



異世界迷宮で
ハーレムを

1

Shachi Sogano
蘇我捨恥
illustration 四季童子

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美人。ものすごい美人である。
メイドは、ロクサースというやうだ。
やさしい。この世界の美人は地球より上だ。

スローラビットに近づいた俺は上段から魔物の肩口辺りに斬りつけた。
デュランダルが魔物をえぐり、肩からわき腹へと二刀のもとに切り裂く。
スローラビットはそのまま倒れ伏した。一撃だ。



買つていただきく資格がありません

「……私にはご主人様に

ロクサースが俺を見てあわてて頭を下げる。
イヌミミが揺れた。あの耳はかわいい。
ロクサースが頭を下げたまま告げた。



異世界迷宮でハーレムを 1



▶ INTRODUCTION

▶ ワンクリックで人生が一変する

- ▶ 自殺サイトをのぞいていたこの物語の主人公・加賀道夫。
世の中に絶望し、ネットの世界を浮遊していた一高校生が、突然、異世界に紛れ込んでしまう。
しかも、「**強い男**」に生まれ変わっていたのだ。
学校ではいじめを受けていた少年が、異世界では、
強い冒険者として畏怖される存在になっていた。
学校では女子とは無縁だった少年が、
異世界ではアイドル級の**美少女**を「手に入れる」権利に手が届きそうになった。
ネットの深淵部に紛れ込み、ワンクリックで人生を変えてしまった道夫。
新しい人生にはみじめさや暗さなんてかけらもない。
生まれ変わった少年のチートでハーレムな伝説が今、はじまる！

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Prologue

Part 1

Have you ever heard of this? A Suicide Site?

Oh, don't give me that look, I know you have. Pretty much everyone's heard of at least one these days. A website on the internet where you can find various ways of committing suicide or kindred spirits to commit group suicide with.

When I first stumbled upon this, I was deeply confused, to be honest.

For you see, I didn't really want to kill myself, but at the same time, I was at a time in my life that I didn't really want to live either, and the prospect of definitely ending my shallow existence once and for all appeared strangely alluring to me.

Because this world has done everything it could and then some to drive me into the deepest pits of darkest despair.

I am being bullied and ostracized at school, in a way that's more hideous than your standard, by-the-book physical abuse: I was being ignored by everyone, treated as if I was nothing but air. In class, during lunch breaks or when going to and back from school, I was always alone. When an assignment required us to get in pairs, I would always end up as the sole one who had no partner. Every. Single. Time.

When the number of male and female members in our class was uneven, teachers would try to pair me up with girls. You can probably guess how that swell idea was going to end up, but I'm going to tell you anyway, just to kick myself in the balls some more, because at this point, why the hell not? Every one of those bitches would try to weasel her way out of being assigned to me. They did so either by saying they already made a promise to be together with someone else, or when that tactic proved to be ineffective, they would

reluctantly join me only to do all the work themselves. And they did all of that without even glancing in my direction or uttering a single word.

Oftentimes I could swear I saw the aura of resentment towards me manifesting itself around them physically as a form of protective armor, and comments like 「I feel defiled」, 「I have to go cleanse myself with holy water」 or 「I can never be a bride now」 were so common that I stopped counting them after a 100th time, give or take. I thought I was used to them already, but no matter how often I heard them or in how many variations, they still hurt the same, adding more and more fuel to the brightly burning pyre of my self-hatred.

And before some of you ask that dumb question, no, it wasn't like that in high school only. It was like that ever since elementary school, where I was getting into fights with the other kids almost on a daily basis, resulting in me getting labeled as a violent delinquent. You'd think that things would get better given enough time. Well, boy do I have news for you, they didn't. Not in the slightest.

By the time I was in 4th grade I was everyone's sandbag during almost every break, especially after one of the classes when we were all sharing our dreams for the future with each other. I had, in a splendid display of childish idiocy, blurted out that I wanted to be a professional wrestler. Adding to that, I was always thrown out of the class when it was time to change for P.E., and in the summer when it was time for swimming classes my clothes *and my clothes only* would always magically end up thrown into the pool. Yup, those were the days of my childhood that I don't want to remember.

I have to say though, things did quiet down a little bit when I began to learn Kendo as a means of self-defense. It was also a very effective way to channel all of my pent-up frustration and violence into something productive. By the time my sh*tfest of a life reached the 2nd year of Junior High, the physical bullying stopped completely and switched to the mental one. I think that one incident when I'd "accidentally" beat the everlasting f*ck out of one of my oppressors and ended up sending him to the hospital for a few months had something to do with, but I can be wrong about it. Well, let's not dwell on the small details for now. Bottom line is, for a while things did quiet down. No one dared to raise his hand against me, but I did become an outcast without a

single friend.

Throughout the years of their education kids can be some real sacks of sh*t, wouldn't you agree? Once they will learn that they can't inflict harm upon you physically, they will try to do so mentally. As if there was any real chance of them finally leaving me alone.

The attitude of my father at home was pretty much the same. When my mother died, the first thing he did instead of mourning her was turning me into the object of his domestic violence. 「YOU SHOULD BE THANKING ME, I'M DOING IT ALL FOR YOUR SAKE!」 he shouted as he was beating the crap out of me to the point of unconsciousness.

That was the moment when I finally realized that this is what this wretched world is all about. No matter how hard you'll try to live a good, honest life, the only way for you to make your dreams come true is to do so by eliminating everything and everyone who stands between you and your goal. Only when you are standing atop the mountain of the countless corpses of your enemies where no one will ever be able to threaten you anymore while triumphantly sipping the nectar of sweet victory, only then you'll be allowed to tell that you have truly won the sh*tty game called 「Life」.

Heh, such an outlook on life sounds like it's more befitting of a criminal or a petty member of the Yakuza, but that's how it really is. Without power, you're no one. Just one of the nameless nobodies living their days aimlessly as a member of the like-minded grey mass of mediocrity. At least, that's what I think after everything I've been through.

This world is a hopeless, truly rotten place. Looking back on it now, it must have been precisely because of that.

That was the reason why I decided to click on the link to that obviously shady suicide site I found one night while I was surfing the net in the solitude of my own room after I've had my fill of father's beatdowns for the day.

How should I put it? It was... an eye-opening experience. I'm not kidding, reading through everything that was posted there really helped me understand what a fool I was up until that point. Before, I thought I was the only one who had it rough, but now I finally saw that the world was riddled with hundreds

of thousands of people of all backgrounds and ages who just couldn't take it anymore and therefore they searched for a way out. On that day, something had changed within me, as if a switch was suddenly flipped inside of my mind. What began as a curious one-time-only read began to develop into a keen interest. So I've read all the posts, gathered the information, went through all the links and finally reached what could be called the site's inner sanctum.

Thinking about it carefully, this world has brought me nothing but regrets. I had no one I could call my lover, no friends and no family who would support me through thick and thin. And if that was the case, why would I even bother to continue living in such a hell on earth?

My grades were not exceptional in any way. Because of the domestic violence in my family it would be impossible for me to go to the university. We barely had any money to make ends meet. My only redeeming quality were my Kendo skills honed since my early years. In addition to Kendo, I really wanted to train in Judo or Karate, but since the lessons cost a fortune that was impossible. Even with Kendo, I was only able to practice it because the master of the local Dojo trained kids free of charge and also leant them their equipment, but I knew he was not doing it out of the kindness of his heart. That was only an excuse for him so he could give 「private lessons」 to the kids he took a 「liking」 to, especially the girls. So in case you didn't hear me the first time, let me reiterate:

This world is a truly rotten place.

The list of my regrets was much longer than the ones relating to my family's financial situation, of course. One of them was my desire to finally graduate from being a virgin. I mean really, who wouldn't see that coming? Dying without having any experience in sex? Now that would be lame. Just like any other high school boy my age, I wanted to try doing it at least once. I wanted to know if releasing all of your sexual desire into a girl really felt as good as everyone else around me was saying.

Like that, the days went by without bringing any significant changes with them. All this time, I was on the fence about whether or not I really wanted to kill myself. After all, the thought of ending my life with my own hands

scared the living hell out of me. I was afraid of the pain and of what would happen if by some miracle I managed to screw things up. And while we are on the subject, I wonder if dying is really as simple as books portray it to be: that you just close your eyes, drift away to sleep and that's it. Well, I guess that might be the case for dying of natural causes like illness or old age, but for everything else? I guess I was still too big of a wuss to test it out for myself.

I was pretty good at Kendo. It might be tough, but maybe if I put more effort into it I'll be able to make my living out of that? That certainly wouldn't be half bad if it worked.

As for losing my V-Card, all good things come to those who wait, I guess. Surely I will get my chance to get down and dirty with someone nice if I were patient. And if I officially attained the status of a Wizard first (reach 30 years of age still virgin)? I didn't give a fuck.

Having such conflicting thoughts in my mind I went on reading the posts published on the site, where I was a regular by this time. And one fateful night, my eyes fell upon a link to a post titled 『Before You Decide To Commit Suicide』.

This is it.

A guide that is going to help me make up my mind!

This is what I wanted the whole time!

Part 2

With my excitement quickly rising, I decided to click on the link. Who knows, maybe it will point me towards some good alternatives to suicide? I am just a teenager in his second year of high school after all, so checking out the alternatives before committing myself to the real deal was understandable.

Now let's see what we have here... uh-huh, all right, cool, I get it...

I muttered to myself as I was slowly scrolling down the page. To give you a brief rundown of its contents, it stated that if you find your own world to be a shitty place where you absolutely cannot live, then why not move to another one?

That was... not what I was expecting, if I am to be honest. But on the other hand, there was a surprising amount of sense to it. I mean, think about it: if you're fed up with the world you live in, then switching to one that that is more to your liking is kinda obvious.

The page listed many examples of such worlds: a world which is technologically advanced, a world where pirates and their ships make the law, an ancient world filled with swords and magic... such a world might really not sound so bad. If I chose something like that, I could move to a world which was inhabited not only by disgusting humans, but also beautiful and noble elves, hard-working dwarves or even demi-humans and beasts lived together. That would certainly be interesting.

But how can you move to such a world, you ask? That's simple, really. The answer to that question is: through games. Internet ones, to be more specific.

And it just so happens that the page was providing links to the main pages of all kinds of games, not only the ones that I listed above.

I guess I could give one of them a try, just for the hell of it. It will certainly be healthier than spending the whole night reading the comments of the other users of the suicide site for who-knows-which night in a row. Yes, let's think about it like a much-needed change of pace, or a breath of fresh air. See, for all my earlier trash-talking I can still act like a semi-decent human being if I want to. If I have to fill my head with something then I'd much rather it be games than suicidal thoughts. Maybe it's my internal coward speaking through me now, but I have seen for myself over the past few days there were many people who thought exactly the same, so maybe those kinds of advertisements were made specifically to appeal to them? Well, whatever.

When it comes to online games I can proudly say that I am not a total noob, since I did play some of them in the past. Although, I have to admit that my friendless loner attitude must have rubbed off on me pretty hard, because even when playing online games, where meeting new people and cooperating with them is kinda the point of it all, I was a bona fide solo player. I was what you might call a quintessential casual, playing only what looked nice and casting it aside as soon as I got bored with it. But when I did play, I made sure to enjoy every second of it. Even if the game was a literal piece of crap, I didn't hate it per se, just the people who made it this way.

All right, so when I entered the page of one game that looked interestingly enough for me, the first thing I was told to do was choose my race and the country of origin from a very impressive selection of choices. Hmm, maybe I should aim for something interesting, like a mixture of the most unexpected things possible? And if I get tired of it anyway, I can always just start over from scratch.

The next page was about the frequency of wars occurring in the game's world. So it is the setting where countries fight with each other for supremacy instead of being friendly, I guess? I wonder if it's going to be similar to the battles between guilds, but on a much larger scale?

Well, not that it's going to have that much meaning for me as a solo player anyway. With that in mind, I think I'm going to choose one of the more friendly countries. Okay, now that that's done, what do we have next? Dungeon type or Field type? Now this is going to be a difficult decision. Can't I just choose both at once? Oh, well would you look at that, apparently

I can. Sweet, both it is then. It's also good that you can just choose the settings recommended by the game itself since there are just so many detailed options to choose from that carefully reading through all of them would have probably taken me an entire night's worth of sleep.

One of the last things to choose from was the language settings. Huh? What's this, how come Japanese is not the default one?! What even is this Brahim language? I have no idea, but since it's a default one then it's probably better to leave it as it is without messing around with it too much.

Soon after that I have arrived at the section of the character creation labeled as [Bonus Points Distribution]. Huh, I guess every online game has one of those nowadays. The system itself was similar to the one featured in the classics like D&D where you had to [roll] your character statistics based on the total value of your roll. You have a total of 6 basic stats: Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intellect, Wisdom and Luck, and the total value of the roll of your virtual [dice] determines the numerical bonuses to those 6 stats. Thankfully it looks like you can reroll your character stats as many times as you like until you roll your ideal desired results so at least I don't have to worry about being stuck with something totally useless and not suited to my preferred play-style. The only downside to it is that rolling "exactly" what you want might take a considerable amount of time since the RNG was not on the players side most of the time when it came to stat distribution. But since I don't want to half-ass everything this time around, I should take my time to roll something that will at the very least be decent to play with instead of a total random.

Points-wise, many of the initial stats were at the values between 10 and 20, meaning that they were the very basic ones and we want something better than that, so we're rerolling that one.

The next roll scored me a total between 40 and 50, so I wasn't as bad as the first one, but it wasn't good either. Another reroll then, don't fail me this time. Let's fast forward a number of rerolls into the future where I finally managed to score myself something genuinely good. I have a feeling that this is the best result I could have hoped for, so I'll be keeping that one. Also, the color of all the values was green, which indicates that my roll was an above-average one. All right, looks like we're off to a pretty good start in here, but I

wonder if we can perhaps do a little bit better?

Generally speaking, in games that use the dice rolling system for deciding the stats rolling anything which has a total value of 75 and above is considered to be good, but most of the players (at least from what I've heard online) always aimed for a total 80 or above in order to really maximize their roll and squeeze every additional point they could to ensure the best start possible for themselves. My current total is 79, so the million-dollar question is: should I keep it or try to push my luck a bit and aim for that famed 80?

.... Ah screw it, You Only Live Once Rolls for the win, we're starting over!

As a result, I ended up with a total value of 60. Figures. Nothing like a little bit of F rank gacha luck kicking you in the nuts to remind you that you're not the hot Sh*t you thought yourself to be. Are we going to leave that poor 60 be and finally start the game? Hell no! I rolled something good once, so I can do it again, even if I have to resort to using the most secret, forbidden technique of stat rolling: [Rapid Fire Mouse Clicking]! While I am furiously clicking away, here's some random trivia about this technique for you: the most skilled of its users are supposedly able to achieve the clicking frequency of 30 clicks per second! Isn't that like, awesomely unreal?! I wonder what games they were playing in order to achieve such a form at using it (**TL NOTE: Ever heard of *StarCraft*, kid?**).

As I continued to click like crazy, having nothing more but my eyes to rely on when to stop, a number 8 flashed before my eyes. Was that number 80 just now? It was 80, wasn't it?! Unfortunately, the number that was displayed on the screen when I stopped tapping that left mouse button was a measly 19. CRAP BASKETS! I did it! For just a brief moment I have scored that legendary 80 and I blew it out the window! OF-FUCKING-COURSE!!! And you know what comes next? That's right, you guessed it, we're starting over one more time!

Inhale... *Exhale*... *Inhale*... *Exhale*...

My disappointment is immeasurable and my day is ruined even more than it already was. *Sigh* well, no use crying over spilt milk I guess, we're just back to the Redoville for the moment.

The next few attempts were filled with 60 and 70 somethings, but let's be real here guys, all right? You know as well as I do that after scoring that 80 once I wasn't going to stop until I scored another 80 again. This is what we players do after all, it is literally in our blood, that competitive drive, or what normies would normally call a [Hold My Beer Syndrome]. We've all been there or at least saw someone from our surroundings being there, right? That certain someone who is like [*Come on man, there's no way that you'll actually *insert whatever stupid thing here**] and the other guy, being an absolute Chad Thundercock of a madman that he is being all like [*I'm not going to do it? I'm not going to do it?! Here, hold my beer!*] usually followed by poor Chad either embarrassing himself in front of everyone or hurting himself in a really stupid way. Of course, with my personal situation being the way it is I have never really had the chance to be such a Chad myself, which is why now is a perfect, probably once in a lifetime opportunity for me.

[Give it a break you loser, there's no way someone like you can score 80 or higher while rolling stats!]

Oh yeah? Well you know what?! Screw you! Screw every last one of you Chads with all your Stacies and successful normie lives! This is my time to shine now! I will do it! I will beat this Reroll icon like it's my meat on a lonely Friday evening and I'll roll the best stats possible!

Okay, everyone ready? Hold on to your seats then, cause we're taking this icon for a ride!

Part 3

(Sarcastically) Day 6524: rations running low.

I've been clicking and clicking and clicking for so long that my right hand went totally numb. And after every single click I made a brief pause to check the value that appeared on screen to be absolutely sure that I won't miss a good roll. Click, reroll, click, reroll, click, reroll, click, why am I doing this again? It's been so long that I'm having difficulty remembering. And looking at those tiny digits on screen is such a pain in the ass... I continued my clicking crusade while thinking such thoughts. If nothing else, I have to praise myself for my own stubbornness.

It wasn't until much, much later that the sight I longed for finally appeared on my screen: two digits making a number, shining with a clear, golden light. It took me a long time to get here, but the end result was even better than what I initially wanted. I rolled a highest value possible, probably because there are no three-digit numbers programmed into the system.

A 99. Just looking at it gave me all kinds of satisfaction. After the long struggle, I have finally arrived in the promised land. I did this out of spite and sheer desperation and still managed to obtain it. The days of yore when I just clicked away like a madman already seemed to be nothing more but a distant memory (even though they literally happened moments ago).

I have it. A total stat value of 99. Would I try to roll that again? Oh hell no. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity that might never repeat itself again if I

just let it pass me by, so you bet your ass I'm keeping it. I don't even care about the game itself anymore, just rolling that was enough of a victory for me. Since I'll be playing solo anyway, such a roll was the best possible outcome I could have hoped for. There literally is nothing better than this when it comes to rolling stats, so I clicked on confirm without any regrets.

Next was setting up your avatar character and distributing Bonus Points. There was no information on microtransactions, loot boxes or any kind of in-game purchases. Could this be a browser-based game? Looking at the number of my bonus points, there were quite a lot of them. Well, since the game is being so generous to me from the start, I guess I have no choice but to continue playing and seeing how things will turn out.

Bonus Points themselves could be used to increase the values of various parameters on the character creation screen, such as Strength, Endurance, Equipment Load, Bonus Spells Slots and even Bonus Skills and Equipment. Initially I was thinking of dumping all of my Bonus Points into Strength, but that would mean I'll have no points to spend on other possibly useful things. Hmm, what to do?

Typically, in these kinds of games the benefits of increased parameters could only be felt in the game's early stages as the end result was dependent entirely on the character's overall level. Taking that into consideration, should I invest my points into something else? How about Bonus Equipment? I bet that with the right amount of points dumped into it I could start the game with the strongest weapons and armor from the get-go. That would certainly make the beginning stages a breeze. Bonus Spells could also be useful, especially those cool sounding like Warp or Gamma Ray Burst. Oh man, so many things to choose from and not nearly enough points to try out everything that actually catches my attention.

Normally I could've just used the internet to find some tips for beginners, but I got so caught up in setting everything up that I didn't even registered the actual name of the game, so I done goofed with that, I won't lie. Then again, that was kinda the point of what I'm doing here, to dive into it blindly and see if this is actually worth a damn. That, and I don't want to waste that one-in-a-million chance I got with that godly roll I managed to secure. Ugh, I have to hand it to the game's developers, putting so many things to choose from and

giving you so many points was a brilliant trick, making the decision harder for me.

While I scanned the entire screen for any potential tips, I noticed that there was a [Reset Character] option at the bottom of the Bonus Skills list. So with this Bonus Skill, redoing your character should be available, right? And if this page is titled [Character Page 1], then it would stand to reason that I can either redo the same page or create another one if I want. That way, I can start playing essentially whatever I want without worrying too much.

I clicked on the Reset prompt to see if it actually works. Bonus Points Returned to 98, probably because one point was used to perform the reset itself. The necessary experience value has also decreased accordingly. Of course, I should know something like that is going to be necessary. But right next to it was a skill that increased the value of the experience obtained. But how is it any different? Should I choose both for the time being? Checking the required experience value reduction, the Bonus Points were at 97, and the required experience value decrease was displayed in half of the required experience value. It's an enhanced version with a reduced experience level, or an evolved version to be more exact.

If you click on the required experience value $\frac{1}{2}$, the Bonus Points will drop down to 95, but the required experience will change to the $\frac{1}{2}$ of the normal required value. Doing so again will change the required value to $\frac{1}{3}$ of the original and repeating the process one more time drops the Bonus Points to 91 but changes the required experience value to $\frac{1}{5}$. Doing so yet again will drop the Bonus Points to 83 but changes the required experience value to $\frac{1}{10}$.

The number of my Bonus Points has been reduced. It would appear that the value of the Bonus Points required keeps on doubling. Clicking on the required experience value of $\frac{1}{10}$ resulted in the Bonus Point total becoming 67 and the display changed to $\frac{1}{20}$ of the required experience value. Quickmath time! 83 minus 67 gives... wait, how do you count to 16 again.... Oh yeah, 16! So the value is doubling after all!

Now, what if I uncheck the required experience value of $\frac{1}{20}$ and click to return the Bonus Point to 83 and the required experience value of $\frac{1}{10}$, and

then to the 91 Bonus Points and the required experience value of 1/5 and the once again to return it to 1/3. Ok, so this time I'm going to choose the increase in the acquisition of exp.

When I increased it, the Bonus Points became 90, and the display of the increase in the acquisition experience doubled. Is this the same pattern? When I repeat the process once more, the Bonus Points will be 88, and the earned experience value will change to triple the normal amount. When I clicked 3 times, the Bonus Points became 84, and 3 times the earned experience value changed to 5 times the earned experience value. I think I will actually go with that.

Other than that, there was also an option to pick a Second Job. This will without a doubt prove to be useful. Normally, in a job-based game, each job can use its unique skills and spells . If you have a second job, you can use the skills and spells of those two jobs at the same time. It's strange that here it's treated like a Bonus Skill. If you don't set a Bonus Skill, you're going to lose its slot permanently. Fucking game choices man. This reeks of a shit-game mechanic, but I guess we have no choice. Once I picked that up, the value of Bonus Points decreased to 83. Two jobs at the same time will probably be all I'll be able to get at the start of the game, so if I decide to switch it for something else I can always reset at any given time.

Right next to the Second Job skill was a job settings skill. So I'm guessing that if I won't choose it, I'll be stuck with some lame default settings, huh? Let's leave it for now and check what other options do we have. Increased Recovery Speed and Shortened Spellcasting Speed may also be skills that can be useful, but since I don't know whether magic can be used from the beginning I'm skipping this for now. Discount Negotiations and Lowered Prices... that might be useful when I'll have to buy a lot of things.

As for the rest...

I think I'll pass any Bonus Spells for the time being, because some of them blatantly asked you if you're okay with performing suicide attacks. Big nope for me. I'm not going to use suicide attacks, no matter how OP they might be. Not in a million years.

Let's go back to Bonus Equipment for now. As far as the beginning of the

game is concerned, this is going to be absolutely crucial. Wearing literally anything else that is not your starting equipment should be enough to make sure that you will not get owned throughout the beginning stages of the game. I clicked Bonus Equipment and then Bonus weapons, decreasing my number of Bonus Points to 82, changing my initial loadout simply called Weapons to Weapons II. So that is the pattern that the Bonus Equipment is following? Okay, fine by me. I clicked on it 6 times, expending a total of 20 Bonus Points to get myself a set of Weapons VI. Next I clicked on Bonus Accessories until my Bonus Points total was down to 17, and as a finishing touch, I increased the Lower Experience value to 1/5 of the normal total and increased the amount of exp obtained 5 times.

After all was said and done, the number of my remaining Bonus Point was 1. What should I spend it on? Identify Skill, or maybe put one more into Bonus Weapons, just for the hell of it?

Nah, I'll go with Identify after all.

I have no Bonus Points left now. With nothing else left to do, I clicked OK to finish the character creation process, when all of a sudden, the screen has changed.

WARNING!

IF YOU CHOSE TO CONTINUE BEYOND THIS POINT, YOU WILL LIVE YOUR LIFE IN A DIFFERENT WORLD, NEVER TO RETURN TO THE WORLD YOU WILL BE LEAVING BEHIND.

KNOWING THIS, DO YOU STILL WISH TO CONTINUE?

The hell is this? Yeah, yeah, as long as I don't have to pay for it, I don't care. Just let me click yes and begin playing for fucks sake!

I click yes without a second of hesitation.

FINAL WARNING!

KNOWING THE RISK, DO YOU STILL WISH TO CONTINUE

ANYWAY?

YES NO

Annoyed at the game's persistence, I clicked yes like a madman.

Huh? But wait a second... wasn't that message kinda disturbing now that I.... think about... it..... Fuck..... what have I gotten..... myself..... into.....

Chapter 1: The First Village

Part 1

Player Name: Kaga Michio

Character Information & Equipment:

Class: Villager, Lv1

Weapon: Durandal

Accessory: Ring of Determination

It took me a while to realize that I was laying in a haystack. Why was I laying there and why in the haystack of all possible things I don't know and to be honest, I don't care. The most important thing right now is that I was apparently in some kind of barn or shed, hence the haystack. Last time I checked there was no barns or places that sold hay in Tokyo, so I have to think what the presence of all that hay around me means.

Commence the solo brainstorming session!

Okay, first things first, recollection of everything that I was doing yesterday. Most of the time I was bitching about how much dick Life has managed to stuff inside me up until now (just my typical day) and then I happened upon that sketchy post which led me to an even sketchier net game which I decided to check out in order to detach myself from all the shit I've been dealing with lately. Then I proceeded to create an account and my character (which took ages by the way, thanks to that needles clickfest with stats) and when I was finally about to start, I lost consciousness after reading that warning which appeared on my screen. Next thing I remember was waking up here, in this haystack.

So yeah, there you have it. In conclusion, I am just like that one who became a meme on the internet recently, I know nothing. Could it be that was somehow trans...

.....

.....

OH FUCK NO! THIS BETTER NOT BE AN ISEKAI STORY OR ELSE...!!!

Or else what?

Okay, all right, let's calm down and think about it rationally for a second. Instead of being transported into another world, it is more probable that I am inside some kind of virtual reality. Otherwise, why would I have to deal with all of that game related stuff in the first place? No way, something like that should be impossible with the current level of technology in our world. And how would that even work when all I did was basically a character creation process like in any other game? So what? Is it more like, I don't know, a dream? A very realistic lucid dream?

[Bruuuuuoooooo!] [Wah!]

At that time I heard the sound that I wasn't able to hear before, probably because I got too lost in my own thoughts. It wasn't anything that sounded hostile, but it did give me quite the scare. Something is here in that shed with me. Maybe I'll be able to see it if I just squint my eyes and concentrate.

Huh? What is that?

When I focused my gaze on the direction the noise was coming from, an information window was displayed directly in my mind, telling me that the source of the noise was apparently just an ordinary horse. When I got up on my feet and approached, the info turned out to be true, there really was a horse in one of the boxes near the entrance to the barn. Judging by the thickness of its legs it's not a Thoroughbred, but just a normal horse. Not that I could tell the difference even if I had both types in front of me, I'm just a normal guy, not a friggin horse-breeding expert.

As for the hut itself, it was probably the same size as your typical studio apartment, which is to say, quite spacious. Completely different to the apartment where I was living with my old man up to this point, which was approximately the size of 6×4 tatami mats. But enough talking about my dull, uninteresting past, I have more pressing matters to attend to right now, like

looking around and assessing my surroundings. The inside of the shed was pretty dim, but from the spaces between the boards of the wooden walls and scarcely placed wooden windows I could see that the sky outside was still tinged with a slight shade of red. The question is, does that mean the night is about to fall, or maybe the dawn is breaking to greet the new day? Other than me there are no people around. As I already said, the windows are the most basic wooden ones, without any glass or shutters.

The minutes passed and the horse eventually grew quiet, presumably drifting off to sleep. While we're still on the topic of that horse, I wonder if the information that were displayed in my mind were the result of the Identify skill.

Identify.

That was one of the skills that I picked up during the character creation process, that much I can remember. Well, now is as good of an opportunity as ever, so why not take that ability for a test drive? Thinking like that, I looked at myself and said the word [Identify] out loud, and sure enough, another information window popped right up. Let's see here... Kaga Michio, male, 17 years old, Villager Lv1... ohhhh, so I guess this is my status then? Kaga Michio is my name, but... how does the game know that? I mean, that was not the name that I chose for my character when I was filling out the registration form yesterday! After all, even an unsociable loser like me knows the bare minimum of the net games etiquette that states that you should never use your real-life name while making a character in game! So how is it possible that my character's name is the same as my real name? Has my computer been hacked by some kinda super hacker who messed up with my game account as a sick joke?!

Perplexed, I examined my whole body, but I wasn't feeling any kind of discomfort anywhere, and everything I touched felt super real, as if it were made of real flesh instead of a bunch of 1's and 0's. I even have the same jersey I was wearing for an entire day yesterday, complete with food and sweat stains! Yup, no matter how I look at it, it is my body. Wow, to be able to reproduce every single detail of the player's looks and wardrobe, that is some seriously sick VR technology.

Since I was home all day yesterday I was also barefoot, feeling the hard ground with every inch of the soles of my feet. As for the temperature, the air around me is neither hot nor cold. I'm fine with having no shoes as long as I'll stay inside of here, but a lack of shoes might be a serious problem once I'll have to venture outside. Thankfully, looking around the shed for a while I managed to find something that upon closer inspection with my Identify skill turned out to be a pair of simple sandals. Since I don't have any socks on my feet then I might as well wear them. After all, it's certainly better than having no shoes at all. They were pretty primitive in their design, with strings that were supposed to be tied around the ankles to prevent them from falling off. As it turned out, I still had to tie them up manually instead of just poking them with my finger with a motion imitating clicking. When I used Identify on my body again after everything was said and done, some new information appeared.

Kaga Michio, male, 17 years old, Villager Lv1, Thief Lv1, Equipment: Sandals

Uhm... that the name of that second job makes me feel like a bandit, and I probably am one for taking somebody else's possessions without asking them for permission first, but oh well, at least I've got a second job mere minutes into the game. By the way, my jersey does not seem to be classified as equipment. Is it because it was brought here from outside of the game? The only thing listed under the equipment tab are those sandals I have stolen. And speaking of equipping, I should have some Bonus Equipment on me right now.

Next to the haystack where I have woken up I found a room which contained a sword. Using Identify on it revealed that it was the Holy Sword Durandal and it came with a crapload of various skills, among which were the ones such as Attack Power x9 and Damage Absorption 25%, HP Absorption and MP Absorption. So this is what it means to have a Bonus Weapon 6, huh? Also, next to the sword I found a curious ring. I'm going to Identify it either way, but I wonder if it's going to give better benefits than Durandal? It says that it's a Ring of Determination. Those are some good items to start the game with.

I put on the ring and equip the sword. This further confirms my suspicion that

this is indeed a game, since my actions have been confirmed in the character status screen. Once again, I'm amazed how detailed this virtual reality is. Fixing my Durandal so that it would be attached to my belt just like the katanas worn by the samurai, my preparations were now complete.

Being fully equipped for the road that lies ahead of me, I decided to leave the stable and take my first step into this new, unknown world that was waiting for me outside. What am I going to find out there? I don't know, but maybe it won't be as bad as I initially thought, minus being labeled as a Sandals thief.

Part 2

The first thing I saw after I left the barn was the early morning scenery of a peaceful country village. The buildings consisted mostly of one storied wooden houses surrounded with vegetable gardens. The eastern side of the village consisted of vast open fields, while the northern part housed a large forest. It looks like the villagers begin their daily activities fairly early, because even though the sun had just risen over the horizon, some of them were already up and about, walking down the simple, stone-paved road.

I don't know if I should hide from them or not, but just to be on the safe side I've chosen to hide behind the barn for now. There are still too many things that I don't know that being cautious sounded like the best possible course of action for now. After all, I don't know who these people are and if they are friendly to outsiders or not, and there's also a matter of me stealing (although by accident) those sandals from inside the barn. I don't know about you, but for me the prospect of having my hand cut off as a punishment for theft was not a welcoming one. So in order to avoid attracting unnecessary attention to myself I decided to wait and observe the villagers from the shadows and use Identify on the couple which happened to pass by the barn on their way to the fields. It told me that both of them had only a first name without any last names, didn't have any Jobs except for [Villager] and were both at Lv1. In other words, they were your typical, run-of-the-mill NPCs (Non-Player Characters).

While we're at it, I am also at Lv1. Sooner or later I'll have to do something about it.

I decide to enter the forest from the side of the barn and observe the village from there. That way I'll be able to continue my investigation of the surroundings without having to worry about getting caught by anyone.

The village itself was actually quite large, stretching way into the southwest

direction. The total number of houses in the whole thing should be around thirty to forty. The village's very center was the place where most of the two- and three-story houses were located. Squinting my eyes to see better, I used Identify on the people who were currently coming out of them. Just like before, they had only one name and one Job listed, but not all of them were labeled simply as [Villagers]. Among all the people were a total of five [Farmers]. I don't know what made them different from the regular village-dwellers, maybe the fact that they were more effective at cultivating the land? Man it sure as hell would be swell if there actually was some kind of tutorial here that would explain all of the basics to me, but I guess that is too much to ask for, huh? For now I guess I'll just have to make do with Identify alone.

Now to continue my monitoring.

The person with the highest level was a Lv25 older-looking dude. Should I try talking to him, or perhaps settle my sights on someone with a lower level, just in case that things could really go south? Let's see now... I spy with my little identifying eye that the person who was 8 levels below the one with Lv25 was actually the village's chief who's apparently 69 years old. Heh, 69, such a neato number.

In addition to him there was also someone with Lv6 who appeared to be a merchant, but it was hard to tell if he was a traveling one or the owner of the village's general store. Either way, he must be one of the more financially stable members of the community here since he walked out of one of the few three-story buildings in the neighborhood.

I wanted to investigate some more, but unfortunately any further attempts ad doing as such have been interrupted by a pair of high-pitched voices echoing through the calm, early morning air. They belonged to two people who left the village perimeter some while ago and now they were running back with all their strength, literally screaming their throats out. Unfortunately for me they were both too far away for me to hear what exactly was going on in here, but I found out soon enough.

One by one, the villagers rushed back into their homes, only to emerge back with weapons, mainly swords and spears, in hand. Don't tell me....

Don't tell me someone actually saw me and they were preparing to lynch me! Are you fucking serious?! For a measly crime of stealing a pair of used sandals that are not even all that comfortable to begin with?!

At least that's what I had initially thought, but thankfully that does not seem to be the case this time, since the villagers weren't converging on my location, running towards the east instead. Hiding behind the trees, I quietly follow after them to what all the commotion was about.

After around two minute of walking, I finally saw it. A large cloud of dust approaching the village from the eastern road, followed by intimidating shouts and the rumbling of hooves against the beaten ground.

It was a bandit raid. It wasn't just my assumption based on my knowledge of the tropes from games set in medieval times and audio clues, oh no. I took my time to scan them with Identify, and even though they were still so far away from me that they looked like nothing more but the grains of rice, it showed me that each and every one of them had [Bandit] listed as his Job. Man, the reach of that skill is seriously OP.

Also, thanks to that I was finally able to grasp the situation I found myself in. All the signs pointed towards only one possible conclusion:

This is a [Tutorial Quest: Bandit Raid!] On a side note, this is not a name that I have come up with on the fly. The information window that just appeared before my eyes literally called it like that.

Since this is a tutorial quest, I should be able to complete it without any major difficulties, since the levels of the Bandits are generally quite low, single digit ones. Even if I myself am only at Lv1, there is no way in hell that I could lose an introductory battle like that! Not when I also have a Holy Sword Durandal on my side! (TL Note: Ever heard of Dark Souls, you scrub?)

The Bandit's equipment consisted primarily of Copper Swords, the same as the ones possessed by the villagers and simple Leather Armors. A high-end weapon like Durandal should eat them for breakfast in no time.

All the villagers stopped just some distance away from the barn I was initially hiding behind and took assumed their positions, waiting for the Bandits to approach them. I look towards them once more to confirm their numbers. Most of the villagers were present, including the Lv25 village's head. What are the chances of them besting a group of bloodthirsty cutthroats? If you say [not very high] then I'm afraid I have to agree with you, especially after taking Identifying the Bandits and their Leader form up close.

Bandit Leader Hugo

Male, 38 years old

Job: Bandit,

Equipment: Iron Sword, Bandit Bandana, Iron Armor, Leather Shoes

Yeah, no doubts about it. The guy in the middle must be their Leader. His level is exceptionally high and his equipment looks to be more luxurious when compared to the rest of the band around him, who wore the standard stuff. Level-wise, the Leader was at 19 and someone who looked like his right hand was at 11 respectively, and the rest of them were single digit ones. Could this be because this is the first event in the game? Well, no use thinking about it now. For now, let's just adopt the following mindset: everything is going to be all right as long as I'll be careful enough not to get hit by any of the Leader's attacks.

