the ringleader and give them a noogie! I'm fine with them selling dolls of me, but the hair was way out of bounds! That's just creepy!!

Philip cowered in fear. He definitely didn't seem like the ringleader; the boy worshiped her, and would never do anything so disrespectful. In which case...

Mitsuha scanned the room until she saw a girl averting her eyes. It was the nine-year-old who had designed the logo for the stall.

It was you?!

Mitsuha gave the girl her well-deserved noogie, forbade her from ever going behind her back like that again, told her she was garnishing a fifth of her sales, and then forgave her.

She's only nine now, imagine what she'll be like when she grows up... I'm gonna recommend her to Petz as an apprentice! She's way too dangerous to leave at the orphanage unsupervised!

But the dolls are selling like hotcakes, apparently. Hold on, the kids charged how much for them?! Are the people who bought them okay in the head?! Maybe figurines and body pillow—no, don't think about it!

Mitsuha took a few deep breaths to calm herself down. “So, does anyone

want to work as my coachman while I'm in the capital?"

Whoops, I just started a big fight. They all really want the job...

In the end, Mitsuha hired two boys and one girl as drivers—one to serve as primary coachman, and the other two as substitutes. The children would continue to live at the orphanage as usual and be ready to come to her store when needed. She would also entrust her carriage and horse to the orphanage, and pay a separate fee for the horse's care. That would help her drivers get to know the animal, and hopefully provide the rest of the children with a learning experience as well.

How will I summon them, you ask? Well, there are always two or three kids loitering around my store waiting for a job.

Mitsuha paid the children in advance and instructed them to practice driving so they'd be ready the next time she came to the capital. She reminded them to take good care of the horse and get comfortable with it, too.

The director had a creepy smile plastered on his face throughout her entire visit. Maybe it had something to do with the massive profits they had made from the unsettling dolls.

Aren't you supposed to be a selfless clergyman? Don't go over to the dark side!

Mitsuha returned to her domain and took some time to think.

Can I follow the count's example and skip ballroom season this time? The capital's a madhouse right now... No, I guess I can't get away with that. I'm the whole reason everything's in such an uproar, and I need to speak to the king

about what's been going on.

“You can’t miss the board game tournaments, Lady Mitsuha!” Miriam pointed out.

I had completely forgotten about that...

“H-How many people do you think are going to enter?” Mitsuha asked.

“We’ve shipped over thirty thousand games, and we can expect about as many participants.”

“Wha... Are you serious?!” Mitsuha was stunned. *Help! I've fallen and I can't get up!*

By Miriam’s estimation, about eighty-seven percent of people who had bought a game were expected to participate *before* the invasion. Now that number had climbed to ninety-eight percent, if not higher.

“It’s really not so surprising. The winners will get to spend time alone with the most popular person in the kingdom right now—you. They’ll be able to talk to you about anything they want, and even pat your head. Just think about how much money we could make by selling time alone with the Lightning Archpriestess... Nobles and big-time merchants would pay dozens, no, hundreds of gold coins for a few hours with you. There’s no way anyone who’s allowed to enter the tournaments won’t give it a shot, even if they know they can’t possibly win.”

This is really bad! These tournaments are gonna cause chaos in the capital!

Mitsuha called an emergency meeting. She invited all of her servants because she wanted to hear the opinions of normal people.

“...And that’s the situation. Does anyone have any ideas to fix this?”

Mitsuha asked.

Her servants stared at her in dumbfounded silence.

“You did this to yourself, Mitsuha!”

“I’m well aware of that, Colette! Keep your comments to yourself and try to think of a solution. I’m begging you!”

Silence again. Everyone seemed to be giving it serious thought, but to no avail. Until...

“Um...” It was Noelle, the girl who was almost sold off by her parents to work as a merchant’s apprentice.

Did she think of something?

“Um, what if we convince people they have more to gain by *not* participating?”

Huh?

“Maybe we can give something to anyone who’s allowed to participate but decides not to.”

Sh-She’s a genius!

“That’s it!” Mitsuha cried.

Mitsuha spent the rest of the meeting surveying her servants as to what normal people thought of her and what kinds of goods and services they would find most attractive. Then she dismissed the servants and continued the meeting with just her brain trust: Miriam, Colette, and Noelle, because she had come up with the idea.

“We’ll start the tournament by having all participants come to reception to receive a black-and-white portrait of Mitsuha. Once they receive their portrait, we’ll efface part of the branding on their board to prevent them from registering

multiple times. Participants will then find an opponent on their own, and the winner will take the loser's portrait.

"All winners will then continue challenging people who have played the same number of matches as them, taking all their opponents' portraits when they win. Four wins will net a person sixteen black-and-white portraits, which they will then be able to exchange for one color portrait," Miriam said.

"Yeah," Colette chimed in. "That way, people who don't think they're very good will withdraw after registering 'cause they'll be afraid of losing their portrait. Then what if we made it so that anyone who gets a color portrait can shake Mitsuha's hand in exchange for a stamp on their portrait saying they can't use it to compete anymore?"

Ooh, that's just the kind of wit I expect from her!

Fortunately, they hadn't revealed the exact prize list yet, so they could still make adjustments. Making the prizes for third and fourth place the same, and ditto for fifth through eighth, would simplify the tournament—there would be no need to hold matches to determine third place or fifth through eighth place if the prizes were identical. Handshakes were quick and easy, and Mitsuha had no problem giving them out to decrease the number of matches.

Mitsuha was also going to call in her many favors with the king and have him supply soldiers to patrol and prevent fights.

I'll use a risograph service to print all the copies of the portraits. And no, that's not a mistranslation of "lithograph."

You know what, I feel like this might actually work. All I can do now is pray!

The prize list would be as follows:

1st place: An afternoon of walking and shopping with Mitsuha, followed by dinner. Head pats included.

2nd place: Walking and shopping with Mitsuha. Head pats included.

3rd and 4th place: A one-hour lunch with Mitsuha. Head pats included.

5th through 8th place: The right to squish Mitsuha's cheeks. Head pats included.

All who get their color portrait (worth sixteen black-and-white portraits) invalidated with a stamp receive a handshake.

What the hell is this?! Miriam, Colette, and Noelle made that prize list entirely on their own. They said everyone would be satisfied with it. I wonder if I can trust them on that...

Handshakes and head pats are one thing, but where the hell did squishing my cheeks come from?! ...Oh. Colette, obviously. She's just proposing things she wants to do herself! It's not normal to do that to anyone past elementary school age! Though Micchan and my other friends did keep doing it to me all through high school... But I don't want total strangers doing it!

Well, no point fretting about it now. This prize list was decided in an official meeting, so blowing it up now would only hurt morale. I also can't think of any other prizes that tick all the boxes: something extra specially effective that will attract customers without using any of the county budget. Hrngh...

This is all part of my job as lord of this county! A little embarrassment won't hurt me! Urgh, this sucks...

The participants who gathered multiple color portraits would likely want to play until the end rather than trade them in, so they didn't need to come up with any other prizes. They were good on that front.

Mitsuha decided to print multiple different portraits. It would have been boring if they were all the same, and variety would make it more exciting for collectors. There wouldn't have been much value in simple drawings, so she decided to use photographs and make them high enough quality that there could be no imitations.

She would ask the zany dressmaker to make an outfit for her and take the pictures. Mitsuha was a firm believer in using whatever connections she could to curb expenses.

I'll combine the portraits left over after the tournament into complete sets and sell them at a high price! Now, that can go toward my personal savings!

Mitsuha obtained her custom-made carriage from Earth and brought it to her county. It was a small carriage, light but sturdy, built with titanium and an aluminum alloy called duralumin. Both materials were used in aircrafts, and were tough relative to their light weight. They were optimal for the frame, even if they were expensive.

The carriage had independent suspension. That was also expensive because of the extra parts required, but it would improve stability. Mitsuha didn't care that it was too complicated to be repaired in this world; if it ever broke down, she could just take it to Earth and get it fixed there. There was no need to hold back with something only she would use.