The moment the Bandits finally reached the village, a fierce battle commenced, and the best way I can describe it was: chaotic. Unintelligible shouts and screams filled the air as both Bandits and villagers were slashing away at each other with their swords and it quickly turned into a situation where I couldn't clearly tell one side apart from the other. All I knew was that the battle itself was slowly moving towards me in the forest, so if I timed my actions right, I could probably jump out and land a few surprise attacks here and there.

Both of the sides were pretty even, one not being able to overwhelm the other to claim the decisive victory even though the fight itself was going for a while now, developing a clear standstill. The same was true for the bandits Leader and the village chief, but because the chief's level was higher than that of the Bandit Leader, it's only a matter of time before he comes out on top. However...

One of the horse-riding Bandits came between the two Leaders, distracting the chief and enabling the Bandit Leader to perform a thrusting attack which made his sword penetrate deep into the chief's body.

What was that technique?! It looked like the Leader stabbed the chief through the gaps between the elements of his armor, but could something like that really be pulled off by a thug like him? I heard that such a technique really existed and was utilized mainly by the master swordsman fighting against armored opponents to strike at their vital points, but only a selected few managed to master completely master it.

Wounding the chief like that, the Bandit Leader totally has him on his mercy, looking down on him and grinning in a very unsettling way. But now that his eyes are focused on him and no one else, maybe that was the opportunity I was waiting for?

I feel that now would be a good chance for me to sneak behind him unnoticed and stab him through the heart with my Durandal. Something is telling me that an attack like that would deal a considerable amount of damage, possibly even killing him on the spot.

I slowly remove the Durandal from its sheath on my waist and squeeze its handle with both my hands. It is much heavier than a wooden sword I was so used to carrying, but not to a degree where I couldn't swing it around since my muscles have been thoroughly trained through years of Kendo practice. Also, I keep telling myself in my head that since it is a first in-game event, there is no way for me to die in it.

I have to do it. I have to go. It's either now, or never.

So I take a deep breath...

...and I dash out of the forest straight into the heat of battle!

Part 3

I can no longer hear the surrounding sounds. I don't know who screams what anymore. I simply run straight ahead with the intention of attacking the Bandit Leader.

One of the bandits noticed me as I was on my way and jumped at me to stop me, so I had no choice but to slash him twice before he would do the same to me. I think his level is Lv2. As he was falling onto the ground I didn't even pay him any attention, I just raised Durandal up and resumed my advance. I simply continued to run while striking down those who would stand in my way, and after I jumped over the bodies of some fallen Bandits I've finally found myself next to their leader, who had still failed to notice me due to the commotion from the battles around him. I tightened my grip on the sword's handle, and with my feet planted firmly in the ground I performed a spinning slash aimed at the Bandit Leader's neck. When he realized what was going on, it was already too late for him to do anything. Durandal struck him dead in the neck, cleaving it as if it was made of butter and sending his head flying high into the air before it finally fell at his feet. The expression on his face was that of utter shock and disbelief. But that was not important to me now. The important thing was the blood that gushed out of the place where the decapitated head was just moments ago, and let me tell you, it was like a fountain.... Oh wow... o-oh, shit... oh fuck why is it not stopping already?! Why does it keep on splashing around?!

No! Michio, stop acting like a bitch-ass pussy and get a grip already! You don't have the luxury of standing around admiring the gory details! There are still Bandits around who are in desperate need of a beating!

I did just like I said and engaged the other enemies. They were all felled by a single blow of my Holy Sword. With each swing another bloody fountain was created, sending scarlet droplets into the air, culling down the enemy's numbers.

Once all of the small fries were finely chopped like the pieces of logwood, my attention turned to the second strongest Bandit, the one who looked like their Leader's right hand. Together with a couple more of his goons he was attacking a group of villagers who formed a defensive formation around their chief, who somehow managed to get back on his feet after that critical attack between the pieces of his armor. When I approached them, one of them screamed something to the others while pointing towards me. The second-in-command also looked at me and also started screaming, after which he and all of his remaining men began to run with their tails tucked between their legs. Looks like my little sneak attack also managed to inflict some sick psychological damage as well.

Now that they have turned their backs on me, this is another perfect chance. I started to chase after them, slaughtering anyone who's back had the misfortune of bumping into Durandal's pointy end, until I happened upon the third strongest man among the entire group of bandits, the one who was Lv11. Without saying anything he just assumed a fighting stance and charged at me, slashing at me from left to right and right to left in an attempt to overwhelm me with a barrage of blows. I managed to block some of them, but the rest I was forced to dodge by rolling backwards and to the sides like a mad acrobat. This opponent is wearing better armor than the rest of the Bandits, so I won't be able to defeat him by just swinging my sword around randomly. I grabbed Durandal's handle with both of my hands again and also assumed my stance. If there's one thing I learned from my kendo lessons, it is that when you are fighting against an armored opponent, your moves are all that's important.

He tried to slash me from above, so I quickly sidestepped and slashed him on the wrist, wounding it severely. Durandal is truly strong, being able to inflict such wounds with such a shallow cut. However, the Bandit ignored the blood dripping from his wrist and attacked me again. I prepared myself to block and counter it, but it turned out that he was just feinting that attack. His real aim was to swing his bleeding hand at me so that the blood from the wound splash into my eyes, momentarily blinding me. Of course, he used that chance to get away.

Right now, all of the bandits were in full retreat mode, running for their lives

like the little bitches they were. So I guess the likes of them are only tough when they are absolutely sure of their advantage. What a bunch of losers.

Before they completely retreated, I finished off as many of them as I could. None of them posed a threat to me now, not when they were exposing their backs to me as they were trying to get away. Eventually only a handful of them managed to flee, but I still managed to earn quite a lot of experience points in the end, so I think that it was all worth the trouble.

「Fuuu~~」

Breathing a sigh of relief after the battle was over, I just sat down right where I stood. Even if this is only a game, all that moving around was still pretty tiring, just like in real life, so I need a moment to calm myself down from all that battle high. Little by little, the sound of the surroundings are flowing into my ears again as I look around the battlefield to get the grasp of the situation. As one might have expected, the whole field is littered with corpses, mostly the bandit ones, and the pools of spilt blood. Not a pretty sight at all, I can tell you that. And by the looks of it, the bodies of the dead are not going to disappear immediately. What an unnecessary bit of realism. I wonder if it's something that the beta testers overlooked. Then again, do VR games even have beta testers to being with? Or maybe I am doing the testing right now? If that is indeed the case, then maybe I should file a complaint to the developers.

As I was contemplating what should be the contents of my complaint, the village chief approached me.

「I don't know what to say, oh brave stranger.」

I glanced at him when he finished talking. Even though the language setting was that Brahim or whatever, the first word was totally incomprehensible to me, but with every next word I could understand what he was saying more clearly.

「Oh, forgive my rudeness. Tell me, do you speak Brahim, stranger?」

「I know it to some extent.」

I replied to him.

「Ohh, and you speak it so fluently even though you're not looking like a local. Are you perhaps an Adventurer?」

「Perhaps」 my ass! It should be obvious at first glance!

「Well, I guess you could say that.」

I politely confirmed his suspicions. After all, I don't want to make him my enemy by being unnecessarily rude or secretive. If possible, I want to build friendly relations with them because who knows, maybe I'll be able to benefit from it quite a bit?

「Thank you for saving our village from those filthy brigands. You have our undying gratitude, young Adventurer.」

「No need to thank me. I just did what everyone else would do if they were placed in such a situation.」

I tried to brush it off as if it were the most natural thing to do. Also, something about this whole situation seemed awfully fishy to me. For someone of his age and level, the village chief appeared to be almost too humble to me. Why would he use such a polite tone and words when talking to a Lv1 brat like me? Okay, I get that I probably saved his life and all, but even for something like that it seems to be a little too much.

「Please, allow me to reward you for your bravery and selflessness. Is there anything I can do for you?」

「Hmm, let me think... oh, then, if it isn't too much trouble, I don't have any place to stay, so maybe you could do something about that?」

Although it is a game, the fatigue I felt was very much real. For virtual reality that's quite an achievement. Other than that, I simply didn't want to stay here on this battlefield anymore than it was absolutely necessary. I wanted to leave it as fast as possible.

「Come stay at my house then. My name is Somalia and I'm the chief of this

village.]

Identify told me the same. His Job was really listed as Village Chief.

「My name is Kaga Michio. Pleased to meet you and thank you for your kind offer.」

「XXX father! XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX ✕ .」

I couldn't understand most of the conversation between the village chief and the villagers, even though I could understand the chief himself quickly. Just what is going on in this game?

「Are there many people here who can speak Brahim?」

「That would be just me and the village trader.」

「Is that so?」

「I must say, you're quite amazing, Michio-sama. You're able to speak Brahim even though you're so young!」

Is that really something so amazing? And by the way, Brahim is not Japanese. Far from it, actually, it is a language that sounds like everything but Japanese. But for some bizarre reason I was able to understand those who also knew how to speak it. As for everyone else, even if they spoke to me, I couldn't understand a single word they were saying. Looks like I will only be able to hold a conversation with the village chief and that other person.

Looking at the chief, I have to say that he didn't look like someone who's a Lv25, and a former Adventurer at that. I mean, Village Chief was the only Job he had listed, so maybe in this game your status changes in real-time depending on the choices you make and the actions you take?

While we're at it, let's have another look at my own status.

Kaga Michio, Male, 17 years old

Jobs: Villager Lv2 Thief: Lv2

Equipment: Holy Sword Durandal, Ring of Determination, Sandals

Sweet, looks like the levels of my jobs went up as a result of that battle earlier. Well since it was as fierce as it was then what did you expect? My only gripe would be that after killing so many Bandits I only managed to gain a single level in each of my jobs. Looks like grinding levels is going to be a serious pain in the ass.

By the time I finished the inspection of my status we had already arrived at the Chief's house.

Part 4

「You must be tired after the battle, Michio-sama. I'll have my wife prepare a bath of hot water for you, so until it is ready please make yourself at home.」

「All right. Thank you, and sorry for the trouble.」

The Chief had a little exchange with his wife which I totally couldn't understand, and then he urged me to come inside with him.

The entire thing was a two-story building build in western style. Based on what I have seen up until now, it looks like the civilization in this game is not all that advanced. My guess is that technologically they should be at the level of our Middle Ages at best? I mean, I haven't seen anyone using a gun so far, but I didn't see anyone using a bow either, so I guess the exact specifics will have to be determined later.

From the entrance alone it became apparent that inside this house was much bigger than it looked from the outside. Immediately upon entering, I was guided to a small side-room and told to sit down.

「Please wait here while we will get everything ready.」

「Okay, I'll be sure to do just that.」

「Now, if you'll excuse me...」

It was a simple room with almost no furniture in it, probably serving as some kind of a storeroom, so before the Chief left me there to wait he handed me a wooden board so that I could sit on it. Well, I was hoping to at least get

myself a chair, but that is fine as well. Everything is better than freezing my ass off on the cold hard ground.

「Phew.....」

I sighed without even realizing it. Well, as far as the first times in games go, this was certainly an intense one, but I think now that we have reached our 「Rest Period」 after successfully completing the tutorial event would be a great time to call it a day and log out.

..... Wait, how do you do that again? Maybe there is a button, or a prompt somewhere within my field of vision..... nope, no good. Then maybe I have to move my hand or fingers in a specific motion, like in that one famous VRMMO... nah, that was not it either...

..... Huh?

But no, seriously now, how the fuck do I log out of this goddamn game?! No, no no no no no no, don't tell me I can't log out!?

I was beginning to panic. Thinking about it, I really didn't know how am I supposed to log out of this game. There was nothing about it before or after the character creation process, and certainly no information windows with that crucial details appeared when the game started. But then... how am I supposed to go back to reality?

「Log Out!」

I shouted, but nothing happened. No forced pause, no time stopping around me, nothing. The game's world just continued onward.

「Log Off! End! Stop! System! Options! Main Menu! Save & Quit!」

Still nothing.

「Main Menu! Menu! Exit to the Main Menu! Exit Options! Window! Open Window! Menu Window! Exit Window! Memory! Save! Quit! Save & Quit! Quit Without Saving!」

I tried saying every combination possible that came to my mind, and still nothing happened. At this rate, I will really be unable to return to reality from this fucking shit game!

But.... Can I really call this a game at this point? Because all of my senses were telling me that everything around me was 100% real. There was no room for doubts. This couldn't have been a mere dream or some cheap fabrication, not with that level of attention to every little detail.

And anyway, if this really is a virtual reality that is practically indistinguishable from the real world, then how is this possible that something like that hasn't been covered by the media?! I mean, can you imagine?! That would make this game the very first to offer a full virtual reality experience!

..... No. As awesome as that would be, it's just not possible. After all, I didn't use any VR gear to start playing. All I did was opening a browser, clicking on a link and finishing the character creation process. That's something even a trained monkey could pull off.

And yet here I am. In a world that is clearly not real, but it looks, smells and feels like real.

For all I know, this might be the real world, and the life I was living up until now was nothing more than a cruel simulation. But then... why would I think that this was a game? My Identify Skill came to my mind. A tool that allowed me to view myself as if I was watching from a third person perspective and all the information about me, something like that was possible only in games.

However, as I finished inspecting every part of my body, I finally noticed it.

All the blood that my jersey was stained with.

If it was a game, something like that would never have happened. And it wouldn't have that nauseating smell! Blood would have just fly into the air and fall to the ground where it would have simply disappeared after a while or turned into a myriad of pixels and evaporated.

So which is it? A game world, or a real world? Where am I? What Is going

on here?! I guess it doesn't really matter all that much. Without a way to log out of it, what difference does it really make? If I am stuck here without any option to bail out, then it means that this has become my new reality.



WARNING!

**IF YOU CHOSE TO CONTINUE BEYOND THIS POINT, YOU WILL
LIVE YOUR LIFE IN A DIFFERENT WORLD, NEVER TO
COMEBACK TO THE WORLD YOU WILL BE LEAVING BEHIND.
KNOWING THIS, DO YOU STILL WISH TO CONTINUE?**

That was the last memory of my own world that I had. That ominous message which appeared at the end of the character creation process. It was way too dubious to be part of the actual game, and admittedly I was pretty tilted at that time so I kinda neglected it and clicked yes without really thinking it through.

That's why I can be entirely sure this is a game world or not. If this is the game world just like it was described on the main site, then the warning given at the end could certainly be true.

「Please excuse me.」

While I was thinking so hard on it, the village Chief came to me together with a woman who looked like she might have been his wife. She was carrying a large wooden bowl filled with water and a towel in her hands.

「Aa, aaah.」

「Michio-sama, please use this hot water and towel to cleanse yourself off the battle's filth.」

His wife placed the bowl in front of me and handed me the towel, or to be more precise, a piece of cloth that was supposed to be the towel.

「My wife also prepared a change of clothes for you. What you are wearing right now is dirty, so let us wash it for you.」

「Thank you, and sorry for the trouble.」

And a change of clothes was placed in front of me.

At first I thought that that woman might be the village Chief's servant, but by using Identify I confirmed that she was indeed his wife at the age of sixty-six.

Completing the task she was given, she left the room together with her husband.

When I was finally left alone again, I took off my clothes and wiped myself with the ragged cloth-towel. Looking at my jersey, it was completely littered with red stains. The blood of all the Bandits I have killed, and it didn't look like it was going to disappear anytime soon without a thorough wash. Well, what did you expect, Michio? This is apparently not a game, so of course it won't disappear.

Not a game huh? Because sure, real life allows you to identify other people after looking at them and carry up to six weapons. Yeah, right.

FINAL WARNING!
KNOWING THE RISK, DO YOU STILL WISH TO CONTINUE
ANYWAY?

Okay, okay, I admit, this really is another world that is just like the game I was supposed to play. Also, I admit that I tried to run away from reality and look away from the facts I should have easily acknowledged. And what is the most common way of escaping reality in video games?

Murdering the shit out of everyone who comes your way.

If this is really a game, then I just killed a number of game characters, even though they were mere Bandits. But if it's not a game, then the ones I have killed were actual people. What I did earlier, my heroic charge forward coupled with slicing the Bandits into fine pieces, would simply be called a brutal murder if this was the real world. So for the safety of my own mind, I want to think that this world is a game, even though it might as well be nothing more than wishful thinking.

.....

.....

「.....」

I can't. I just can't ignore what I did earlier. I have to accept it. This is reality, and I just committed a murder. I killed people. I took and ended people's lives, thinking they were just some mobs from a game! That's horrible! Utterly unforgivable.

But all in all unavoidable, the more I think about it.

Part 5

Yeah, that's right. I shouldn't allow something like that to bother me at all! In a medieval setting events like that are an everyday occurrence, so there's no sense in getting depressed over them if it was just a first from many more that will probably come my way. If I won't be able to at least do that, then I probably won't be able to go on living in this world.

I take a deep breath and make my decision.

From now on, this is my reality. A place where I'll have to live from today onward, and in order to live, I will definitely have to get my hands dirty, so I cannot be afraid of doing it. Do whatever it takes for me to survive. And speaking of surviving, there actually is a way for me to confirm my suspicions of this world being a game.

The Character Reset option.

What came to my mind was the Character Reset screen. As if I was sitting in front of a computer screen, I was able to see the images of how all of my stats would look if I decided to reset my character and all of his skills. As expected, resetting all of the stat points and Bonus Skills would be not very effective, because contrary to the character creation process a reset cannot be performed over and over again on one character page until you would achieve a desired result, and all of the changes would be apparently applied in-world without logging me out, so there goes my hope of bypassing the rules set by the system to no-way-fag my way out of this predicament.

So according to the system warning I have received at the end of the character creation process I have made a decision to permanently leave Japan and begin my life anew in another world. But here's the thing: it wasn't exactly my conscious, thoroughly thought-out decision, but rather one made while being tilted and annoyed that I couldn't begin playing already and just

smashing the okay icon with my mouse. Had I known it was going to end like that, I would have never clicked that blasted OK button and just moved on with my life, probably to find myself a new game to play, preferably the one that would be less sketchy than this one.

Anyway, currently I had 1 Bonus Point left to use for some reason. I should have used up all of the ones I had, but maybe I overlooked this one? Ah, whatever. I guess I should just drop the whole resetting thing and leave my character as it is, at least for the time being and change into the clothes the village Chief prepared for me.

But really now, is the way back to the real Japan closed for me forever? If that warning was for real, then I guess that was really it for me. I can't go back and that's final. And oddly enough, that might end up working surprisingly well for me, since I was contemplating whether or not I should kill myself in the first place. Back in Japan, nothing is really waiting for me to return. Not the school where I had no friends nor my abusive shit-of-a-father.

Thinking about it, what was keeping me alive there anyway? Was it the need to see the next issue of all the mangas I was reading or the taste of the meat buns from the bakery that was near where I lived? Because if so, then I have to say: Kaga Michio, those were some legitimately crappy reason for continuing to put up with the dicking that Life was handing to you.

Will I really live in this world? Can I do it? The clothes the Chief presented me with were too large for me and didn't fit me at all. They were rough and itchy and not comfortable at all, just like that ragged towel I had to wipe myself with. I guess another thing I will have to say goodbye to will be the soft and comfortable Japanese clothing I was wearing my whole life. Ehh, it's fine, it's fine. Just another compromise I will have to get used to. Besides, if all of the villagers were wearing them then that has to mean they are not as bad as they look. I just have to stop being so nitpicky about everything and thank him for letting me borrow his clothes. I tried to use Identify on them, but apparently normal clothing was not considered an item by the game's systems. I have to make sure to remember that there is such a distinction, but for now there are more important things I have to focus my attention on.

For the time being I guess I should remove Durandal from the items I have

equipped on me. It is a great sword. An amazing sword. A very powerful sword. I fully realized that during that earlier fight.

Which is exactly why it can become the target of thieves or other bandits. If this is a game, then it probably won't get stolen, because it should be safe in the space of my personal inventory, but it'll be an entirely different story if this is not a game. For now it is my only weapon, so if I lose it I will be in such a deep shit that I don't even want to imagine it. I think that the best course of action in regards to that will be to sleep with one eye open, just in case someone tried to pull a sneaky on me with their sticky fingers.

In regards to that, I am curious about the sandals I am wearing right now, because technically they are someone's property which I have unlawfully appropriated upon my awakening in this world. So if somebody else's sandals can become mine when stolen, then the same can probably be applied to my Durandal. So just like in real life, stealing can go both ways here, except for the fact that if I get my Durandal stolen for me it will be equivalent to losing 63 of my Bonus Points which I've spent to get it, and if there's one thing I can consider to be my ally in this strange, unfamiliar world, that would be Bonus Points, without a doubt. Those 99 points I have received at the beginning helped me out tremendously in gaining a good head-start, so I absolutely have to make sure I will treasure every single one of them I can get from now on.

Another thing that I have to be wary of is the possibility that those who might want to steal Durandal from me might do it the easiest way possible: by killing me, its owner in order to obtain it, which brings us to the next issue: how is death treated in this world? When I die, will I just be revived in the nearest church or cathedral with a little less gold in my pocket and lowered experience value, or is death treated here the same way as it was in my world, something final that cannot be undone by any means? In any case, I shouldn't be going around with my holy sword on full display like that all the time if I want to avoid trouble. Worst case scenario, I will simply use the reset option to get rid of it. If I won't be able to use it anymore, no one else will!

But wait, will I even be able to just delete it after it will be stolen from me?

Okay, time for a little test.

I tried resetting my character in such a way that it didn't have Durandal, that is by not putting enough Bonus Points in the Bonus Weapons category. As a result, the Ring of Determination which I was wearing on my finger got removed. So it's just like I suspected, huh? Looks like if Durandal is indeed stolen from me, both the stat bonuses it was giving me and Bonus Points required to obtain it will be wasted.

After performing another reset to get Durandal back, I just stood with it for a while, contemplating my options here. For now I removed Bonus Weapon 6 from my skill list, making Durandal disappear.

Okay, now that that's done maybe I should twiddle with the Jobs settings for a bit. I imagined my character status screen in my head and moved to the list of Jobs I had available. Currently there were 3 of them.

Villager Lv2

Thief Lv2

Hero Lv1

That third one, Hero was not present when I awakened, so I'm guessing it must have unlocked after the battle with the Bandits? I wonder if it's maybe because the Chief saw me as a hero after I helped him? All right, let's examine that new class of mine a little bit closer, shall we?

Hero Lv1

Class Effect: Heroic Bravery – Raises the value of each statistic by 10 points

Class Skill: Overwhelm

Looks like a pretty good Job to me, definitely efficient in terms of stat bonuses it provides. As for the acquisition... since I obtained the Thief Job by stealing a pair of sandals, then I truly must have acquired the Hero Job after defeating those Bandits. Will I have to level this job up by performing other heroic deeds? And I wonder if the stat boosts are going to keep increasing with class levels? Because even at Lv1 it's waaaaay better than those of the other two, but I guess that was to be expected from a class reserved exclusively for heroes. As for the other two, the Villager Job grants only a slight boost to the STR stat and does not grant any additional skills to

go along with it, so in my book it's literally the thrashiest of all Jobs. The Thief Job was somewhat better than the Villager, except for the fact that instead of a slight STR increase it offered a boost to AGI stat, but it also had no skills associated with it. In conclusion, those two starting classes suck so much ass that it's actually unbelievable how bad they are.

All right, that settles it, I'll perform the character reset again since I managed to acquire that third Job. This time maybe I'll try to build myself around it and put all the remaining Bonus Points into the experience-based skills. Yeah, that sounds like a good plan.

Part 6

Kaga Michio: Human Male 17 years old

Jobs: Villager Lv2 Thief Lv2 Hero Lv1 Equipment: Sandals

After completing the character I reset, I used Identify on myself. I now had three Jobs.

But wait a minute, shouldn't Hero be the first one? I tried switching Hero with Villager, but it did nothing. So what, you trying to tell me that only Villager and Thief can be set as the first Job? Why is that?! Eh, this sucks major ass, but no helping it I guess. Let's just set Hero as the second Job and Thief as the third one, which has apparently advanced to Lv2.

「I'm sorry to bother you, Michio-sama, but may I have a moment of your time?」

The Village Chief came to see me again.

「Sure, I don't mind. What do you need?」

I don't know about you, but to me the Chief's attitude started to feel a little bit too humble, almost as if he tried too hard to kiss my ass. I know he probably feels extremely grateful to me for saving his life, but that's going too far, even by my standards. I know that with Durandal's power I was able to cut those bandits down like grass in the garden, but that doesn't make me almighty or anything like that. If he thinks that from now on my presence here is going to be everything they will need to keep other bandits away from attacking the village, then I hate to break it to him but he's sorely mistaken. No matter what, the village needs to stay vigilant. Then again, maybe that is exactly why he is like that to me. Maybe he thinks that by getting on my good side, he will be able to convince me to become the village's protector?

Ugh, this is shaping up to be even more annoying than I had initially anticipated. I wonder if there's anything I can do to avoid having to deal with such a major headache?

「The breakfast will be served later, but first I would like you to join me outside. We have gathered all of the bandit's equipment that was left after you disposed of them and I would be honored if you could inspect it with me and the other villagers.」

「All right, I'll do it.」

Now this is getting interesting. Inspection? What for? Are we going to distribute the leftover bandit gear between ourselves? Because if so, then I should have the right to claim the equipment of every Bandit that I have personally slain as my own. If I'm lucky, maybe some of them had some good stuff on them that I could use, but if not, I'll just allow the villagers to have it. Maybe they'll be able to sell it for a good price, which would in turn score me some brownie points with them.

「Then please, follow me.」

「Sure, but is it really okay for me to claim part of the gear as my own?」

But just to be on the safe side, I decided to ask the Chief about it.

「Of course. By the right of taking, the equipment of every man you defeated is yours for the taking, Michio-sama!」

「Good.」

So I was right and he just confirmed my suspicions. I also managed to learn about one of the laws governing this world: essentially, belongings of every person you kill are yours. I think it checks out with the setting, unless those are the medieval times with added law enforcement and judiciary systems like those in the present day Japan.

「This time my fellow villagers managed to defeat two of the Bandits. Therefore I'll have to oversee the process of distributing their belongings

between them to ensure that everyone will get his equal share and... I hope I won't overstep my boundaries, Michio-sama, but if it so happened that none of your share of equipment would be to your liking, would you please consider sharing it with us?」

Wow, all those villagers managed to defeat only two Bandits? This is so laughable that it's not even funny. Then again, I have to keep in mind that they fought against them armed with nothing more than simple weapons and farming tools, while I was slashing away at them with a fricking Holy Sword.

「I understand your situation. If it's going to help you, I don't mind sharing some of my spoils.」

Until I learn all of this world's customs properly my best course of action would be to follow any of the suggestions I am given, as long as they are not too absurd, of course. I know technically I was the reason they managed to keep their homes and families safe, but hogging all the spoils of war to myself would be a total dick move. Think of the long term consequences here. With their current weaponry, they barely managed to defeat two of the Bandits while my Durandal did the rest for them. But when I will leave this village to move forward with my new life, there will be no one who they will be able to rely on but themselves and for that, they are going to need everything they can get their hands on.

「Thank you! On behalf of all the villagers, thank you from the bottom of my heart!」

Man, I am really not used to people thanking me for anything.

「Don't worry about it, I just did what anyone else would do if they were in my place.」

I somehow managed to squeeze that lame line out of my throat. Okay, on to the next point of business. Since my Identify is a Bonus Skill I don't think someone like the Chief is going to have something similar to, so maybe I'll make myself useful by helping them sort the things that might be genuinely useful from the ordinary pieces of junk. On a completely unrelated side note...

The villagers seem to be taking me for someone who's Level is above 30.

During that earlier battle, the Villagers and the bandits were all more or less the same level, which was about 25, although some of the Bandits were obviously higher than that, considering the overall Kills/Deaths ratio of both sides. So considering that I myself am at first levels in all of my Jobs, it will be no exaggeration to say that my Holy Sword Durandal has basically hard-carried me throughout my first battle. That is just how OP of a weapon it is.

We went to the outskirts of the village where the battle with the bandits took place. Their equipment was placed on the ground there, waiting for us, guarded by one of the villagers. Could this be this Lv6 merchant, the one who could speak the Brahim language?

「This fine man here is Pitzker, the only merchant in our village.」

「The name's Pitzker, just like the Chief said. Young man, Allow me to express my deepest gratitude for saving our village from those brigands earlier.」



「Michio. I haven't done anything special, so please stop exaggerating.」

「As you wish. This here is the Bandit's equipment that we managed to salvage.」

Taking a closer look, I saw all the Leather Armors, shoes and weapons carried by the Bandits that we have slain.

「Ahh, yes, thank you. Let us rejoice and praise the young hero who defeated most of the Bandits by himself! Now, these items here...」

「I don't care.」

I am not interested in the part of the items that belongs to the two villagers. All I care about is my part of the loot.

「Michio-sama, do you have enough space?」

「Space?」

Fuck, this is the terminology I know nothing about! What about having enough space?!

「Oh, I beg your pardon, have I spelled something wrong in Brahim? Allow me to rephrase then. Do you have enough inventory space for all the items you are eligible to?」

「Hmm, you're right. It might not be enough for so many items.」

I don't understand. Isn't the space in the inventory I already have enough?

「Really? Isn't Michio-sama an Adventurer?」

「Well, something along those lines.」

Does this world have some kinda special definition of who Adventurers are? Come on Michio, whatever you do now, just don't let them know that you have no clue what they are talking about. Keep your mask of deception on and don't let it fall off no matter what.

「Well, then you should be able to access your Item Box. Isn't that how you equipped that wonderful sword of yours which you used to get rid of those Bandits?」

Chief offered me a helping hand. So is that what an Item Box is? It would be hellishly sweet if that was actually the case.

Come to think of it, when I performed a character reset, my Durandal was unequipped off me. So based on what the Chief was telling me, it must have gone somewhere.

「Item Box, open. Item Space, open. Inventory, open. Tool Bag, open.」

I tried using spoken commands again, but just like last time I tried it, big fat nothing happened. Am I doing something wrong here? Or is the spelling different? Anyway, the conclusion for now is that I do not know how to open an Item Box. And to add to the list of my problems (which was growing rapidly), both the Village Chief and the merchant were giving me suspicious looks.

Part 7

Look, I know I must be looking suspicious as fuck right now, okay? I realize that and those looks of yours hurt me more than a thousand actual verbal insults would!

Painful! This is just too painful! It's like I am forced to relive the trauma of my chuunibyou years all over again! N-No, be silent, oh the forbidden power that dwelleth inside of my left hand! Even though you feel anger at those insignificant peasants making fun of your host, you mustn't unleash thine wrath upon this unworthy plain of existence if the equilibrium is to stay unharmed..... FUCK! I did it again! My dark history! The shameful past I was trying so hard to put behind me! It's all coming back to me!

「Well? How is it, Michio-sama? Can you do it?」

「I would if I could, but unfortunately it looks like my inventory space is completely filled up.」

That was obviously a lie, but at the current moment I couldn't come up with anything better, to explain what happened to my Durandal, so I just have to hope that it's going to sound believable enough for them to lay off of me. And while we're at it, where did that goddamn sword go anyway?!

「Oh, then that is truly unfortunate. Tell me, Michio-sama, have you ever been to the city of Veil?」

「Hm? No, can't say that I did.」

「Actually, I will be heading there tomorrow at dawn to do my merchant business. If it's alright with you, I could carry all of your equipment there on my wagon. The city of Veil has many shops that specialize in weapons and armor for Adventurers so it could be easily sold there without any problems.」

The merchant offers. To be honest I was expecting him to buy all that crap off of me right away, but it looks like things won't be that simple. Nevertheless, if he's so graciously offering to do this for me then I should probably take him up on his kind offer.

「Thank you very much. If you could do that for me, I would be much obliged.」

It's a good thing that you don't have to use any complicated menus to hand your possessions over to other people.

「Marvelous. With that said, here is your Intelligence Card from the Bandits.」

The merchant presented me with a notepad sized card.

「Intelligence... Card?」

I ask back at him, unsure of what that thing actually was.

「It is a proof that you have defeated all those Bandits that dropped out of the body of their leader after the fight. With a group as large as they were, some of them are surely bound to be notorious wanted criminals, so if you present it at the headquarters of the Knights of Vale Order, I'm sure you'll be eligible to a handsome reward.」

「Is that... so?」

At first that Intelligence Card term sounded like more trouble than it was worth, but now that the merchant guy explained it to me in detail, the whole matter became quite easy to understand. This is a world with a medieval setting where bandit attacks are commonplace, so it would stand to reason that some of them gathered quite a lot of infamy to their name, resulting in sending wanted posters with their faces all over the kingdom. So this little card is the proof that the deed has been done that everybody seems to be aware of, huh? And I might get some dough out of it? Well, count me in!

Of course, after being killed, the same Bandits won't come back to life again, right? Right, of course. If this is the real world, then it must be like that. Only

one life per person, no redos or respawns allowed.

Even though I more or less understood the principles behind the Intelligence Cards and how they worked, it was still a hefty amount of information dumped upon me all at once, so I couldn't help it but to feel a little bit overwhelmed. I examined the Card one more time just to be sure that I didn't miss anything important and then I proceeded with the inspection of my share of the Bandit's equipment.

Most of it consisted of Copper and Bronze Swords, but my eyes were immediately drawn towards an Iron Sword. It looked to be at least one rank above the rest of the common trash, making it a rare weapon. Well shit. I actually don't want it to be rare. The rarer the item, the bigger the chance that someone is going to target me to steal it.

Looking at all the swords with Identify, there was one thing that caught me as strange.

One of the better looking Bronze Swords had an empty window. The rest of the Copper Swords didn't have any windows at all.

「Is everything all right, Michio-sama? Has something caught your attention?」

The merchant asked me as I was examining the Bronze Sword in my hand. Durandal also had windows like that, but they were filled with various skills. So could it be that this empty window is actually a skill slot?

「This seems to be a good weapon, better than the rest of similar ones.」

「Oh, so you were able to figure that out? For someone who is not a Merchant, you seem to have quite a good eye.」

However, there is a small problem. I don't know how to acquire and equip skills.

「Skill. Skill Slot. Grant Skill. Assign Skill.」

I mumbled to myself again and again nothing happened and nothing changed,

as expected. Ah well, not like I hoped for it to go any different than all those other times when I tried to use spoken commands only to end up severely disappointed. For now I should just finish appraising and maybe consider another character reset to see if anything can actually be done about that.

「If you are wondering about the skill slots, then allow me to explain. They can be created by the blacksmiths when they fuse them from the corresponding Skill Crystals. Does the sword you're holding have any skills assigned to it?」

「No, I don't see anything like that. The slot is empty.」

「That is unfortunate, but nothing to fret about.」

So it looks like I'm going to need those Skill Crystals in order to add skills to the weapons and I will only be able to do so at a blacksmith, or perhaps I'll be able to do it myself if I obtain the Blacksmith Job.

「All in all, this isn't a bad sword, so I think I might do just that.」

「Michio-sama, are you able to tell if a weapon has a skill attached to it or not?」

The Village Chief inquired.

「Generally, yeah. I think you may call it, 「An Adventurer's Intuition」.」

Since Identify is a Bonus Skill, very few people should possess it, so I think it would be wise of me not to mention that I have an ability like that.

「If that is the case, then can I trouble you with looking at the rest of them with your discerning eyes? It would make our lives that much easier if we could pick the best ones possible for the purpose of defending ourselves and selling the ones that we won't need.」

「I guess I can do that, but don't blame me if there'll be something that I won't be able to understand.」

「You have my eternal gratitude, Michio-sama. Well then, let's get to it right

away.]

And I followed after the Village Chief to inspect the rest of the weaponry. Looking through all of them took me some time, but when I was finally done I could tell with absolute certainty that no other weapon aside from the ones that were assigned to me had any skills or skill slots on them. It was the same for all the armor and a bandana that were found among the things Bandits dropped when they died.

Huh? A bandana? Was that the one worn by the Bandit Leader? I must've missed it in the heat of battle.

... Or maybe not. Thinking about it now, it doesn't have to be a part of Bandit Leader's equipment at all!

Just now, all the finer details began coming back to me. Such a Bandana was not worn by the Bandit Leader, but by some of the common ones which were named Bandana Bandits. Just a common piece of cloth worn by the most common of small fries. It totally makes sense. If a Bandit wears a Bandana, he Becomes a Bandana Bandit, otherwise he would be a simple Bandit with no distinguishing features whatsoever. See? Completely logical... not!

This is a world of a game, so there must be some kinda hidden gimmick to it. So, my dear, Bandana, what are you, exactly?

「What is this Bandana right here?」

「I think it is the common one worn by Bandits.」

But contrary to my expectations, the merchant didn't impart any useful knowledge to me.

「Huh? What is it doing here. If memory serves me correctly, none of the Bandits wore something like that.」

The Village Chief said something truly outrageous. None of them wore it?! But... but that would mean that my own memory lied to me... or did it, really? Maybe there really weren't any Bandana Bandits in the group that

attacked the village and it was just a trick of my mind which was quite high on adrenaline at the moment it all transpired? But that would mean that someone has deliberately placed it here. Or that it was simply a rare drop and I was just lucky enough to get it during the very first tutorial battle.

It's funny, isn't it?

Back when I was still living in Japan (it feels weird to phrase it like that when you consider the fact that I left it literally a few hours ago, but whatever). Throughout my old life I was mostly a loser who used to cry himself to sleep every night, I didn't like to stand out and get into fights. But this world is not modern Japan. In this world, if you underestimate even the smallest of threats, you might pay for it with your life. I am the perfect example of that. I don't know how I came here but I did, and using my cheat-like weapon I have ended the lives of many people who probably didn't expect they'd die today, thus saving the village and its inhabitants from what would probably be a morbid end (even though saving the village wasn't my intention in the slightest, but telling them that would be too much of an arrow to my own knee, so I'm just not going to do that.)

Anyway, I think I'm getting off topic too much, so let me get back to it before things get any weirder than they already are.

Part 8

Village Chief looks intently at the Bandana and his brows frown as if he was trying to remember something with all his mental capability.

「I might be wrong... but I think that was indeed what the leader of the Bandits was wearing.」

「Oh, really now?」

The merchant's face got distorted with surprise.

「X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X?」

「X X X X X, X X X X X X X X X!」

Judging by his innocent reaction just now, it couldn't have been the merchant. Either that, or he is a very good actor who has no trouble with masking his real emotions, which I highly doubt. Same goes for the Village Chief. He wouldn't have made that remark if he was the one who replaced the item.

「That's impossible. Allow me to check right away!」

He shouts and then quickly leaves.

I wonder what will happen now? Can the (supposedly) stolen equipment really be found that easily? Also, currently I am only a Lv2 Villager, so if at all possible, I would like to avoid being in the center of everyone's attention as much as possible. If by any chance this develops into a more serious situation involving the entire village, it might be possible for them to find out that I have actually stolen the sandals I am wearing right now and automatically connect the Bandana switching with me. If the whole village

attacked me at once for that, there's no way I'd be able to win against all of them.

Maybe I shouldn't have mentioned it after all? Was I too hasty with that?

With that said, even if I did steal those sandals, the best course of action for now would be to keep quiet and see how the situation is going to develop.

At the very least, maybe I should have my Durandal ready?

As I stood there, contemplating what I should do now, a woman carrying three swords appeared. Could those belong to former adventurers?

「Want me to appraise those as well?」

I ask the merchant.

「If you would be so kind.」

「Okay, let's see what we're dealing with here.」

「X X X X X.」

Urged by the merchant's unintelligible words, the woman presented me with the swords. According to the Identify window, her name was Tirihi, 31 years old. Perhaps she was a widow after some Adventurer?

She was fairly well built and had long, braided blonde hair, typical for the women hailing from the countryside of eastern Europe. From the perspective of someone like me, a high schooler who didn't even hit adulthood yet, she was old enough to be considered an auntie, in the positive meaning of the word. To be honest, the more I actually looked at her, the more certain parts of me became twitchy & itchy. Normally widows and married women are not in my strike zone, but I felt like I could make an exception just for her. After all, I am the hero who saved this village, so maybe with a little help from gentle persuasion she'd be willing to keep me company for tonight... yeah, right, as if that would happen.

Let's behave ourselves for the time being and shake off any inappropriate

thoughts. I hold the sword in my hands and look at it inquisitively. The weapon I am holding now is a one handed sword called Flame Rapier. From the looks and the description of its skill, it is a thrusting weapon which deals fire damage instead of regular physical damage.

「This is a pretty good sword.」

「XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX.」

「Mrs. Tirihi says she is grateful for your humble words, Michio-sama.」

Next I grasped the sword firmly with both my hands and swung it a few times while exclaiming:

「Fire Sword!」

Nothing happened, nothing changed. The rapier's blade wasn't coated with fire or anything. It remained all the same no matter how many times I repeated my swinging motion. *Sigh* Am I actually insane? 'Cause I already know it's not going to work and yet here I am, trying the same thing again. If that isn't madness then I don't know what is.

「.....」

「.....」

Tirihi-san and the merchant are looking at me with those suspicious eyes again.

There it is, another broken death flag!

But just as I was about to fall into depression, a mysterious spell formula appeared in my head. Should I recite it? Something was telling that doing so will actually activate the skill laying dormant within the weapon, so I think it is at least worth a try. Well, here goes.

「Answer the burning will of my heart and manifest thyself! Flame Sword!」

I shouted the spell and swung the rapier from above my head. After a brief,

0.5 seconds delay a trail of fire followed the trajectory of the slash I have performed.

Oh wow. This. Is. Awesome!

「Haaa....!」

Tirihi-san also looked quite surprised at that sudden spectacle. Uh, lady, why are you so surprised? This is your late husband's sword, right? Have you never seen him doing something like that... no. If she knew the sword could do something like that, then she wouldn't bother with bringing it to me to appraise it.

Then the Village Chief appeared at the edge of my field of vision, talking to the other villagers, who probably saw me using that skill just now, because they were pointing their fingers at me and talking rather excitedly, which sends my mind into an alarmed state, so I tried to observe them without making it too obvious that I'm staring at them. What if they found out about my crime of sandal theft?! What happens to a thief once he's caught? Am I going to be made an example of and be flogged in front of the entire village? Or have my hand cut off?! Or perhaps they'll throw me into a tar-filled kettle and feather me to simultaneously punish me and make me into a laughingstock? That would certainly be a good demonstration of what happens to those who dare to break the law, haha, hahahahahaha.

No Michio, you mustn't think like that all the time! I know that my outcast mentality is probably at fault here, but can you really blame me for constantly doubting anyone and everyone around me? All my life I've been shown time and time again that others only want to hurt me, that's why I began to distance myself from them in the first place. But this strange new world is not, at least in theory, like the modern day Japan I chose to leave behind. No one knows me here, so you shouldn't assume that they'll treat you like a dirtbag as well. It might be difficult... heck, it certainly will be difficult, but maybe I should try to have a little more faith in people. Besides, even if I did steal those sandals from that barn, there's no concrete evidence pointing to me being the culprit, and they certainly weren't labeled with anybody's name, so even if I show them to the entire village I should still be in the clear.

「X X X X X X X X X X! X X X, X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X!」

「X X X X. X X X, X X X X X X X X X.」

Next to me, Merchant and Tirihi-san also discussed something that I was still unable to understand. The only thing that I was absolutely sure of, was the fact that after using that skill my body suddenly became quite weary and heavy. Even so, the fatigue I felt right now was not a physical, but rather a mental one which made me feel extremely tired, losing the will to do anything that required any kind of effort on my part. As a result, the rapier in my hands was getting heavier and heavier with each consecutive attempt at swinging it. Going by the standards of the classical RPG games, skills must have some kinda cost to using them, like MP or something along those lines and I probably expended too much of it. But I guess that was to be expected. After all, I currently have only Lv2 at the most basic of the basic Jobs, so it would stand to reason that my ability to use skills and spells would be greatly hindered by having abysmally low stats. And while we are on the topic of stats, I used Identify on myself to check my status and sure enough, right under the red HP bar and above the green Stamina bar was a blue bar labeled MP, which was depleted by approximately 75%. Ouch. As I thought. Until I gained some more levels, no skill spamming for me I guess.

「So, what would you like to do with that weapon, Michio-sama?」

「Meaning?」

「For what price would you like to sell it?」

The merchant asks. Oh, that's right. Since I'm the one appraising it, I guess it falls to me to decide what to do with it?

To sell or not to sell, that is the question. What should I do? Decisions, decisions, decisions.

Part 9

「I... I don't know, really. I am not well versed in how the market works, so I don't know what the best decision would be here. Heck, I don't even know this sword's usual market price.」

「So you have no intention of selling it then?」

「As I told you, I don't know the exact market price so I can't make such a decision carelessly. I think the best thing we could do right now is to go to the Weapon Shop in the city and ask someone there to tell us the actual price of this thing, otherwise we might just end up throwing a valuable item away at a dirt-cheap price.」

Not to mention that I don't even know what kind of currency they are using here.

「X X X X X? X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X?」

「X X.」

Teirihi-san and the merchant have a short conversation again after which she bows her head to me. Wouldn't it be nice if that was the sign of her readiness to service me tonight? Man, that would be totally awesome! Unfortunately that kind of thing is probably not going to happen. But it's nice to keep dreaming, right?

I handed the rapier over to Teirihi-san and took another sword from her, which turned out to be a one-handed Scimitar with two empty skill slots. All in all, it looked like another solid weapon.

「This one doesn't have any skills but seems like a fine piece of work overall.」

「Supposedly it was very cherished by its previous owner, an Adventurer who sadly perished in the heat of battle.」

This time he didn't ask me how I knew it had two skill slots free, meaning he must've bought my story about it being an Adventurer's intuition.

「I think it will also be good to show this to someone who's in the know before we decide what to do with it.」

I handed the Scimitar over to Teirihi-san and she bows her head down to me again. The last item was a simple dagger without any decorations whatsoever. It doesn't look like something that would sell for much money.

「This is just a plain dagger. Not bad as a weapon but there's no way it can be sold for any significant amount.」

Well buddy, back to Teirihi-san you go.

「XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX.」

When the merchant relayed what I just said to her, her eyes instantly turned red and wet with tears. Uh-oh, I might have made a huge oopsie. Nevertheless, she endured the urge to cry and went back home with the weapon in tow. Perhaps she remembered her late husband and wanted to be alone for a while. That was a shattered flag if I ever saw one. Nevertheless, I will be waiting for you tonight, Teirihi-san. My doors will always be open for you.

Now that Teirihi-san went away, the Village Chief approached us together with several other men.

「My humblest apologies, Michio-sama, but this man right here was the one responsible for replacing the Bandana.」

The man who was being dragged along behind him had his hands cuffed in a set of wooden handcuffs. *Sarcastically* So he's the one who tried to take that which did not belong to him without permission. Deplorable, truly deplorable. I renounce that man the most scornfully!

「This is the correct item he was trying to hide.」

The Village Chief urged another man to come forward and hand me the Bandana. I used Identify on it to confirm its authenticity.

Bandit's Bandana. No skill slots or skills.

「This is the item in question indeed. There is no doubt.」

「Now, as for the punishment this man is going to be subjected to...」

The Chief says after we finished the Bandit's Bandana inspection. I wanted to ask about that, but he beat me to the punch. How thoughtful of him. This was something that I was very eager to hear. I have to know if the criminals are handed over to some higher authorities or will the villagers take care of him themselves.

「For the crime he has committed against you, he's going to be tried and judged in accordance with the village's rules. Do you have any objections to that decision?」

This is going to be perfect. As a man who's skilled at reading the mood, there is only one thing for me to say in this situation.

「Of course. Do what you think is best.」

「Of course. We will do just that.」

Huh? What's that? Was that a glimpse of disappointment I saw in the Chief's eyes? Did I say something wrong?

The Chief spoke to the criminal.

The criminal nods and holds his bound hands in front of me.

「Flow of the Water Spirit, breath of the Wind Spirit, unite and reveal the hidden truth. Intelligence Card, open.」

When the Chief finished the chant, a card popped out of the criminal's left hand.

Oooooh! What was that! That was so cool! It's just like the Intelligence Cards that were left by the Bandits that were given to me. The Village Chief took it and murmured something I wasn't quite able to hear, and the additional information appeared on the Card.

「What did you do?」

「I added new information to this man's Intelligence Card. The information that from this day forward he will be your slave and he shall remain a slave unless he is released from his slave duty or bought back.」

「Ah, okay, cool I get it.」

I don't get it at all. What exactly did you do and how does that even work?! For the time being, what I do get is that Intelligence Cards are items that contain every important information about a person, that's why it can serve to identify the Bandits who were slain by me so that I could claim the reward for them.

「Allow me to explain further. The rules of our village state that if the villagers commit a crime such as stealing they are to be sold as a slave where half of the money obtained that way goes to the family who sold the criminal and the other half is given to the victim as compensation.. Of course, it will be the same in your case.」

So they have a slave system established here. Not good.

The situation was now clear to me. If they ever find out about my crime, I will end up just like that guy in the wooden handcuffs. My freedom would be taken from me and that's something I absolutely cannot allow!

「I'll gladly take you up on that offer, but I'll have you know that I don't hold

it against him for what he did. No hard feelings.]

「That might be true, but it doesn't change the fact that one of our own has wronged you.]

「What matters most is that the person responsible was caught. You don't have to apologize for anything, Chief.]

「You're too kind to me, Michio-sama. It's good to know that there are still people like you in the world.]

「Thank you very much. I think we can now conclude the weapon inspection.]

「Then let us go back to my house. The breakfast should be ready now.]

「Thank you for having me.]

I was grateful that we could change the subject to something more pleasant.

I have made up my mind.

I'm getting the fuck out of this place as soon as possible.

Chapter 2: Veil

Part 1

Player Name: Kaga Michio

Character Information & Equipment:

Class: Villager Lv2, Hero Lv1, Thief Lv2

Accessory: Ring of Determination, Sandals

「Michio-sama, you're more than welcome to stay here for tonight if you want. We'll prepare the best feast possible to show you our gratitude.」

The Village Chief told me that while we were eating breakfast, which consisted of oatmeal with salad and cheese. I can't say it was the best I have ever had, but all in all it wasn't that bad either. If we assume that this is the absolute bottom tier when it comes to food quality and that it can only go up more civilized cities, then I think I won't have any problems adapting to living in this world, at least as long as the food is concerned.

From what the Chief said I think it is safe to assume that dinner is going to be on the more luxurious side, fitting for a hero who saved the village from the Bandit attack. Nothing was said about lunch. It is possible that I am biased based on my current lifestyle where I always had three meals a day, but it looks like in this world the standard is two meals a day: breakfast and dinner.

「Thank you very much. Allow me to take you up on your kind offer.」

「Also, about your plans for tomorrow, the merchant said that his carriage is going to be departing for the city of Veil early in the morning. If you plan on going with him, then I suggest you to go to sleep early tonight.」

「Exactly how long will the journey to Veil take?」

「About three hours by carriage.」

The biggest question now is whether or not three hours here are the same as the three hours back in my old world. If I assume that they are, then I can do the following calculation: if we were to depart for Veil at around 8:00 AM then we would arrive at our destination at around 11:00 AM. If the merchant wants to wrap everything up in a day trip, he would have to leave the city by 3:00 PM to return to the village by 6:00 PM, meaning that the total time he would be spending in the city would be around four hours. He said he was going to restock on food and basic supplies, so I think that shouldn't take him very long to finish? 'Cause if we were able to return here before it gets dark, then maybe I'll have some free time to go fishing.

「Then I shall do just like you suggest.」

「Wonderful. I will be sure to relay the message to the merchant.」

With that settled, what should I do until tomorrow? Just sitting idly by would most definitely be counterproductive, so it would be nice if I could maybe find myself a spot to hunt some mobs in order to increase my level as much as possible.

「If I may ask, are there any mobs around this village?」

「Mobs? Could you perhaps be talking about monsters?」

「Ahh, yeah. That's right. Monsters. Are there any monsters around here?」

Note to self: Monsters, not Mobs. Gotta keep my player habits in check if I want to avoid making everybody needlessly suspicious of me.

「Well, I guess there are Slow Rabbits in the depths of the forest not far from here.」

「Slow Rabbits? I've never fought them before.」

The name suggested that they are weak as shit, but my gut was telling me that I shouldn't be overly confident just yet. Maybe it's one of those cases where the name is deceitful, masking the monster's true strength?

All right now, Village Chief. Time to make you spill some more beans for

me!

「What kind of a monster are they, exactly? Those Slow Rabbits, I mean.」

「Oh, they are relatively harmless because they tend to distance themselves from any human settlements and even in direct combat they are not much of a threat.」

「Oh, is that so? Good to know.」

Lucky me! Looks like I'll be able to grind with relative ease if they really are so weak. They will serve as a good way to pass the time and who knows, maybe I'll also be able to farm some items that I'll be able to sell for a nice prize?

Yes, that should be my current mindset. No use worrying that I might not be able to go back to Japan for now. Instead, I should focus all of my energy into securing a relatively stable situation for myself and I'll definitely need a clear head on my shoulders for that.

「As expected of an Adventurer! Even though they are hardly worth the effort, you'll still get out of your way to hunt them to keep the village safe from their menace!」

Dude... I think you're reading too much into it. Also, why have you reacted by shouting like that?

「If they are as weak as you describe them to be, then is it really a reason to be getting so emotional over them?」

「Y-Yes, of course they are.」

「Uh-huh, okay, keep going...」

「Even the Villagers can defeat one if they assault it in a group.」

Hey. What was that? It took several of you to defeat just one Rabbit?! How is that... no, Michio, keep your cool about you. Remember, gather information first, be a judgemental prick later.

「What about the drops? Did it left anything behind when you killed it?」

「Well we did managed to salvage the Rabbit's Fur out of it.」

「I see.」

Does that mean its fur is a drop item or something they salvaged manually by skinning it? It would be nice if it was the former.

「What is it, Michio-sama? Is there any problem with hunting those monsters?」

My doubts must have shown on my face, because the Chief asked me in a worried tone.

「No, everything's fine.」

Although I really wished it wasn't.

That was another dilemma for me. Should I really go for it? Will I, a low-level character be able to defeat monsters that higher level villagers had to gang up on to defeat just a single one? Then again, if I really want to live in this world as its full-fledged denizen, I'll have to eventually venture into the wild and start hunting monsters myself. I have no guarantee that this Slow Rabbit is really easy to defeat, but if I decide to do it after all then the sooner I take care of it the better.

I have no idea if I can even go back to the Japan I know and even if I could, I don't know if I want to go back to the shitty life I had there. And, objectively speaking, how much worse can this world be compared to my own. The risk of imminent death? Sure it's unpleasant, but everyone will die eventually. Ironically, I've found my way into this world thanks to a suicide website. I wanted to end my own life, so what difference does it make if I do it myself or with the assistance of some random monster? I have literally nothing to lose, so I might as well go check those Slow Rabbits out.

「All right, I think I will go check out those monsters now. It won't be a problem as long as I return here in time for dinner, right?」

As long as I use my Durandal, things shouldn't go south too quickly, and if they do, I can always tuck my tail between my legs and run. I stood up from my chair and started heading towards the door, when the Chief called out to me again.

「Michio-sama. Actually, some of our village youths want to hunt the Slow Rabbits as well. If at all possible, would it be all right for them to join you in your venture to the woods?」

「You mean go for a hunt together with them?」

「If they go with you, I have no doubt that they are going to have a good experience.」

Damn, what do I do now?

It would definitely be safer if I had more people with me. But...

「With all due respect, but I think it would be better if I went alone. I have never fought a Slow Rabbit before, so if worse came to worst I don't know if I'd be able to keep all the other's out of harm's way.」

「Now that I think about it, you're right. How wise of you to think about our youths well-being, Michio-sama!」

There was that, but I also had another reason for turning his request down.

At my current level I am weak, even if one of my weapons is OP as heck, so if one of the guys who went with me died a gruesome death it would be possible that the family or close friends of the deceased would want me to take responsibility for that, and since this village has adopted a slavery system, I concluded it is in my best interest to avoid such situations at all costs. I'm not risking any chances of becoming a slave because of somebody else's stupidity, oh hell no!

Part 2

After finishing my meal I put back the Bandits' Intelligence Cards, equip the Copper Sword and slowly make my way into the woods near the village. Strangely enough, not a single monster appeared even after I've been heading straight ahead for about 10 minutes. Normally when it comes to games, I'd have been attacked as soon as taking less than 10 paces outside the village, which should be considered as a safe zone for the players (in this particular case, myself), but no, there wasn't even one random encounter yet. I was honestly kinda disappointed, but at the same time some part of me felt relieved that I didn't have to fight anything yet. Oh, while we're at it, I also wondered why would anyone build a village in a spot full of monsters that were too tough for ordinary people to defeat by themselves? Seems needlessly hazardous and counterproductive to me. Also, since I am finally alone with myself, there's something I want to try.

「Intelligence Card, open!」

You know what happened? Yah, that's right, you guessed it: big fat nothing happened. But it's okay, this time I knew it would happen because the spell was not the same as when the Village Chief did it and I am not the kind of person who would memorize an entire spell after only listening to it once. So now I know that even for my own Intelligence Card this funky incantation is a must. And since I have firmly established that now, I can proceed forward without worrying about it too much.

Not long after I reached the thicker part of the woods I finally stumbled upon some strange animal, covered with white fur, about 50 cm long in total. Could this be the Slow Rabbit? I focused my gaze on it and used Identify and this is what came up:

「Slow Rabbit, Lv1」

Okay, so Identify works on other things than myself and the NPC's without any problems. Thankfully this guy is just Lv1. But then, why would the villagers have difficulties fighting something that has to basically be this world's equivalent of a Slime from other RPG's, meaning the weakest monster possible? I better remain cautious not to have my ass handed to me on a silver platter. I mean how big of a laughingstock would I be if something like that defeated me after I slew so many higher-leveled Bandits essentially by myself? I don't know how big of a wallop this guy actually packs, so I think it would be better for me to use Durandal here instead of a simple Copper Sword.

I opened up my Status screen and went through another Character Reset, switching back to my original settings where I had 64 Bonus Points to use by returning to the 1/5 EXP Required and Obtained EXP x5 and putting them all into Bonus Weapon 6 and since that upgrade cost 63 Bonus Points total, I had 1 Point remaining. Now what should I use it for?

Maybe... Meteor Crash? The description says that it is a very powerful offensive magic, so having it around might prove useful if I ever find myself to be in a tight spot. I confirmed the selection of Meteor Crash and ended the Character Reset there. Durandal appeared in my left hand on its own.

Initially I thought that if I used magic I wouldn't have to resort to using Durandal, but just in case I won't be able to finish that monster off with a single blow it will be my backup plan. I placed it at my waist, but moving around with two swords equipped on me proved to be more than a little difficult, probably because I was not used to it, so I decided to just leave the Copper Sword leaning against a nearby tree. Now I unsheathed Durandal and grabbed it firmly with both my hands.

Looks like the Slow Rabbit hasn't noticed me yet. This might be my chance to one shot it with a surprise attack! Here it goes!

「Meteor Crash!」

I yelled that out loud at the top of my lungs.

But nothing happened. And nothing changed. I just stood there, staring at the

rabbit like an idiot while he also looked at me with a question mark above its head. Really now, all that I need now to complete this scene are the cricket noises and some tumbleweed rolling in the background. Thank God we are so deep in the forest where no one could witness that epic fail of mine!

The spell! I didn't chant the spell's formula, that's probably why it didn't work!

As soon as I thought about that, the chant for Meteor Crash appeared in my mind. Okay, all right, sounds easy enough. Let's try using it now, hopefully to good effect.

「From beyond the infinite universe, the will of the sky is to diminish, destroy! METEOR CRASH!!!!」

I thought I nailed the incantation on the head this time, but once again nothing happened. But I finally noticed why. I didn't have enough MP to cast the spell. Strange. I have eaten more than enough and I am definitely not tired. Moreover, my MP that I lost after using the Fire Rapier should have also been replenished already. But if the spell refused to activate even after all of that, then there is only one possible explanation for this: the Villager's Job MP total at Lv2 was simply too low to use a spell such as Meteor Crash.

All this time, the Slow Rabbit just stood there and did nothing, looking at me as if I was some kinda exotic peculiarity. Oi, if you really are a monster, shouldn't you be running away from humans as soon as you see one?! Or maybe it wasn't afraid because it was actually so strong that it thought a single person wasn't enough to even scratch it after it learned that the villagers needed to hunt them down in groups? Well, guess what, buddy, here's some Holy Sword for you to taste! Let's see how tough you will be after I give you a good old stabby-stab where the sun doesn't shine!

With that I rushed at the monster and slashed it diagonally from top down. The sword digs into the rabbit's flesh as if it was cutting through butter, shredding him almost in half without any difficulties. The Slow Rabbit, a monstrosity that required a group of villagers to defeat just a single one, fell to the ground, lifeless. All it took was literally one blow and it was over. After a few seconds its body began to emit puffs of green smoke before it

melted away into nothingness. All that was left of it after the smoke cleared was a tuft of white, soft fur. Upon closer examination, it was the supposed drop item, The Rabbit's Fur. So that's what Chief was talking about when he was saying that they were able to salvage the fur out of the one rabbit they managed to slay. I took the fur and placed it in my inventory and returned to the place where I have left the Copper Sword. Using Durandal honestly felt like too much of an overkill for the opponents of such a low caliber, but there was always a possibility that I can bump into much stronger monsters while casually strolling through the woods or that only this particular Slow Rabbit happened to be weak as shit. With that thought in mind, I decided to explore the depths of the forest for a little while longer.

Not long after that first encounter I happened upon two more Slow Rabbits, but they were much the same as the first one: one-shotted with Durandal's single slash, so yeah, using the Holy Sword to fight them definitely felt like I was cheating, but on the other hand I now had 3 pieces of Rabbit's Fur instead of one, so I guess I wasn't really in the position to complain or anything. But when the next battle comes around, maybe I will try using the Copper Sword instead of Durandal, just to give those poor mobs an actual fighting chance, or maybe reset my character entirely again ...

Huh? What's this?

I should have no Bonus Points remaining, but for some reason my status screen says that I have 1 more point to use. Could it be that you automatically get Bonus Points over time? That's pretty neat. Okay, but for now I will discard Bonus Weapon 6 and put my Bonus Points between 1/20 EXP Required and Obtained EXP x10. The Bonus Points are now 0. With Meteor Crash still marked as checked, it is much better usage of the points than before. With my preparations finished, it's time to go look for another Slow Rabbit to check how the current settings I am rocking will fare in actual combat.

The Copper Sword's performance was obviously not as good as Durandal's, but all things considered it wasn't that bad either. At least I didn't one-shot the like before, but it didn't change the fact that even such a basic sword tore through their flesh without any major difficulties, maybe not cleaving them cleanly in half but digging pretty deeply into them.

But I have to tell you, the Slow Rabbit I'm fighting now is pretty tanky. It withstood not only my first attack, but also a second slash that came right after the first one, and it even managed to strike me with a counterattack. Or it would have if I didn't manage to avoid it in the nick of time. We exchanged two blows. This time its hits connected, but the resulting damage wasn't all that impressive. Nevertheless, I have to remain cautious at all times. Even the most insignificant of hits can turn lethal if they'd be allowed to pile up. The one saving grace here was that my enemy wasn't able to move very fast. It was a rabbit, after all. But just when I thought that, it did something totally unexpected which caught me totally off guard.

It jumped towards my throat with its bared teeth!

Part 3

Just what is this thing, a friggin' Caerbannog Rabbit?! Its head is badly damaged, as is the rest of its body but despite that it was still able to move around to such a degree!

I instinctively backstepped to prevent it from biting into my throat but that didn't stop it from pressing on the attack. It even threw an occasional body slam into the mix! And let me tell you, when it connected, I felt that with my whole body as a numbing shock spread throughout it! This is really dangerous. I cannot allow any more of those to hit me or I might be toast for sure!

I hacked and slashed at the damn thing but it was as if it had engaged some kinda 「Zombie-Berserk Mode」 or something, because no matter how many times I managed to cut it, it just refused to drop dead and die. Damn it, why are my attacks not working as well as they were just a few minutes ago?! Whenever I could I sneaked two or three strikes in, but it just completely abandoned any form of defense in favor of an aggressive offense. This is getting worse by the minute! If I don't do anything, I might die to this rabbit for real!

I somehow managed to avoid its subsequent attacks and regain my proper fighting posture and even hit the Slow Rabbit in the belly, making blood gush out of it. Good, it looks like that slash was deep enough to actually do something to it. If I can just keep this up, then I might be able to finally bring this bastard down!

But despite my best attempts, it still refuses to drop dead.

Another blow. And another one. Another one, another one, another one. At long last, after what seemed to be an eternity for me, the Slow Rabbit finally bites the dust and melts into the ground after emitting a puff of smoke.

「Haaa....」

I made a big sigh as my shoulders were frantically moving up and down in tandem with my ragged breath and the aching which was resonating throughout my whole body. That... was... beyond... ridiculous now! Is the difference between a normal weapon and the one obtained through Bonus Weapon really that big? I mean seriously, compared to Durandal, the Copper Sword was like, thousand times weaker, maybe even more! Or could it be that this particular Slow Rabbit was bugged beyond all rationality with how insanely strong and tough to take down he was?!

Speaking of which, he should have had a Lv displayed next to his name? I know it was thoughtless of me not to confirm it when the battle started, but I just kinda sorta assumed that it's going to be Lv1, the same as all the others. But now I know what to look out for, so from now on, I will be using Durandal to fight with every enemy that might show up to make sure that a fuckup such as this one won't happen again. I now see that the copper Sword is, without the shade of a doubt, the shittiest of the shitty weapons in this world. As for Durandal, did it not have some kinda life steal or absorption skill? I'm sure that with it I will be healing my wounds faster than the enemies will be able to inflict them upon me, limiting the damage taken to the bare minimum or maybe even eliminate it altogether. With that in mind I put away the Copper Sword and all the Rabbit's Fur I managed to collect and equipped Durandal again.

Not long after that encounter I happened upon another Slow Rabbit, but this time I made sure to check it out with Identify. So those things are Lv1 after all? I approached it while remaining cautious and prepared my Holy Sword, slashing at it while it was unaware of my presence. It disappeared in a puff of smoke while leaving the Rabbit's Fur behind while relieving some of my body's pain and recovering a bit of HP. It's great that this is an actual recovery, not a placebo effect. That way I should return to my best condition after defeating just one or two more enemies. I bagged another copy of Rabbit's Fur to my Item Box and continued to look for more prey.

There weren't that many monsters left in this neck of the woods anymore, but I continued my search in hope of finding even a single one, but I guess that has its merits too. With no monsters in the immediate vicinity of the village I

will be able to live that much more calmly, at least until I will finally decide to leave this place for good.

I wandered around the forest until it was late afternoon and I killed around 10 more Slow Rabbits. It's not getting dark just yet, but it will soon be 10:00 PM and the last thing I want to do is to wander around in the forest I have no knowledge of when it is getting so late so I should probably make my way back as soon as possible.

Even though I could probably still fight some more, that was definitely enough harvesting for today. I slowly exhaled, looked at my own opened hand and used Identify to check my Status.

Player Name: Kaga Michio

Character Information & Equipment:

Class: Villager Lv3, Hero Lv1, Thief Lv3

Weapon: Holy Sword Durandal

Accessory: Ring of Determination, Sandals

Looks like my levels are slowly rising and the best way to keep it that way is to continue to seek and kill monsters. It might also be connected to the fact that earlier my Bonus Points went up for some reason. That reason might be one of the Jobs leveling up to Lv2. So does that mean I scored some good EXP for those Bandits who attacked the village? I must've gotten so much that I didn't notice gaining a Lv2 in my Jobs since that would explain why reaching Lv3 took me almost an entire day of farming basic mobs. But if the leveling process is so easy, then why are most of the villagers such low-levels? Could the speed of gaining EXP have something to do with this? Questions for later. For now, it would be nice to receive confirmation regarding Bonus Points. Are they really increasing with each Level Up? And how do I use them without resetting my character all the time? If I want to be able to pull my own weight in here I better find the answer to those questions

fast. See, this is by far the biggest problem I have with this shitty game: it doesn't give you any Tutorials on how to do things, it's just 「Hey dog, you've been thrown into the game and like, that's it man, go figure the rest out for yourself because we're too lazy to explain even the most basic of mechanics.」. Oh come on, even Dark Souls did it better!

For now I unequipped Durandal and headed back in the direction of the village. On my way back I was thinking of resetting my character again and trying the other options from different levels of the Bonus Weapon skill, which were 5 in total, but then a thought occurred to me: those different Bonus Weapons will probably be weaker than the Holy Sword Durandal, a weapon from Bonus Weapon 6, which was capable of decimating enemies with a single blow, not to mention that its HP Absorption power was necessary for me to recover my health effectively. So maybe I should keep Durandal instead of experimenting with different ones after all? Also, the Rabbit's Fur is quite small and light, so I wonder how many of those would I need to gather in order to make a coat out of it? Something is telling that it would have to be around 100 or 200 of them, maybe even more. Not to mention that the selling price probably won't be that high. All right, Durandal it is. I don't care if using it against Lv1 monsters is going to be considered a cheat or not. All that matters is my own survival and the comfort and ease of the hunt.

While finally making up my mind I have reached the back of the village.

Next to the Village Chief's house was another one almost as big that had its doors widely opened. A three-story house that the merchant came out of in the morning. I wonder if this is his shop, his personal house, or maybe two of them combined into one? I took a peek inside and surely enough, he was right there behind the counter.

「Welcome!」

There weren't any shelves with products of any sort, but it was obviously a store of some kind.

「Sorry for the intrusion.」

I called out to him from the entrance as I made my way inside.

「Oh, if it isn't Michio-sama! What brings you here today to my fine establishment? Do you perhaps want to do business?」

「That depends. What kind of goods are you selling here, exactly?」

「Oh, just a little bit of everything. This is the only store in the entire village after all. As for the amount of goods we sell, the exact amount depends on how much we order from the city and how long it will take for them to get delivered, hence the occasional shortages.」

So that's why all the counters and shelves are almost empty? Awful. This level of civilization is just the worst.

「Can't you do something to always keep some of the goods at hand instead of waiting for them?」

「Even if I wanted to do so, the only type of goods that could be managed in such a way would be slaves for sale. And that is, you know...」

The merchant spoke quietly.

I understand what he was getting at. Even if he wanted to do so, slaves were not a commodity that could be easily obtained even when there was a high demand for them, and they cannot be stored in warehouses like fruits or vegetables. They might not have any rights in this world, but that would be too inhuman of a treatment.

Wait a minute, does this guy think I've come here to buy a slave for myself?!

Part 4

All right, time to defuse the situation.

「Sorry for mentioning something so weird. I guess I am a country bumpkin after all, hahaha...」

「Even the biggest country bumpkin should know that this is how it works in the countryside. Michio-sama, could it be...」

Fuckfuckfuckfuckfuck!!!

「... that you allowed the tales from travelling merchants go to your head too much？」

SAFE!!!!

「Y-Yeah, I guess I just took their words for absolute certainty everywhere in the world. How thoughtless of me.」

「No no, it's fine. I was like that myself until I learned the truth the hard way, so allow me to warn you in advance: even in Veil you won't find many such merchants in Veil, since they dwell mostly in bigger cities.」

「Oh, really? I had no idea it was like that. Guess the stories I've heard were really blown out of proportion.」

「Small wonder given that the folks from bigger cities like to exaggerate to us rednecks from the sticks, so don't worry about it too much. Now that you know how it is you'll be able to properly distinguish truth from fiction in the future.」

「And what about those bigger cities? Are they far from small villages such as this one?」

「Veil is the closest one, but as I already said, it's far from being counted among the bigger ones. Nevertheless, people from the neighboring villages tend to go there quite often. As for the bigger ones, they were originally small villages too, but they grew considerably in size the more merchants and peddlers came to live in them. Nowadays, going to one big city from the other would take you around five days by carriage. I do occasionally make trips to the bigger ones, but for the most part I tend to stick to Veil, so that is where I'll be going tomorrow.」

Yeah, I know that much, that's why I agreed to go with him to sell the Bandit equipment in the city in the first place. As the merchant continued his lengthy explanatory exposition dump, I decided to reset my character once again.

Since I'll be trying to sell that equipment for as much as possible, maybe investing some Bonus Points in Haggle & Barter skill would be useful? When I added a point to it, I got a message that from now on the prices I will receive for every item I will sell will be 10% better. Hmm, will that amount increase the more points I will put into it? After trying it out, the percentage of the increase in obtained gold rose to 15, 20, 25 and 30% respectively. Just like Bonus Weapons and EXP related skills, it looks like it can be upgraded to Lv.6 at best.

Now the most important question here is: will that skill be usable, or was it a total waste of Bonus Points?

「If it's all right with you, I want you to take a look at that Rabbit's Fur.」

I interrupted the merchant's diarrhea of the mouth and changed the topic.

「Rabbit's Fur. Why of course, I can buy it off of you, but a fair warning, don't expect to be paid much for a single... piece...」

He tried to mouth off again, but when I placed all the Rabbit Furs I have obtained today on the counter, he became silent in an instant.

「I asked the Chief if there were any monsters around the village and he pointed in a general direction where the Slow Rabbits were dwelling, so I disposed of a few of them. Well, maybe more than a few, now that I think

about it, but the point is, I'm not selling just a single piece.]

「No way... impossible...」

The merchant stares at the furs in disbelief and swallows so hard that I was able to hear him clearly from the other side of the counter. Why is he acting so surprised? Ah, could it be...?

「You know, the Chief warned me that these Slow Rabbits were quite strong so I was skeptical about hunting them in the beginning, but it turned out they were total pushovers.」

Except for the Caerbannog one, but I am going to keep that one piece of info to myself until the day death claims me and my body will be put six feet under.

「P-Pushovers?! These ferocious predators?! That is... that's... no, I am sorry. If you are a bona fide Adventurer then of course such beasts would be nothing to you. Forgive my offense, Michio-sama.」

「None taken.」

I understand that for normies with normie stats and normie equipment those monsters could have been undefeatable, but right now I am no longer a normie so there is no reason for me not to boast my strength.

「So? What's it going to be? Are you going to buy those furs off of me or not?」

I asked him the most important business question.

「O-Of course I'll buy them!」

Now that's what I wanted to hear.

「Michio-sama, if I may ask, have you joined any Guild or considered joining one in the near future?」

「I have not joined any Guild and I have not thought about it yet.」

That was not a lie on my part. I didn't even know there was a possibility like that.

「When you join a Guild, the one I belong to for example, all the merchants belonging to it are contracted to sell you additional goods aside from the ones offered to the general public and they will buy everything you decide to sell them at preferential (read: better than usual) prices, all because the trading profits are the major source of the guild's income. Of course, I will be more than happy to buy it even without you joining our Guild.」

So there is such a complicated restriction when it comes to purchasing goods in this world? Then maybe it will be in my best interest to join a Guild after all. But for now...