The logo the girl from the orphanage had designed was emblazoned on both

sides of the carriage. *It's not my fault! It's to ward off bandits!* Mitsuha had considered intentionally luring out bandits and eliminating them to improve the safety of the roads, but the constant violence would have grown tiresome. There was always the chance they would attack with bows and arrows or roll boulders down a cliff, so no sense in taking unnecessary risks.

Besides, that kind of volunteer work wouldn't fly outside of her own county. It was part of a lord's job to keep the roads in their territory safe, and Mitsuha couldn't just interfere with that. The logo would keep her and Petz's carriages safe. She also didn't want to get roped into a conflict with some wicked lord who was conspiring with the bandits.

Mitsuha gave the servants at her residence very strict orders before leaving for the capital: if anyone connected to the Bozes family arrived, they were to insist that she went to the capital and had been gone the whole time. She didn't want them to find out she was occasionally jumping back home and wandering around the surrounding territories searching for opportunities to make money. She also made it clear to Anton that he was to tell her during their scheduled radio contact if a member of the Bozes family had arrived. Mitsuha planned to check with Anton every time before jumping back, and she put lookouts on the roads as well. That should be enough to fool them into thinking she was in the capital full-time.

Man, this sure is a lot of effort... I guess it wouldn't really matter if they saw me or got word that I had returned. The count himself already knows that I can make the trip using traversal. That said, I don't even want to think about how Lady Iris would react if she found out.

And thus, it was time for Mitsuha to depart for the capital in her high-performance carriage. She was the coachman, and there were no passengers. Her subordinates vehemently opposed this solo journey, but she overrode them all. Willem could do nothing but shrug and give a wry smile.

The carriage was loaded with dried shiitake mushrooms, dried lightning corn kernels, paper samples, and mizuame as a gift for the orphans, it being a little too expensive for them at Petz's prices. *They contributed to my personal savings with their earnings from the wooden dolls, so I figured I'd give them a treat. I feel bad about punishing them, too... That was the stick, this is the carrot.*

Mitsuha learned how to drive a carriage from one of the former prisoners who had been a coachman in a former life. He was more than happy to help; it must have been a nice change of pace for him. The delicious food and whiskey she gave him as thanks might have had something to do with it, too.

Mitsuha had bought the horse from Bozes County, as Yamano County only had a handful of plow horses. It was an elegant white animal that the count had selected personally. He said that a white horse would suit her best, which made her blush.

I named the horse Silver, obviously. All right, time to go!

“Hi-yo, Silver! Away!”

Mitsuha had made the trip between Bozes County and the capital by carriage one and a half times, so she was familiar enough with the roads to jump any time she wanted, but she intended to proceed normally for a while, at least. There were a few reasons for that: she wanted to get used to driving the carriage, she wanted

to befriend Silver, and she was planning on spending the night in a few towns along the way. It would be problematic if rumor got around that Viscountess Yamano had never visited any of the towns between her county and the capital. Spending the night at least once in some of the towns would prevent that from happening. No one would expect her to stop at every town on every trip, so in the future the people of each town would just assume she had stopped elsewhere.

Mitsuha didn't see any other travelers until she reached the road connecting Bozes County and the capital, which was crowded with people traveling by carriage and on foot. At least ninety percent of them were headed toward Bozes County, as one might expect.

My carriage sure is drawing a lot of attention. Its appearance might be a little unusual, but it's not like anyone can tell what it's made out of or how high quality it is just by looking at it. You'd have to actually ride in it to understand how light and sturdy it is, and how much more comfortable the springs make it. Silver probably looks like a champ pulling the carriage all on his own, too, when in reality it's just much lighter than it looks.

I'm gonna choose to ignore the feeling that it's actually me everyone is staring at...

That evening, Mitsuha arrived at a roadside town in another viscount's territory. It may have had other sources of revenue, but it seemed to be primarily a post town that profited off the travelers passing through. *Yamano County's on the edge of the freakin' continent, so this kind of business would never work there... Damn it!*

Figuring it wouldn't be a good look for a noble to stay at a cheap inn,

Mitsuha picked the fanciest one she could find and walked inside. The common room was packed with guests, who likely represented the wealthiest of the people headed for Bozes County. Just when she was about to leave to find a different inn, a man who looked to have some position in the establishment rushed toward her.

“Welcome, my lady,” he said. “You honor us with your presence. Let me show you to a room right away.”

Is he a clerk? Or the proprietor? I'll just assume he's a clerk for now.

It seemed like he knew who Mitsuha was, which wasn't all that surprising, seeing as this town was on the road between Yamano County and the capital—luxurious inns like this probably made it a point to collect information on any nobles who might pass through.

I'm impressed he realized it was me, though. I'm not really dressed like a noble. Have portraits of me been circulating or something? It's like I'm a wanted criminal...

The town was too far from Yamano County to be the first stop on a journey with a normal carriage or extra carts carrying luggage. Conversely, it was a perfect place to spend your first night on the way to Bozes or Yamano County if you intended to make a second stop and arrive by noon the next day.

“My carriage is parked out front. Please take good care of my horse,” Mitsuha replied.

“Of course, madam! And your companions and coachman?”

“Oh, I’m the coachman.”

“Huh?”

“I drove the carriage myself. And I don’t have anyone with me.”

The clerk stared at her open-mouthed, but being the professional he was, he recovered more or less right away and promptly gave out orders to take care of her carriage, then led Mitsuha to her room personally.

Yeah, I'll just stay here. It's not that late yet, but the next town is a ways away. I'll take the extra time I have before dinner to ask for some hot water and give myself a scrub. It won't really feel like I'm traveling if I jump back to my house in Japan to take a bath every night.

And so, shortly after she requested it, a tub of hot water was brought to her room. She took off her clothes to wipe herself down with a towel, when suddenly the door swung open.

“Archpr—”

Bang bang!

You bet I'm gonna shoot some random armed man who waltzes into my room without knocking. Especially when I'm naked and the door was locked, which I KNOW it was.

The PPS she always wore under her arm she had put on the bed along with her clothes, so she grabbed the Beretta 92F from a nearby bag. She generally carried that one around instead of the big, heavy 93R, unless there was a high chance of combat.

Since Mitsuha was firing the first bullet at half cock, it was difficult to pull the trigger with her small hands, which lowered the accuracy of her shot. Accordingly, she aimed at his leg so as not to accidentally hit him in the heart. The first shot automatically cocked the hammer and allowed her to aim accurately at the man's right shoulder for the second.

“Ahhhhh!” The intruder screamed and fell to the floor. Mitsuha rushed to

pull the blanket off the bed and wrap it around herself before anyone else could enter her room.

“What happened?!” someone shouted as a crowd of employees and guests crowded around her door.

“An armed man barged into my room with no warning while I was washing myself,” Mitsuha replied. “Get some soldiers here, right away!”

Livid at the man for trying to attack an underage girl before the sun had even set, the guests pinned him down and took his sword. A few people ran out of the room to summon the town guard.

Wait, was the sun not being down the problem to them?! Would they have been okay with it if he snuck into my room at night?!

“P-Please wait! There’s been a misunderstanding!” the clerk yelled, desperately forcing his way through the crowd, his face pale. “That man is a messenger from the viscount! He’s no intruder!”

Gimme a break, Mitsuha thought in disbelief. “Not an intruder?? He forced his way into my room with a weapon while I was naked! Without even knocking! How did he unlock the door, anyway?! He *has* to be a criminal!!”

“W-Well, he said the viscount would be angry if you rejected his invitation without even opening the door to speak to him... He begged for my help, so I gave him a spare key,” the clerk explained, still pale.

You think that makes it okay?!