「Then please do.」

「The usual Guild price for one piece of Rabbit's Fur is 10 Nar.」

「I understand.」

I don't even know if it's a high price for such an item or not.

「I see that you have a total of 10 Furs and they are all of excellent quality, I will buy them off you for 130 Nar total.」

130? If the usual price was 10 Nar per one piece of fur then the total should be 100 Nar, so that means that my Haggling & Barter skill worked and I have received a 30% better price. It actually worked! This is pretty neat! I can definitely use that! And if the merchant is willing to buy those items from me for such an exuberant price then I guess I have nothing to complain about.

The merchant takes the Furs away from me and places thirty copper 10 yen coin-looking coins and 10 white coins on the counter. If I had to take a wild guess then that one coin which is probably silver must be worth 10 Nar and the copper ones should be worth 1 Nar each. Time to count them just to be sure I'm not being scammed here.

「26, 28, 30. Everything seems to be correct.」

But how am I going to take all of those coins back with me?

「Um, do you... happen to have a coin purse or something?」

「Unfortunately I don't, but you can use this bag if you want.」

And he handed me a small pouch for my newly acquired coins. And since the top is tied with a string, then it means it must be a drawstring coin purse. I placed all of my coins in there while thanking the merchant for being so considerate of me.

「So Picker-san, you said you belong to a Merchants Guild, right. Would you mind telling me more about that?」

I secretly performed Identify on the merchant to learn his name. Identify is pretty convenient for things like that.

「As a certified merchant I belong to a Merchants guild of course. There are a few exceptions like the Adventurers Guild, but in most cases joining one is required for working in a specified field of business or changing Jobs.」

So that would mean I'd have to do the same if I wanted to change my Jobs, but I'll ask him for confirmation just to be sure.

「So if I wanted to become a merchant myself I'd have to join the Merchants Guild?」

「You want to be a merchant, Michio-sama?」

He asked, visibly surprised, so I hurriedly denied it, saying that I was just considering the possibility.

「Allow me to say this: whether you are a member of the Adventurer's Guild or Merchants Guild, you can only belong to one Guild at a time, and there are strict restrictions for quitting the Guild once you have joined.」

「Hmm.」

Well shit.

「But do not worry, Michio-sama. Even without a Guild membership, merchants will still do business with you.」

「But in order to have access to specialized goods I'll have to join a Guild anyway, right.」

「Yes, and in addition to that, every Job Change needs to be approved at a Guild Temple.」

Great. More needlessly complicated procedures to rain on my parade.

「If you already have some experience working as a merchant then all you have to do is register at the Guild and be approved at its temple. But if you don't have any experience in that field whatsoever then I'm afraid that getting approval won't be an easy task.」

He seems to know what he's talking about very well, so I should make it a point to attentively listen to what he's saying and ask my questions accordingly.

「So what about the village farmers.」

「All members of the Farmers Guild.」

Even they have to be registered in the Guild? That's crazy! Is there even a Job that does not require joining a Guild to obtain it?!

Multiclassing is considered a Bonus Skill by the game, so it would seem that an ordinary person can only have one Job at a time. But then, what about the odd Jobs such as Thief, Villager or a Hero?

You can only join one Guild, so I will have to carefully consider all my options before making a final choice.

Part 5

I returned to the Chief's house and had dinner. After that I returned to my room and waited for a few hours, but no matter how long I waited, Teirichi-san did not come to visit me.

I knew it would be like that. I knew that well, but still some part of me wanted to believe that maybe luck would smile upon me this one time. But alas, this was not meant to be. It would be too good to be true.

... I wonder if it's because I'm not some handsome-looking Chad?

So I just spent my night alone like a total loser, crying myself to sleep.

I feel like I was dreaming, but I cannot remember about what, exactly. To be honest, I was a little surprised that I didn't wake up to the hustle and bustle of Tokyo, but instead there were the sounds of a typical countryside.

By the way, my illusion that this world was a virtual one was finally crushed when I felt like my bladder was about to explode, so I hurried to the bathroom to relieve myself. This feeling was too real to be something that was just fabricated by my brain. But of course there was always a chance that all of this is just a hallucination and I was really stuck in a coma in some hospital with machines sustaining all of my bodily functions. If something like that would end up happening, I don't know if I even want to wake up from such a dream. No, this was now the world that I would have to live in. As far as I know for now, returning back to Earth is impossible for me.

「Nnnnnnnnnn.....」

I slowly stretched my arms as I laid back on the bed. It was very poorly made, just a thin mattress and an even thinner blanket laid on top of simple wooden boards. I wonder if this is the standard for all people who live in this

world or is it just that poor country bumpkins have to put up with something so uncomfortable?

「Excuse me.」

I heard the Chief's voice outside the door.

「It's the Village Chief, Michio-sama. I'm sorry to be bothering you this early in the morning, but it is time for the wagon to the city of Veil to depart.」

「All right, I'll be there shortly.」

I got up from the bed and went downstairs with all my luggage, that is a copper sword and a drawstring bag. Inside of the bag were all my money and the Intelligence Cards obtained after the battle with the Bandits. For now, those things are my entire property.

「Good morning, Michio-sama.」

「*Yaaaaawn* Morning.」

「We took care of cleaning the clothes you were wearing yesterday. Here you go.」

Inspecting the surroundings closely, my jersey was indeed lying on the table near the entrance.

「Ah, that's right. I had this bad boy with me as well.」

I can't believe I managed to forget about it so easily. Of course the sword and the bag were not my only assets! There was my trusty jersey as well!

The front door of the house were open, so I peeked outside and saw that it was still relatively dark. The sun has only just begun to rise on the horizon.

I took my jersey, which was now cleaned of all the blood that had stained it during yesterday's battle and returned the clothes the Chief had lent me to him. For the current me, this jersey felt like the second skin. I don't know what I'd have done if I wasn't able to wear it anymore.

「Your clothes seem to be made from some highly unusual material. It must be something highly valuable.」

「You think so? It's considered pretty common back where I come from.」

It's just a cheap jersey, identical to the hundreds of thousands of other jerseys you can buy in Japan but judging from what he said they probably don't have clothing made of polyester fibers in here. Such a material probably doesn't even exist here.

「Feel free to use this bag if you like.」

And he presented me with a rather large bag which had what looked to be shoulder straps on it. Could this be a backpack?

「Hooo? That's nice.」

「And here is your breakfast. Please enjoy it during your journey.」

「I'm sorry for making you do all this for me.」

I politely thanked him for the backpack and the food. I placed all of my current belongings into the backpack and closed it. Well, it looked extremely cheap and worn out as heck, but hey, in my current situation I will make use of whatever I can.

「Please, it is the least I can do to thank you for saving our village.」

With that, he handed me another small bag.

「Huh?」

When I opened it, I saw it was filled with coins. They were all emitting a dull, yellowish glow. Are those... gold coins? It looks like there are more than 10 of them in there.

「I know it's not nearly enough to fully repay you for your...」

「No, no, it's fine, this is enough, really.」

Feeling a little embarrassed, I decided to accept the reward he was offering me with gratitude.

「I'm really sorry I cannot give you any more than that.」

I once again assured him that this much was more than enough. I wanted to put an end to this embarrassing situation already while simultaneously avoiding looking like a greedy bastard who wanted to extort the poor villagers of all their savings. With my shaky situation, I wanted to avoid drawing as much attention to myself as I could, and it will certainly be better to be remembered by the entire village as a humble individual rather than someone who's just money-hungry.

With my entire luggage packed up, I placed the backpack on my shoulders and followed after the Chief to the place near the outskirts of the village where the merchant was already preparing his wagon for departure.

「Good morning.」

「Morning.」

We exchanged our greetings casually.

「We will be departing as soon as it gets bright. Could I ask you to take a seat in the front beside me?」

「Fine by me.」

I got on the wagon and took my seat beside the merchant. I just hope it won't be shaking too much.

In the back of the wagon there were several items: the equipment of all the Bandits who were defeated, the two swords belonging to Teirichi-san and a small cage that resembled a doghouse. Teirichi-san's dagger was not among the items that we were going to sell.

The cage was made almost entirely out of wooden boards, with only the front having a steel fence. I was wondering what that curious structure is, but my unspoken question has answered itself before long, when a man who was

accused of the item theft yesterday was brought in and placed inside.

「As a criminal he is to be taken to the city and sold to the Slave Merchant.」

The Village Chief explained, probably noticing my questioning gaze.

「You don't say.」

「Half of the sum obtained from the transaction will be paid to you, since you are this man's master, Michio-sama.」

「Well, since I managed to get back what was stolen from me anyway, is there really a need to go that far with admonishing this guy?」

「If we did that, there is always a chance that he would have done it again since he wouldn't have learned any lesson from it. This is the only way to insure such a thing won't happen again.」

So that's how it is. As much as I didn't want to, I had to admit that such a reasoning was very down-to-earth. Besides, an outsider like myself should really not try to meddle in the internal affairs and traditions, so I had no choice but to nod in agreement.

Before we left, a young man approached the wagon and started talking to the caged man.

「XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
X X.」

「XXXXXXXXXXXXXX.」

Is he a relative of the stealing man?

Along with the young man came a little girl, who I presumed to be the man's daughter. Even if I didn't understand the word they were saying, I could read more than enough from the atmosphere itself. She was probably saying things like 「Papa! Please, don't go! Don't leave us!」. They were telling the man not

to give up and resign himself to his fate, but I think that deep down inside they knew that it was a futile effort.

「It's gotten bright enough. We're leaving!」

Merchant took his place next to me, took hold of the reigns and in the next moment the pair of horses began to move, pulling the wagon behind them.

「Thank you for taking me with you.」

「Don't mention it.」

Saying that it was bright enough for us to leave was a bit of a stretch in my opinion, because I could barely see the horses in front of us, but this guy has probably made this trip countless times already, so he must have been used to it by now.

The city of Veil, huh? I wonder what kind of town it will be?

Part 6

Before we completely left the village and the Chief behind, a thought occurred to me: I might never come back here again, but for me this was my first village, my place of genesis in this strange new world.



Granted, my start in here wasn't exactly a peaceful one and I was this close to being (possibly) turned into a slave over a pair of sandals if anyone ever caught on that I stole them from that barn I woke up in, but other than that the Chief has treated me kindly, so I might reminisce about them from time to time if I ever feel like it.

For a while we were just sitting in our respective seats, taking in the sights. The man in the cage has been silent, not saying as much as a word ever since we departed.

「Are the roads safe to travel?」

I asked the merchant in an attempt to break the silence which began to get really awkward really fast.

「I'm not going to lie, monsters are known to be lurking around Veil and the roads that surround it, but they are being exterminated by the Adventurers and the town's guards on a regular basis, so we have nothing to worry about.」

With each passing minute, the world around us was getting more and more bright and the wagon was also slowly gaining speed, rattling and shaking as it did so. Could it be that the roads are in such a bad shape or maybe the wagon itself is at fault here? Or maybe both of those things at once? All around us was a leaf forest, exactly the same as the one near the village where I hunted for Slow Rabbits yesterday. I don't know if it also goes that deep, but it does not seem to be the case here, or at least that is my guess judging after the trees unimpressive height. Also, because it was just the same generic, repetitive scenery all the time it grew dull on me pretty fast, so much so that staring at those trees began to hurt my eyes, and when you combine it with the constant shaking, you'll get something that's more akin to a passive-aggressive torture than anything else. So yeah, we haven't been on the road for more than half an hour and I could already tell that I was not going to have a jolly good time.

That being said, I basically had no choice but to grit my teeth and endure it. In an attempt to divert my mind from this uncomfortable feeling I tried to bite into the bread that was among the things the Chief's wife prepared for me for

breakfast, but this endless shaking made it insanely difficult to enjoy even a smallest bite of it in peace. With that attempt ending up in failure, I returned to staring mindlessly into the space around me since I had nothing better or more interesting to do.

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Sigh I'm. So. BORED! Not to mention that if I don't shift my sitting position from time to time then my butt will start hurting as if it had wooden splinters piercing into it!

Then a small shadow wandered in front of the wagon. An animal, or maybe some kinda monster?

「Oh, a Slow Rabbit. So they are here as well, huh?」

「You seem to be very familiar with them already, Michio-sama.」

「Well, I did hunt a bunch of them yesterday, so I guess there's no way for me to mistake them for anything else now.」

That, of course, was a lot of bullshit on my part. All I did was glance at it and my 「Identify」 skill told me that it was a Slow Rabbit. Probably. The font its name is written in is too small to see it properly from here.

「Ah, you were right, Michio-sama! This is indeed just a Slow Rabbit. In that case we have nothing to worry ourselves with. We can continue without slowing down or having to find a way around it.」

「If you say so.」

The wagon approached the Rabbit and then drove past it without attracting its attention at all. If we had more time on our hands I would have liked to get down from the wagon to hunt it, but for the current moment our biggest priority was getting to Veil as soon as possible.

「Wow, we really went past it without a hitch.」

Not that I wasn't expecting that to happen. If those guys were so passive and weak, then I wonder why everyone back in the village had so many problems with fighting them, to the point of pissing themselves from fear whenever someone mentioned them? Were they so weak, or is it that I'm just too strong as an Adventurer (putting the matter of my OP Durandal aside)? Be that as it may, that obstacle was now behind us. But another one would soon take its place.

From atop the wagon, I managed to spot a small, spherical shape further down the road. I tried to focus my eyes on it, and 「Identify」 showed that it was a Lv1 Gumi Slime. So it would seem that there are even monsters like that in here. This is much closer to the bestiary from the classic RPG games that I know about than that rabbit earlier.

「There's a Gumi Slime up ahead.」

「D-Did you just say G-Gumi Slime?!」

The merchant pulled the reins and stopped the entire wagon in an instant.

「What's wrong? What happened?」

「Gumi Slime is a vicious monster that attacks any people who come near it on sight! Usually it resides only in the depths of the more remote forests, but this one must be on the lookout for prey if it wandered off onto the roads like that. Now that it has crossed our path, we won't be able to go further. We have to either find a way around it or wait for it to go away.」

「We will only waste time if we do that. You stay right here, I'll go and take care of it.」

If avoiding it means making needless detours and wasting precious time, it will really be better for me to fight with it. I should be able to manage just fine, especially with my Durandal.

「Are you sure about that? It's one of the strongest monsters in the entire area!」

It's threat level is so high that even all of the villagers would be unable to defeat if even if they ganged up on it!」

Yeah yeah, you said the same about the Slow Rabbit, and we all saw how true those warnings ended up being.

「Not to mention that if the Gumi Slime catches you inside it, your body will melt instantly!」

He explains with an expression of sheer horror written all over his face. Is it really that dangerous? Because I'm doubtful as heck about that.

If what he says is true, then I should be fine as long as I won't allow it to catch me. That and I can't cower away from any Lv1 monster just because someone tells me that it's dangerous. I won't be able to achieve anything at all with such a noobish mindset. No pain, no gain, as they said in my old world.

「We'll be fine. You just focus on keeping the wagon going forward. I will handle the rest.」

I command the merchant in the most confident tone I'm able to muster.

「A-As you command, Michio-sama. I shall trust in your judgement.」

The merchant resumed the wagon's advance, resuming the sickening clutter and shaking.

While we're on the subject of fighting monsters, the Hero's Job surely must have some Skills I can use, right? If it turns out that I won't be able to beat it with Durandal, I'd have to try using those. With that in mind, I proceeded to check the Job settings.

「Over... whelming?」

Ugh, the name itself does not tell me anything. The spell has floated into my head, but should I be using it now? And more importantly, can it be used by itself, like any other Skill, or maybe I can only use it with the sword belonging to Teirichi-san?

「Michio-sama?」

「It's nothing. Keep going forward.」

「As you wish. I just hope that you really know what you're doing.」

That makes two of us, man. That makes two of us.

Part 7

I took the backpack off so that it wouldn't hinder my movements and pulled Durandal out of its sheath. As an emergency I can always use the Copper Sword at my feet, but hopefully it won't come to that.

As the wagon made its way further down the road the Gumi Slime must have finally noticed our presence because it turned towards us and approached with small jumps of its gel-like body.

「Okay, stop right here.」

「Y-Yes!」

When the wagon lost enough speed, I quickly jumped off of it and ran past the horses towards the Gumi Slime. Holding Durandal with my left hand, I swung it sideways just like I would a baseball bat. It cuts through the slime's body from the left, makes its way through its insides and then leaves through its right side, but it merged itself right back together. Right, of course. As if the things were ever that simple.

「Deliver..... WHOA!!!!」

Gumi Slime jumped at me just as I was about to chant the spell that would allow me to use Overwhelm Skill. I waited for the last possible moment and then twisted my body to avoid getting caught in its belly. Looks like chanting Skills while fighting is impossible to pull off after all.

With my next attack I tried cutting him diagonally from above but it jumped to the side just before my blade could reach him, so I dashed after him and repeated the attack just as its body touched the ground, targeting its brain specifically. If gaming logic also applies here, random attacks at its body will only make it put itself together after a second, so the only proper way of

dispatching it will be to destroy the brain.

Durandal's edge cut through the membrane on the top of its body like it was just a wrapping paper and followed all the way through to its lower parts, spreading it all over the ground like a puddle of water after a rainy day. If my guess was correct, then it should be all over now. Hooray for video game clichés.

The remains of the Gumi Slime slowly melt away and turn into the puff of green smoke, indicating that it has been defeated. When the smoke dissipated, a drop item was left on the ground: some kinda white powder. Upon closer inspection, it turned out to be a Gumi Slime Starch. Ooooookay, I guess? I don't want to rack my brains over how something like that came to be, so I'll just pack it into my backpack and go back to the merchant.

So, from this one encounter there are a few things that I managed to confirm. They are as follows:

- 1) I can keep using Durandal to fight against the monsters, but I have to keep in mind that depending on the monster type it might not be able to one-shot them, so I need to take that under consideration.
- 2) Casting spells and Skills in the middle of the battle is insanely difficult, if not borderline impossible, so they can probably only be used with a first, preemptive strike. But what if I ever find myself in a pinch that would require me to use them? Looks like I'll have to practice using them in a fight after all.

Reflecting on the results of the battle in such a way, I have approached the merchant's wagon.

「I-Is it over already? Did you defeat it?」

「Yup, it's as dead as it can be.」

「A-Amazing! Not only did you manage to beat such a terrifying monstrosity by yourself, but in such a short time as well!」

「Sure, whatever you say.」

All I did was whacking it a few times with my Durandal, so I don't know if that is really something so praiseworthy. On a side note, I don't even want to think how many times I would have to hit that thing with the Copper Sword to kill it.

「Michio-sama, could it be that you are secretly a Mage? Did you use some incredible spell to help you finish the battle in a flash?!」

Merchant asked me in an excited manner.

「Don't be ridiculous. You clearly saw me fighting this thing with a sword, didn't you?」

Part of me wanted to tell him that I am secretly a Sword Mage, but that would be taking things too far.

「Oh, right. Now that you mention it, you also took those Bandits from yesterday down by using nothing but your sword.」

No shit Sherlock. But it's not that I killed them with just a sword because I chose to do so. It's more along the lines of me slaying them with a sword because I didn't know how to use Skills or magic at all. I can bet you that even if my very life depended on it, I'd still be unable to make proper use of them.

「Yeah. So that's that I guess. Any further questions? No? Good.」

I climbed back on the wagon.

Magic has to exist in this world. It has to, since it was in the settings when I was creating my character. So I guess there are magicians here, but are they any different from normal humans?

「Oh, is that a Slime Starch, by any chance?」

「Well, yes. That Gumi Slime left if after I have defeated it.」

「How about this then? I will buy it off of you for a special price that you won't get anywhere else as a commemoration of your incredible

achievement. It will certainly benefit you more than keeping it.]

A merchant gave me a business offer. I will give him my answer, but first I have to make a quick Character Reset to reinvest the 63 Bonus Points I've put into Bonus Weapon 6 into increasing the purchase price by 30%. After my Durandal disappeared I closed the Status screen and got back to talking with the merchant. I just hope he won't find what I just did to be weird enough to start questioning me about it.

「Yes, let's do that.]

I handed the Slime Starch over to him. Was my Reset done in time? Will I receive that 30% better price?

「Thank you very much. To tell you the truth, the Slime Starch is dissolved in water as an ingredient to make alcohol, the so-called Slime Liquor. It's a beverage that many people tend to enjoy.]

「Hoo?」

「The normal market price when selling Slime Starch is 40 Nar, but as a special thank you for protecting me and my wagon from harm, I would like to buy it off of you for a special price of ten times that amount, plus an additional 30 % since you are my personal business partner since yesterday. In other words, I want to give you 520 Nar for this Slime Starch, Michio-sama.]

「Well, in that case I don't think there is any need for me to hesitate, is there? I will gladly accept your offer.]

Ten times more than 40 Nar gives 400 Nar, so that 520 must be after applying those 30% from my Bonus Skills, so for a price of redistributing 63 Bonus Points I will receive 5 silver and 20 copper coins. I placed them in the drawstring bag and placed it in the backpack afterwards.

「Is it difficult to become a mage?」

I asked because I was genuinely curious about that.

「I guess you could say that. In order to become a mage you have to eat a special medicine before reaching the age of five, but the only ones who can afford it are nobles and the children of millionaires. Personally I have never saw any mages in these parts for as long as I live.」

「Really? Wow.」

Who knew there was such a ridiculous restriction in order to become a mage? If that's the case then I guess I won't be able to become a mage myself, huh? And here I was hoping I could try using some magic since this is a fantasy setting.

While I was thinking about all those things the wagon continued to go forward at a steady pace, until suddenly the walls of trees came to an end and the walls of the city came into my field of view.

「Ohhhh, is that the city of Veil?」

「That it is indeed.」

「It's quite big.」

Is the length of the wall more than one kilometer? The town must really be pretty big. Of course, it is still small when compared to the modern Japanese cities. Nevertheless, building such a wall in a world like this one must have cost a ton, so this city must be quite rich if they managed to build something like that.

Outside of the walls there were fields spreading all the way into the border with the forest where city residents plowed the earth. The sun was still only about halfway in its journey across the sky, so if we include the time for that battle with the Gumi Slime, the journey from the village to the city took around three hours, so I think I can safely assume that the passage of time is roughly the same here as it is back on earth.

Part 8

「I don't want to sound like I'm bragging, but this city is the best one out of all the ones built in this region.」

The merchant says.

Aside from our own, several merchant wagons were gathering near the ramparts, making a queue that was coming and going in and out of the city. The city of Veil had a main gate, but there was no gatekeeper to guard it and no one was conducting any kind of checks or inspections.

「Is everyone free to enter the city as they please? There are no restrictions whatsoever?」

「But of course. The walls themselves are not high since this is not a castle town and they won't be able to stop those who posses the Movement Magic or other means of teleportation so everyone just stopped being bothered with such procedures.」

Movement Magic, huh? So they even have such a thing here? Truly, if this world possesses such methods of travelling then upholding the checks at the gate that pretty much everyone can bypass would really be a futile effort.

Huh? But then... what is that wall even here for? If a war was to ever break out, I'm sure that the soldiers could be transported magically over it, without any need to come out of the city on their own feet. Also, if there is something as convenient as movement magic here, then why did we waste our time with coming to Veil by a wagon in the first place? And do they have any countermeasures against the monster attacks?

「Hoo boi.」

I had so many things that I wanted to ask about, but for now the best course of action would be to wait until we will get ourselves into the city proper.

A few minutes later we had passed through the walls and found ourselves in the city.

「We will pay a visit to the Slave Merchant first, then we will go to the station of the Knights Order so you could turn the Intelligence Cards in and then we can go to the Weapon and Armor shops so you could buy yourself some new equipment. Is that okay, Michio-sama?」

「Sure, no objections here.」

We proceeded through the town along the wide, cobbled road. The buildings on both sides of it were all well-kept and about four-five storeys in height. For a civilization where goods and building materials are not as easily accessible like in modern day Japan everything looked to be relatively advanced. The streets were busy and filled with lively, energetic people, but not to the point where you could call this entire place chaotic. Quite the opposite, actually. All in all, this place seemed like a good town.

I activated my Identify Skill out of curiosity and saw that the people who were walking past us were a mixture of various professions, like villagers, farmers, peddlers and even warriors. To think that such a menagerie could actually coexist in peace.

「If you keep going straight along this main road you'll reach the city's center, but for now we're going to take a right here.」

「Okay.」

And the wagon turned right at the nearest intersection.

「A fair word of warning: the neighborhood where the Slave Merchant is located is a place where it's best to be on guard at all times if you don't want to wind up involved in some... shady situations. There are also brothels and sex shops nearby, but I wouldn't recommend using their services if this is your first time in a city like that. Besides, and don't take it the wrong way

Michio-sama, but you look a little bit too young to be partaking of the services offered by the prostitutes.]

And he looked at me like I was some kinda kid who needs to be babysat at all times.

「I'll be sure to take that under advisement.]

He probably thought I didn't even know what a prostitute was. Haha, joke's on you asshole, because I know very well what a prostitute is and exactly what kind of services they tend to provide. Granted, I have never visited any brothel and used said services, but I saw many movies pertaining to the subject, so I have all the theoretical knowledge I might need, so maybe, just maybe the time for me to get rid of my useless V-Card and enter the forbidden, dazzling world of adult, sensual fun.

After all, since this is a medieval setting, then the demand for the prostitutes must be quite high and there are bound to be a lot of them. However, with the poor security around the walls and the unrestricted entry to town it is possible that most of them will either be nestled near the slums or they are going to be controlled by gangs or other criminals, just like in my own world.

This matter will also need to be investigated in more detail. I mean, it's a standard procedure, right? In order to get to know the potential dangers of this new, strange world it would be best to experience and clarify them for myself after conducting an exhausting, complex research. Yeah, right, let's go with that argument. Huh? What's with that disgusted look like I was a sentient piece of unburnable trash?! This is a survey! A scientific practical survey of another world and the dangers that might lurk in it! Moreover, I have to conduct it personally in order to achieve the best possible results! I can't just rely on somebody else's (in this particular case, the merchant's) words because that someone might be biased against that particular profession, rendering his opinion useless from the scientific standpoint. That is why I am going to JUST DO IT! I WILL MAKE! MY DREAMS! COME TRUE!

As soon as we turned right from the main road, the wagon stopped at the second house. Could this be the Slave Merchant's dwelling? It sure looks like

an ordinary, red-bricked, three story house to me.

「Good morning and welcome. How can we be of service?」

When the wagon came to a halt, a young man jumped out of the doorway almost immediately. A quick Identify revealed that he was a Lv3 Merchant. If his level is so low, then this must mean that he is still just an apprentice.

「I'm here to drop off the criminal who has dared to commit a crime of stealing from a hero. Check the cage at the back of the wagon if you would.」

Going with the merchant's instructions, the Slave Merchant's Apprentice did as he was told and removed the sheet that the cage at the back of the wagon was covered with. After that he examined the caged man for a bit and then said:

「Very well. Please follow me inside the store.」

And we followed after him.

「Since I told him you're a hero, we're bound to receive a good price for that slave.」

Merchant whispered that to me so that the apprentice couldn't hear us. Well of course we're going to get a good price. I mean, I have my 30% Better Prices Skill on and everything, so that is the only result we should be expecting.

「The master will be here shortly. In the meantime, may I ask for the document of ownership necessary for the purchase?」

「But of course. Here you go. And here's a copy for you, Michio-sama.」

The merchant... I'm going to call him Picker-san from now on, it will be easier that way. Picker-san produced two documents and handed one of them off to me.

「And this is?」

「An official Deed of Slave Ownership signed by the Village Chief.」

Oh, so I even get to have written confirmation of me having a slave, huh? That's neat, but also a little disturbing at the same time. I continued to look at it while we were guided to one of the rooms at the back of the shop, clearly meant for taking guests in.

Soon after we made ourselves comfortable on the large leather sofa, a man appeared before us. He looked to me in his forties and Identify revealed that he was a Slave Merchant. In other words, he was the owner of this whole establishment. His level, 44, was also the highest I have ever seen since I came to this world. Or could it be that this village where I spawned was a literal stick in the mud in the middle of nowhere?

「I am Alan, the owner of this shop.」

「Michio. Kaga Michio.」

「And I'm Picker, a Merchant from the village of Somara. Pleased to make your acquaintance.」

「The pleasure is all mine.」

We stood up, greeted each other and sat down again. But damn, this sofa is really comfortable. Could it be that this Alan guy could afford to buy such a luxurious item because of how much money he was earning from the slave trading business?

「The main gate looked to be quite lively. Did something happen?」

Picker-san began with a little small talk.

「So I take it that the two of you don't know yet?」

「Don't know what?」

He glanced at us and revealed some curious information.

「A Labyrinth was found two days ago.」

Part 9

「A Labyrinth you say? That is definitely a most curious bit of information.」

Ah, a Labyrinth, huh? Cool, that's very neato, especially since I can't remember if the setting I chose for my game was the one that had both open world and dungeons or only one of the two. But since they mentioned that it had been discovered only two days ago then this must mean that it is a setting with both of them after all. I guess for now I'll just sit here quietly and gather as much information out of their conversation as I possibly can.

「Did you encounter any monsters outside of the town?」

「Not strictly outside of Veil, but we did run into two of them in a rather short amount of time.」

「Twice, huh? Then maybe that means that the activity of other Labyrinths and monsters outside of them will also start to increase? Hmm... which monsters did you encounter?」

「First it was a Slow Rabbit, but the second one was a Gumi Slime!」

「I see. That must have been pretty rough on you, huh?」

Alan the Slave Merchant asked Picker-san with a tinge of honest worry in his voice.

「It would have been if I was alone. But thankfully Michio-sama, this upstanding young man here, happened to be travelling here with me today and he took care of that wretched monstrosity before I even had the chance to blink!」

「This young man took such a monster down alone? I don't want to be rude,

but he certainly does not look like the fighting type to me.]

「I thought so too when I first met him, but yesterday he also helped to defeat a Bandit party that tried to raid the village where I usually do business and he defeated the most of them all the while saving the lives of the villagers and the village's chief, so he has proven himself to me more than enough.]

Man, it felt incredibly good to be praised this much, but it was also making me super uncomfortable since I am not used to being complemented at all! Also, was that Gumi Slime really that strong? Or maybe it really was, but I just couldn't notice it because I fought it with Durandal and defeated it in three attacks? Anyway, it would be best to change the subject as soon as possible or else my poor heart might not be able to handle all those praises!

「Y-You know, that man would have probably tried to steal that equipment regardless of me being there or not. Not to mention that I just happened to be in the village by sheer coincidence.]

「That may be so, but it does not change the fact that it was you, not anyone else who helped the village, Michio-sama, and that he tried to steal a part of the equipment that was your part of the spoils of battle. I see that you are uncomfortable with him being your slave, but trust me, this is for the better.]

「I agree with him. Now, may I have a look at that Deed of Ownership?]

「Oh, yes, of course. Here you go.]

I gave my document to the Slave Merchant.

「Are there any changes to the usual deal that I should know about?]

「I wish to relay half of the selling price to Michio-sama.]

Picker-san explained to the slave Merchant as he was reading through the Slave's Deed of Ownership.

「Certainly. I see no problems with that.]

「If I may ask, how much is that going to be?]

「It has been confirmed that the man you wish to sell is in good health and should have no trouble with performing manual labor, so I think that I'm going to offer you the usual price of 30,000 Nar.」

I don't know if that is a high price or low because I don't know the inner workings of the slave market, so I just looked at Picker-san. He nodded his head lightly.

「I see. This is indeed a good price.」

「I'm glad we are on the same page here.」

「Then as I said before, I'll have half of that sum paid to Michio-sama.」

Looks like my Skill that should give me a 30% increased price did not work this time. Maybe it's because of my current Job settings? Or perhaps the fact that the transaction wasn't made with me directly?

「Is this your first time using the slave selling services, young man?」

Alan the Slave Merchant asked me directly.

「Yes. This is my first time coming to this city after all.」

「I see. Are you an Adventurer? Or do you plan to become one in the near future?」

Eh? Why did he ask such a thing? Could it be that my face looks like that of an Adventurer? Yeah right. What kind of an Adventurer wanders around random villages repelling Bandit attacks and stealing Sandals from old barns, am I right?

「I am not an Adventurer just yet, but I do plan to join their Guild in the near future.」

「So can I assume that you will also be interested in buying yourself more slaves in this near future?」

Wait a minute. What did that guy say just now?

「Like, uhm... are there.... Well.... Are there many Adventurers who buy themselves slaves?」

I finally managed to connect my words into a relatively normal sentence.

「Of course there are. More than you think, actually.」

Buying myself a slave, huh? I never even thought of such a possibility, probably because in modern times slavery have been long since abolished and no one would even think of going back to those dark times. But this world is vastly different from my own. There are slaves here. Moreover, slavery seems to be a booming branch of business. And if slaves can be sold in exchange for the hefty amounts of money, then of course the opposite should also be possible. But if that's the case...

Would it be possible for me to buy myself a female slave?

Having.... *Huff... Huff!* a beautiful girl as my slave....

The one I could order around... and do whatever I wished with her... haha, hahahahahaha....

「If you don't mind me asking, why are you acting as if it was your first time hearing about all this? This is supposed to be common knowledge, one of the cornerstones of this world that every citizen, regardless of their social standing, should know about.」

「Yeah, about that... you see, I apologize for asking such obvious questions, but for the most of my life I was living with my master deep in the mountains where we trained together and we were only visiting civilized places in order to restock on food and necessary supplies, so I'm afraid that I might not possess any kind of 「common sense」 that you all have. Sorry.」

I went for the first excuse that came into my mind. My logic was that if I spent all my life up to this point training in the mountains with no access to civilization whatsoever, it would perfectly explain my lack of knowledge as well as my supposed prowess in battle. The biggest question here is whether or not they are going to fall for it. Besides...

My strength comes from me having Durandal as my weapon, nothing else.

「Ah, now that I look at you, you do seem to be rather young, or rather like you just barely entered adulthood. I see, now I get it. You must have had it pretty rough, living a life like that, huh? In that case, do you want to go and see the Labyrinth near this city with your own eyes?」

「I have never been to one before, so that might indeed be a good experience for me. If it is not a problem of course.」

If they really have dungeons in this world, then exploring them might be a good idea. Just like every man feels like it is his duty to stick his... finger into a hole when he sees one, I feel like every aspiring Adventurer should go to the dungeon. Especially if there is a possibility of finding rare treasures or obtaining more levels in a much faster manner.

「Then I will explain it in more detail once you finish going about your business here in town. How does that sound?」

「Of course. Sorry for making you go out of your way like that.」

「Not at all. Anything if it means obtaining another prosperous client.」

I feel like we might have achieved more than simply selling a slave at a good price here. The Slave Merchant left the room for a minute and then returned with the money.

「This is the half price of 15,000 Nar, as agreed.」

「Thank you very much.」

Picker-san received the money gratefully. It was one gold coin and a crap-load of silver coins. So one gold coin is equal to 10,000 copper coins?

「And for our newest customer here a sum of 19,500 Nar as a special bonus and encouragement to continue doing business with us. We look forward to any future transactions you'll be willing to make.」

So this time my Bonus Skill worked properly. That's good to know, but I am

not really fond of the idea of making more people my slaves. This time was an exception, but the prospect of actively ruining someone's life like that is not particularly appealing to me. Buying slaves (female ones that is) might still be an option, but male ones are an absolute no-go.

「We look forward to doing business with you, Michio-sama. Have a nice day.」

Looks like he has already remembered my name. Great, now I have no choice but to come here again. Ah well, maybe he'll tell me more about the Labyrinth, so I guess there'd be no harm in that.

Part 10

After our business there was done, Picker-san and I left the Slave Shop and got on the wagon again.

That latest transaction added a lot more coins to my drawstring bag, and all that just from the 30% better prices. I repeatedly glanced at Picker-san, but he didn't seem to mind at all that I obtained more money than him for such a bizarre reason. The Slave Merchant said it was a gift to encourage more transactions in the future, but that was exactly the thing that I was the most skeptical about.

「I have accepted the money, so I guess there's no backing out now, huh?」

But both my mind and my heart were telling me that getting any deeper into that slave business was a bad idea. I mean, in my time slavery has been abolished in its entirety and even thinking about buying one could be considered a serious crime! But this world seems to have its ethics code taken straight from the Middle Ages, so I guess to them buying and selling slaves is no different than buying things at your local grocery store. I know I myself said that I should get used to living in this new world as soon as possible, but that didn't change the fact that doing something I was taught was wrong to its very core still made me feel uncomfortable.

After returning to the main road, we proceeded down to the city's center.

「It's so lively in here.」

There were various stalls on both sides of the road selling various items: food, clothing, etc. and people were gathering near every one of them in large groups. A few of them even had people who looked like priests and street cooks. I couldn't help but to think on how many of those people are your ordinary citizens and how many of them were actually Adventurers.

「The building over there is where the Order of Knights is located.」

Picker-san pointed towards a certain building placed at what looked to be the city's central plaza. It was a tall brick building with a bell tower. Apparently that was our next stop. When we parked the wagon outside of it, a young-looking knight came up to greet us. Identify told me that he was a Lv4 Knight, so since his level is so low then that must mean that he is still technically a squire, right?

「XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX」

「X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X. Michio-sama, please give me the Bandits Intelligence Cards, would you?」

Picker-san asked me as he held out his hand.