“So you’re saying that you, an employee of this inn, took this armed man’s story at face value and gave him a spare key so he could enter my room regardless of *my* wishes? If he forced his way into my room because he wasn’t going to take no for an answer, then you’re saying he was going to take me

along with him whether I liked it or not, right? Whether I agreed to go or not?

“Also, even if he *is* a messenger from the viscount, there’s no way he should’ve been able to find out I was here so soon. Which means someone from this inn told the viscount I was here. So you’re brazenly admitting that this inn sells information on its guests and gives armed men spare keys to girls’ rooms as a matter of course. *And that the viscount is in on it.*”

The clerk collapsed weakly to the floor, as if he had finally realized the true import of what he had done.

Mitsuha explained the situation to the guards when they arrived, and they took the man into custody. She didn’t know if the criminal was telling the truth or not, so she only gave them the facts of the incident: an armed man entered her room using a passkey while she was washing herself, necessitating defensive measures. With everyone still crowding around, she hadn’t had a chance to change and was still wrapped in the bedsheets. There were a large number of witnesses, some of whom had helped take the intruder’s sword and pin him down. All this evidence left no reason to doubt her story.

The guards were unable to hide their disgust as they led the man away. Not only did he attempt to attack a child, but he was also pathetic enough to let her fight him off. The man, who still seemed to be in shock from the gunshot wounds, just trembled and made no attempt to argue as they led him away.

The first bullet had grazed his thigh while the second bullet had pierced his right shoulder, smack on target. *I may not be the most experienced marksman, but not even I could miss at that range. He wasn’t even two yards away. Four feet, maybe a little more. Neither shot hit a major artery or anything, so he’ll be*

fine. He's not in any danger, and his injuries will heal.

A butler and a group of guards were making a fuss by a carriage parked outside, but Mitsuha paid it no mind. *Nothing to do with me.*

“I’ll be leaving right away,” Mitsuha announced.

“Huh...?” the clerk responded.

“Did you really expect me to stay? I’d rather sleep outside than stay at a dangerous inn where the employees sell out their customers. No one from the Yamano clan will ever set foot in here again.”

“Did she just say ‘Yamano’?”

“Now that you mention it, that did sound like lightning...”

“The Lightning Archpriestess?”

“This inn tried to sell out the Lightning Archpriestess?!?”

The customers spoke to each other in whispers before raising their voices in anger.

“I’m leaving, too!”

“Same here! Square our account right away!”

“We’re outta here, too. We’ll find somewhere else to stay!”

They announced their intention to leave one after the other. None of them wanted anything to do with the inn any longer.

“I will convey to His Majesty your testimony that the man you aided in breaking into my room is a servant of the local lord,” Mitsuha announced. “Now, if you’ll excuse me.”

Chaos descended upon the stables as guests suddenly began streaming out of the inn right before sunset. Fortunately, the other guests let Mitsuha leave first. Preparing her small one-horse carriage didn't take much time anyway. She wondered if the guests would simply move to other inns, or travel to another town altogether. The next town in the direction of the capital was a little far, but the next one in the direction of Bozes County was relatively close.

I'm obviously just gonna jump to shorten the journey. Traveling after dark is dangerous for a newbie coachman. Once again, this is a perfect time to use Kushana's famous line: "If not now, when?"

Once she was out of sight, Mitsuha jumped to the outskirts of the next town. It was already sunset when she arrived. This time, she decided to stay at a regular inn. The first place that caught her eye was a one-story building that also had a tavern attached.

Looks as typical as an inn gets. I choose you!

"Are there any rooms available? And can I leave my carriage with you?" Mitsuha asked the girl sitting behind the reception counter, who looked to be all of six years old. Mitsuha assumed the proprietors had their hands full preparing dinner, and this was their daughter. *If not, they're violating the Labor Standards Act!*

"Yes, of course! Hey, big bro!" the girl called out.

Good, she does seem to be their daughter after all.

A boy about the same height as Mitsuha emerged from the back. *Which probably makes him about eleven...?*

“Please take care of our guest’s carriage,” the girl said to him.

“Got it,” he replied.

Mitsuha left her carriage with the boy, got the key to her room from the girl, and decided to go ahead and eat dinner right away. The only items she carried with her into the inn were a near-empty canteen and a small bag with some personal effects. It was little enough that she could hold onto them without needing to go drop them off in her room before heading to the dining room.

She ordered the most popular meat dish, and as she began to eat, she listened to the snippets of conversation around her.

“...Then she drank all the seawater, an’ the ocean dried up in the blink of an eye...”

Sounds like a dad telling a story to his children. There are definitely some myths about drinking seawater. I think there’s one from Norse mythology about Thor...? Oh, but, he didn’t succeed at it, did he...

“And with the seawater gone, the enemy ships were left stranded in the mud.”

“Wow, so that’s how the Archpriestess captured the enemy’s gigantic battleships!”

Pffffttt! Mitsuha spat out her drink.

“That’s disgusting, miss,” someone at the next table complained.

“S-Sorry...”

Where the hell did that rumor come from?! It’s absurd!

She sheepishly buried her beet-red face in her bowl as she ate. Just then, a man who looked to be in his mid-twenties strolled into the bar. He was wearing a hat and holding a small harp-like instrument. Waving a casual greeting to the

little girl at reception, he walked to a spot in front of the tables.

Doesn't seem to be a customer...

The man put his hat upside down on the floor in front of him, seated himself in a chair, and began to strum his instrument.

Oh, he's a minstrel or musician looking for tips.

“Listen well, my friends, as I sing of how the famed Lightning Archpriestess drank up the ocean and captured the enemy’s gigantic battleships—”

“IT WAS YOUEUUU!!!”

Before Mitsuha knew what was happening, the restaurant had gone quiet, the minstrel had slipped out of his chair, and she was standing over him with a fork gripped menacingly in one hand.

“A-Archpriestess?”

Crap! Now I've done it!

Once Mitsuha regained her composure, she scolded the minstrel harshly and warned him not to spread any more horrible rumors. When the man lamented that he was relying on that story to make a living, she relented and told him a version of the battle to defend the capital (edited for the people of that world, of course). She simplified “Machine gun one! Ten o’clock to two o’clock, mow them down in five seconds! Fire!” to simply “Mow them down!” and so on. No one from this world was on the front lines during that battle, so she figured this story would be enough to pay for his meals for the time being. He could use that time to come up with his next epic.

Hearing this tale from the Archpriestess herself, the minstrel was moved to

tears. He thanked her profusely, and asked for proof that it had come directly from her, so she wrote a few lines on a piece of paper and handed it to him. *That was smart of him. He knows what he's doing.*

Afterward, a group of guests who had also listened to the story bought her drinks, and they all had a merry time. Mitsuha wasn't hurting for money, but it still felt good to be treated. It made her feel truly liked and accepted.

She gave herself over to the jolly atmosphere and drank everything they gave her.

Hey, I'm just following the local laws! When in Rome, and all that!

The next thing she knew, the proprietor's daughter was seated snugly in her lap and squirming ticklishly under Mitsuha's gentle stroking.

Huh? When in the world did...?

Mitsuha had no idea just how out of control that story was going to get. She didn't foresee how much the minstrel would embellish it—which, it turns out, is what minstrels do—or understand the consequences of giving him a written testimonial. When she later received a special invitation to a play that professed to be “The True Story of the Battle to Save the Capital as Told by the Lightning Archpriestess and Presented with Her Written Approval,” yet so altered as to be utterly unrecognizable as the account she had given, her eyes rolled back in her head and her soul escaped through her open mouth.

Mitsuha awoke the next morning feeling refreshed and went down to the ground floor to eat breakfast. For some reason, there were only a few people eating. *Ah, the guests might be a little late leaving the inn today...*

The rest of her journey went smoothly. She jumped every now and then and arrived in the capital on the fourth day.

First order of business: the orphanage.

“Archpriestess, this latest batch of lightning corn is pretty low quality...”

It's the schemer girl!

“This batch was made in Yamano County. That's the lightning corn you'll be using from now on,” Mitsuha replied.

“Huh? Where was it coming from before?”

“From my country. We were selling it at a huge loss because it had to be shipped here by boat. I've just been trying to hold out until the harvest in Yamano County was ready. We'll actually be making a profit now, though, so please do your best to sell it. I'm going to switch to bags made in Yamano County soon, too. They might be a little harder to use, but... On the bright side, we won't have to worry about running out of lightning corn or bags if the boats from my country stop coming. A merchant named Petz will be bringing regular shipments from my domain.”

“...Okay.”

This girl really was smart. She could see why they had to switch to domestic products. Unfortunately, Mitsuha's next announcement was going to be a sad one.

“Also, because we've sufficiently spread the word about lightning corn, and because production in my county is now in full swing, it won't be long before I start selling it on the open market.”

The children gasped.

“B-But that means...” the schemer trailed off.

“Yep, you’re gonna have competition,” Mitsuha finished for her.

“Weren’t you the one who got mad at *us* for going behind your back?!” the girl yelled, her face flushed with anger.

I knew they weren’t gonna take this well...

“I told you from the start that the stall’s purpose was to advertise a special new product from my county, remember? Do you really think you can sell *all* the lightning corn produced in my domain at this one stall?”

The children fell silent. The schemer simply puffed out her cheeks. Mitsuha pointed out that now they could just buy stock from Petz and operate as an independent business, which meant they wouldn’t have to give her a share of the profits anymore, but the girl argued that losing the backing of Yamano County would hurt them in the fierce lightning corn wars to come.

Wow, she thought that far ahead...

One long debate later, they arrived at a series of compromises: The children could no longer call the stall an official Yamano County business, but they didn’t have to go out of their way to draw attention to that fact. They had to remove the line on their sign that said the stall was directly managed by the Archpriestess, but they could continue to use the anti-bandit logo, and they could still claim to be the “original” lightning corn purveyors. Mitsuha not being involved anymore also meant that the orphanage could keep all the revenue.

The children were reluctant, but in the end they agreed to these terms.

I’m pretty sure the people of the capital associate lightning corn so heavily with the Lightning Archpriestess and with this stall specifically that, even without using my name, they’re gonna have a major leg up on any late arrivals

to the market—unless popcorn is sold at a significantly cheaper price elsewhere, which shouldn't happen because the orphans are acquiring their stock directly from Petz AND all revenue will go straight to the orphanage. In practice, they have no labor costs.

Oh, what should I do about the portable stoves and gas? Should I sell them to the orphanage, or take them back and tell the kids to use normal wood-burning stoves? If their sales slow down once competition increases, they might be able to keep up with demand using a charcoal brazier...

“Lightning Archpriestess, a-are you gonna stop visiting us?”

Oh no, the boys look like they’re gonna cry!

“O-Of course not! I’ll drop by every now and then to make sure the quality of the lightning corn hasn’t dropped!”

I thought this might happen, so I’m gonna cheer them up with the mizuame I brought, then scram!

The director of the orphanage seemed content to leave all the shady business talk to the children, just so long as they made enough money to keep the orphanage running.

Wait, shouldn’t the adults be a little more involved here?!

Chapter 29

The Big Showdown

Mitsuha's next stop after the orphanage was Bernd's restaurant, Paradise.

"Bernd, can you do me a favor? I want you to make dishes using this new ingredient and advertise them as much as possible!"

"You always show up out of nowhere, huh, Mitsuha..." Bernd emerged from the kitchen with an exasperated look, followed by his daughter, Aleena, and his apprentice, Anel.

"Are these...mushrooms? Looks like they've been dried..."

Bernd's a good chef. He's never seen shiitake before, but he knows a mushroom when he sees one.

"They're delicious! The best way to prepare them is to soak them in water and put them in soups and stews. The water you use to soak the mushrooms makes an amazing savory stock. Let's go ahead and start soaking them now so you can use them tomorrow! I'll be back then!" Mitsuha submerged the dried shiitake in water, then made a quick exit as Bernd and the customers looked on with jaws agape.

Time to return to my home away from home in the capital, Mitsuha's General Store!

"Mitsuha, what took you so long?!" Sabine whined. She was already waiting at the shop when Mitsuha arrived.

Where does this girl get her information from?!

“Father is dying to see you. Come, we’re going to the royal palace right now! Oh, that’s an unusual carriage. Did you make it yourself?” Sabine asked, putting her mountain bike inside it without bothering to ask permission.

No, you can just ride alongside m—oh, she’s not listening... She’s too excited to ride in the strange carriage.

Mitsuha herself drove. It would’ve been too much to ask the orphan she hired as her coachman to drive the princess to the royal palace as their very first job. Sabine sat inside the carriage, treating the ride like some kind of test drive.

“Wow! This is amazing! It doesn’t hurt my butt at all!” she shouted excitedly.

It is a stark difference compared to this world’s carriages, isn’t it.

“Where was this made... I don’t suppose I even need to ask, do I...”

Yeah, so don’t.

“Hey, Mitsuha. Let’s play some shogi la—”

“NO WAY!!”

Crap, she thinks she can get whatever she wants from me right now. I might have to find a way to knock her down a peg...

The meeting at the royal palace consisted of the usual faces—the king, the chancellor, Marquis Eiblinger—plus a few more, including Crown Prince Lionel and the minister of finance. Mitsuha had already given the king a general report over the radio, and Marquis Eiblinger had filled in the details, so they didn’t need to talk about anything that had happened prior to the marquis’s return to the capital. Accordingly, she focused on what happened afterward, and on their prospects going forward.

“...In short, most of the former prisoners are being cooperative. We’re having them teach our people how to operate the captured boats and cannons. We also have people studying their ships and weapons with the goal of making our own. Our technological inferiority means we’ll never match their strength by simply imitating them, so we’re developing high-explosive projectiles to gain the upper hand.”

Everyone nodded along quietly to Mitsuha’s explanation.

“Making ships and weapons is nothing more than a stopgap, however. If we don’t foster improvement in our fundamental scientific knowledge and technological prowess, we won’t develop past the technology we’ve just acquired, and the enemy will leave us in the dust. We need to work as hard as we can to catch up. That said, if the next survey fleet arrives sooner than expected, we can always buy ourselves more time by just making it disappear like we did the last one.”

“What?!”

“I know, I know, but it would be perfectly plausible for the next fleet to go missing for unknown reasons, too. There are endless disasters that could occur. The crew members could get sick and die from water that some well-intentioned locals gave them, or their ships could be attacked in the middle of the night after they let their guards down because of a warm welcome...”

The king and the others stared at her in disturbed silence.

They’re probably all thinking I’m the last person they’d ever want to make an enemy of... Oh, shut up!

“Also,” Mitsuha continued, “the next fleet might end up landing at a different country entirely. It’s likely just happenstance that they showed up here

this time. We need to spread word throughout the continent as quickly as possible.”

“Hmm, that will be tricky, but I suppose it must be done. Can I count on your cooperation in that matter?” the king asked.

“I guess there’s no other choice... So yes, I’ll accompany you abroad.”

“Glad to hear it. Also, I hate to ask this, but would you be willing to reach out to your homeland...?”

Mitsuha knew what he wanted, but that wasn’t going to work.

“There would be no point. My country is too far away and would have nothing to gain from helping us. The distance is too great for trade, and we don’t have anything worth offering, anyway. We also lack the military strength or influence to make much of an ally. They have no reason to take an interest in this kingdom other than the fact that I happen to live here.

“There would be risk involved, too. If I died a premature death, my country might blame this kingdom for overworking me and take an interest in the *bad* sense. It’s safer not to involve yourselves with them,” she explained.

The king and chancellor hung their heads in disappointment.

“Anyway, there’s no guarantee it will come to war. That is, we *are* technically at war right now, but that’s only because of an unfortunate misunderstanding with a slave trader who exaggerated his position. That can still be undone. The only way this ends without conflict, though, is if the Kingdom of Vanel sees us as an equal power, rather than a small country they can easily push around.”