「Oh, right.」

For a moment I completely forgot that our only goal in coming here was to exchange the Bandit's Intelligence Cards for... presumably money? I took the backpack off my shoulders, opened the drawstring bag, took the Intelligence Cards from it and handed them over to the knight while Pickersan did the same. The two ones he handed over are from the two Bandits that the villagers managed to defeat. I wonder if he'll be able to see something that I wasn't able to see on them. I mean, I already tried looking at those Cards earlier to see if they had any information about a possible bounty on their heads, but ultimately I found nothing of the sort.

[I will now check your Intelligence Cards as well.] [Please do.]

The merchant held his left hand up and brought it backside up to the Knight's face.

「Investigate the will of the flowing spirit, the wisdom of Intellect:
Intelligence Card, open!」

He chanted a short spell, after which the letters appeared in the air above the Intelligence Cards. So he's going to check our personal information as well,

huh?

This is bad. Now he's probably going to check my Intelligence Card as well! But do I even have one of those?! And what am I going to do if it turns out that I do not?!

He looked at the merchant's Card for a while and then he nodded his head and handed the Cards back to Picker-san who nodded back at him, and then he turned his gaze onto me. Well, here goes nothing. Without much of a choice I stood before the Knight and raised my left hand towards the Knight's face, imitating Picker-san's movements as closely as possible.

「Is this okay? Did I do it right? Will that do?」

「Investigate the will of the flowing spirit, the wisdom of Intellect: Intelligence Card, open!」

My heart was pounding like crazy the entire time he was chanting the spell, but much to my relief, the Card popped out of my left hand just like it did when the merchant was doing it earlier. That's one bullet dodged, but I still felt somewhat anxious when the knight began to scan the Card with his eyes. What is going to happen now? Is everything going to be okay?

「And... how is it? Is something wrong?」

I asked the knight when he was staying silent for a good while now. I am afraid of that silence.

「You have a last name? Are you a Freeman?」

「Y-Yes?」

I think I just shit myself a little.

「Very well. Please, come with me.」

Looks like I managed to pass for now.

The knight entered the building and went to one of the rooms that looked like

an office and we obediently followed after him. While we were doing that, I had a look at my own Intelligence Card.

<Kaga Michio: 17, Male, Villager, Freeman>

All of the information about me were written neatly with kanji. Are kanji the official writing in this world? Also, maybe having a last name was a rare thing here? Not to mention that it was my first time hearing that I was a Freeman. Are the Freemen different from normal people here? Maybe they are someone who the nobles dislike?

「So, what was that all about?」

「He was checking whether you had one of the criminal Jobs or not. If you had, then you wouldn't be able to collect the Bounty, since they canoot be handed over to criminals.」

Those words made the world around me freeze in place. I have a THIEF JOB!!!!!! But the Job that was listed on my Intelligence Card was a Villager, so that would mean that only the First Job is visible to other people checking your Intelligence Card. Having Villager as my first Job was a little lame, but now I am happy to have it. That way, I will be able to avoid any unnecessary clashes with the law!

「I-Is that so?」

That was all I could say before I heaved a heavy sigh.

I tried pulling the Card off my hand, but no matter how hard I tried to do so it just refused to leave. I pushed it back into my hand, grabbed the tip sticking out of it and pulled gently, causing it to retract back. Even though it was sliding in and out of my own flesh, I didn't feel any kind of discomfort. So mysterious.

「We will check the Bandit Intelligence Cards inside. I'll be back with the results shortly, so please wait here.」

Taking advantage of that brief moment of waiting , I asked Picker-san:

「A question: how do you extract the Intelligence Cards in ways other than the owner willingly showing them to you?」

「When a person is killed, their Intelligence Card is going to be ejected approximately 30 minutes after death.」

Picker-san explained matter-of-factly. So what I can understand from it is that you cannot get your hands on Intelligence Cards or steal them if the one bearing it is still alive.

A short wait later, a beautiful female knight came out of one of the offices. Identify revealed that she must have been one of the big shots in here, because she had a noble-sounding name and her level was much higher than that of the guy who was in here with us. She was a beautiful lady with a tight-looking body that even the armor could not hide, even though her chest was medium in size at best. She had her flax-colored hair tied in a cute ponytail, but I bet that if she let them down they would reach all the way to her slim waist.

「Are you the one who defeated the Bandits that raided the Somara village yesterday?」

And she directed her sharp, piercing gaze straight towards me.

「Y-Yes, that's right.」

「That was a band of brigands who had their base of operation in the slums of this town. We are currently in the middle of the operation to root them out, but some of them managed to flee from the city before we could bring them all to justice with our steel. Am I correct to guess that you've been paid for the two of them, but not for the rest?」

Miss Beautiful female Knight glanced at Picker-san.

「Yes Ma'am, that is correct.」

She then looked at the knight who led us here as if she saw something filthy stuck to her shoe, sighted deeply and snapped her fingers. Not 10 seconds

after another Lv4 Knight came running to her with a white leather bag in his hands.

「This is the prize money for the Bandits. Take it.」

And she threw the bag at me.

「Uwah!」

That was sudden, but thankfully I managed to grab it before it hit the ground. Wasn't that kind of a dick move?!

「There, you have your money. Now if that's all then I suggest you to go away quickly if you don't want to cause any more trouble.」

And she left without saying anything else to us.

Eh? That's it? Just like that? Nonono, at least this once let me behave like a proper human being!

「I'm sorry for the trouble! And thank you very much!」

She stopped for a second and glanced at me, but said no other words besides that. Huh? What's going on? Has my sincerity not reached her? Did I mess up again? She didn't say anything. No words of thanks, or not even an explanation on how the village could be under Bandit attack even with all the knights in the city?

「Don't beat yourself up over it, Michio-sama. A majority of the knights come from the noble families, and they always tend to look down on us commoners.」

Picker-san says that as we make our way back to the wagon.

I know that. I understand that much.

But I still think that's wrong.

Why is it that the only ones who can get along with beautiful girls are hot-

looking fuckbois from high society?! I thought that something would change once I decided to leave my old world behind, but apparently my luck has not turned for the better at all.

Part 11

「*Sigh* So, where are we going next? Weapon & Armor shops?」

I asked Picker-san in a tired voice.

「That's right.」

And the wagon resumed its travel along the paved road.

As for the prize money from the bandit's Intelligence Cards, I have put it into the drawstring bag in my backpack, just like everything else. I wonder if my Skill also worked on it? If it really works on the basis that the money had to be handed to me directly then I guess it probably did work, so I guess that whole mess of a situation at the guardhouse was all in all worth the trouble, since now I should have quite a sum of money to purchase everything else that I'm going to need. At least one thing worked as intended here.

The weapon and armor shop was located just a short distance from the central plaza, so we didn't have to travel far to get there. When we entered, the first thing I saw was a greatsword in a huge display case in the middle of the shop. Identifying it revealed that it was a Steel Greatsword with 3 Skills, which made me think that it could be a pretty decent weapon. When we initially entered the shop there was no one behind the counter, but when the bell above the door rang, a man soon appeared from the shop's depths. He was a Lv11 Weapon's Merchant. So apparently this world can have many separate Jobs even when it comes to merchants and salesmen, not lumping them all under a single category.

「Welcome to my fine establishment. How can I be of service?」

「We would like to sell some equipment.」

Picker-san said and proceeded to present the Weapons Merchant with all of the equipment that was at the back of the wagon.

「Hmm, let's see now... Souls dwelling in weapons, release your power!
Weapon Appraisal!」

Weapon Merchant chanted the spell and began examining the Copper Sword.

BA-THUMP BA-THUMP! *BA-THUMP BA-THUMP!*

Uwaah, for some reason having the weapons appraised like that made me just as nervous as when that Knight from earlier was checking my Intelligence Cards. But on the bright side, appraisal of weapons should go a lot smoother than that previous endeavor and it shouldn't end with a nerve-wracking emotional roller-coaster, or at least I hope so with my whole heart. Also, if there are spells to examine Intelligence Cards and weapons specifically, then could it be that there are also spells meant for identifying Bonus Skills?

「How is it?」

「How many of those do you have?」

「Copper Swords? 18 of them in total.」

「Then I will buy them off of you for 250 Nar per piece.」

That was the Weapon Merchant's offer. Picker-san closed his eyes and nodded lightly, and I can totally see why. That's going to be quite a nice sum, even if it has to be distributed among the villagers in the end.

「Very well.」

「Next, that Iron Sword. I can buy it for 1000 Nar.」

「Oh really?」

「And then...」

He picks up the Flame Rapier and looks at it for quite a while.

「What's it going to be?」

「This weapon, the Flame Rapier, I see it has a Skill on it. In that case I'm willing to pay 18,000 Nar for it.」

I kinda expected the numbers to be different for a weapon that has a Skill on it, but for it to be that much?! I looked at Picker-san and he seemed to be just as surprised as I was, but nevertheless he nodded in acceptance once again.

「I am content with that amount.」

「And 500 Nar for that Scimitar.」

He says so after barely glancing at the Curved Sword that was among the weapons we intended to sell.

「Is this a price that include the Skill Slots?」

「With all due respect, Mr. Customer, please don't try to be smart with me. This weapon has no Skills in it, so I can only offer the usual price for it.」

That's what he said. So you want to tell me that even as the Weapons Merchant he is not aware of the existence of the Skill Slots?

「No no, of course it doesn't have any Skills, I'm not going to argue with that. By the way, what price would this sword here fetch?」

I handed the Copper Sword from my waist to the Weapons Merchant. It was the one with the empty Skill Slots that I obtained from killing the Bandits.

「Souls dwelling in weapons, release your power! Weapon Appraisal! This is just an ordinary Copper Sword. 250 Nar and not a single Nar more.」

I didn't like how this asshole emphasized the word 「just」. That Copper Sword is not the same as the other ones, because it has empty Skill Slots. As I thought, this guy simply cannot see them for some reason. Okay, that's fine, I just confirmed that Skill Slots don't have any impact on the item's price at all. All that matters are the Skills themselves.

「All right. We'll sell the Scimitar along with the other swords.」

「Thank you very much. Since it's such a large transaction, I'm going to give you a special offer and accept all of them for a total of 35,550 Nar. How about that?」

Is that the effect of my Bonus Skill? But this time the transaction wasn't made directly with me, so it shouldn't activate. Argh, I honestly don't know what is going on anymore!

「Do we have ourselves a deal?」

「I believe we do.」

「Very well. Please wait a minute while I get the money.」

The Weapon Merchant went to the back of the building again and returned with the money shortly. He had three gold coins, five silver coins and an assload of copper coins. I took my share of the coins without even counting them because at this point it is just too troublesome.

「Thank you very much for your patronage.」

「Pleasure doing business with you.」

I put all of my coins in the bowstring back and gave Picker-san the two gold coins.

「Those two coins are the entire village's share, right?」

「That's right, Michio-sama.」

「I gotta say, this is quite a lot for that number of items.」

We managed to sell all of our Copper Swords, Iron Sword, Flame Rapier and two Scimitars for a total of 20,000 Nar.

「Right? Even I'm surprised we managed to sell all of them for so much. I guess luck is on our side today.」

Yeah, right, luck. And the name of that luck is my 30% Increased Prices Bonus Skill. Go ahead, thank me, praise me for it!

..... what? A man can dream, right?

Next shop we stopped by was the Armor Shop.

「Since the Bandits who attacked the village didn't wear any armor we have nothing to sell here, but if you want to become a proper Adventurer it is a purchase we just can't neglect, Michio-sama. Don't worry about the price and just pick whatever will best suit your needs. If it'll be necessary I will lend you some of my personal funds.」

「Thank you for the offer, but I don't think going that far is going to be necessary...」

「No no no, this is once again to express my thanks to you for saving the village. If you hadn't shown up, it is quite possible that as one of the wealthiest villagers I would have been killed and had my goods and savings robbed. It is no exaggeration to say that I probably will never be able to fully repay you for what you did yesterday, so allow me to do whatever I can, when I can.」

You say that, but such gratitude from a guy is kinda gay in my book. Then again, at the very least you thanked me. Teirichi-san, on the other hand, did not visit me during the night to thank me with her body.

We parked near the shop and went inside the shop, browsing through all the different pieces of armor before we decided that the best fit for me is going to be a Leather Breastplate and a pair of Leather Shoes and we called the shopkeeper.

「Welcome, welcome, oh esteemed customers! How can I be of service?」

I glanced at him with Identify and confirmed that he was The Armor Merchant. Man, they are really going all out with how many Jobs this World has. Could it be that every merchant has his own Job depending on what he is selling? Because if that really is so then the possibilities are literally limitless!

「Yeah, we would like to buy this Leather Breastplate and these Leather Shoes and also sell this Bandana here.」

「Souls dwelling in armor, become an unbreakable wall! Armor Appraisal!」

Armor Merchant took the Bandit Bandana I presented him and appraised it with his spell. I would very much prefer if they did it normally without using magic, but if the appraisal can only be done in such a way then I guess there's no helping it. While we're on the subject of magic, I wonder if everyone can use every appraisal spell, or is it limited in such a way that Weapon Merchants can only appraise weapons and Armor Merchants can only appraise armor?

「So? How much for it?」

「First things first: what the hell is this?」

Armor Merchant lifts the bandit Bandana and waves it in front of my face. Is he also going to suspect me of something shady just because I had an item which had the word Bandit in its name?!

「A Bandit Bandana. What of it?」

There is no sense in trying to fool him so I just gave him the name of the item without even trying to hide it.

「Oh, so you do realize what this is? Then again, you look surprised so allow me to give you a free lecture, kid: This is a Bandit equipment. It raises the physical abilities of its wearer, but only if he or she has a Bandit, Thief, or any Job that is connected to being an outlaw. Bandits could pay you up to 10,000 or maybe even 20,000 Nar for it, but since this is a normal store, I'm afraid I cannot accept this.」

So it's only useful for Bandits and the like? All right then, since he won't even touch it let's just leave it at that then.

「Okay, just forget about it and let's do business with something else.」

I put the Bandit Bandana away and continued to sell the other goods to him.

Well, I have a Thief Job, so technically Bandit Bandana should be of use to me. I'll have to test it if the opportunity to do so ever presents itself. But for now all I can say is that buying and selling things in this world appears to be needlessly complicated, so if I want to make my life easier in the future I need to make a mental note to limit such escapades as much as possible or else my poor Japanese heart won't last long.

Chapter 3: Roxanne

Part 1

Player Name: Kaga Michio

Character Information & Equipment:

Class: Villager Lv.3, Hero Lv.1, Thief Lv.3

Accessory: Ring of Determination, Sandals

Successfully selling all the stuff to the merchants meant that I have succeeded in doing everything that I've set out to do in the town of Veil. This means that as of this moment, I am free.

When that thought occurred to me, I felt both happy and somewhat empty inside. Sure, I can do whatever I want without anyone bossing me around and telling me what to do, but now that Picker-san and I went our separate ways, there was no one here who knew me.

The reality that I was now alone in this foreign world hit me like a truck-kun hits a protagonist in an Isekai-story. That thought alone almost made me have an anxiety attack, until I remembered that I was technically not alone after all. That's right, there is one more person whom I got acquainted with very recently, like, not even two hours ago.

The Slave Merchant! He must be waiting for me to get back to him so he can relay the information about that so-called 「Labyrinth」 to me! Since he offered to give me that information himself without me pestering him about that, it would be really dickish of me not to go and hear what he has to say, right? But first...

I went into the shadows of the alleyways behind the Armor Shop with my new equipment in tow. I decided that it would probably be best if I wore the

Leather Armor over my jersey for some extra protection, but I placed the Leather Shoes and Bandit's Bandana back into the backpack. That bandana is different from the ordinary ones, so there is always a possibility that those in the know will recognize it right away, so if I wear it in public, I might end up being mistook for an actual bandit, and that is the last thing I want to be dealing with. Finally, I had the Copper Sword on my back and two Scimitars at my waist. That is the closest to being a samurai as I can possibly get at the current moment.

I made sure that no one was walking near me or looking at me and opened the bag with the prize money. It contained a total of 16 gold coins and a lot of silver coins, meaning that the total prize was more than 160,000 Nar! It's great that I have so much money now, but the sheer amount of coins weighing down my string bag began to feel like a great inconvenience. For someone like me, who is used to using the 5 or 10 yen coins, suddenly switching to the currency of this world which seems to be going up every 100 coins might require some getting used to. Also, if I remember correctly, the Village Chief gave me 15 gold coins total just before we departed from the village. I don't know if they are of the same exact value, but it should be almost as much as the prize money for those defeated Bandits. All right, time for some quick math!

15 gold coins from the Chief plus 16 gold coins from the bounty for the Bandits plus the two gold coins from all the shopping and selling I've done with Picker-san... so it should be 33 gold coins in total. In addition, I also have a lot of silver and copper coins. Since the gold ones are the ones that are worth the most, I'll put only those into the drawstring bag, and then put it at the very bottom of the backpack in order not to lose them. Okay, now I should be ready to move on.

I left the back alleyways and returned to the city's main street, which was still as busy as it was when we came here. Taking a closer look at the stalls, I noticed that aside from humans, non-human races were apparently also present here, and in surprisingly large variety. Tall, short, covered with fur, scales, even those with sharp ears... sharp ears? Elves! So there are even elves in this world?! And wow, there are many more female ones than males, and... and... and OH MY GOD they are even prettier than the ones depicted

in mangas, anime and books from my own world!

Now then, simply staring at the female shopkeepers like some kinda pervert would probably get me in trouble with the authorities, therefore the best course of action will be pretending that I am interested in buying the products they are offering and have a gander at them during that window shopping.

One of them was especially beautiful and had nicely shaped big breasts, so I spent the most time at her jewelry stand. Now, I know for a fact that when it comes to age elven looks can be very deceiving, so I tried checking her out with Identify, and the result is... Age: 37? Shouldn't it be like, 370 or something, since she's an elf and all? I mean okay, as long as she looks like she just passed her twenties (in other words: perfectly smashable) I'm fine with that. Oh and by the way, when I tried to Identify myself to see if it would display my age, it only showed my name and gender.

After a short walk I came back to the Slave Merchant's shop, to which customers were coming and going as if they were out buying groceries. Welp, I get this is a world totally different from mine, but honestly, I expected at least one person to act suspiciously or nervously look around as if they have stolen something. Am I the strange one here, or are all those people not right in the head? Probably it's the former. Also on a side note: while I was walking around the stalls ogling the nicely looking ladies I tried to listen in on the other people's conversations in hope of gaining information about the typical slave's market price, but that plan went out the window pretty fast because most of them weren't speaking in Brahim, so I simply couldn't understand a word they were saying.

「Hello? Is now a good time? Am I not bothering you?」

I asked after I finally mustered enough courage to go inside the shop.

「Ah, the young lad from before. By all means, do come in.」

The one to greet me was the same apprentice as before.

「Is Mister Alan here? I would like to talk with him about the matter we discussed earlier.」

「Certainly. Come and have a seat while I go fetch master for you. He'll see to you in a moment.」

I was shown to the room next to the entrance to the shop, not the one in the back. Could it be that this Alan guy has different rooms for different “business” purposes? Am I going to be treated like an official customer now?

This room was literally littered with expensive-looking furniture, complete with fluffy carpets, leather sofas, paintings on every wall and a big table and a pair of chairs made from what looked to be a dark oak. This must be a customer reception or something along those lines.

「Welcome back to my fine establishment, Michio-sama! I have been waiting for you.」

The owner, Alan, came to me right away. I haven't even sat yet.

「Y-Yeah, right.」

「But where are my manners? Please, sit wherever you like. Make yourself at home.」

I took his advice and sat on one of the sofas. It was even more comfy than the one I sat on when I was here with Picker-san.

「Before we get any further, there is something I would like you to know about the man you sold to me today.」

「Yes? What is it?」

「I had a little bit of a... friendly chat with him to get to know him better, as per the usual procedure in my line of business and he revealed to me information that might be of interest to you. That man became a slave because he committed a crime of stealing the Bandit Bandana, which was among your spoils of battle, right? Well it turns out that he didn't commit that theft alone. He actually had an accomplice, unfortunately, he didn't want to share his name no matter how ...nicely... I asked him to do so. Do you understand what am I going at, Michio-sama?」

「Yes, I do. Thank you for telling me, I'll be sure to remain careful.」

Bandit Bandana is an item that raises the stats of anyone with a Bandit or Thief Job so criminals were ready to pay a high price for it. If that guy wanted to steal it from me, then that means he probably had someone willing to buy it off of him. I don't know who that someone might be, but I think we can safely rule out the Village Chief and his wife since they were very helpful to me after I helped stop the attack on the village and nothing in their behavior pointed towards them having any kind of ulterior motives. Maybe it was Picker-san? He's a merchant after all, and they mostly have only one principle in their line of business: to sell to the highest bidder. Then again, dealing with bandits was probably too risky for someone like him. For all I know, when the transaction would have been completed they might have just offed him to get away with both the item and the money. Then, who might that supposed accomplice be?

But that is a matter for later. For now, let's focus on the task at hand.

「When I came here earlier, you mentioned something about a Labyrinth, right? I would like to hear about it in more details, but first, where exactly is it located?」

It might be best to ask him about everything I want to know about before we get down to business.

「It has been discovered in the forest just west of the town.」

「Meaning the opposite of where we arrived from.」

「That's right.」

When we departed from the village, we followed the sun as it made its way across the sky, meaning we were going from east to west. So in order to reach the Labyrinth, I'll have to keep going west from the city's other gate, got it.

Shortly after we began our discussion, a female servant came to the room, carrying a luxurious tea set, probably with refreshments for me and Alan-san. But those clothes... could it be that she's...

UwU, what's this? A maid?

SWEET STRAWBERRY SHORTCAKE ON A ROCK N' ROLLIN JESUS
WITH A FISHSTICK THEY HAVE MAIDS HERE!

Ok, that's it. This world is the best world ever!

Part 2

IDENTIFY HER! IDENTIFY THIS PICTURE-PERFECT BEAUTY RIGHT THIS INSTANT!

Roxanne: Female, 16

Beast Warrior Lv6

So her name is Roxanne, huh?

She is very pretty, no, beautiful, no wait, words cannot describe how much of a hottie she is! She's on a totally different level than the models and idols I knew from the Internet and TV back in Japan. Unlike them, who are basically made to look and act the way they are for the sole purpose of making men flock to them, she feels like something truly genuine, untainted by the corruption of show business (thank God that they don't have it here!). I mean just look at her! Truly an angel unfit to walk this dirty soil!

She has gorgeous pale-red lips and a pair of big, shining eyes, and her hair, colored like the finest of chestnuts look so irresistibly fluffy that I just want to bury my face in them! And she even has that typical maid hat... looking... thing!

「Here you go, sir.」

She placed a filled cup in front of me. When she was doing so, her rich breasts, clearly too majestic to be contained by the dark blue dress she was wearing under her maid apron were visibly swaying back and forth. Dayum girl, who would have thought that you're going to have such a nice pair of bazongas on you? Also, today is such a great day!

「Thank you very much.」

I answered simply.

Maybe that's just me not paying enough attention, but most of the clothing in this world seems to be rather loose and bulky, which makes it somewhat difficult to properly appraise the size of a woman's bust. But in Roxanne's case? Every article of clothing was tightly sticking to her body, as if they were made that way on purpose.

This is a shocking, quite shocking discovery indeed, wouldn't you agree, my dear reader?

Even when she finished bending over to place the cup in front of me and returned to her normal, graceful standing position, her breasts continued to sway and jiggle, drawing my eyes to them as if they used some kinda hypnosis spell on me!

「As I said before, the entrance to the Labyrinth has only been discovered about two days ago so it hasn't even been fully explored yet. We currently don't know exactly how big it is nor how long will it take to clear it.」

「Uh-huh, I see.」

Whatever the merchant was talking about came in through one of my ears and immediately left through the other, because the entirety of my attention was focused on Roxanne's chest. Height-wise it looks like she's the same as me or a little shorter, so about 160 cm. I couldn't tell exactly because of the clothes, but if how tightly they fit her is any indicator, she shouldn't have any excess fat on her, except for her marvelous breasts of course. Like seriously, they must've absorbed all the nutrients from her meals in order to grow this large. Perhaps it has something to do with the fact that, as pointed to by her Job, she is not a human, but a demi-human or beastfolk of whatever non-human species are called in this world? It does not look like she has a tail or a pair of animal ears on her, but those may well be hidden from view by her uniform.

Oblivious to everything that was happening inside my head, Roxanne walked

to the table at which Alan-san seated himself, gave him the cup and poured him the same drink she poured me. He picked up the cup and slowly raised it to his lips.

「Oh please, Michio-sama, don't mind me. Have a sip yourself.」

「Ah, right, sorry about that.」

Since he said it's okay for me to have a sip then I guess I'll do just that. But it would be nice if it was just some herbal tea and not something that has alcohol mixed into it, since technically I am still just a minor, although by Japanese standards. If I'll have some free time on my hands I'll have to obtain information on what is the drinking age here. And maybe the age of consent while I'm at it.

Urged by the Slave Merchant, I put the cup to my mouth as Roxanne leaves the room.

「So? What do you think?」

「Hmm...」

He asked me that, but I barely managed to drink any of the cup's contents, so I had to make the answer up on the fly.

「It's not a bad drink, to be honest. I've never tasted anything like this in my life so far.」

「No no no, I'm talking about the girl. Looks like she piqued your interest.」

Who, Roxanne?

「Oh, her? Well yes, she's certainly an eye catcher, that one.」

「Right? Out of all the slaves I have in my inventory right now, she's probably among the best ones. And the one I would recommend the most.」

Ah, now I see. I understand what it was all about. So Roxanne is not a servant. She's a slave as well. One of the best ones, huh? I definitely see why

he would want to do that. And I guess it makes sense. After all, Alan-san is a Slave Merchant, so why would he recommend anything else but slaves to a potential customer such as myself?

「Allow me to cut right to the heart of the matter, Michio-sama. If you're going to set your sights on exploring the Labyrinth, buying a slave would be the best course of action for you.」

In that case, would I be able to buy any one of his slaves? Even the beauty such as Roxanne?

「What I mean is, you're going to need to form a Party, since tackling a dungeon like a Labyrinth on your own would be nothing short of suicide.」

Debatable, seeing as how I have my OP Durandal with me, but let's assume that he's right for now.

「.... Keep going.」

Of course, that Party stuff does not interest me all that much. All I really want to know is if I really want to buy Roxanne as my personal slave?

I suddenly feel very hot, like all the blood has rushed into my head. I wonder if my face is red right now? This is not good, dude. Calm down, just try to calm down before you do or say something stupid! I might still be a kid, but that does not mean it's okay for me to do and say everything I want, consequences be damned. Come on, me, think with your head, not with your dick!

「With a Party of your own. You'll be able to hunt monsters and earn money more efficiently. Of course, there are Adventurers who prefer to go solo, but all in all it is more beneficial to have a large Party, up to six members total.」

「Y-Yes, of course.」

So Party's can consist of up to six members? That information might prove to be useful in the future. Being free as a solo player is my preferred option for now, but having someone to share my travels with might not be such a

terrible idea either. We'd be fighting together, eating together and sharing the stories of our lives while doing it, make a name for ourselves as famous Adventurers and sleep in the same room at an inn to cut costs... wait, sleep together? Sleeping... together with Roxanne... if I bought her...

「Naturally, the problems begin when it comes to splitting the loot obtained from adventuring, like magical items or platinum coins. The Labyrinths are mysterious structures that we don't know everything about, but we do know that by clearing it you can get rich very fast at the risk of injury and quite possibly death.」

So I assume that a platinum coin is worth even more than a gold coin? I could probably easily buy Roxanne with one of those babies in my purse....

But wait. If Labyrinths really are filled with such treasures, then what about a situation in which one member of the Party decides that he wants to hog it all for himself?

「What about disputes over items and money? Do they happen often?」

「Thankfully not that often, but there were times when some Adventurers desired some items to such a degree that they were willing to turn their blades on their fellow Party members.」

「And how were such situations resolved?」

「Simply and effectively. Eye for an eye, tooth for tooth. In the Labyrinth, if a Party member attacks you with an intent to kill you, you are legally allowed to defend yourself, by any means necessary.」

「I see.」

The most logical option here would be to continue to go solo in order to avoid such flaming messes, but if I do that, the possibility of buying Roxanne might be forever out of my grasp! Ugh, this is so frustrating! I know I shouldn't think about it, but I just can't get that thought out of my head!

What do I do? What the fuck should I do here?! To buy or not to buy myself

a slave, that is the question! But the right answer to that problem is nowhere near in sight!



Part 3

On the one hand, I know that buying and owning slaves is morally wrong. After all, it was outlawed in my world for a reason. But on the other hand, she is such a beautiful girl that I felt that if I won't step up now and claim her as my own, such a chance might not present itself to me anymore, and I wouldn't be able to forgive myself to the end of my life if something like that ever happened. I need to make a decision now!

「Of course, if your Party consists of people you know you can trust with your life, there will be no problem with betrayals. Or if you still worry about that, you can purposefully hire the people who are weaker than you. Thankfully, cases of such happenings are fewer now than they were just a few years ago.」

He was practically spoon feeding me valuable information, but Roxanne was all that I could think of.

If this was a game, having conflicts within the Party wouldn't be such a big deal. Worst case scenario your in-game character would die and simply respawn at the nearest church/temple (whatever the spawn point was) and you could go on to exact revenge on the Party member who thought he could screw you over. Even in MMORPG's, where the interaction was almost exclusively between living, thinking players stuck together for better or worse, the possibilities for betrayal and PK (Player Killing) were limited by the game's systems.

Reality, however, was a totally different nut to crack.

No matter where you go, people around you are all ultimately complete strangers whom you don't know if you could trust at all. I mean seriously, let's consider the following: you're going to the Labyrinth with your Party

members, you fight monsters, one of them drops some valuable item that one of your Party members wants so badly that he's willing to kill for it, and he does just that. What am I getting at? Considering that death is probably nothing unusual in a monster-filled dungeon like a Labyrinth, no one would probably even be suspicious when someone would die in there, since the culprit would be able to just play the whole thing off as a 「He bit off more than he could chew」 scenario. And while we're on the subject of valuable drops and treasures...

「A question, if I may. While in the Labyrinth, is it possible to get stabbed in the back by one of your Party members?」

「There is such a possibility, yes.」

I knew it. It would have been too good if that wasn't the case. Knowing that she might as well try to kill me if she doesn't find me to her liking or that if the opportunity to run off with a valuable treasure presents itself to her, do I still want to buy Roxanne?

「I see. That's not nice to hear.」

「However, Parties consisting of a master and his slave have some unique rules to them. Since a slave is a possession of its master, the same principle applies to any item or money the slave might obtain.」

That's one concern out of the way. But if I want to make Roxanne mine, there is still one thing that I have to know about.

「Hypothetically speaking, if I bought Roxanne from you, would she be able to stab me in the back and run away with the treasure even though I'm her master?」

「Something like that would not be possible. You see, master and slave are bound to one another by a pact. If the master dies, his slave dies with him.」

「For real?! Isn't that too harsh?」

So if Roxanne ends up being bought by someone else and that someone kicks

the bucket, she will bite the dust as well.

「Perhaps, but everything depends on how the master intends to live out his life. And if you decide that you no longer want a particular slave as your property, you can always release them from servitude or prepare a document which transfers the ownership rights to someone else.」

「Oh, so there is such an option. That's good, very good.」

Knowing that I can release her before I die was a very useful piece of information. Sentencing her to die prematurely simply because something happened to me would be too cruel.

「But if you aim to be an Adventurer, and one who aims to explore Labyrinths at that, you might as well prepare such a document beforehand, although having it on you would amount to nothing if you ended up devoured whole by some monster or disintegrated by a trap. My best advice would be as follows: if you want to have slaves, you'd better resign yourself from exploring Labyrinths or other dangerous places. Or know exactly when to tuck tail and run if you value your life. I know that for someone young and eager like you the prospect of being an Adventurer might be the one which yields the biggest financial gain, but trust me, there are more safe, stable ways of securing a source of income. Not to mention the fact that you'd need to have a place where you and your slaves could stay, eat and sleep and I'm not talking about renting rooms at an inn all the time. If you want to be a slave master, your own house is an absolute necessity.」

I'd definitely want to provide Roxanne with a place where she could live, eat and sleep in peace. Especially sleep, with me in the same bed.... Nonono kid, get your goddamn head out of the gutter and start taking this seriously by thinking of anything other than doing morally questionable things to that maid girl and that bombshell body of hers! I want to stop with the lewd fantasies that go through my head, but try as hard as I might, the picture of her perfect tits and the vision of what I would do to them...

「On the bright side though, if you manage to pillage enough treasure from one successful Labyrinth raid you'll have enough money to quite possibly afford a comfortable lifestyle for the rest of your days. But there are a few

things that you also need to have in mind before making the final decision. First, when it comes to their status and social standing, slaves are only slightly above Bandits. Actually, the biggest difference that sets these two groups apart is that you are legally obliged to kill Bandits, Thieves and other Brigands and you can claim their possessions as your own whereas killing a slave who has its master is considered a punishable offense. But those who ran away from their master are treated just like any criminal.]

So they are only slightly above Bandits and their ilk, huh? Looking at someone like Roxanne, this is truly hard to believe.

「Besides adventuring, are there any ways to make money?」

「Of course there are. As long as you'll be a member of a proper Guild and are willing to learn the ways of your new trade, you can become anything you want.」

「Okay, I get it.」

The biggest problem here is that you can't form a Party with anyone unless you trust them. I came alone from Japan to begin with, but even before getting isekaid out of the blue like that I had severe trust issues coupled with disdain for other human beings, who I assumed were all out to get me and pour salt onto my open wounds, so how can anyone expect me to form bonds of trust with the denizens of this world when I don't even know what are the laws of this land and what counts as common sense here?!

And will I be able to procure enough money to buy food for both myself and Roxanne without delving into the depths of the Labyrinth? Well, I can always not buy Roxanne and begin my career as a solo Adventurer. With a weapon like Durandal by my side making a name for myself shouldn't be anything difficult.

「So how about it, Michio-sama? Would you be interested in buying Roxanne? She's a Beast Warrior, so I'm sure she'd be a great addition to your Party.」

「Beast Warrior...」

「Yes, because she's a Werewolf. Beast Warrior is a Job that only a Werewolf or other Beastman can acquire.」

「Werewolf huh? Gotta say, she doesn't look like one at all.」

Of course I knew about her Job and its level because I used Identify on her.

「Well, what do you say? Pretty tempting offer, am I right?」

「Yeah, but...」

「And to top it off, she's the most beautiful one among the female slaves I happen to have in stock now. With her stunning looks and the intellect to match it, she'll be a perfect companion for a first-timer like you. And she's a Werewolf Beast Warrior at that!」

The Slave Merchant continued to pour his honeyed words down my ears.

This is nice and all, but I need to keep a clear head. I mustn't make a hasty purchase under the influence of that sweet-talking of his! Besides, there must be a catch somewhere! There always is!

Part 4

But... but maybe this time it was actually an honest deal with no trickster strings attached? It would be strange to sell someone so beautiful as Roxanne without having some hidden agenda, but maybe that's just my damaged mentality speaking again?

「So, why is her being a Beastman so important? Because you seem to be making a great deal out of it.」

「Are you familiar with the saying that elves are the number one non-human race when it comes to their lifespan and longevity?」

「Well, yeah.」

I mean, isn't it common knowledge that elves tend to live much longer than humans? Or could it be that this is another thing that's different in this world?

「Then allow me to break it to you: that is just an urban legend.」

Oh really now? That's interesting.

「Elves are said to be the longest living race because they stay young-looking for the longest. In actuality, the lifespan of Elves and Beastman are about the same.」

「Is that so? I have to admit, I didn't know that.」

The eleven woman I ogled back at the street shops was supposedly 37 years old when I Identified her, but she looked like she was in her early twenties at worst. But I have to say, when it comes to looks as a whole, Roxanne was even prettier than that elf lady. And her boobs are definitely bigger.

「That's understandable, so don't worry about it all that much, Michio-sama. We humans and non-humans have different points of aging and ways in which we perceive the passage of time. To illustrate it with an example, I think you'll agree that for us humans there is little difference between a two years old dog and the one that is eight years old, right?」

「Now that you mention it, I guess you're right. I never given it much thought myself.」

「When it comes to Beastman, at the age of 16 or 17 they are no different than us humans, but the older they get, the difference becomes more apparent. Typically, we humans start to show visible signs of aging around 40 to 50 years of age, but when Beastman hit that same mark, they still look as young as they were in their teenage years, so from the perspective of our limited lifespans, the Beastman might as well stay beautiful forever.」

「Ahh, I see.」

Roxanne is one year younger than me and she's already so beautiful that it was unbelievable. So you want to say that even when she reaches her forties and fifties her looks won't change much from how she's looking now?

「In addition to that, there is one more very important factor that sets the Beastman aside from other races, a factor that is held in very high regard by all of the customers.」

「And that factor is?」

「Since they are half beasts, or animals if you prefer lighter terms, they are unable to bear human offspring.」

「Oh.」

So people do tend to consider that aspect as important, huh? I honestly didn't think that anyone would pay any mind to something like that in a world based on medieval settings. Then again, that would mean that I could just go at with Roxanne over and over again without worrying about any pesky consequences nine months later.

「To that end, the dear Roxanne is still a virgin, if that matter is of any interest to you.」

She's still a virgin? *Smacks lips* Nice!

「Does her being a virgin have any impact on her price?」

「It does, but for a practical reason. With virgins, you don't have to worry about contracting any sexually transmitted diseases. Of course, we do have proper establishments of the sexual nature in this town, but I wouldn't recommend using them even if that was the last place of its kind in the entire world. If anyone asked you didn't hear it from me, but to be honest, instead of listing the diseases the local prostitutes have it would be faster to list the ones they don't have.」

So I take it this world still has no ways of countering STDs then? Kind of a bummer, but the one to be expected, since the medicine and modern drugs should be pretty much non-existent here. Looks like that puts my plans for an investigation of brothels to a grinding halt. Nevertheless...

「Thank you for the warning. I'll be sure to remember it.」

「Good. Going back on the right track, Roxanne herself is perfectly aware that she might be used as a sex slave.」

「You don't say.」

So she's actually aware of how she might be used by her potential owner?

「On top of being made aware of the possibility of her becoming a sex slave, she has also received all the theoretical knowledge required for pleasing any kind of customer, no matter what his kinks or preferences might be.」

「Hm...」

That made me both concerned and aroused at the same time, but all my concerns evaporated without a trace as soon as I imagined Roxanne in a turtle shell bondage. Just that image alone was enough to send my youthful imagination, which I tried to keep in check, running berserk again.

「But that should come as no surprise, because, let's be honest here, if you weren't interested in those things you wouldn't have been interested in buying yourself a young slave girl in the first place.」

「I guess so.」

To be honest, learning that was kind of a relief for me. In this world, just like in my previous one, buying yourself a young female slave seems to have only one purpose, and everybody realizes that, so presumably I won't be the first one to commit such a (morally) dastardly deed and I sure as hell won't be the last one.

「But I have to say, Michio-sama, I am glad that you decided to pay a visit to my establishment on a fine day such as this one.」

「Why is that?」

「After spending as many years in the business as I did I can proudly say that I have a keen eye for judging the customers who walk through the door of my shop, and it saddens me to say that even if many of them do want to buy themselves a female slave, many of them won't even lay a finger on them due to their 「moral compass」 telling them that it is wrong. To be totally blunt, those are the kind of customers I dislike the most. The way I see it, any kind of purchase, be it a slave or something as simple as a grocery shopping, needs to be done with a leveled head and hefty amount of consideration. You know what they say: haste makes waste, right? And I think we can both agree that wasting money on something you won't really need is the ultimate waste.」

So people like that are present in this world as well, huh? Lovely. If there's one kind of person I hate more than bullies and those who wronged me for no apparent reason, it would have to be assholes with loads of money who always buy everything in sight, only to throw it away after realizing that they don't really need it. Thankfully, I can say with certainty that I wouldn't treat Roxanne in such a way.

「Well, I guess that's right.」

「So why do purchases like that keep happening, you ask? Well If you asked me for my opinion, I would have to say that the reason for things being the way they are is simple: inexperience, both at the side of the customer who walks in here without knowing what is he getting himself into and at the side of the female slaves who are not taught proper sexual education. Thankfully, I can proudly say that Roxanne is not someone like that. She received all the necessary education needed to be proper companion for any aspiring Adventurer, so you can rest assured that she will never be a burden to you.」

「I see.」

「And lastly, as an added bonus, she is able to speak Brahim fluently.」

「Oh yeah, you're right!」

Back when she gave me the cup with the drink I was able to understand every word she was saying, so I guess it makes sense for her to know Brahim, which must be the name for this world's version of the Japanese language, but I guess I was just too engrossed with the bouncy swaying of her tits to notice that. And honestly, can you blame me?! It was totally amazing! I would love to see it again if I had the chance.

「And that concludes my speech on why I would highly recommend buying my dear Roxanne.」

Great, looks like his sales pitch is finally over.

Roxanne.

There is no doubt that she's the most beautiful girl I have ever seen in my life (not that I saw many of them to begin with). Her eyes were so bright and dazzling that just one look was enough for me to feel like I was being swallowed in by them.

Can I really buy someone like her? I bent over my cup to give it one last brainstorming session with a heavy chest. Is that what the weight of freedom and responsibility feels like?

Part 5

To tell you the truth, I still have my doubts about this entire matter, but above all else I don't want to be left alone in this strange, unfamiliar world. If I can have myself a companion, even if it will be a slave, then of course I would like to jump at such a chance right away. What about my moral dilemmas? They are still nestled at the back of my head of course, but let's look at it from another perspective: if I will buy Roxanne, I will do my best to treat her in a respectful manner and to one day set her free so she could decide her fate on her own. On the other hand, if someone else ends up buying her, there will be no guarantee that such a douchebag won't treat her like nothing more but his personal sex toy, and that is something that I absolutely cannot allow. Back in Japan I've had my fair share of mistreatment, enough to last me several lifetimes and not wish a similar fate happening to anyone else.

The biggest problem here is that slavery is apparently a part of the system of how things are ran in this world, and it looks like it is here to stay, at least for the foreseeable future, and we all know that if there is one thing that cannot be easily changed or overthrown, no matter what world you are living in, it's the established social hierarchy and the twisted "norms" that come with it. In my old world, even though it is claimed that we were living in a progressive, advanced society where the concept of inequality has long since disappeared, it was nothing more but a nicely sounding slogan filled with hypocritical bullshit fed to the masses who were dumb enough to believe in it. Okay, we abolished slavery because we deemed it to be too inhumane, but even with that one problem gone, a myriad of others appeared almost immediately to take its place: illegal employment, framing, human and organ trafficking, child prostitution, those are but a few droplets which appeared in the cesspool of shit that humanity has turned into. And here's the real kicker: everyone seems to have agreed that the ones to be blamed for the present state of the

earth are the members of my generation, the millennials! How fucked up is that?! And to top things off, the damn boomers expect us to fix everything while they continue to sit around on their lazy asses doing absolutely nothing! The vast majority of us are still either high school or college students, so how can they expect us to find solutions to the problems that “responsible, full-fledged adults with a great amount of life experience” can’t fix even if their goddamn lives depended on it?! Also, even if by some miracle I’d be able to push this world towards the same changes that occurred in my world, the most probable scenario would be the one in which we managed to get rid of slavery, but we’d be left with the same old developmental problems that the earth is struggling with right now: poverty, overpopulation, escalation of inequality and the like. Thankfully, going down such a path is not an option right now, due to a very simple reason: as a person, I lack both the mental capacity and charisma to enforce any kind of change or push through with the development of any invention of greater significance like computers, airplanes or solar panels and electricity.

Another issue is the fact that in this world slavery is very strongly connected with the judiciary system and the apparent enforcement of justice. Just like I’ve seen back in the village, making someone into a slave is a valid option of inflicting punishment upon the criminals, and my guess is that option is being chosen rather frequently, since it essentially gives you either a free servant or a lot of money if you decide to sell your slave just like I did. In that case, what would be the, maybe not the best, but a good alternative to slavery? I honestly have no idea, but at the very least I feel like more prisons would be built. And not just the small ones, like those cramped town dungeons you see in video games. This world would need one giant, big-ass prison for all those would-be slaves. But in order to build something like that, money would be needed, and when we say money, it’s obvious that the first thing that comes to mind is taxation, but in order to gather taxes more efficiently bureaucracy would have to be introduced, but in order for it to be introduced, we’d need to develop a better education system so more bureaucrats could be raised to collect the taxes which would then be spent to build prisons so that the people wouldn’t have to be turned into slaves... man, I’m getting confused by my own thoughts and it’s making my head spin!

The worst part is that bringing bureaucracy into the fray would absolutely not

be the end of problems and solutions, but I don't know what should be done next because I have absolutely no idea who and what else is connected to the bureaucracy and how in the hell are those connections making the world go round.

But anyway, I digress too much. I didn't come to this new world with the intention of becoming a perpetrator of social change or some Abe Lincoln's second coming. No no no, I came here because I wanted to kill myself and was looking for alternatives. Can we just proceed to the part where I actually get to buy myself a slave already?

Roxanne, oh my beautiful, precious Roxanne with that beautiful face and bouncy bazoongas of yours. Just wait a few more moments, I'll be buying you very shortly!

『You look as if you reached a conclusion to your inner turmoil. Michio-sama. Has my elaborate explanation helped you make your decision?』

『I guess you can say that. So, can we proceed with the transaction?』

『But of course! Now then, if you would....』

Alan the Slave Merchant reached his hand to me, and when he did so, a half-transparent window with a system message appeared in front of my eyes.

『Do you want to buy Roxanne the Slave?』

『Yes』『No』

Finally, the moment is upon me at last. I have to say, this anticipation is becoming unbearable, to the point where my hands began to shake.

『Do you want to buy Roxanne the Slave?』

『Yes』『No』

Of course I can't choose 『No』 here. I want to buy her in order to have a companion who will aid me in my future travels and to free her when the time would be right.

『Do you want to buy Roxanne the Slave?』

『Yes』『No』

Also, maybe she will finally be the one who will take my V-Card away from me, since both Teirichi-san in the village and the beautiful female knight from earlier showed no interest in helping me with that. At that moment, a thought occurred to me. Nothing related to the situation at hand, but just something I was curious about.

「Is the price of sex slaves any different from the price of the normal ones?」

「No, it is practically the same.」

「Really? I thought they are going to be pricier.」

I honestly thought that was the case, since the sex slaves are mainly used for satisfying the bodily pleasures, just like their name implies.

「Their market price is the same because the differences in their duties are minor at best. Both sex and non-sex slaves mostly perform the same jobs, hence the lack of difference in their prices.」

「Then what about the differences between male and female slaves?」

Alan-san nodded and continued.

「Speaking of fighting abilities and the ability to do manual labor, men have better abilities than women. However, the price of a working adult male is about 120,000 Nar, whereas for a young woman, her price will be higher, depending on her good looks.」

It's true that if it's purely for work purposes there shouldn't be any difference in price between men and women. But it's also true that good looking girls are always very expensive, that is a principle that was true even in Japan, but they are always in higher demand than guys. That is why even if they cost more, I'm sure none of the female slaves are left to gather dust for long.

Well, the Slave Merchant's story started to be strangely relatable. Just like in

real life, women tend to have it better, even when it comes to the price for selling them. And speaking of selling, I guess I should reset my character again.

This time, I removed my points from 30% Increased Selling Prices and pumped everything into Buying Discount, which gave a discount of 30%. Okay, now we can finally start talking about the actual numbers. Bonus Skill, don't fail me now!

「Is Roxanne going to be expensive?」

「Hm, let's see here...」

He seemed to be counting from memory, and then he declared with a broad smile on his face. Is he content with the fact that I am finally willing to make my purchase?

「Yes, the typical market price is about 600,000 Nar.」

...

.....

.....

WHAT IN THE ACTUAL FUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUU.....?!

Part 6

... UUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUCK?! No matter how you look at it, more than half a million is way too much for a slave! And that's the price with the active 30% discount, for crying out loud!!!!

「Well, looking at your face right now I probably know what is going on through your head, Michio-sama, and honestly, I can't even blame you for it. So how about that: since I was the one who recommended Roxanne to you, I'll lower the price for a bit. Does 422,800 Nar sound more acceptable?」

The merchant presented me with something that must have sounded like a nice bargain price to him, but for me it was still way too expensive, even after such a significant drop.

I took a deep, long breath.

422,000 Nar. What kind of a price is that?! If only it was cut down by another 50%, then I would have jumped at the transaction without a second thought, because honestly, what other choice do I have? Right now, it's either buy a slave and have yourself a Party companion or go solo and continue to be all by myself, a scenario I wanted to avoid at all costs.

Roxanne has absolutely captivated me. Literally everything about her screamed to me that I should make her mine: her deep, bright eyes, her magnificent chest and her beautiful face. The biggest problem here is that I only have 33 gold coins. My ethics or personal feelings are not the problem here anymore, because I have already steeled my resolve to do this. I just don't have enough money to make the purchase, simple as that.

「Unfortunately, it looks like it's a purchase that's beyond my current financial capabilities.」

「Is that so? This is grave news indeed.」

The merchant replied. If he was disappointed with such an outcome, he did an outstanding job at not showing it in the slightest. I, on the other hand, was very disappointed with myself.

「I guess we have no choice then. Why don't you take a look at some of the other slaves then?」

Ahh, I see what's going on here. It was all a part of your clever little marketing strategy, huh? Oh you rascal, you. Showing me your best slave first, making me eager to buy her, only then sell me a cheaper one? It's like those brothels in my world that scam people by marketing themselves with the best girl they have in their crew just to trick people into making an appointment with her, but when the push comes to shove and they muster the courage to arrive all that is waiting for them is 「The Lady Handling the Phones」 who says that the girl you were supposed to meet up with is either busy with another guy, or that she's sorry but she couldn't make it in time and then just as you're getting ready to leave you're "graciously" offered to pick one of the other girls instead, only to taken aback by how big of a step-down they are, but you can't just say no and leave with your money in tow, because some burly guy who looks like he just got released out of prison is blocking the exit and is threatening to "make you one with the floor" if you don't make up your mind soon. A very specific example, I know, but do not worry, I'm not speaking from experience. Of course a sad, little cherry boy like myself wouldn't have any experience in that field to back his stories up. It's just one of the many threads about brothels that I visited back when I was surfing the net looking for ways to end myself.

On a side note, con artists and telemarketers often use similar trick, but with their own, unique twists added. But in this particular case, I can't say that I was deceived by anyone. I just don't have enough money to buy the best merchandise available, so I have no choice but to buy a cheaper replacement.

All right let's get this over with. I already said A, so now I have no choice but

to say B.

「Very well. Show me the other slaves you have for sale. 」

「As you wish. 」

The Slave Merchant bowed down to me and showed me to another location. We went to the stairs at the back of the shop and proceeded to go to the third floor. The staircase was narrow, but well kept. Not a single floorboard squeaked under our feet.

「Welcome. 」

When we got up there, an older-looking lady greeted us. The only things that were present on his floor were a small corridor beside the stairs and two pairs of doors, one on the left and one on the right.

「Line up the girls for me, please. 」

「As you wish, master. 」

The lady stood up from the chair she was sitting on, took out a small key from her pocket and proceeded to open the doors to the left and disappeared inside.

「This third floor contains women's quarters. Everything here is managed by female employees, and no men beside me have the right to enter here. 」

「I see. 」

「Right now, all the girls are undergoing a thorough inspection of their virginities. 」

He explained as if it was the most obvious thing under the sun. But now I get why he wouldn't let any guy work on this floor. One man and so many virgins... the temptation would be too much to bear. While we were waiting in the corridor, the lady's muffled voice could be heard from behind the door. Apparently she was going through a roll call after she finished her physical examination. Eventually it ceased and she returned to us.

「The preparations have been completed.」

「This way, Michio-sama.」

He guided me into the room, where many female slaves were lined up shoulder to shoulder. All of them were wearing simple, tidy clothes, they all looked properly fed, there was no excrement on the floor and the room itself was not giving off any particularly nasty odor. I guess that was understandable. They are a product to be sold after all, so they need to be kept in optimal condition in order not to scare the potential customers away.

「So these are all the female slaves you have?」

「That's right. Go ahead and see them all for yourself. Feel free to look to your heart's content.」

「All right.」

I walked in front of them and examined them all, one by one. A part of me regretted that they weren't told to strip themselves naked so that I could see every nook and cranny of their bodies, but it's better not to push my luck here. None of them were as eye-catching as Roxanne, so I haven't decided on buying any of them yet.

They were all looking at me with curious eyes rid of anxiety and nervousness, which made me somewhat embarrassed and self-conscious about my average looks. I guess that they are judging me as much as I am judging them. I understand that they are doing so because when I finally decide to pick one of them her life is going to change drastically with me as her new master.

That is what it means to buy a slave. It's not about grabbing yourself a free laborer or a sex toy, it's about giving them a chance at a better life or ruining it completely.

「Is there a problem, Michio-sama?」

「No, not a problem at all. I was just amazed at how well-kept your slaves

are. It's totally different from what I was expecting to see, to be honest. 」

「This should come as no surprise. I run a business here, so in order to gain the upper hand over my business rivals it is essential for me to keep the entirety of my merchandise at the highest standards of both health and clothing. Their food is also being handled with proper care. Trust me, they are better off here than they would have been back where they came from before they were being sold into slavery. 」

The tone of his explanation suggested that he must have explained the very same thing he was explaining to me time and time again.

「I see. 」

That was the only answer I could give him. Also, it made me wonder... this place is actually pretty damn neat, since the slaves probably don't have much work to do aside from maybe keeping the shop clean. If not for the fact that they are going to be sold one day, they would have probably wanted to stay here forever, or at least that was the impression that I got from my time spent here and the information obtained from Alan-san's words.

Also, the longer I looked at the girls, the easier it was for me to spot something critical:

Their interest in me was nothing but an act.

Part 7

The first one, who was smiling cheerfully just a few moments ago now looked straight ahead of herself with tired, unmotivated eyes, as if she was about to fall asleep on the spot. Looks like she totally lost any semblance interest in me.

The second one glared at me with a smug smirk on her face, as if she wanted to openly ridicule me. She even glanced at my crotch for a brief second and snickered in a mocking manner! If we weren't in a Slave Shop I would have probably delivered a nice haymaker right to her face, but since I can't do that I decided it would be best to stay my pimping hand for now. Let it go Michio, you're better than that. No need to stoop so low just because a slave tried to act like a smartass around you. Actually, it makes things much easier for me, because now I am certain which one of them I won't buy even If she was the last girl on the planet.

「Michio-sama, I hope you'll forgive them for displaying... something of an attitude towards you? I assure you, their intention is not to mock you, it's just that...」

「Yeah yeah, whatever you say you're probably right.」

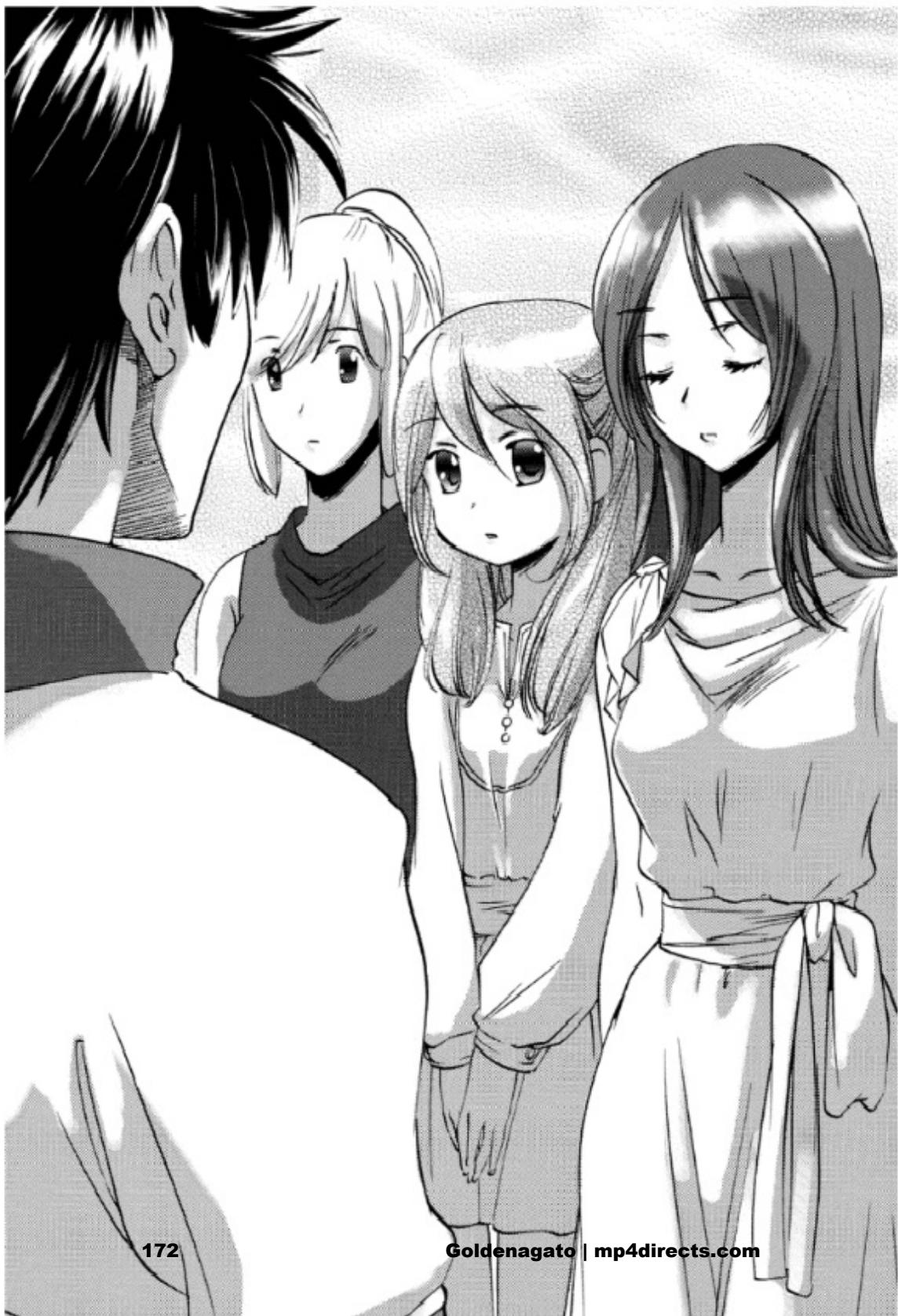
Look pal, whatever their reason for such impudent behavior might be, I don't want to hear about it. I'm not here to play psychiatrist to their troubles after all. I'm looking for a reliable companion, not the one who will be nothing but a burden to me since day 1. The way I see it, instead of allowing girls like that one over here to do a lot of negative PR for you you'd be better off selling her to do manual labor, like maybe working at the mines or something along those lines. That way you'd still have the profits from selling her and

had one less headache in your shop. But you now, that is just my opinion. Anyway...

The next slave girl had much livelier eyes than the first one, but on the flipside her face was nothing to write home about. The one next to her was pretty nicely-looking... but nope, she's a no-go for me. Identify showed me that she was a Villager at the age of 27.... And that's much too old for my strike zone.

Next one was cute as well, but had no breasts at all; an absolute cutting board, the kind that a chef of a restaurant would want to borrow when they ran out of their own. The last one, the one who was after Little Miss Cutting Board was still a kid, but she was pretty cute, all things considered. And no, I didn't mean it in a lolicon sort of way, all right? I am certainly no child molester, I prefer the girls who are of my own age, maybe a year older.

My ideal girl, huh?



Now that I've seen every last one of them, I have to say that they are all pretty cute. The fact that there is some age diversity between them was definitely a plus, because I am sure that I will be able to find the one who will be just up my alley.

That is what I would have said if I hadn't seen Roxanne first.

To me, she was so beautiful that all those other female slaves looked so inferior to her that I probably couldn't see them as truly attractive even if I tried. Ugh, I fell for the merchant's trick completely. Even though I realized that he showed her to me first as a bait for buying the uglier ones (no offense ladies, except for the smugly smirking one, you can just go eat shit for all I care), but I can't do anything about it! I'm a young, healthy, impressionable guy, so what other reaction would you expect when a hot chick was placed right in front of my raging hormone-driven eyes? In light of that, there could be only one solution to my current situation: I left the room without deciding to buy any of the female slaves presented to me. Probably knowing that that's how it was going to end, the merchant left after me.

When we got out of the room, the older lady from before waited for us along with Roxanne. Did she finish all of her duties and come here to see us? Aww, now that's just precious! I knew it, she's an absolute angel!

She bowed her head to us respectfully, and it was at this moment that I saw a pair of ears adorning the top of her head.

Dog ears. They were the FUCKING. DOG EARS! OH MY SWEET JESUS, HOW CAN SHE BE SO CUUUUUTE!!!!!!

She didn't have the maid hat-thingy on anymore, so her ears were clearly visible for all to see. They were the big, hanging fluffy ones, like those of a Golden Retriever. They also look like they could be easily hid underneath her hair if she didn't want anybody to stare at them.

「So I guess there's no use asking how it was, right?」

「Right. I'm sorry, but it looks like we're back to square one.」

「That does seem to be the case indeed. You hear that, dear Roxanne? Looks like this customer took quite a liking to you.」

The Slave Merchant outright told that to Roxanne. What the fuck dude?! You're not supposed to blurt it out like that, have some compassion for your fellow man!

Roxanne just looked at me without saying a single word. When our eyes met, all I could do was to look away from her shyly. I was never good at interacting with the opposite sex and I don't suppose that will change anytime soon, but the stares were always the worst for me. Every time a girl looked at me, it was almost certain that her face would twist in uncontrollable disgust, as if I was some kinda bug that needed to be squashed under the heel of their shoe, so I guess it's only natural of me to expect Roxanne to do the same now.

However, much to my astonishment, she didn't do anything like that. She... she smiled. It's true, I'm not bullshitting you! Faintly, just faintly, but she really did smile! I... I didn't expect that at all, but I'll gladly take it.

It was a nice gesture, but it doesn't change the fact that impossible is still just as impossible as it always was. I won't be satisfied if it's not Roxanne, but I don't have enough money to buy her. I guess I should just forget about buying slaves and move on as a solo Adventurer.

「Master, if I may...」

「Yes darling, I know what you are going to say. Michio-sama, while I can't lower Roxanne's price more than I already did, I am willing to wait for a few more days.」

「Huh?」

「Let's see here... you said this was your first visit to Veil so you are probably not well versed with the terrain around the city, and there's also the matter of the Labyrinth... so how about five more days to get the necessary amount of money?」

The merchant continues with his onslaught of words without giving me a single moment to wrap my head around what's happening here right now.

Is this another one of his tricks? First he showed me his finest product to then bait me into buying the cheaper ones, so now he probably wants to firmly have me in his clutches by offering me such a kindness. Was I too careless? Have I let my guard down too much because Roxanne's beauty blinded me to everything else?

「Ah, n-no, I...」

「Trust me, you're not the only one annoyed at the fact that you don't have enough funds to finish the transaction. But as long as you can procure the rest of the money in a few days, I will be more than willing to wait. You're fine with that as well, right, Roxanne?」

「Yes, thank you very much, master.」

And she bowed her head to him again.

What is this? Why is he suddenly getting so cooperative? What is going on here?

Part 8

Now that he's gotten so cooperative, there is no way for me to refuse unless I want to be taken for a complete douchebag.

I would like to believe that he's doing it out of the kindness of his heart, but he's a merchant. Kindness is not a part of their trade, unless they can squeeze some coin out of it. Then again, even if he has some ulterior motive, I guess it works out for me just fine. Thanks to that I will truly be able to buy someone as beautiful as Roxanne for myself. Besides, what would both of them have to gain from trying to deceive me like that?

Alan-san mentioned that she's still a virgin, just like all the other female slaves in this store, and we have already established that it is like that because virgin female slaves are worth significantly more than fully capable male slaves. Is it about the money after all? Could it be that the Slave Merchant and Roxanne know that once I'll set out to collect the rest of the gold necessary for the purchase I will probably have much more than that and they plan on stealing it from me after Roxanne kills me? No, that can't possibly be the case. If it was really like that, such a plan wouldn't have even a shred of sense, because Roxanne would have died along with me, and that would prevent both her from getting her share of gold and Alan-san from selling her to some other guy willing to cough up the dough. Well, that is all considering that his explanation about the relationship between a master and his slaves was not made up.

Another option is that the two of them were really just trying to have me buy Roxanne, using the good business opportunity to their advantage. I am willing to bet that Alan-san thinks that if I will be satisfied with Roxanne, I will be willing to purchase more slaves from him in the future, but I'm too

blind to see this because my crippling social anxiety robbed me of one of the most essential abilities we humans can have: to have a little faith in your fellow men.

「I'm glad that you are willing to give me the benefit of the doubt, but even with that I cannot guarantee that I'll be able to procure the necessary amount.」

「In that case I'll have to sell her to another customer, which won't be hard at all, considering how beautiful she is.」

「So what you're telling me is that I have to get my ass up in gear and get the money as fast as possible because other clients are ready to buy her? Is that why you gave me those five days?」

I tried to get that information out of him.

「Unfortunately I'm afraid I cannot tell you anything, Michio-sama. That is a company secret. In other words, that knowledge is none of your concern. If you really want to buy dear Roxanne, then I suggest setting your priorities to getting the money, nothing more, nothing less.」

「And here I thought you were on my side!」

「I am on no one's side, Michio-sama. I am, first and foremost, a merchant, a man of business. As long as I get my money, the matter of who gets to be the girl's new owner does not matter to me.」

That statement was cruel, but also perfectly logical at the same time. I should have known. Of course. He's a merchant, the one dealing with slaves. To him, they are nothing that goods which need to be sold either to those who have the money and are willing to spend them, or to the highest bidder.

「Dear customer, as I said, as long as it's those five days, I am willing to wait for you.」

Roxanne looked at me and smiled again. Her perfectly white teeth could be seen through the narrow gap between her glossy, cherry-like lips.

Beautiful, she's just transcendently beautiful.

「All right. Now that that's settled, Roxanne will be moving to the sold slave's quarters.」

「As you wish, master. I will make the preparations at once.」

Alan-san relayed the news to the older lady. So I guess that means the game is all set now.

「Yes, be sure to do that. Michio-sama, let us be on our way. You as well, Roxanne.」

The older lady guided Roxanne to the room across the one I have previously entered, while Alan-san and I moved towards the stairs leading back to the shop's ground floor.

「Yes. Uhm, Mr. Customer, thank you for your patronage.」

Roxanne bowed to me three times in succession, each bow deeper than the last one. Her dog ears were shaking in a cute way. Yup, the game is on for real. If I can truly have something so precious for myself, then I have to get the money no matter what!

「Let's go.」

「Yeah.」

The two of us went down the stairs without looking back again. Okay, now that we were left alone again, I guess it's time to do a little prodding.

「You took quite a gamble there. What if I really won't be able to get the money? Cause it's not like I'm some kinda magician who can conjure them up from thin air you know?」

I started the conversation as we were going down the stairs.

「Oh, I don't think it's like that at all. I heard that you have single-handedly defeated a group of wanted criminals. If that information is indeed true, then

that would mean that you managed to earn between 120,000 to 200,000 Nar in less than one day.]

It was a guess on his part but wasn't that much off the mark. He actually managed to estimate the amount of Nar I got fairly accurately. But even so, he still seems to be forgetting about one thing: he wants me to get 420,000 Nar to pay for Roxanne's purchase. Now, in order to get so much money in the shortest amount of time possible, the best option would be to go to the newly discovered Labyrinth and hope to find some valuable items there, but if I want such an escapade not to be anything else than a glorious suicide method, I would have to get myself a Party first, and getting myself a Party would mean the necessity of splitting the loot obtained from raiding the Labyrinth equally between all the Party members, and that would automatically diminish my personal gains, to the point where procuring the desired amount of Nar would be pretty much impossible to achieve.

What the Slave Merchant doesn't know, however, is the fact that just two days ago I was nothing more but a depressed teenager who wanted to end his own miserable existence, having achieved nothing and not obtaining any money at all, be it my world's Yen or this world's Nar. Even after being transported here, the only reason I was able to mop the floor with those Bandits was because I managed to obtain a ridiculously OP weapon for myself after countless experiments with Bonus Points and the Skills. Same goes for milking as much money as possible out of everyone. If not for the Character Reset option which can be used as many times as you want and the fact that performing a Reset takes less than a minute if you know exactly what you want to reset into, I wouldn't have as much dough on me as I have now. What I'm trying to say is that I was only successful so far because my 「special treatment」 as a player allowed me to become somewhat of a demigod compared to all those people who thought that a Slow Rabbit or a Gummi Slime were terrifying monstrosities that should be avoided at all costs.

「I'm just saying, you should prepare yourself to be extremely disappointed, just in case.】

「I will, you don't have to worry about that. But my intuition is telling me that you're going to be all right. I believe I have mentioned this before, but I have

a pretty good eye when it comes to appraising people and their value as potential business partners.]

Dude, where does that confidence of yours come from and why don't you share some of it with me?

With such thoughts in my mind, we returned to the guest room we were initially sitting in.

Currently there are only two ways of obtaining money that would allow me to achieve my goal. One of them was raiding the Labyrinth on my own and hoping for the best. The ideal scenario here would be that I manage to find enough valuable Drop Items to get myself at least 100,000 Nar per day, peaking at 500,000 Nar after five days. Enough to buy Roxanne, and just enough to have some spare change for some initial lodging and food costs. Honestly though, such an outcome is extremely unlikely.

Normally, one piece of Rabbit's Fur was 10 Nar, so in order to get any significant amount of money out of it I would have to hunt a shit-ton of them, and even then I have no way of knowing if all of those encounters would end with me getting an item that I want. From the info that I have gathered so far, it looks like one defeated enemy can only leave one item behind when it dies, and it won't always be the same one. Supposedly there are also stronger monsters who drop more valuable items with higher rarity, but whether or not I will be able to deal with them by myself is unknown at this point.

Another option would be to hunt more Bandits and collect the bounties placed on their heads. If the average sum is 160,000 Nar, I should be able to get the necessary amount a little bit faster. Is the Slave Merchant's confidence in me coming from that? I... I honestly don't know if I should think of it as incredibly naïve or progressive of him.

Part 9

But I guess I am still naïve as well, since a part of me still doesn't want to admit that this is the real world, just like the one I left behind when I molested that [Yes] button. Back in the village I wholeheartedly thought that this was nothing but an ultra-realistic game, and that's why I had no reservations about turning the Bandits that attacked it into salami, and besides, I did it mostly in self-defense. But now things are going to be different. We're not talking about defending yourself anymore, we're talking about assaulting other people, criminals though they are, but that's beside the point, so that I could trade their lives for money which is going to be used not for some chivalrous endeavor, but for the scummy reason of satisfying my own selfish desires. The only real problem with this approach would be finding a sufficiently large group of Bandits or a few smaller ones near the town across the span of two days. That pretty lady knight said that the group I had dispatched in the village was the one operating in the slums of Veil, so I can probably assume that no other group would take their place, at least not for the time being. Based on my video game knowledge, all the criminals in the city will either hide in the city sewers, or relocate to their hideouts outside of the town, most likely in some caves or encampments deep in the thickest parts of the woods. Chasing them down would be another matter entirely if I knew the terrain around Veil like the back of my hand, but without such knowledge, running blindly around the forest might just prove to be a giant waste of my precious time.

As for the other ways of achieving my objective, I guess I could try doing the one thing that everyone who got sent to or reincarnated into another world would try sooner or later: use my knowledge from the time spent on Earth combined with my Identify Skill in order to multiply the amount of money

that is already in my possession, but like I said before, I am just your average high schooler who knows jack shit about the economy and the processes which govern it, so I wouldn't know what to do, even if the method and resources were right in front of me. And as far as I know, there are no tricks to gain a large amount of money in literally a few days. Getting filthy rich always involves long-term investments with large amounts of risk to them.

「Supposedly the Bandits whom you have defeated had decent equipment on them. Maybe selling them to the shops here in town could be a nice way to start?」

The Slave Merchant suggested once we got back to the guest room and I sat back on the sofa. As if I didn't know that already.

Certainly, if I sold Durandal, it is more than likely that I would get 100,000 Nar for it, maybe even more. As for the Copper Swords, in my opinion they are just glorified, oversized butter knives unfit to fight not even against the Bandits, but also the weakest of monsters, so I don't think they'd even be worth that much to begin with. But since the only weapon visible to others is the one I currently have equipped, there is no way for Alan-san to know about Durandal. When I first came here, all I had on me was a Copper Sword on my back, but now I also have a Scimitar tucked on my belt. From the outsider's perspective, I guess I'm looking like some kinda weapons maniac or a sword collector.

Now let's see... combining the prize money and the money obtained from the Village Chief with the ones I would probably get for selling Durandal, I think I would be able to obtain the required 420,000 Nar pretty effortlessly.

The thing is, no matter what happens, I absolutely cannot sell Durandal. Ever. If I did that, it would be lost to me forever, and that would mean a double loss for me: that of a powerful weapon and the Bonus Points I've spent to obtain it.

Even if obtaining Roxanne is everything to me now, losing Durandal would be equivalent to losing everything, because without Durandal, I won't be able to guarantee Roxanne's safety. Losing such a valuable weapon would spell no end of trouble for both of us. No, that sword is my absolute trump card.

Even if it means facing more difficulties and adversity, I can't part with it no matter what.

「If I chose to enter the Labyrinth, will I be able to make a sufficient amount of money out of it?」

I have to gather information about ways to obtain money without sounding too suspicious. First, let's try to get as much info about Labyrinth related matters as I can.

「You can. It won't be an astonishing amount but at the very least it will be a steady one. The exact amount would depend on your ability and luck, but I think 1000 gold is the minimal amount you could get for a single item found in there.」

It depends on your ability and your luck...

I guess so. But since the ordinary drop items would get me so little, gathering enough money out of them would still be impossible.

「1000 gold per item, huh? While that might be good in the long run...」

Right now time isn't exactly my ally.

「Can I get sell those found items to a Guild?」

「The Explorers and Adventurers Guilds are both here in this town. The Explorer's Guild is the second building on the right across the main road. The Adventurer's Guild is located in the center of the town on the west side. Just between you and me, they don't like each other very much.」

The Adventurer's Guild and the Explorer's Guild are not on good terms, duly noted. Having an Explorer Job might not be such a bad idea.

「What about hunting down Bandits and collecting bounties for their heads?」

「That's certainly a possibility, but I wouldn't recommend it, if you want my honest opinion.」

「Wouldn't... recommend it?」

「Yes, and for a number of reasons. For example, the only place where the Bounty Hunters Guild is located is the Imperial City.」

「Bounty Hunting...」

So it can really function as a Job, huh? That was to be expected. If you can become a Thief by stealing something and a Hero by Saving a village, then by following that logic hunting down Bandits and the like should make you a Bounty Hunter.