Mitsuha went on to discuss the plans to finish the shipyard, make prototypes of

small boats, and finally move on to official warships, and after touching on a handful of other topics and making some proposals, it came time to bring the meeting to a close.

“Oh, before you go, I’d like to ask a small favor of you, Your Majesty. You do owe me a lot at this point, after all,” Mitsuha said.

“Wh-What do you need?” the king asked, looking a little scared.

“I was hoping you could lend me a large detachment of soldiers for the big showdown.”

“Huh? You should know you have my full support. I’ll supply as many crewmen and soldiers as you need.”

“Oh, no, not that showdown. I’m talking about the one in the capital. You know, the reversi and shogi tournaments. We’re expecting an absurd number of people to enter, which will make it a nightmare to manage... The capital might be totally dysfunctional for a few days. Apologies in advance.”

“Uh...”

The king ended up granting Mitsuha the guards she wanted for the tournaments. She could relax on that front.

Oh, and I remembered to tell the king what happened on the way to the capital. I said I would tell him, and I always keep my word.

She made sure to say that she didn’t think the local lord had ordered his vassal to take the rash actions he did. The clerk at the inn was the true offender for giving the man a key. The lord probably did just want to invite her over for a pleasant chat. If that was the case, she felt a little bad about the harsh accusations she had made in her fury after his vassal walked in on her naked.

The lord might even have rushed after me to apologize, but I had already jumped away. I'll gladly accept any apology he offers at a later date. I told the king about what happened so that he and other nobles wouldn't blame the lord if talk of the event reached their ears. I was definitely not just tattling on him. His county is on the route between my own and the capital, so I need to establish friendly relations.

Hmm, he might be more pliable in negotiations if he feels guilty about what happened. I smell money! Maybe I'll ask him to do some maintenance on the road.

Mitsuha went back to Paradise the next day and unveiled a variety of dishes made with shiitake. Bernd and the others loved them and started devising shiitake dishes of their own right away.

Now that she had a guaranteed customer, Mitsuha would have Petz start carrying shiitake on his regular trips between her county and the capital. Chefs at other restaurants would definitely begin buying shiitake once they tried them at Paradise and learned they were available for purchase, and it wouldn't be long before housewives started cooking with them at home, too.

...Wait, what's Marcel doing here? He's the chef for Adelaide's family, he doesn't work at Paradise...does he?

Mitsuha went to the mercenary guild next. She wanted to hire some novice mercenaries to help out on the day of the tournaments, but ran into a snag.

“No one will be here? On those days specifically? What if I move the dates of the tournaments?” Mitsuha asked.

“Then no one will be here on *those* days,” the girl at reception replied.

“What? Why?!”

Why is she telling me that any two days I pick won’t work?!

“Because nearly all of our mercenaries will be entering your tournaments. So no matter what days you decide to hold them, there will be no mercenaries here for you to hire,” the receptionist finally explained.

Oh, duh! Why didn’t I think of that? Mitsuha sighed. *What do I do now?*

Where did Mitsuha always turn to in times of need? The orphanage, of course!

“Hmm, I was thinking the tournaments would be a great time to put all hands on deck and sell as much lightning corn as we can,” the schemer girl told Mitsuha when she tried to hire the orphans to help with the tournaments.

Apparently they were planning on borrowing pots from their neighbors, mass-producing popcorn on an assembly line, then having all the orphans walk around and sell it at the event. They wanted to make one last killing before they lost their monopoly.

I can’t believe this girl! I need Petz to get her outta here, stat!

The orphans probably would have accepted the job if Mitsuha insisted, but she didn’t want to spoil the plan they had worked so hard on. She wished them the best of luck, then withdrew.

“Welcome back, my lady.”

Mitsuha had decided to try the Bozeses’ capital mansion next, where she was greeted by a chorus of servants. She figured they wouldn’t have much to do

without their employers in town.

“Please help me, Rufus!!”

...Wow, he actually agreed to help me. I knew I could count on the butler of the Bozeses' capital mansion!

Rufus said he would leave a skeleton crew to guard the mansion during the two days of tournaments, and lend her the entire rest of the staff. He even said that servants from the Ryner mansion would be able to help, too. Whether that came about through some maid network or via Marcel over at Paradise, Mitsuha didn't know.

This is just like that moment in every RPG where the protagonist is in trouble and all the friends they've made rush to their aid from all over the land! All right, let's do this!

After getting approval from various quarters and checking to make sure there weren't any conflicts with events in the royal palace or elsewhere in the city, Mitsuha decided to hold the tournaments in two weeks' time—she wanted to give anyone coming from other parts of the kingdom plenty of leeway to get there. She also put up posters announcing the dates right away, and had flyers distributed to other towns to make sure the correct information got around. The black-and-white and color portraits were already taken; she could print them at any time.

What do I need to do next... I guess there's not much, actually. The only real problem is how to handle registration and portrait redemption during the event. I'm leaving security to the king's soldiers, and for the first day of the battle royale—ahem, I mean, the tournaments, the entrants will search out their

opponents, so that won't take any effort on my part, either. We'll make brackets for the lucky few who survive to the second day, since that'll require a little more oversight. And the victors who survive to the very end will get to enjoy a delicious dinner with me. Talk about a "royale with cheese"... Woof, sorry.

The tournaments would be held concurrently over the course of two days. The reversi tournament would involve eight rounds the first day and seven the second, for a total of fifteen rounds. That would accommodate up to 32,768 people. Even if half that many showed up, they would only have to cut one round, which wouldn't make much of a difference time-wise.

The notion of sixteen thousand matches taking place simultaneously throughout the capital was still terrifying, though, and the goal of the portraits was to reduce that number as much as possible. If the number of entrants decreased dramatically, they would simply have to adjust on the fly.

I feel like searching for opponents is gonna take longer than actually playing the matches... We'll be able to coordinate the matches on the second day because there will be so many fewer people, but the first day would be straight-up impossible. The players will just have to manage on their own. We're gonna light lamps in the public square at night in case it takes that long.

There weren't nearly as many people playing shogi yet, so that tournament would only entail four rounds on the first day and three on the second. There were fewer matches, but each one would take significantly longer than a game of reversi. *I don't think there'll be any problems on that front. The people here aren't given to lengthy pondering.*

The prizes would be given independently to the winners of the reversi and

shogi tournaments. That meant there would be two first place finishes, two second place finishes, and so on.

I'll be having dinner twice, going on four walks and shopping trips, having four lunches, getting my cheeks squished by eight people...and all sixteen winners will get to pat my head. I might go bald after all. Oh, I'll be fine because of my healing powers. Right.

The sun sank steadily toward the horizon as Mitsuha spent the rest of the day at the Bozes and Ryner mansions explaining the procedures for the tournaments and checking to make sure plans hadn't changed.



“All right, everyone! Let me hear you scream if you want to pat Mitsuha’s head!” Sabine shouted, her voice amplified through a speaker attached to the largest tree in the public square.

“YEEEAAAHHH!” the crowd shouted back in unison.

Crap. I never should’ve let her be the MC. I was gonna do it myself, but Sabine volunteered, saying, “You’re the prize, Mitsuha! You can’t lower yourself to doing a job like that! You need to sit up on that platform and look dignified, like a proper prize!”

Sabine then read the script detailing the rules of the tournaments and finished with a loud declaration: “The inaugural board game tournament starts now!”

Inaugural? I’m not planning on doing a second one, just so you know.

The tournament participants all began looking for opponents at once. Some challenged those nearest them, while others raced around looking for children they thought would make for easy opponents. *I hope those people run into a kid like Sabine!*

After some rethinking, Mitsuha had decided to open registration five days before the tournaments. There was no way they would’ve had time the morning of the event to hand every player a black-and-white portrait and scrape off part of the Yamano branding on their board in return. Even an army of thirty maids would’ve had to register over a thousand people each, which would have taken an ungodly amount of time. Doing the registration beforehand was the right call.

Mitsuha was left with nothing to do once the matches started. Sabine said

she shouldn't wander around during play because it would cause chaos and people wouldn't be able to concentrate, and the others agreed with her. As such, she sat unmoving on her perch, feeling more like a doll to be won than the sponsor of the event.

Having nothing else to do, she decided to do some thinking.

It's been almost a year since I wound up in this world. I've had a few near-death experiences, and made a lot of valuable connections. I owe so much to its people, and many of them have come to rely on me, too. I'm even starting to feel like this world is where I belong.

I never go back to Earth anymore except to take care of the house, show everyone I'm still alive, and procure stuff I need over here. All my friends have moved to the city for college or jobs. Maybe I should just become a person of this world like I told the countries of Earth I was. But I don't want to lose the house that Mom and Dad left me...

If I actually have stopped aging, I wouldn't be able to live in Japan forever anyway. I can use makeup to make myself look older, but that'll only work for about ten years before people realize something is off. Maybe I'll sell the house at that point and tell people I'm moving abroad. I could stay in contact with my friends over email, and after another twenty years I could pretend to be my daughter and go visit them. They'd get so excited about how much I look like their old friend.

At some point I'll have the captain prepare multiple national identities for me. I'm sure there are lots of countries that are loose with that kind of thing. For the right amount of money, you can buy anything from citizenship to a doctorate.

Then I'll prepare safehouses around the world. That way I'll have a bunch of identities and residences ready to go if I ever need them.

One day I'll be a princess from another world blessed with a long lifespan due to her elven blood, and another day I'll be an ordinary girl in rural Switzerland leading a quiet life and looking after her weapons collection. Yet another day I'll be a girl who owns a deserted island in the South Seas and watches over the world from her secret base. But her true identity is—!!

“Mitsuha, how much longer are you going to keep daydreaming?”

Sh-Shut up, Sabine!!

Chapter 30

Que Sera, Sera!

“Mitsuha, someone to see you,” Sabine said. A man who looked to be about thirty was standing beside her.

“It is a pleasure to meet you,” the man said. “I am Baron Humbot from the Herald’s College.”

“...Herald’s College?” Mitsuha had no idea what he might want.

“Quite right. It appears you have chosen a coat of arms but have not yet come to have it registered. I am here to inform you that we have taken care of the paperwork on your behalf. To show our gratitude for all you’ve done, Archpriestess.”

“Oh, thank you very much. Sorry for the trouble... Sabine, go grab one of each of the color portraits and stamp them ‘invalid.’”

“On it!”

Sabine dashed toward the reception table.

...Wait, coat of arms? What’s he talking about?

“Um,” Mitsuha began, “about this coat of arms—”

“Ah, I should have given this to you first. It’s your registration certificate,” the baron cut in, handing Mitsuha a piece of parchment with a design drawn on it.

Damn. I should’ve known. It’s the logo Codename: Schemer Girl designed. The one we use to ward off bandits. Now it’s the official Yamano coat of arms? For as long as my line continues?? I want to die.

Sabine returned with a set of the portraits and gave them to Baron Humbot. The man's face lit up with joy, and he thanked Mitsuha again and again before walking away with flushed cheeks.

Yeah, people are gonna love these pictures... Especially the wedding dress and maid ones. Guess whose fault those are...

The players were given instructions to return to registration when they reached eight wins or couldn't find another opponent, and come evening they started trickling in. The first ones to arrive had apparently already won all their matches, and the servants working reception entered their names into one of the two brackets for the next day. Players who couldn't find an opponent were told to pick someone from the staff other than Mitsuha to play against.

Ah, some middle-aged man just picked a Ryner maid who got one of the first six hundred boards shipped to the capital. He's gonna regret that...

Mwahaha, and that other guy fell right into my trap! He picked a little girl thinking she'd be an easy opponent, but little does he know she's the unbeatable Sabine! I stationed her there to take down cowardly players who thought they could waltz their way to eight wins against easy opponents. Mwahahaha!

I felt bad for the servants who gave up the chance to participate in order to help me out, so I'm giving them all the equivalent of the prize for finishing fifth through eighth. I might actually go bald... Oh yeah, my hair'll grow back thanks to my healing powers. I keep forgetting! Phew...

“I’ve won four games of shogi. Is this where I register for day two?”

Wh-What is Lady Iris doing here?! Oh, only the count was too busy to

come, so the rest of the family left him behind. Poor guy...

According to Lady Iris, the count had told her not to steal opportunities from the common folk, so she entered the shogi tournament, since the vast majority of shogi players were nobles. Alexis and Theodore entered the shogi tournament as well, and Beatrice entered the reversi tournament, but they'd all been knocked out already.

Tough luck. I'll give them some voided color portraits later as gifts. That seems to be what I've mostly ended up using them for.

The first day's matches finally came to an end well after sunset, but the staff's battle was far from done. There were plenty of things that needed doing, including making the tournament brackets for the second day.

In the end, a certain number of people chose to keep their black-and-white portraits and withdraw from the tournament, but not a single person voided their color portrait to receive a handshake. Every single person who won four matches believed in themselves enough to aim for the top. Their spirit was admirable.

All right, I'm gonna sell the rest of these color portraits after the tournament. People would've been upset if they chose to keep their color portrait and withdraw, then found out they could've just bought one later, but fortunately no one did that. The way things worked out, the color portraits are basically just tickets people got so they could avoid the annoyance of carrying around sixteen black-and-white portraits. No one will complain about me selling them afterwards. And if anyone does, I'll ignore them. Plus, I can put that money toward my personal earnings, rather than the county's.

Oh, I also forbade the winners from selling or giving away their prizes. I

ain't the kind of prize you can treat like a commodity!

The second and final day of the tournament had arrived. There were only 136 players left in total, compared to the previous day's thirty thousand-plus, but the crowd was the same size.

Everyone who lost yesterday came back to spectate... Not that much of anyone will be able to see the matches through this crowd.

The excitement in the square was palpable, and the players' eyes were bloodshot.

Did any of you sleep last night?

The matches on the second day were thrilling. Lady Iris's close loss to the chancellor in the shogi semifinal was especially heated, and the crowd went wild when Lady Iris threw a piece at him in frustration. The chancellor went on to win a narrow victory over some count Mitsuha didn't recognize to take the championship.

The reversi tournament was entertaining as well—big comebacks in the final few moves aren't all that rare in reversi, so each match commanded the crowd's attention to the very end.

And thus, the two-day showdown in the capital came to an end. Mitsuha felt as relieved as a student finishing their term paper the morning it was due.

It's finally over. We all survived. I'm not gonna hold any more stupid tournaments!

A few days after the tournaments ended, the capital had returned to normalcy.

People weren't treating Mitsuha as differently as she feared they might.

Is that because I was already the savior of their country? Is it like how if you pour two-hundred-degree water into a container of two-hundred-degree water, it's still two hundred degrees? No, that doesn't quite fit...

Anyway, the war economy was booming, what with the various projects the government had started in response to the invasion, but there didn't seem to be any real sense of danger in the capital. Maybe they thought Mitsuha would save the day again if anything happened.

I'm not too happy about that, but then again, there's nothing to be gained by the common folk living in fear. In which case, maybe it's best for the people to go about their business and leave the worrying to the king and nobles. That's what they call noblesse oblige, isn't it? As a member of the nobility, I guess I need to join the worriers, maybe offer some ideas.

One thing she had to decide was what type of artillery fuzes to use with their cannon shells. Time fuzes might be best for the shrapnel shells designed to target sails and people standing on deck, while contact fuzes would probably be better for the high-explosive projectiles designed to destroy the hulls.