At least I thought that it's going to be like that, but apparently I was mistaken, cause when I checked my own status I have received no such Job. Maybe it is necessary to join a specific Guild first?

「A Bounty Hunter? You need to accumulate a lot of experience at hunting criminals to obtain such a title.」

「I see.」

Apparently the prerequisite for that Job is to have a Warrior Job at Lv10 or so.

「Even then, you won't be able to protect everything around you simply by being strong. Hunt down enough Bandits as a Bounty Hunter, and you'll quickly gain notoriety in the criminal underworld, becoming a target for everyone willing to exact revenge or increasing their infamy. When that happens, you won't be safe anywhere, even behind the walls of the Imperial City.」

From a criminal's point of view, Bounty Hunters must be their sworn enemies. It's natural for the two to detest each other. It's natural that both those groups would want to exact revenge if their members were harmed. I already murdered quite a lot of them, so... have I already been branded as a potential target?

「If you kill too many Bandits, can you end up being targeted by other

outlaws?」

Looks like hunting Bandits might not be as good of an option as I have initially thought. Kill or be killed. That must be the absolute law of this world. But even if you'll be strong enough to kill many, the ones who'll come after them will eventually bring you down. History proved that to be true time and time again. Well, back in my old world at least.

「That's right. And the prize money received in this way is absolutely not worth the risk of you and your relatives being targeted by other Bandits.」

Then is it possible that the Bandits I had killed during the raid on the village had extraordinarily high bounties on their heads? The ones going way above the usual price paid for the extermination of their ilk? No, that cannot be it. Picker-san counted the reward money for their slaying pretty accurately, so I guess it couldn't have been anything special.

Either way, Bandit extermination should be my absolutely last resort. First, I should try my luck in the Labyrinth.

「All right, I think I learned everything I wanted to know now. But one last thing before I leave: if I want to stay in this town for longer, are there any inns or hotels you'd recommend? I don't want anything fancy or too pricey, but at the very least it should be something comfortable, with good food and soft beds.」

「Those are some pretty specific conditions, but if you're looking for something that is a middle ground between affordable and comfortable, The Veil Pavilion, an inn located at the southwestern end at the rotary in the town's center should be the place to go for you. It is managed by the Innkeepers Guild, so I can fully vouch for their quality.」

「Okay, I will go there immediately.」

I don't know what to think about that Innkeepers Guild, but it cannot be a bad place if Alan-san is recommending it to me. At the very least, it should be better than spending the night at the stables or with no roof above my head whatsoever.

I stood from my seat. Now that we said everything that needed to be said, there was no reason for me to stay here any longer. For now I will have to secure myself a place to stay, but from tomorrow morning, I will have to work my ass off as hard as I would beat my meat on a Friday night (hopefully I won't have to take care of that myself for much longer).

「Then I will be anxiously awaiting your return in five days, Michio-sama.」

Sent off by those parting words, I left the Slave Merchant's shop and moved forward towards my new goal: To gather enough money to buy Roxanne! And I think I don't have to repeat myself, but I will do so just to psyche myself up.

Failure is not an option here!

Chapter 4: The Labyrinth

Part 1

Player Name: Kaga Michio

Character Information & Equipment:

Class: Villager Lv3, Hero Lv1, Thief Lv3

Accessory: Ring of Determination, Sandals, Bandit Bandana

The day was still young. If the main roads in this town are designed in such a way that they are heading directly to the north, south, east and west, then the sun has moved slightly over the west towards the south. So it should be... a little over noon, if I'm not mistaken?

Now that I've gotten back onto the main road, the first place I will try to visit will be the Explorer's Guild which is in that second building to the right, according to the information I have obtained from Alan the Slave Merchant.

So that confirms that he wasn't lying: there really is such a Job as an Explorer. Just to be sure I used Identify on that one hot chick in the building and it showed me that she was a Lv17 Explorer, just like the receptionist-looking guy behind the counter.

Okay, now for the most important part: do I really have to join the Explorer's Guild to become an Explorer myself? Also, I was expecting the inside of the building to look more like a tavern, or the medieval equivalent of an office building, but if I were to draw any comparisons, then I'd have to say it looked like a primitive post office, wooden tables, counters and mailbox next to the guild's main entrance included. Several townspeople were already inside, apparently doing business with the guild's staff, because I heard sentences such as 「I'll take that, then」, 「Sold」 or 「So how much is this going to cost me?」 being used. If that is any indication, then I guess this place can also buy

items off of you and made it possible for you to purchase whatever it is they are offering. But I am not interested in those, not for now at least.

First of all, I'll need to do some information gathering. Listening to the people around me in hopes of catching something interesting, I headed over to what I assumed to be an information board with multiple pieces of parchment stuck to it....

Well, shit. I can't read any of those strange letters.

Something is definitely written there, but I don't know what that is, which is strange since the Bandit's Intelligence Cards were written in kanji, so why are the letters here different? Is the Explorer's Guild special or were the Intelligence Cards special?

「Excuse me sir, is there a problem? Do you need assistance with anything?」

A soft voice called out to me from behind my back. When I turned around, I learned It belonged to a young girl who looked roughly the same age as me. She was a Lv2 Explorer and was dressed in the same receptionist outfit as the guy behind the counter.

「Uhm, yes. Actually, I'm sorry to bother you but I can't read any of those.」

I said apologetically while pointing at the message board.

「Of course sir. If that's the case then I can read the information you want for 16 Nar.」

I see. A substitute reader, huh? In a world in which the literacy rate is quite low and the ability to read is a privilege reserved mostly for those of noble birth who could afford to learn it, such an institution might actually be a quite lucrative business. And the price seemed to be pretty reasonable, but that is just my own opinion, that is to say a layman who doesn't know the actual value of this world's currency and the average hourly payment rate.

「Then please do so.」

I took the backpack off my back and got the necessary amount of money out

of the drawstring bag.

I wonder if 16 Nar is the standard price, or the one that has already been affected by my 30% discount skill? Because my intuition was telling me that the former was the case here.

「Please follow after me.」

She took the pieces of paper out of the board and we made our way to one of the tables. On the way, she passed the payment on to the receptionist dude. So I assume he's responsible for handling all the money that comes from the transactions with the people who want to read the information despite not being able to read themselves? That might be wise from the guild's perspective, but I hope that guy leaves all the money here when he finishes his shift. After all, if we assume that the Explorer's Guild earns a lot from substitute reading alone, then the caretaker of said money would make a perfect target for a robbery.

Money, huh?

It pained me a little that I had to spend some money so soon after steeling myself to save as much of it as possible, but if it's for the purpose of getting as much information about this world as I can, then I will take every little piece of info I can get my hands on, as long as it will lead me to making lots of money in no time.

On a totally unrelated side note, that girl is as pretty as Roxanne is, at least when we talk about facial features. If we're talking about boobs, then hers were hidden under the uniform she was wearing, but at the very least the visible bulges confirmed that she was not as flat as a cutting board. But she was still inferior to Roxanne, who was an absolute bombshell all across the board!

「All right , I can translate as many things as you want, as long as it'll be in the time it takes for the sand in this sand watch to finish falling. Is that alright with you?」

She then procured a small hourglass out of her pocket and showed it to me,

probably so that I wouldn't try to accuse her of cheating on time. But I feel like I should point out that even for a pocket hourglass, the midsection was surprisingly narrow. I wonder how much time it will take for the sand to fall from one section to the other? 5 minutes? 10 minutes? Maybe 15 at best? Either way, I should get this lady to read as many documents as she can for me. In other words, be as precise with your questions and demands as you can.

「Okay, I understand.」

「Then I presume we can start the countdown?」

「Yes, please do.」

She then placed the hourglass on the table and turned it upside down, beginning the sifting of the sand inside.

「So, what exactly do you want to know, Mr. Customer?」

She asked me. What I want to know is... wait, actually, I don't even know what I want to know, because I have no idea what is written on those pieces of paper. I asked her to read them for me precisely because I wanted to know that! So I guess we'll start with that and then branch out to the specifics.

「What is written in this document right here?」

「Those are the general information about the newly-discovered Labyrinth, The Labyrinth of Cooratar. The current exploration progress is 11 levels. The first level is inhabited primarily by Needlewoods, level 2 is the domain of Naïve Olives, the third one...」

I don't get a single word of what she's saying to me. Like, I hear those words, but none of them is clicking with me. All I know is that she's probably talking about monsters prowling each level of the Labyrinth's dungeon.

「What about the intel on the Labyrinth's deepest depths?」

She takes all the papers and searches through them in order.

「Well... it looks like no one has reached the deepest level yet, therefore we don't have any information on it yet. I'm sorry.」

After all that searching, all she had for me was a disappointing answer. But I kinda expected it, since the Labyrinth was apparently discovered only a few days ago. Of course no one would have reached all the way to its end in such a short amount of time.

「And the other papers? What are they about?」

「The ones over here contain the details of jobs for an Explorer.」

Another piece of knowledge which was imparted to me by Alan the Slave Merchant was that the Guilds generally did not offer quests and jobs to outsiders, and that they might find it difficult to recruit Party members, but he also said that the guilds are always open for accepting new members into their ranks. But for the time being I would like to avoid making any decisions that may or may not have an impact on the rest of my days spent here. Before I commit myself to one guild or the other, I'll have to carefully consider all of the options available to me to ensure that I won't pick the worst possible one on the worst possible conditions. Kinda like with job hunting back on earth, but with more dire consequences.

Part 2

「What kind of jobs are there, exactly?」

「There are various kinds differing with specifics and difficulty level. Are you interested in anything in particular?」

「Not really, so if you could please start reading from the beginning...」

「Well then, first we have the services offered by the Knights of the Marquis of Negliva for those of 70 years of age or above, more details will be given when the candidates arrive in the Knight's headquarters. I believe that is one of the requests that are a part of the kingdom's elderly assistance initiative.」

So they have one of those here, even though this is clearly a medieval setting? Okay I guess. All that I care about is that there is nothing about recruiting potential Party members. Besides, I wouldn't want my companions to be a group of old geezers who are one foot in the grave already.

「Next one please?」

「Goods carrying quest, commissioned by one of the warriors in service of Viscount Kustov. That is all.」

「Hmm...」

I repeatedly looked over the upper and lower pieces of paper sprawled on the table. All of them probably relate to the same kind of quest, that is transportation or escorting jobs, because their characters in the headers that apparently represented them were repeating across all the posters, or at least

that was my guess from observing the movements of the guild lady's hand as she moved her slender fingers from words to word, explaining their meaning to me. I think I have a firm grasp of those two now, but the rest of the symbols were still a complete mystery to me.

As I was lost in my own thoughts, about six minutes have passed.

「I'm afraid the time is up. What do you want to do, sir? Shall I continue or do you want me to stop?」

The sand in the hourglass seemed to have fallen from top to bottom in its entirety. So this pocket one lasts for about six minutes, huh? Technically I could ask her to read some more of those posters for me for another six minutes, but that would mean I'd have to hand another 16 Nar to her, and since I don't want to spend any more money than absolutely necessary, I think it would be best to call it quits here for now.

「We can stop here. Thank you for your assistance, ma'am, you've been very helpful.」

「I'm glad to hear it. Thank you for your patronage and have a pleasant day, sir.」

We shook each other's hands and then I left the Explorer's Guild. To be completely honest, this whole endeavor wasn't helpful at all, except for maybe one thing: reaffirming my conviction that it would be more beneficial for me to actually learn the written language of this world. That way I wouldn't have to bother with finding someone to read stuff for me all the time, and that would be a huge relief for my wallet, and who knows, maybe it would also improve the way others look at me.

Crossing one thing off of my to-do list, I headed towards the town center. My next priority was securing myself a place to stay, at least for the time being. To do that, I headed to the inn which Alan the Slave Merchant recommended to me. It was to the southwest, so just opposite of the knight's guardhouse. Supposedly it was run by the Innkeepers guild, so it should be a place that should be both safe and secure, but a part of me was getting worried that due to such a convenient location the accommodation fee might be off the charts.

However, that was one of the few matters where I absolutely couldn't allow myself to be a scrooge. I have 33 gold coins on me and I won't allow them to be stolen from me just because I chose some cheap, but shady place instead of something more reliable.

I entered the inn through the lightly colored, wooden door. One look at the place told me that it was just like Alan-san told me: kinda sloppy and definitely not cozy, but perfectly average for someone like me. It looked more like an interior of a restaurant than the lobby of a hotel. Curiously enough, almost all of the tables here were empty and there was barely a soul to be seen. Right about now should be one of the busiest times of the day when places like that should be bustling with customers! Or maybe the concept of lunch does not exist in this world?

「Welcome!」

As I headed for the counter, a man standing behind it called out to me. He was a sturdy looking guy in his thirties, who was a Lv28 Innkeeper. Well, this shouldn't come as a surprise. If there was such an organization as an Innkeeper's Guild. He wore rough clothing which was somewhat similar to what I was wearing right now. Looks like the business really wasn't booming to such a degree that he could afford to buy himself something fancier. But enough about that. Let's talk business.

「How much would I have to pay for a longer stay?」

「You intend to go to the Labyrinth as well, young lad?」

How did he know that I was going to the Labyrinth? Was it just a lucky guess? Or perhaps more people like me came here with exactly the same intention? That was what I initially thought, until it occurred to me that he probably deduced that from the way I was dressed. I mean, if I was in his shoes and saw a young man dressed in a bandana, leather armor and two weapons on him, I would assume that he was a) crazy b) trying to rob me c) heading someplace dangerous. And the only such place around these parts is the newly-discovered Labyrinth, so yeah, it must have been a simple cause-effect deduction.

Since the Labyrinth is still brand-new, there might be a possibility of more people like me showing up, and once they do, it will be like an open hunting season, so I hope he still has some vacant rooms left. Please let that be the case!

「That's right. That is my intention.」

「Hmpf, thought so. You look exactly like them adventurous folks who come to the big cities from the countryside to see what the world outside of their stuffy little villages has to offer and try to make a name for themselves. So what kind of room do you want then? A single? Or double? Or perhaps a shared quarter?」

「For now single room will be enough.」

A shared quarter? What's that? Is it similar to those Japanese Edo period-styled hot-spring inns where you can have as much as six people sleeping together in the same room? And here I thought that medieval worlds in games were based exclusively on European middle ages where something like that wasn't as common. What a nice cultural addition. Regrettably, I have to turn that option down, for security reasons. I have too many valuable items on me to risk them getting stolen. That is why I cannot allow myself to share a room with other guests.

「What about the furnishings? You want something that's a bit more on the fancier side?」

「Just your standard lodging will be fine. I don't mind if its furnishings are a little old.」

「What about the meals? Of course I can't force you to eat here exclusively, but if you choose to have your meals together with the room, then I could offer you a discount, as per the policy of the Innkeepers Guild. And just between you and me, dining in this city can get pretty darn expensive, going as high as 100 Nar per meal, and since you came here for lodging then I guess you're not exactly sleeping on the moneybags, right? Then again, if you were really strapped for cash, you would have chosen something even cheaper.」

So I have been branded as either a poor or stingy type of guy. But putting that matter aside, the Innkeeper makes a pretty solid point. What should I do about the meals I'm going to eat? I know that since I came here from the 21st century Japan I'm probably going to be heavily biased towards the food from this world, but what I had so far wasn't exactly what I would call terrible, so I think that given enough time I might be able to adjust my palette to it, even if it is many tiers below what I have been used to for my entire life.

「Fine then, hit me up with the meals as well.」

If what this guy says turns out to be true, then finding a decent food place with affordable prices might be quite an ordeal. That's why having food waiting for me here at discounted prices might not be such a bad deal.

Part 3

「Now, this is just a formality, but it's an order from the top brass of my Guild, so just bear with it for me, okay kiddo? Here, this is my Intelligence Card with the officially certified Innkeepers Guild's seal of approval.」

And he practically shoved his Intelligence Card down my throat. It really must have contained all of his personal and business information, but since I can't read any of those words I can't know for sure.

「Ah, okay. Not that I didn't believe you, but it's nice to know that your Guild takes such small details into consideration.」

「Really? You're the first one who actually thinks like that. Other customers, even some of my most loyal regulars just think of it as a bother.」

No shit? But I can see why that would be the case. If Intelligence Cards can be said to be this world's equivalent of my old world's ID Cards that contain every little detail about a person then the owners of inns, shops and restaurants could definitely use them to keep shady customers out of their businesses by creating the list of the permanently banned ones and handing it over to the authorities. Kinda scary, futuristic concept, but as long as it gets the job done...

「By the way, are there any restrictions as to who might stay in this fine establishment?」

「As long as you are a law-abiding citizen you're free to stay here. The only ones whom I won't tolerate here are Bandits, Thieves and other scummy criminals. I take pride in the fact that for as long as I've been the owner here,

none of them bloody outlaws set as much as a foot in here and I intend to keep it that way. Does that answer your question, boyo?」

「It does, thank you very much.」

「Good. Anything else you wanna know?」

「Nah, I think I'm good for now.」

It would seem that this place will accept anyone, be it a noble or a slave, as long as they are not lawbreakers.

「Speaking of Bandits, have you heard any rumors about their activity in the town or in its vicinity?」

「Not many of them, thank the Gods for that. But from what I do hear it seems that the activity of the Demi-human Brigands and Beastman Pirates began to be on the rise again. Not to mention the Robbers who commit brutal and atrocious acts on anyone who happens to be unfortunate enough to cross paths with them. I have never seen one of them for myself mind you and I'm not going to complain about that. So to give you a short and precise answer, you'll definitely find them around here, but I wouldn't recommend looking for them unless you had no other choice. No matter who they are, criminals and outlaws are no good pieces of shit who should all be wiped out from the face of this earth!」

「I see. I'll be sure to take those words to heart.」

Looks like he really has it out for Bandits and other criminals. Perhaps it would be best not to pursue the matter further. Instead, let's ask him about the actual cost of my staying here.

「How much would I have to pay for the lodging + meals combo, if you don't mind me asking?」

「Ah, that's right, I almost forgot about that! The cheapest single room costs 260 Nar and the cheapest meal set costs 60 Nar, so 320 Nar in total. If you intend to stay for longer, I can cut that price to 224 Nar per night. I always

demand payment in advance, but you can pay for 1 day every day instead of paying for a week or a month.]

320 Nar a day for accommodation and food, downed to 224 Nar after applying my 30 % discount. Good to know that it works in this particular case.

「That's a pretty sweet deal you have for me, and I'll gladly take it.」

I took the backpack off my back and took the drawstring bag out of it.

「Thank you for your patronage then. The meals are served in this here dining hall. Breakfast is already included in the accommodation fee. We begin serving it 30 minutes after sunrise, sometimes a little earlier if there is a special occasion. Dinner is served starting from 30 minutes after the sunset, and will be served for 2-3 hours, so it will be in your best interest not to be late if you want to keep that stomach of yours full. As long as the lights in the canteen are on then you're safe, but if they are turned off then you either wait until breakfast or finding something on your own.」

「Sounds reasonable enough.」

That said, I placed 4 silver and 48 copper coins on the counter. If I knew exactly how long I would have to stay here then it might have been better to pay for more days in advance, but with my current budget I would have risked losing all the money I have on me right now without any guarantee that I would be able to get those back. That is why I will pay for 1 day of stay on a day-to-day basis, starting from 2 days payment right now.

The Innkeeper counted the coins slowly.

「Payment for 2 days, got it. Now boy, raise your hand.」

「Okay.」

I did exactly as I was told.

「Investigate the will of the flowing spirit, the wisdom of intellect. Intelligence Card, open!」

I stretched my left hand with the newly-materialized Intelligence Card towards him. Showing him my Card sounded infinitely more convenient than filling the inn's logbook while being unable to write the letter or read the words.

「Is this enough?」

「Yeah, absolutely. Kaga... Michio, huh?」

I know that the name on the Intelligence Card was written in the Japanese fashion, but I wasn't sure if I should go out of my way to tell him that Kaga was my surname, not a given name.

「That's my name alright.」

「And your Job is still a Villager I see. Well, do your best to get yourself some decent one as fast as possible.」

「I will be sure to do that.」

「Okay, that takes care of all the formalities. Now come on, I'll show you to your room.」

And he left the counter. It looks like he does not intend to carry my backpack for me, so I have to do it myself.

「Right behind you, sir.」

I followed behind him through two flights of stairs. Looks like my room is placed on the third floor.

「If you really intend to go explore the Labyrinth, I can buy the ingredients you'll find in there off of you, as long as it won't be too large and it will be more than one piece of it so I can add it to the menu.」

「Roger that.」

If I'll obtain some monster meat I might as well sell it to him, since he seems

so eager about the idea.

「When you return here after the day of adventuring and you'd want some hot water to wipe your body, come see me about it. A whole basin of hot water costs 20 Nar by the way. Take it to your room with you after dinner and bring it back in the morning before breakfast. If you want to use the lamp, the rental fee is 10 Nar, and it contains about an hour's worth of lamp oil. Feel free to add more oil yourself if you'll need it, just don't go starting any fires.」

「I will be careful not to do that.」

While we were talking about all those things we have reached our destination. The Innkeeper stood in front of the door as he was searching for the right key to the room, and then he placed it in the keyhole and opened the door.

「Here we are.」

「Hoo...」

It really was a single bedroom the size of about 10 tatami mats. The only furnishings were a small closet right next to the room's entrance, a bed in the middle and a desk and a chair at the back. On the other side of the room was a medium-sized wooden window.

All in all, this room isn't all that bad. It's certainly better than the one at the Village Chief's house, although I stayed in it for only one night and it was free of charge.

「The shelves under the closet can be locked and I reinforced them with special shielding cement, but I would advise against putting any valuables in them anyway. If you have such items, you'd best keep them close to yourself at all times. The servants will come clean the room once a day. If you want your clothes to be washed, just negotiate the price with whoever will be in charge of cleaning at that time. When you'll be heading out, please leave your room key at the reception desk. The number of this room is 3-1.」

He showed me the key and placed it on the closet.

「Alright. Thank you for all the information.」

「Don't mention it. Now please enjoy your stay.」

And he left the room, leaving me alone with my thoughts.

Part 4

Finally being left alone in my new temporary base of operations, I sat on the bed to test it out. It wasn't particularly soft, but also wasn't as hard as I was initially expecting it to be. Overall, it was not bad, like a solid 5/10 or 6/10.

I lowered the backpack on the floor and took all of my luggage out of it. I think that my old jersey can be left here without any regrets. The Village Chief thought it was pretty valuable, but he couldn't have been more mistaken, so even if it was stolen from me, I wouldn't have been shedding many tears because of it. The same principle can be applied to the leather shoes which are currently on my feet. They were cheap as dirt, so even if I lose them I can buy myself another pair anytime.

Next I took off the Scimitar and Copper Sword in order to rearrange the way I was wearing them. Since I was training kendo from a young age I was more accustomed to fighting with a two-handed sword instead of a one-handed one, but I wasn't going to use Durandal in a fight unless I had absolutely no other choice. Since the Scimitar was a relatively light weapon, it would be best to place it at my waist.

Finishing my rearrangements, I placed the rest of my things in the closet and locked it, storing the key safely in my backpack. I did the same with the Bandit's Bandana since it was so light that adding it there made no difference to its weight. The last thing which ended up there were the two drawstring bags filled with my money.

Inspecting the key to the room, there was something written on it. Probably my room's number, but it was written in a rather peculiar fashion. The Intelligence Card contained Arabic numerals, but those were different from

them. They were more reminiscent of the ones I saw on the posters back at the Explorer's Guild. Could it be that the letters they were using there are the standard, or 「normal」 letters used by the inhabitants of this world?

.....

Okay, now that I got myself accommodated, I feel it is high time for me to go hit the Labyrinth. I will accomplish nothing by simply sitting around on my ass doing nothing. Yup, that sounds like the best course of action for now.

I got up, pulled the backpack back on my shoulders and left the room. Back at the lobby floor I just left the key on the counter in front of the Innkeeper who gave me a small nod and I left the inn and made my way towards the town gate which was facing the castle in the distance.

There were no gatekeepers at the gate, so I just crossed it without being bothered by anyone and made my way towards the nearby forest. According to the Slave Merchant's instructions, the Labyrinth itself should be nearby.

While I was passing by the wheat field, I noticed that a suspicious black wall suddenly appeared between the trees right in front of me. It's a good thing that I managed to stop myself right in my tracks, otherwise I would have surely bumped into it head-first and then who knows what might have happened? What the hell is this thing? Is this some kinda trap?

As I was thinking that, a group of six people before me approached it as if it was the most obvious thing to do. Is this some kinda transportation device? A teleporter, perhaps? That's amazing and cool in all sorts of ways! I want to give it a go immediately.... But wait a second! Identify! Just like I suspected that Party has someone with the Job of a Wizard among their Ranks. A friggin Wizard!

「Here. This is the place.」

「Umu.」

All of them exchange a few sentences and the knight who I suppose is the Party's leader proceeds forward and enters the forest. Despite his fairly low

level, he looks like a pretty proud and self-important fellow. For now, maybe I should try following after them to see where they will go and what they are going to do.

Following after those guys (at a reasonable distance, of course) to the other side of the portal, I happened upon a small hill with the same kind of portal I passed through just now. Is that the entrance to the actual Labyrinth? I said that the portal was on a small hill, but to be honest, rather than a hill, it looks like just a sizeable mound of fresh soil. My guess is that this, let's call it entrance for now, is the only thing that's sticking above the ground level and that the dungeon itself is actually hidden underground.

Apparently, someone was waiting for the group at the entrance. Looks like an Explorer. When the Party I was following approached him, he began the conversation almost immediately.

「How far have you gotten?」

「The second level. I got out just now.」

「What kind of monsters have you encountered?」

「Needle Woods on the first floor and Green Caterpillars on the second floor.」

He gave them a short, methodical answer.

「Well, you heard him. So? What should we do?」

「I think we can handle the first level.」

The knight presented his opinion. So he really must be the party's leader. The rest of his comrades nodded their heads and approached the black wall one by one, and then disappeared. So that really is the entrance.

Should I go in as well? Ah, but before that, I guess I should do another Character Reset. I opened the menu and got rid of the 30 % discount and replaced it with Bonus Weapon 6. Now I have 1 Bonus Point left, because the second one was used to get the ability to shorten the casting time of Skills and Spells, since using them in-battle was difficult enough as it is. Not

casting them should be easier for me, even if only for just a little bit. I am lucky that such a Skill has been implemented into this game... I mean world. Upon closer investigation, that 1 Bonus Point should shorten the casting time of Skills and Spells for about 10%. I decided to place the last Bonus Point I had left into Critical Strike Chance Increase. Just like with the reduction of the casting time, one Bonus Point seems to be equal to a 10% increase. If that is the case, then I wonder what is the maximum cap for such abilities? 30%? 50%? !00%? Or does it vary from Skill to Skill, depending on what it is and the method of its use?

With that out of the way, I closed the settings screen. Durandal is placed on my waist next to the Scimitar.

With the preparations done, I finally approached the entrance to the Labyrinth. I was half-expecting the Explorer who stayed near the entrance to comment on how I shouldn't be going into such a dangerous place when I'm clearly not ready, but he just ignored me and didn't even look my way. Okay, that works just fine for me I guess.

I tried going through the black wall myself. When I inserted my hand into the portal, it went through it without encountering any kind of resistance. Encouraged by it, I went there properly.... and ended up in a room-like cave, or perhaps a cave-like room.

It was a small square space covering about 4-5 square meters. There wasn't any artificial source of light, but thankfully it wasn't so dark that I couldn't see my surroundings at all. The dim light emitted by the stone walls was enough to give me the vague idea of where I should go to proceed.

So this is a Labyrinth, huh?



Part 5

Three roads were extending from this room: one in front of me, one to the left and one to the right. The black portal behind me served as an entrance to the Labyrinth, therefore it was of no interest to me for now, since I wasn't going to leave this place minutes after I entered it.

All of the roads looked exactly the same, that is a narrow tunnel about 3 meters wide and even more dimly lit than this starting area, so much so that seeing what's on the other side was practically impossible. In your typical RPG terms, I found myself on the crossroads, and quite the complicated ones at that.

Will I really be okay wandering around this place? After all, I didn't prepare any kind of mapping supplies. Moreover, I haven't even thought about buying myself some of those. The same goes for some portable sources of light, like torches or even that goddamn oil lamp from the Innkeeper. What am I going to do now if it turns out that the inside of the Labyrinth is all dark like a... I'll better stop talking now before I say something I'm going to regret. I mean, I didn't see those six players carrying any light sources with them either, but there is a possibility that their Wizard could create light with his magic. Alright, time to use my knowledge learned from video games in practice.

When it comes to mapping and navigating the labyrinths, the general rule of thumb is that you should always stick to one side of the passages you're going through or to always turn in one direction so that you could eventually come back to the place where you started the exploration even if you end up getting lost.

I chose to go down the path to the left. There was a fork at the end of it, and one of the available paths was turning left again. Both the floor and the walls are still solid and don't show any signs of crumbling down on my head or any traps launching themselves at me from out of nowhere.

Luckily for me, when I made another step, I noticed that every time my foot touched the ground beneath me, that portion of the floor shone with the same dim light emitted by the walls of this place. So it turns out I don't need an external source of light after all. Good to know. It's nice that this Labyrinth turns out to be quite a convenient place to explore. This way, I won't have to worry about being suddenly attacked from behind by monsters who dwell in here. And speaking of surprise attacks, after I went a few steps ahead, I heard the sound of something moving behind my back. However, it was not an attack I was anticipating, ready to slash whatever tried to jump me with my right hand firmly on Durandal's hilt.

Looking back towards where I came from, the black wall shone with a pale blue light, revealing another group of people. They were a party of 5 Knights and 1 explorer. I thought they were going to head through one of the pathways leading out from the main area, but apparently their intention was the exact opposite, because they faced the stony entrance and then proceeded to head out of the Labyrinth, one after the other. So the entrance to the Labyrinth is at the same time its exit. Expected, but having a visual confirmation is always nice. Anyway, I should proceed further. I cannot allow myself to waste even a single minute if I am to make a ton of cash required to buy Roxanne.

One thing I wondered about though, was what I was going to do if a monster really attacked me in here. As I mentioned above, the passages were claustrophobically narrow and Durandal wasn't exactly a short sword or a dagger, so If I'm going to be attacked in those corridors, I will have no other option but to run towards some wider space if I ever want to defend myself. Only an idiot or a total noob would attempt to fight with a longsword while being confined in an enclosed space. If this was just a game dying wouldn't be much of a setback, since I'd just have to make the trip back here again from the nearest respawn point, but as long as I have no way of knowing if I only have one life here or not, I'm going to assume that death here is like the

one while playing games on Death March difficulty: you die = no do-overs, just the cold emptiness of the void in the afterlife.

But before I worry more about that, a system message flashed before my eyes.

『New Job obtained: Explorer』

Now what do we have here? Better check it in the Job settings screen.

『Job: Explorer, Lv1』

『Active Effect: Slight increase to Physical Attack』

『Skills: Item Box Party Organization Dungeon Walker』

Oh would you look at that, just by going into the Labyrinth and walking around a little I have obtained the Explorer's Job! So you don't have to join a Guild to obtain a Job they represent after all! Neat!

So let's run a quick check, just to be sure. I have obtained a Thief Job after I have stolen a pair of sandals from the barn in the village, the Job of a Hero after I saved said village from a Bandit attack, and now a Job of an Explorer after entering the Labyrinth. What does that tell us? It tells us that you don't have to join a guild to get a Job, but you still need to complete an action that would act as a sort of 「trigger」 for obtaining it.

I tried changing it to be my first Job, but it proved impossible. The only two Jobs which could be set as my main one were Villager Lv3 and Thief Lv3, just like before. I can't place Hero or Explorer at the first slot. If that is how it's going to be, then I guess I have no choice but to continue going forward with Villager as my main Job. Even if it was kinda lame, it was still a better alternative than placing Thief as my first Job and becoming the target of society's scorn in this world as well. Can you imagine how epic of a fail would that be? It would literally be the biggest of all 「Oof's」, and to add salt to the wound, the one I would have brought upon myself with nothing but my own stupidity. As long as the First Job is considered your main one, the one that can be displayed on the Intelligence Card for all to see, it's best not to

tinker around with it too much and just leave it at the default, safest option. Besides, it doesn't change the fact that my second Job was the Hero Lv1. The Skill of that Job was called Overwhelming. As to what that Skill actually does, I have no idea, since I didn't have any occasion to actually try it out, for the obvious reason.

The third Job I set was the newly-acquired Explorer Lv1. I think now's going to be a good time to test one of the Skills that came with it, the Item Box. Let's give it a shot.

「Item Bo...!」

Before I finished speaking those two words, something that looked like a small wooden box appeared in front of me. Or at the very least, something that looked like a lid of the wooden box. I tried to look at it from the side, but all I saw were the edges of the thin portal out of which the Item Box appeared. Did it arrive from the other dimension? Is it governed by some kinda space manipulation magic? But why did it appear like that even before I finished calling out the Skill's full name? Is it because of the Reduced Skills and Spells chanting time I invested my Bonus Point in? I thought it will only work on Spells and Skills with longer incantations, but it looks like it works on the shorter ones as well. I wonder if the effect would be the same if I just mentioned it in casual conversation? That would be quite a weakness, or perhaps even a bug. I would have to pay attention to it from now on, but for now I yeeted the Item Box from its portal to the meat and potatoes of the test that I wanted to carry out.

Okay, here goes nothing I guess.

I tried removing the Scimitar from my waist and putting it inside the Item Box. I had some concerns at first, but much to my relief it managed to get inside without any problems. Next I tried letting go of the box, and it disappeared, just like I expected. Then I called the Skill's name again, and the Item Box materialized itself in front of me one more time. I opened the lid and sure enough, the Scimitar which I placed inside not even a minute ago was there, waiting to be pulled out. Going by the video game logic, even if the sword was sizeable, it should only occupy one slot inside the Item Box. Hmm, I wonder if I can be like the protagonist of that one game... I think it

was called Gothic? I remember that you could carry every item from the entire game in your backpack because its inventory space had no limit. Wouldn't it be nice if that was the case here as well? Yes it would.

Part 6

If only the circumstances allowed me to, I would love to twiddle around with the Item Box some more to thoroughly test its capabilities, but my common sense was telling me that a Labyrinth, a foreign, uncharted ground was not a place for such frivolous behaviors. If I'm not careful, a monster might attack me the moment I let my guard down.

I let go of the Item Box, allowing it to slide back into the dimensional portal it popped out from, and then proceeded to checking out the rest of the Skills. I can leave the Party related one be for now, since I don't have an actual Party yet.

「Dungeon Walker!」

The best way I could probably describe this Skill was a navigation device which worked entirely in my head. Just like a professional GPS, it was asking me where I wanted to go, so I thought about the Labyrinth's entrance, the very first room I ended up in when I came through that black wall-portal. When I pictured that place in my mind, Dungeon Walker pointed me towards the right wall of the cave I was currently in. When I approached it somewhat reluctantly, it turned black, and the same pale blue pattern like before appeared on it. Could this be a shortcut to the starting area? Let's see for ourselves, shall we?

I walked through the wall, and sure enough, I ended up going back to where I started, a dimly lit cavern with a wall-portal serving as the doorway inside the Labyrinth. As soon as I exited this newly formed doorway, it closed behind me and returned to being just an ordinary wall. I see, so that's how it works.

So to cut the long story short, Dungeon Walker will show me the shortest possible route to any place I have previously visited as long as I remember it and can picture it clearly in my head. I could be pretty useful on the surface as well, but I think that this Skill's usage is restricted only to the inside of the Labyrinth and other kind of Dungeons, hence the name Dungeon Walker. Category-wise, I wonder if it is closer to walking magic or perhaps map magic? Are such magics even exist in here? I don't know, so I just make those names up on the spot for my own convenience. And while we're still on the subject of walking around and wall-portals, I walked through the same one earlier, when I entered the forest outside of the Labyrinth after that one Party. What was up with that, exactly?

「Dungeon Walker.」

I chanted the name of the Skill again after visualizing a portal at the edge of the forest in my head. The wall in front of me has indeed turned black and the symbol has appeared on it, but I wasn't able to go through it no matter how hard I tried. So it can point me to a place outside of the Labyrinth, but it won't allow me to use the passage to go there? Looks like I'd have to get a separate Skill if I wanted to use that kind of magic in the world outside of the dungeons. Kind of a bummer, but at least now I know that I won't have to worry about mapping the entire area and getting lost in here.

「Dungeon Walker.」

I recast my Skill to go back to where I have come from and approach the newly formed black portal in the wall... but I couldn't go through it at all. Another failure? But why? I thought I did everything exactly as I should! A shortage of some kind? No, that can't be it, because the black portal appeared. Could it be that the places that I can go to are limited to the Labyrinth entrance or places with doorways? If that's the case, then I guess I have no choice but to walk back on my own without any assist.

On my way back through the corridors, I noticed that something was wandering behind me. It was a small monster that looked like a hybrid of a human with a plant. I was rather small and quite thin. I wonder if my current power will be enough to defeat it? I brandished Durandal from my waist, gripped it tightly with both my hands and rushed towards the monster.

「OVERWHELMING!!!」

I placed my whole battle spirit in that shout and swung my weapon down, slashing the monster downward from its left shoulder. It fell to the ground immediately and didn't stand back up.

Alright! Still managed to dispose of him with a single blow!