As for the ships themselves, Mitsuha wanted to prioritize speed and defense over size. One option would be to make scaled-down, armored versions of a fast ship like the *Cutty Sark* or the *Thermopylae*, for which blueprints and models were readily available. Alternatively, they could make exact copies of the ships they had captured, and try to brute-force it with superior artillery and armor.

Slow down. I don't have to make all these decisions myself. I just have to present the king and his advisors with choices, and they can decide: Do we want to prioritize defense or firepower? Do we want to sacrifice performance to build

big ships, or build small ships that are easier to make and maneuver? I don't need to carry that burden all by myself.

I'm here by total chance. A miracle, really. If I had died when I fell off that cliff, if the first noble I met had been a wicked person instead of Count Bozes, if I had left for another land, this kingdom would've been devastated by the empire's invasion, the dragons, and the Vanel fleet. If I'm here and able to help, I will. I want to protect my friends and those who have helped me. But it would be arrogant of me to think that I have to do everything myself, or that the fate of the land is entirely in my hands. The world will keep spinning without me, and these people are tough enough to keep on living even if they're on the losing side of a war.

Que sera, sera.

Whatever will be, will be.

That might sound like an empty saying, but it's not. If you live life with a positive attitude, if you stay true to your beliefs and don't fret about every little detail, things will work out somehow. It's a nice, optimistic way of saying to trust in the hand of fate.

I could use that advice. I have so much on my plate with my county, the capital, the kingdom, neighboring countries... And then there are the nations of Earth. I'm gonna take it easy. I can't forget my original goal.

Which was what again? Oh yeah! To save money for a happy and peaceful retirement. And to jump away to another land and change my name as soon as there's trouble. Whoa, I just thought of something. I've only jumped between here and Earth so far, but I could probably go to other worlds, too. Though I

feel like it would be best to put on a space suit first, just in case.

Walking along lost in thought, Mitsuha ran into Petz.

“Hey, Petz. How’s the new girl?” she asked.

“She’s been a real surprise. The girl’s going to be a good—an incredible merchant!” Petz responded.

Why did he correct himself?

“I told her she could live at my store, but she said she was worried about the orphanage, so she’s going to commute from there for the time being...”

What’re the people who run the orphanage doing that a nine-year-old kid needs to worry about them?! Get it together, guys. Seriously.

“Oh, Petz. I have a proposal for you. Would you like to carry some of the products I sell at my store?” Mitsuha asked. “Shampoo, conditioner, that kind of thing?”

“R-Really?! Are you really okay with that? I’d love to, of course. Not only do I know the products will sell, but they’ll attract customers who will also buy other items while they’re in my store. Where is this coming from, though...?” Petz asked.

Guess it’s no surprise he’s dubious. “I’ve just been too busy to open my store much lately, and I’m worried it’s an inconvenience for my customers. I’m thinking of closing up shop and turning the building into my capital mansion. I’m on the way to establishing a stable income, so I want to take it a little easier,” Mitsuha replied.

Petz seemed satisfied by her answer.

I really did stretch myself too thin. While I’m thinking about it, though, I’d

sure like to switch to making shampoo locally. I'll have to look into that.

“Speaking of income, the portraits you left with me are flying off the shelves!” Petz exclaimed. “At this rate your name will be known even beyond the borders of our land.”

“Wha?”

“Er, I was just saying that your portraits are going to end up in other countries and spread your fame even further...”

Mitsuha screamed internally. *I was blinded by the prospect of money! I didn't even think about the consequences of selling those portraits! All this time I haven't been too worried about my fame because of the lack of photographs and television, but then I go and distribute printed pictures of myself? What, am I an idiot?! I am? Oh.*

“Huh? What are you doing squatting there, Mitsuha?” Sabine’s voice intruded on Mitsuha’s thoughts.

“Oh, Archpriestess! I’ve been wanting to speak with you! I have a request in regard to your portrait...”

“Mitsuha, about the third-place lunch...”

Voice after voice piled up, and Mitsuha unleashed another internal scream.

Oh well. Looks like I'm gonna be busy for a while yet. But it's all good. I'm sure I'll achieve the quiet and peaceful life I want after a few more years. And once I do?

Que sera, sera!

Bonus Chapter

Beatrice and Mitsuha

“Mitsuha, let’s go get some food!”

“H-Huh? Oh, it’s you, Beatrice. That’s kind of sudden, isn’t it?” Mitsuha asked after Beatrice showed up out of the blue at her shop.

“Don’t you remember? I said I’d show you around all the good restaurants when I came to the capital,” Beatrice replied.

Oh yeah, she did say that. I think it was back when I went to their Bozes County residence for the very first time and was about to leave for the capital. I can’t believe she remembered...

“Yup, you’re right,” Mitsuha said. “We had a date!”

Mitsuha hadn’t spoken to a girl other than Sabine in a while. It had been adult after adult recently, and she was getting tired of all their ulterior motives. *All right, I’ll close the store and hang out with Beatrice today!*

She couldn’t go out in her store uniform, though. “I’m gonna close up and change, so wait there a moment, sweetie!”

“Don’t call me that!”

Oh yeah, she doesn’t like it when I use terms of endearment. She took offense when I called her “little” last time. She’s five years younger than me, though, so I can’t help myself...

Also, she’s gotten a lot more casual with me since we first met. She seems to think she’s older than me, and, well, I don’t plan on correcting her. If I do, the count will find out it was an eighteen-year-old sobbing into his chest. Eighteen

puts me three years into adulthood in this kingdom—way too old to do something so embarrassing. Also, I wouldn't be able to get away with certain things anymore just because people think I'm a kid!

And then there's the biggest problem: I'm only five feet tall at eighteen years old. Beatrice is four inches taller than me at thirteen. That I don't mind—Beatrice is white, and everyone ages at their own pace. I'm only slightly below the average height for a Japanese woman. The problem is... You know. M-M-M-My chest. Beatrice is a C cup at the very least, but I-I'm still an A... But once again, I'm Japanese! Beatrice is white! It's genetic! Twenty-four percent of eighteen-year-old Japanese girls are A or AA—there are girls with even smaller breasts than mine! It's not time to panic yet!

Mitsuha got so worked up that she was panting.

A-Anyway, the point is, it would be just a bit problematic if I informed Beatrice that I'm older than her. I have my image to think about, and the last thing I want is to be the object of pity.

...Looks like I got off track there. What was I talking about? Oh yeah. Beatrice doesn't like being called sweetie. Hmm...

“I’m gonna call you whatever I want, sweetie!” Mitsuha declared.

“Oh, come on...” Beatrice whined, but Mitsuha just steamrolled her. It seemed Beatrice wanted Mitsuha to treat her like an older sister, but that wasn’t going to happen. This wasn’t some girls’ school where the students built ties stronger than blood.

Beatrice and Sabine are kinda opposites, aren't they? Sabine wanted to call me “Mistress Mitsuha” until I shut her down. What was that, Beatrice? You've

decided it's short for "sweet big sister"? Sure, whatever. Enough about that, you big-boobed wonder.

Once Mitsuha had changed and locked the store, they departed.

"You know the best place for stylish girls like us? A confectionery!" Beatrice exclaimed.

Mitsuha wasn't sure about the "stylish" part, but she was on board with the sweets. Now that she thought about it, she hadn't yet been to a sweets shop in this world. She always either made food herself or brought it from Japan, and she didn't have any friends her age to go out with.

What about Sabine, you ask? She's a princess, so I have to be careful where I take her. I'd only want to take her to a place I'm super familiar with...and I don't have any places like that!

...Wait, are there even confectioneries in this world?!

"Here we are," Beatrice announced.

Apparently there are.

Despite being called a confectionery, the shop sold more than just candy and pastries. There weren't a lot of candies in this world to begin with, or at least, not that Mitsuha had seen. Though maybe those types of luxurious treats were only accessible to the nobility and the rich, or just hadn't become widespread yet.

Anyway, this shop had regular meals and snacks in addition to its confections. The prices were absurd—each plate cost several silver coins for a minuscule portion that would only fill up a toddler. *As someone who abused the title of "undernourished child" to pig out at lunch every day in elementary*

school, trust me, I know what I'm talking about!

Beatrice rolled her eyes at Mitsuha, who stood frozen with the menu in hand. “Mitsuha, you make way too much money to cheap out on food! And don’t grip the menu like that, it’s embarrassing! You’re shaking!”

Money wasn’t the issue. Mitsuha could afford it just fine, but she was reluctant to spend so much money on anything she could get a better version of in Japan for just a few hundred yen. It would cost more than a small gold coin just to get three little items, which was enough money for three trips to a cake buffet back home.

Maybe I am just cheaping out...

“Geez, Mitsuha,” Beatrice groaned. “Today will be my treat, so just eat whatever you want and don’t worry about the price!”

No, I can’t be treated by a girl five years younger than me! My Japanese pride won’t allow it!

“Don’t worry about it! You’re younger than me, so there’s nothing to be ashamed of!” Beatrice added.

Riiight, from her point of view, there’s nothing wrong at all with her paying for my food... And I highly doubt anyone wealthy enough to eat here would deign to split the bill with someone younger than them...

“...Thanks Beatrice...” Mitsuha said finally.

All right, now for some girl talk!

“So anyway, Viscount Juisteiner’s third son made a move on Sherilena. Farry got really angry about it, and started maneuvering to ruin his good

name..."

"Laefia came up with this totally insane plan to seduce Ernbast, the oldest son of Count Cordiall..."

Mitsuha screamed internally. *You're only thirteen, Beatrice! Do all noble girls grow up this fast?! Oh, it's common for noble girls to get engaged before they turn ten and marry as soon as they reach adulthood at fifteen, so thirteen is smack in the middle of their most competitive years? That makes sense, I guess... Still, this kind of murky, vicious gossip isn't what I wanted out of my alone time with Beatrice! Come on, let's have some light, innocent girl talk! We should be giggling our butts off, not talking about drama in high society!*

"Then Sestalia was caught with Lord Aylish, even though she's engaged..."

Make it stop...

"Oh, can I have another scone and an apple tart, and some more tea, please?" No matter how mentally exhausted she was, Mitsuha wasn't going to forget to order more sweets and tea, and she snagged the waiter the second she was done with what was in front of her. The stacks of empty plates on their table foretold of a bill that had already climbed to several small gold coins.

"Oh yeah. What about you, Mitsuha? What's your history with boys?" Beatrice asked.

"Grk!"

Way to get me where it hurts. I was actually popular with boys in elementary school and middle school. They were always asking me to play baseball and soccer when they didn't have enough people, and demanding I tell them about my airsoft matches with my brother and whatnot. I definitely wasn't

athletic, but I was good enough to help fill out a team, and my presence made things easier on the less athletic boys—they all appreciated having someone on the field who was a bigger burden than they were...which is an important contribution.

Micchan would always say, “That’s not being popular! They’re treating you like a dumb younger boy, not a girl!” And sure enough, they stopped talking to me in high school.

Mitsuha explained this to Beatrice while converting age and school to the equivalents in this kingdom.

“That’s not being popular!” Beatrice said.

Damn it... Let’s talk about something else.

“Anyway, Beatrice—” Mitsuha began. But...

“I’m not talking about *playing* with boys. I’m asking if you’ve ever had a *boyfriend*.”

“I-I guess not...”

“Hmm. Well, if you were going to date someone, what would be your type? Do you value looks, personality, status, or, let’s see...money?”

Hold on a second! Beatrice just looked down at a piece of paper! Did she prepare these questions in advance?

“Who put you up to this?!” Mitsuha yelled.

“Eek!” Beatrice screamed.

Oh crap, that was really loud...

Mitsuha apologized to the employees and other customers, then turned to interrogate Beatrice.

“So? What’s going on here?” she demanded.

“Um, well...”

“Answer the question. What. Is. Going. On. Here?”

“I-I’m so sorryyy!” Beatrice finally relented. “See, um, Alex asked me to take you to a restaurant and ask you these questions. He gave me a gold coin to fund the operation.”

That’s why she said she’d treat me!

“Then, after that, Father said, ‘I’ll buy you anything you want if you ask these questions,’ and gave me *two* gold coins...”

She got two people to pay her to do this?!

“Then Theo gave me a gold coin...”

Make that three people!! What a beast!!



Well, whatever, Mitsuha thought. I'm sure Beatrice has her reasons, and I can't blame her for being a little greedy. I guess I'll help her out.

“Here, give me that.” Mitsuha wrote her answers in the blank spaces between the questions. “You can share these with each of the questioners. But don’t tell them I gave you the answers this way. Make them think you got it out of me with your deft conversational skills.”

“O-Okay...” Beatrice said with a guilty nod.

Sweet, I can totally misdirect them! They've got a long ways to go before they can challenge me to a war of information!

“Well, shall we head out?” Beatrice asked.

“Huh? Why the rush? Let’s stay a little longer,” Mitsuha replied. *Seems like Beatrice is ready to part ways, but it’s still too early for—*

“What are you saying? We have three more restaurants to go to today. We need to keep up the pace if we’re going to visit all the restaurants I want to show you before ballroom season.”

“HUUUUUH?!”

Beatrice really is a beast!!

Afterword

Hey, FUNA here. Thank you very much for reading volume two of *Saving 80,000 Gold in Another World for My Retirement!*

In this volume, Mitsuha saved the kingdom from a back attack (that is, a sea attack) and managed to make it through the board game tournaments unscathed.

This volume concludes the first season of *Saving 80,000 Gold in Another World for my Retirement*. This is where I imagine the first season of an anime adaptation would end... Not that I have to worry about that. [Things have changed! The anime is airing even as we speak – Ed.]

The story will move on to season two in the next volume, where Mitsuha and the gang hop aboard the Good Ship Lollipop and head out on a road trip! It's not called that because the captain is a loli... At least, I don't think so... That is, it's not even really a ship.

Anyway, I need all of your support so that more volumes can be published! I don't want the series ending at this perfectly good stopping point!

I've got a bunch of new releases coming up: keep an eye out for new volumes of *I Shall Survive Using Potions!*, as well as of the manga adaptions for both that series and this one! You can also check out the newest chapters of the very well-received manga version of *Saving 80,000 Gold* on the webcomic magazine, *Suiyobi no Sirius* (http://seiga.nicovideo.jp/manga/official/w_sirius/). A new chapter comes out every second and fourth Wednesday (*I Shall Survive Using Potions!* gets a new one every first and third Wednesday).

My sincerest thanks to my editor, the illustrator, the cover designer, the proofreaders, the production, distribution, and sales staff, the administrators of *Shosetsuka ni Naro*, everyone who pointed out writing errors and gave me advice in the comments section, and of course, to everyone who picked up this book.

Thank you so much!

Please continue to support both the novel series and the manga. I hope to see you again in the next volume...

Mitsuha: “So you finally learned to act like a princess, Sabine...”

Sabine: “What do you mean, ‘act’? I was born a princess! Just watch! ‘I am Sabine, a princess of this fine kingdom.’ Aren’t I regal??”

Colette: “I am Colette, a commoner of this fine—”

Mitsuha: “Not you too, Colette!”

FUNA

Debuted as a novelist in May, 2016, with *Didn't I Say to Make My Abilities Average in the Next Life?!* (Earth Star Novel), which had previously been serialized on the web novel site *Shosetsuka ni Naro*.

Kodansha's K Light Novel Books is also publishing *I Shall Survive Using Potions!*

Just in case, FUNA has dabbled in the likes of judo, kendo, and Shorinji Kempo, but has achieved a *dan* in none of them. Without a *dan*, there's no need to worry even if things go south.

Illustrator

Touzai

I bought some protein powder recently.

Saving 80,000 Gold in Another World for My Retirement 2

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