I must've looked pretty cool right now, right? I bet that if somebody saw my greatness just now, they'd want me to join their Party right then and there. If Overwhelming is so OP, then I might as well make it my personal secret ultimate technique. Heh, I can probably kill the strongest of monsters with such a move. As long as I have Durandal and the Hero's Job, I feel like I might be invincible! And who knows? Maybe once I'll find a way to actually level that Job up, maybe I'll get my hands on even more powerful abilities... yeah right. That attack just now was not due to a Skill. It was a simple blow from Durandal. Overwhelming didn't activate at all. I shouted the Skill's name, but nothing happened and nothing's changed when I did so.

What the hell is wrong with this damn Skill? Is it useless? Bugged? Broken? No, I refuse to accept that that's it!

I used Identify on myself and checked that one bar under my HP which, as I assumed earlier showed the energy required to cast Spells and Skills, essentially my MP bar. Only $\frac{1}{4}$ of it remained. The rest was drained. $1/4^{\text{th}}$, huh? That's very low. That must also be the reason why Overwhelming failed to activate properly. I simply didn't have enough points left to use it. My first guess was that I still couldn't use the Skill, but I got it together with the Hero Job, so it should technically be possible for me to use that Skill even when the level of its corresponding Job was still just 1. *Sigh* this is my second failure at using a Skill in a span of like what, 15 minutes? Therefore not having enough energy was the only plausible explanation as to why I was unable to use it.

But then, what is at fault here? My excessive usage of Dungeon Walker? Yeah, that has to be it. I must've simply used it too many times which drained all of my energy down to such a pathetic level. But I was convinced that it was going to be more of a Passive Skill, the one which provides the

user with benefits at all times without any actual cost of its usage! Was I wrong to think that? Does Dungeon Walker has to be activated at the cost of expending energy points, just like any other Active Skill? That must really be how it is. I mean, if you think about it carefully, there is no such thing as Passive Skills with active effects that can be turned on and off. Passive Skills are Passive Skills precisely because once acquired, they stay active all the time. But Active Skills, on the other hand, could have the additional, passive effects to them. So yeah, I think that settles it. Dungeon Walker is actually an Active Skill with a passive effect, and that's the end of that story.

Anyway, the monster I have just defeated disappeared in a cloud of green smoke. After he was gone, the only thing remaining after him were the small branches, like the ones you often see on the trees in the spring. Identify told me that it was a Needlewood Branch, a drop item from the enemy I just killed, the Needlewood. Come to think of it, the Explorer Who talked to that Party I tailed did mention something about the first floor of the Labyrinth being taken by Needlewoods, and the second one was the domain of... Green Caterpillars, if I remember correctly. I tried putting the dropped branches into the Item Box, but for some reason they got rejected. Hey now, so you're telling me that putting a giant-ass Scimitar in there is okay but a few twigs are a no-go? *Groan* Okay, fine, if you're going to be so anal about it, then I'll just place the damn thing in my backpack. There, happy now? Great. Now that that's done, let's move to the next prey who's clearly aching to be slaughtered.

Along the way, I checked Durandal's Skills and saw that it also has a Skill called Absorption, meaning that with each enemy killed I should recover either a portion of my health or the energy necessary to cast other Skills. I have no way of knowing if I sis recover some health because that Needlewood earlier didn't even graze me, but it look like I did recover some energy. Maybe I should go and kill some more enemies just to confirm it? Yeah, that is what we're going to do.

The next Needlewood rushed me from afar and twisted its wooden body in an attempt to slam into me and slash me with its branches, but my own attack was still faster. Just like the one before him, he ended up being one-shotted, this time by a slash which followed from the right shoulder to its left side. It

disappeared, dropped the items, I collected them and moved forward, prepared for quite a lot of grinding to be done.

Part 7

When I arrived at another wider cavern the only way I could choose was the one leading straight ahead. Right now I have ventured quite far to this floor's left side, but there is absolutely no cause for concern, since I can always use Dungeon Walker to go back to the starting point.

In the next four caverns I also had no choice but to go straight ahead, until I happened upon another enemy. I was hoping to get a surprise attack at it, but unfortunately the mechanic of the floor shining with every step gave my position away too early. It's not that big of a problem, but I'll have to take that into consideration the next time I'll come to the bigger area. Also, it would be good if I could determine if the monsters in here move and hunt by relying primarily on their sight, or if they use other senses to determine the location of the potential prey. But that will come later. For now...

「Overwhelming!」

Since I should have enough MP recovered, I tried casting the Hero Job's Skill one more time. At first I thought that nothing has happened, just like last time. But this time something about the enemy has visibly changed. The Needlewood's movements became much slower, as if he was moving in slow motion. He was slowed to such a degree that I thought he was going to freeze in place any minute now.

In the meantime, I have approached it and positioned myself behind it. Due to the slow effect, it didn't even shift its head in my direction. For a second I thought about leaving it alone since there was no way that it would be able to hurt me in its current condition, but I discarded that thought almost immediately. This is a monster, and I am an Adventurer. This world operates

on a very simple principal of [kill or be killed] where one wrong move equaled death. I didn't have to worry about it in my old world, but right now I have to keep telling myself that I am no longer an ordinary, powerless citizen. I am a warrior, and if I have the strength to fight, I might as well use it against anything which seeks to inflict harm upon me, no matter how defenseless it might seem! So sorry buddy, but I won't be risking letting you go so you could call the rest of your friends in an attempt to overwhelm me with your numbers!

I raised Durandal into the air and swung it down, cleaving the slowed Needle Wood before me in half.

There! How do you like that, you wooden dick?!

Based on my observations, I can tell that the slow effect lasts for some time, but I'll have to confirm if it is the same for every enemy who'll be slashed by Overwhelming, or does it differ from enemy to enemy.

I exhaled deeply and placed Durandal back at my waist as the monster, who probably didn't even realize what was going on until it was too late disappeared in a puff of green smoke. My own feelings have also calmed down sufficiently for me to analyze how exactly the effect of Overwhelm worked. Was it really slowing down whoever was cut by my weapon? Or was it actually accelerating my own movement speed, making me see everything around me as moving extremely slowly? Or perhaps it's just increasing my Agility? Either way, to put it in the simplest way possible, it is a Skill which manipulates time. If it can really allow me to move faster than my enemies, than that is going to give me a tremendous advantage in battle. However, there is still one issue that I have to address.

The negative effect that the loss of MP has on my mental state.

After using Dungeon Walker too much, I have exhausted almost all of my MP, and as a result of that, my head was gradually being filled with gloomy, depressing thoughts which made me quite angry and irritated, and that anger and irritation reached their peak when I used Overwhelm to kill that Needle Wood whom I first wanted to spare. But after I slayed it and the MP recovery effect kicked in, I gradually started feeling better, as if something has chased

away the dark clouds looming over my mind.

Does my mental well-being really have something to do with how filled my MP bar is? Because I remember that something like that has happened to me before, when I used the Skill of the Flame Rapier, only then I simply felt extremely mentally exhausted. So if we assume that expending MP worsens my psychological state and recovering MP improves it, then that would mean that the more Skills I use in battle, the wilder of an emotional roller coaster ride I'm going to go through.

Great, that is simply wonderful. Here I was, thinking that this adventure is going to be just like your regular RPG kind, but now I feel like I have just discovered the existence of a hidden Sanity statistic, just like in those Call of Cthulhu games. And that means that if I want to avoid the scenario in which I'm going to either go insane or so depressed that I'm going to kill myself for real this time. So until I'll be able to afford using Skills without having my MP drop to zero almost immediately, I think it would be best to avoid spamming them left and right unless the situation really calls for it.

Okay, after all these battles I think it's high time for another appraisal of my levels. I looked at my own hand and used Identify.

Kaga Michio (Male, 17 years old)

Villager Lv4 Hero Lv1 Explorer Lv1 Thief Lv3

Equipment: Durandal Leather Armor Sandals

The only Job whose level went up was the Villager. Hero and explorer stayed exactly the same as they were.

Exactly how many Needle Woods have I defeated so far? I don't know the exact number, but it must be approaching a hundred, and yet even with the two of my Bonus Skills, 1/5th Experience Required and 5 x Experience Earned the only Job to gain a level was Villager? Just how many EXP does the Hero Job needs to level up?! And don't get me started about the Explorer, my newly acquired Job! Is obtaining levels for anything that isn't your main Job really that difficult?!

To begin with, I don't think that the actual level cap in this world is very high, probably because this is a reality, not a game that can be cleared in just a few days if you spend all of your time grinding and power-leveling. The denizens of this world can't do that, hence they have to amass experience gradually over the course of their entire lives, so it should come to me as no surprise that killing close to 100 monsters was still not enough for more than one Job to level up. Or maybe the Bonus Skills are not working as they should be working? Honestly, I don't even know anymore. Maybe by obtaining more Jobs the value got reduced to 1/3rd? Or perhaps the rest of the Jobs do get the EXP points, but not the entirety, but only a small portion of it? That would explain why did the Villager Job's level went up from 3 to 4, but the level of Hero and Explorer stayed the same.

Ugh, at times like these I would really like to have some kinda strategy guide with me. Or a cheat compendium.

Since my business with that monster is done, there's nothing left to do but to pack the branches he left behind and be on my way.

Or maybe I should do another Character Reset?

Since the Villager has leveled up, I should have one more Bonus Point. That is one thing which is totally praiseworthy: a system in which the total number of your Bonus Points increases as the level of your first assigned Job increases. With that said, I removed the Critical Strike Chance Increase and replaced it with Skill Cast Time Reduction. I feel like it might be of better use to me, because further down the line I will probably obtain much more MP, to the point where I will be able to spam Skills without running the risk of damaging my mentality, so it would be nice to have something that would allow me to fire those Skills off that much faster. As for the Critical Strike Chance, I think investing my Bonus Points into it might have been a mistake, because let's face it, with my current equipment I will probably never even get the chance to use it in an actual combat since I one-shot every enemy that is stupid enough to face me, and even if I didn't do that, 10% Critical Strike Chance is still a pretty low number, so it can go fuck itself for all I care.

Part 8

The thing with having a strong weapon on you (and Durandal can certainly be classified as one such weapon or even going beyond, seeing how absurdly OP it is) is that if you can defeat everyone who dares to challenge you with one of two strikes, you will have absolutely no use of Critical Strikes, as they only serve to increase the damage done by weaker (normal) weapons beyond their usual capacity. In most games, the damage done from critical attacks varies between 100 – 250% of the damage dealt by the weapon you currently have equipped, so I’m sure that Durandal would have achieved truly absurd numbers, but that would only be a cosmetic touch. Against the current, low level enemies, the base damage done by it is perfectly enough for me to breeze through any challenge I might come across.

With my latest Character Reset, I’ve made sure to distribute my Bonus Points in such a way that I have none of them left. After getting rid of the Critical Strike Chance Increase I’ve put 2 Bonus Points in Skill Cast Time Reduction and 1 Bonus Point in Skill Cast Speed Increase. I wonder if just with those 3 Bonus Points alone I’ll be able to achieve the highest possible reduction time and casting speed increase? It certainly would be nice, but let’s not get our hopes up just yet.

For starters, I have to see with my own eyes how the current Cast Time Reduction and Cast Speed Increase will influence the usage of my Skills.

As a trial I decided to use the Item Box Skill, and when I called its name out loud, it appeared in my hands almost immediately. Great. Now we see that those Skills do actually contribute to my performance in a practical manner. I’m glad I decided to perform that Reset just now.

When I ventured forward, I battled even more Needlewoods. I know that one Explorer at the entrance mentioned that they are on the Labyrinth's first floor, but did he mean that the first floor consists only of Needle Woods? Because so far, I haven't seen any other monster besides them. Well, it's not like I have any problems with that fact, especially since my Durandal ensures that I one-shot them every time, granting me an easy win and a relatively safe passage through the corridors of this floor, but I'm just saying that some variety would be nice every once in a while, otherwise the process of farming monsters and their drop items will get extremely repetitive and dull.

After plowing through hordes of enemies for a while, I decided to try wearing the Bandit's Bandana to see exactly how its effect is going to work. But in order to do that, I have to set the Thief as my first Job.... But I cannot do that. No matter how many times I tapped the Thief Job in an attempt to set it as the primary Job, the game just wouldn't let me do that.

Why? What is going on here?! Why can't I do this now, when earlier both Villager Lv3 and Thief Lv3 could be set as the first Job without any issues?!

No, wait a damn minute, a thought just occurred to me.

Currently Villager is not Lv3, but Lv4.

Oh, so that's how it is? Then that would solve the mystery quite nicely.

Right now my Bonus Points are distributed as follows: 63 points in Bonus Weapon 6, 15 points in 1/5th EXP Required to Level Up, 15 points in 5 x EXP Earned, 3 points for the Third Job, 2 points for Skill Cast Time Reduction and 1 point for Skill Cast Speed Increase, Identify, Job Setting and Character Reset. A total of 102 Bonus Points, an increase by 3 points from the original 99 due to the Level Up of the Villager Job to Lv4.

However, that way I'd have to leave the Villager as the first Job, willingly discarding the option of switching it with the other Jobs that might provide me with better benefits.

Back when the Villager Job was still at Lv3, it was possible to switch it up with Thief Job, which was also Lv3. Because there was no change in the

amount of the Bonus Points.

So what would happen if I tried a little something?

I performed another Character Reset where I discarded the Skill Cast Time Reduction and Cast Speed Increase and recovered the 3 points I've spent on them just a few minutes ago. Then I entered the Job Setting screen. If what I have in mind right now proves to be correct, then it might be possible for me to set the Hero Lv1 as my first Job.

Bonus Points are a wonderful addition that can be obtained by leveling up the first Job you have selected, but once they have been used up, the level of the Job set as the first one cannot be reduced to its earlier value. The increase is permanent. That much should be obvious. But now with the adjustments I've just made...

I was able to set the Thief as my first Job!

Now that I was finally able to do that, I can test the Bandit Bandana at last. If I remember correctly, it is supposed to increase its wearer's physical capabilities. When I placed it on my head I did had a feeling as if my body became somewhat lighter, but that might as well be my imagination. I don't understand it very well so that's the best way I can describe the feeling that has enveloped me.

It looks like this world is unlike the video games I have played thus far. Normally you'd be able to see the effects of the positive changes to your status immediately, but that does not seem to be the case here, even after increasing your level. All I have in regards to whether or not the Bandit's Bandana's effect has worked or not is my gut feeling alone. I would have gladly tested it out on one of the Needle Woods roaming the Labyrinth's halls, but since I'm killing them to death like One Punch Man (but like, with a sword, so... One Slash Man?) it wouldn't prove anything, and I don't want to fight with anything else than Durandal right now. Even though I wouldn't have to use the Copper Sword since I have a Scimitar with me, I feel like it would be only slightly better than its copper counterpart, directly impacting the time it would take me to defeat monsters in here, and since I am strapped for time, I cannot allow myself to experiment.

Finishing my little Job switching test, I took off the Bandana and reverted my character settings to the previous ones. It would be very bad if someone happened to see me wearing it, even by accident. The last thing I need right now is the spreading of the news that I have a Job that allows me to wear clothing that is exclusive to criminals.

I don't know exactly how much time I have spent hunting in here so far, but I feel like it must have been around an hour or so. Technically that much should have been enough for my first bout into such an unknown ground, but a part of me was telling me that I can still keep going. But this is my first time in the Labyrinth, so maybe calling it quits for today is actually a smart thing to do? On the other hand though, I don't feel tired at all yet, and my mental fatigue was also holding up nicely because of that self-restraint on Skill usage I placed upon myself.

Yeah, let's keep going just a little bit more.

No matter how far or deep I will delve into the depths of this dungeon, I can always use Dungeon Walker to get myself right back to the entrance point by going through the shortest route possible. As long as I'll have MP to cast that, there's no way for me to get truly lost in here.

Throughout the next hour, I fought around twenty more Needlewoods, which always came at me one at a time. Of course, I have spent most of that hour by going around the narrow corridors and the small caves they were leading into. Unlike in the video games, the real life didn't possess a random enemy encounters system that would allow me to fight a battle after battle in a span of seconds, which was quite regretful, because I'll admit that it would be nice if I could maximize the amount of battles and drop from enemies as much as possible without having to waste too much time on actually finding them.

Although all I needed to slay Needlewoods was one blow from Durandal, the procedure of defeating them, gathering the drop items and placing them back in my backpack still took a considerable amount of time. That is a chore to be sure, but at least my life is not threatened. The Villager's level did not increase further, but both Explorer and Hero both got up to Lv2.

And that's what I call fucking progress!

Part 9

By doing another Character Reset I got rid of Durandal. Then I opened the Item Box and took the Scimitar out of it.

Hmm? What's this?

When I took the Scimitar out of the Item Box, I noticed that it freed some space right next to it. I think it means that I can place some additional items there. Kinda tricky and unintuitive, but I can work with that.

I got some of the dropped branches from the backpack and tried putting them into the newly-freed space of the Item Box. Looks like one space slot can be taken by two branches simultaneously. It was exactly the same for the slot right next to it: exactly two branches could be placed there. So I guess that means that a single space slot in the Item Box can be occupied by varying quantities of items, depending on their size, and quite possibly weight?

I tried to do another thing next. I tried to place some branches into the space that was already occupied by one Scimitar, but I couldn't do it, but two branches could still fit into the space right next to it. I'm pretty sure that this space was not there before. But now that I think about it, it might also be related to the level of my Explorer Job. Maybe when its level will go up, then the number of spaces in my Item Box will increase accordingly?

When I just got this Job, meaning it was at its base, level, Level 1, I only had one space in the Item Box that could only hold one item in it, but now that the Explorer Job gained a level, I have obtained an additional item slot and could not hold up to two pieces of the same item in one slot. That's why I should now be able to hold both of my Scimitars in a single item slot. I guess

I could test that further when I will elevate Explorer's Job level to Lv3. If my assumption is correct, then I should get a third item slot and be able to hold up to three items of the same kind in one slot.

But for the time being, I placed the Scimitar back onto my waist and made my way back to the Labyrinth's entrance and passed through the black wall-doorway back to the outside world, and then headed back to the town of Veil.

When I got out of the forest, I noticed that the sun's position had changed drastically. I thought I was in there for only about an hour or so, but it looks like much more time have passed. It was probably due to my cautious approach since it was my first time in a place like this and I thought that it would be best not to go in too deep. But if I am to make all the money I'll need to buy Roxanne, then I'll have to cast that overly cautious attitude aside in favor of a more aggressive, gain-oriented approach. I only have so many days left until the deadline, so I need to pick up my pace from tomorrow onward.

Even though the day was slowly moving towards the night hours, the city was still booming with activity. As I was making my way towards the town's center, I took my time to browse through various shops and stalls (and ogled the nice looking shopkeeper ladies while I was at it).

Before returning to the inn and calling it a day I decided to pay a quick visit to the Adventurer's Guild, the other place that Alan the Slave Merchant has told me about.

The building itself was one story larger than the one belonging to the Explorer's Guild. At first glance, it looked like a really big post office, the kind that you'd see in larger cities. There were about five or six people inside, not including the receptionist-looking staff members behind the counters by the walls. Huh, when I look at it like that, I realized that this place has much in common with the Explorer's Guild, even though the two were not exactly on good terms. Was it a conscious choice, or perhaps all of the public service buildings were build like that?

「Uhm, excuse me? I would like to sell some items from the Labyrinth, if it's not a problem of course.」

I reset my character to get the 30 % better selling price and then I stood in front of one of the counters. Since this is my first time selling anything to the Adventurer's Guild, I guess the actual amount of money I'm going to get is not all that important, but it's always better to get more money rather than less and then regret it. That and I'll get to see for myself whether or not they are going to try and swindle me out (which was rather improbable, but I'll have to be ready for everything).

I was expecting an older dude to be behind the counter, just like it was with Picker-san back at the village, but instead the one who was going to handle my inquiry was a nice-looking onee-san with an above average face. She looked much better than most of the village women but was still inferior to Roxanne in my opinion.

「By all means. Please place your items here on the counter.」

She gestured me with her hand and a big friendly smile on her face.

「Here you go.」

I placed my backpack on the ground beside my legs, took all the items that dropped from the monsters I have slain today and placed them on the counter. The spoils from my first-ever excursion to the Labyrinth were 21 Needlewood Branches. Even though I killed more enemies than that, only twenty-one of them actually left something behind them when they died. I guess this must be another game-like aspect of this world: a chance of obtaining a Drop Item from a monster when it is slain. On a side note, I wonder if the items here have varying degrees of rarity just like in all the RPG games that I've played. If so, then the degrees would probably be Common, Uncommon, Rare and Very Rare, and the ones belonging to a Very Rare category would sell for much more than those from the Common one. Hehe, it would be nice if those branches were actually worth a ton; that would make achieving my current objective so much easier. But I guess we'll have to wait and see what this nice onee-san has to say about it.

「Understood. Please wait here for a bit while I will go and check the exact price for your items.」

She placed all the branches in a small tray and then withdrawn to a room in the back of the building. She's probably going to examine all the branches to confirm how much they are worth.

Since I had no choice but to wait, I decided to take a look around the guild building. As I was taxing everything with my eyes, I saw that one section of the wall to my left suddenly went all black, and that people emerged out of that newly-formed dark space.

Wait a minute... that looks like a wall-entrance to the Labyrinth! Then... is that Dungeon Walker?! But I thought that it can only be used inside of a dungeon! The ones who emerged from it were two Adventurer-looking dudes. There were no Explorers with them.

「Attention please! Anyone here interested in a one-way trip to Tahera?」

The first Adventurer who emerged out of the wall asked that question in a loud, lively voice. When he saw that apparently no one was interested in his offer he chanted something in a quiet voice, created another black gateway on the wall and disappeared inside it.

Well, that sure was random as hell.

Putting that aside, if that Skill wasn't Dungeon Walker, then it must have been Field Walker, a Skill that works similar to Dungeon Walker, but outside of Labyrinths and Dungeons. Or at least that was my assumption. I mean, it would be very logical, right? If Dungeon walker can be used to create passages and shortcuts in and out of the Labyrinth just like that Party did before me, then Field Walker must be used like a method of fast travel between various towns and cities. In that case, those two must have been heading to another city called Tahera. But if that was their goal, then why did they stop here? Did they just drop in to say hi? Also, I wonder if that skill is Job restricted. Would I need to become an Adventurer first in order to use it?

As I was contemplating that, another portal has appeared in the exact same spot as before, and a group of Adventurers came out of it. Without talking to or greeting anyone, they left the guild as soon as they appeared.

Yup... that was definitely a series of events that happened.

.... Jesus Christ, how much longer will I have to wait?!

「Thank you for your patience. Here is your money.」

Onee-san who took my items finally came back to the counter, so I turned my head back towards her. Now let's see, how much money did those branches get... me?

Huh?

On a small plate before me, there were two silver coins and a lot of copper ones. When I counted it, their exact number was 73.

73 coins. That is how much my hard work was worth.

Is that a fucking joke?

Part 10

Okay, alright, time for some quick math to figure this bullshit out. I sold 21 Needlewood branches to this fine lady here, and got 273 Nar in return. That would mean that a single branch went for as little as 13 Nar! And that's the price after it was already boosted with the 30% price boost, so normally one branch was only worth 10 Nar!

That price is so laughable that it makes me want to cry bloody tears!

I thought that I was in the Labyrinth for only an hour, but given how tilted the sun's position in the sky was when I got out, it might have actually been two hours. Now, for the sake of my big brain calculations let's assume that it takes an hour to kill ten enemies, two hours to kill twenty enemies and so on, all the way up to one hundred enemies in ten hours, and that a single enemy defeated was worth 10 Nar. That would result in a profit of 1000 Nar in ten hours.

With that, my initial goal of earning two gold coins per day would remain nothing but a distant dream. And even if I somehow managed to double that amount, it would still be a far cry from the 20 000 a day that would allow me to get enough funds to buy Roxanne without any issues. With that said, the obvious solutions would be to either spend more time in the Labyrinth's upper floors each day, or to venture deeper inside in hopes of getting my hands on something that would allow me to get more money. Yeah, those are the only viable options I can think of at the current moment.

「By the way, can you tell me the exact requirements for joining the Adventurer's Guild?」

「Of course. Truth to be told, becoming an Adventurer is relatively simple. All you have to do is to have an Explorer Job and have it at lv.50. If you are interested in joining, then do you want me to show you to the person who's in charge of the whole procedure?」

「Thank you, but that won't be necessary for now.」

After respectfully declining, I collected my backpack and headed out of the Adventurer's Guild.

So basically what I learned from my short visit there is that Adventurer is an Explorer's senior Job and in order to acquire it, you have to make so many explorations to advance the Job to a ridiculous level, but the lady in the guild failed to mention if actually joining the guild was one of the requirements as well. Maybe it won't be necessary, or maybe it will. If at all possible, I would like to not join it carelessly, seeing as joining a guild apparently forces you to buy, sell and in general do business with that guild only, which can prove to be bothersome in the long run.

The slave merchant told me that the Explorer's Guild and the Adventurer's Guild do not like each other very much, and now I can say that I totally see why it is like that. In order to become an Adventurer you had to be an Explorer first, so it wouldn't be an understatement to say that joining the Explorer's Guild was nothing more but a stepping stone on one's way to become an Adventurer. Thinking about it, that is more than a little messed up and unfair, but it looks like that is how things are rolling here, so unless people won't change their way of viewing the Explorer's Guild, I guess nothing will really change in the way they are treated.

For the time being, I decided to use the money I got from today's expedition to buy myself some basic clothing, like socks, pants, an alternate set of shirts and pants, and a cloak.

The pants that I bought are the so-called pumpkin pants, the kind where the waist and both legs are tied together with a string. Along with the rest of the clothes that I bought, they are all used instead of brand-new, because that was a cheaper option. I'm glad that something as convenient as second-hand shops is also present in this world. This is going to make my life that much

easier, at least when it comes to buying clothes.

When it comes to the cloak, I settled for a dark one with a face-covering hood. Edgy, I know, but what can you do? It looked really cool so I just bought it without a second thought. Both mornings and evenings here tend to be a little bit on a cold side, so wearing a coat to mitigate that wasn't anything unusual. Quite a lot of people seem to be wearing them, in fact. Also, with that cloak, I will be able to wear my Bandit Bandana without anyone seeing it and raising suspicion as a result. In other words, a perfectly legit camouflage.

With nothing else to do, I returned to the inn, and sure enough, the Innkeeper was behind the counter, just like when I left the inn to go to the Labyrinth.

「Yo, welcome back, kid!」

Yup, the atmosphere of this place was totally off-putting, but I guess there was no point in complaining if I wanted to keep my place to sleep for now.

「Can I get my key?」

「Sure you can. Here.」

And he handed me the key to my room.

I quickly got up to the third floor, left my baggage in the room and got back down to the reception.

「You serving dinner yet?」

「Yes, you're right on time. Go grab yourself a menu at the entrance to the dining area.」

「Also, when I'll finish eating, I'd like to ask you for some hot wa...」

「That will be 20 Nar, thank you very much.」

「.....」

I swear to God, this guy... but wait a minute. 20 Nar? What about my 30% discount?! Why does it not apply here?! Well, it's certainly a bummer that it does not seem to be effective since I'd like to cut my spendings as much as possible, but that much I can deal with. I took 20 Nar from my pocket and left it on the counter.

When I entered the dining area, the first thing I saw was a table with four sets of dishes on it and a nice, friendly looking young woman next to it.

「Welcome, please, feel free to choose you diner for today from the following dishes.」

Is this lady in charge of the dining area (or maybe I should start calling it cafeteria for short)? The aura around her was totally different than that of the Innkeeper when she opened her arms and invited me further. Taking a quick glance at her with Identify, she was a 28 years old Female Innworker.

Even though this was supposedly the menu, it was different from the ones that I am used to. Looks like this one here is actually a system that allows you to select a real deal right from the get-go instead of picking a dish from the list and waiting for it to be prepared. If I were a betting man then I'd bet my money on the fact that this was a countermeasure against those customers who couldn't read at all. With such a system in place, even those who are illiterate can pick a dish without any complications, allowing for a continuous stream of customers. I have to admit, whoever thought about such a solution, that was a really smart move. Then again, there was something written on a piece of paper that was placed on the table I was guided towards. It must be a reservation that was prepared for me before I arrived, because it was a number, the same one that was engraved on the plaque that was attached to the key to my room.

Now let's see here... hmm, out of all the dishes, the rightmost one struck me as the most delicious-looking.

「I'll be taking this one.」

「Understood. And what would you like to drink?」

「What choices do I have?」

「We serve beer, wine and herbal tea. You can also order Slime Liquor, but you'll have to pay extra for that one.」

「Then I'll be having herbal tea.」

「As you wish. Now, please sit down and wait a minute while I go get your order.」

I had a little taste of the alcohol some years back, but I don't know how much of it I could tolerate without getting drunk off my ass, so it'd be better not to touch any of it for now. I have too much money on me to lose it all carelessly if I were to go on a drunken rampage.

When I took my seat at the table, my food was delivered to me literally minutes after. It was a stew with boiled meat and vegetables. The amount is... well shiver me timbers, but there is a crapload of it! Is it because they only serve two meals a day here? Because if that is the case, then I have absolutely nothing against such a policy. The more on my plate for me to eat, the better!

Well, without further ado, time to dig in!

Part 11

「.....!!!」

Oh... my... LORD ALMIGHTY!!!!

The bread was soft and tender, and both the stew and the vegetables and meat (probably beef) were equally taste buds-blowing, and seasoned just right with spices, out of which pepper was the one with the strongest taste. It might be just my personal opinion, but you could definitely make a fortune with this dish if you started selling it in Japan. Sure, it is a bit pricey, but something like that could definitely be sold as a high level gourmet dish back in my old world!

I took my sweet time to enjoy this meal and then went back to my room. The rays of the setting sun coming in through the wooden window painted it with a slight shade of red. After literally a few minutes since I got here, I heard someone knocking at the door.

「Please come in!」

「Excuse me. I brought the hot water you requested.」

A man whom I have never seen before came into my room, carrying a tub filled with hot water with him. He placed it in the middle of the room and then put a towel next to it, immediately leaving the moment he finished doing his work. I thought about giving him a small tip for all the trouble he had to go through to bring it all the way to the third floor, but it looks like there was no need for me to do that.

I took off my clothes and wiped my body with the towel dipped in hot water. It was understandable that the Village Chief's house did not have any bathing facilities, but if an inn like that does not have them as well, then I guess bathing might not be all that popular in this world? Maybe it's just a luxury that only the filthy rich people can afford? This tub of water here cost me 20 Nar, so it was definitely not on the cheap side. But if I just neglected my personal hygiene and just kept on getting all dirty and sweaty without a care in the world then I'd be no different from an animal.

After getting myself clean, it was time to wash the clothes I was wearing as well. Unfortunately I do not have any soap on me, so all I could really do was to douse them in hot water and hang them out to dry. Besides, I don't even know if one of the shops in town is even selling soap, or does it even exist in this world in the first place. Before I always took things like soap or cleaning detergent for granted, but now that I won't have access to them anymore, I guess it will require some intense getting used to. The same goes for toothbrush and toothpaste. I think this world is still not technologically advanced enough to have those available. Also, when it comes to buying food, I could really, and I mean really use some convenience store right now. I'm afraid that if I want to continue eating quality meals like the one I've eaten today then that's going to get pretty darn expensive in the long run.

Since it will take some time for my clothes to dry I put on the pumpkin pants and one of the spare shirts I bought today. The pants didn't have any kind of string or a rubber in them so I couldn't adjust them, but that was only a slight inconvenience. Now that I finally had some time for myself I could feel the fatigue of the entire day catching up to me, so I just laid down on the bed and drifted off to sleep in a matter of minutes.

I must have gotten at least a few good hours of rest, but when I have woken up, it was still dark outside, so I just laid still on the hard hay-mattress, surrounded on all sides by pitch-black darkness. I think I was dreaming. About Roxanne. I couldn't recall what I was dreaming about exactly, but judging by the fact that my pants were still as clean as they were a few hours ago, at the very least I could be sure that it wasn't "that" kinda dream. It's funny though. It's been a few days since I arrived in this world, and I have never once dreamt of Japan. Not even a single dream to remind me of my

home world and the life I've led there (as shitty as it was). Maybe that's because instead of longing for something that I will probably never see again, my brain has already switched its gears into thinking about the things that are within my reach, just waiting for me to grasp them firmly with my hands? Heh, who would have guessed that there will come a time when someone like me, who was considered to be a failure and a sore loser by anyone around him will have a real chance at snagging a real 11/10 beauty for myself (putting aside the fact that she is going to become my slave)? When compared to the girls in my old world, she is a million times better, there's no doubt in my mind about that! Not to mention that she is nothing like all those cutting board-like bitches that would report you to the police for sexual harassment the moment you'd dare to point that fact out to them! I can still see it so clearly, that image that has burned itself in my mind. Oh how her lovely melons jiggled up and down when she handed me that tea cup!!! Oh man, and now my horny mind is going on a rampage again, even though I have yet to obtain her as my own!

Initially I was afraid that I will always be alone in this new and strange world, but if I get her to be my companion, I'm sure she'll be able to teach me everything that I'll need to know not to stand out like a sore thumb. That is my current objective, and I absolutely cannot allow myself to fail at it. If there is anyone whom I could rely on, I'm sure it would be her.

After that I must have dozed off for some more, because when I opened my eyes again, the room wasn't as dark as it was the last time. I exhaled heavily. Even though I went to bed relatively early last night (maybe it was around 7:00 pm, I can't really tell because there are no watches or clocks here), my limbs still felt kinda sore and I was still tired. That is probably because in order to get to Veil I have woken up pretty dang early and left the Village Chief's house and the village before sunrise, and then had a day full of surprising and taxing activities, both mentally and physically.

This world has one major drawback: the lack of electricity and technology makes it so that there is pretty much nothing to do after dark, aside from the adult entertainment such as brothels, drinking and gambling. No gaming console, no TV, no PC, no internet, no manga, no books, no nothing! If all I can do is to just lay in here and bore myself to death, then maybe I should go

out and collect more information from the bar or something like that? Yeah, that would be a pretty swell idea, if not for the fact that it probably wouldn't go very well for me. As a kid who was constantly bullied, my communication skills were at the level where I normally wouldn't be able to hold a normal conversation with others out of fear that they also might start picking on me. What about the last two days you ask? Ah right, I guess I was able to somehow get by just fine, but I think that is entirely because I'm still treating most of the people here as nothing but game NPC's despite my best efforts to convince myself to switch that mentality into treating them like the proper human beings. You know how it is, right? In games, normal NPC's won't ever attack or turn on you, the player, unless they are scripted to do so or you provoke them yourself. As long as you don't do that, they will continue to behave in a neutral manner and spew exposition and quest info your way all day long without batting an eye. At least that's how I thought it would be here, but if any of those people outside are just as unpredictable as real people now, there's no telling when some of them might get offended or triggered by something I say and pull a knife on me. And that brings me to my second concern. The money I have on me right now. With the amount I have on me right now, wandering around without any legitimate reason might not be a good idea.

One gold coin will allow me to stay at an inn for around a month, so 33 of them would allow me to have a place to stay for three years. Even back in Japan, no one would be parading around with that much money on them, much less go get themselves piss-drunk at a bar, so I'm not going to do that either. I'm going to be a better man and rise above!

Part 12

Thirdly, I have no clue as to how much alcohol I could drink without getting shitfaced. I know that I am still technically a minor so I absolutely shouldn't drink even a drop of it... but that was before I was transported here. As far as I know, this world does not have any limits on how old you should be before you're allowed to drink, so one of these days I might as well give it a go to see why everybody is so gung-ho about it. Besides, getting information at the bars is always much easier when the other party you want to extract information from gets drunk sooner than you, so learning my limits will be to my benefit. I just have to wait with it until I won't have so much money on me. And there's no telling how much of a blabbermouth I might become when the good stuff starts getting into my head. Just imagine, a young lad screaming some drunken nonsense about Earth, Japan and all the things the denizens of this world haven't even heard off while swinging his beer mug around with a beet-red face. Yeah, I'm sure that a spectacle like that would guarantee me a nice round of questioning at the guardhouse at the very least.

On the other hand, all those alcohol-related musings of mine are based on the assumption that I am the same as I was back in Japan, while that might not be the case at all! Who knows, maybe after I was brought here my physicality and metabolism have been altered to adapt to my new reality, so maybe I could actually drink a small waterfall without its side effects kicking in? Or maybe the alcohol in here is pretty weak in comparison to the one served on earth? Be that as it may, as long as I don't have any way to turn all those question marks into solid evidence, the wisest course of action would be to avoid any and all alcohol altogether.

Fourthly, all I need for now is the information on how I can make money quickly and effortlessly. Every other information, such as what is considered

common sense in this world and the general laws that govern it I can ask Roxanne about once I will finally make her mine.

If I went to a random bar right now, I wonder if I'd have been able to hear some nice, juicy stories? If not, I could just sit around and try listening to the conversations of others. That way, maybe I could pick a thing or two in the art of weaving ridiculous stories and honey traps meant to trick others? Then again, that would probably require me to have one hell of a silver tongue and a deep understanding of how this world works. Without those two, someone like me, an outsider without an ounce of common sense on him would just make a perfect sitting duck of myself.

Ehh, in the end, information gathering looks like it's going to be more butthurting trouble than it's worth. Maybe I should just quietly go back to sleep again?

It was just a precaution, but last night I slept with a Scimitar under my pillow in case someone tried to break in and rob me of my belongings. Maybe it's just me being overly paranoid again, but I also have to admit that doing so made me feel like one of those samurais from old historical dramas who even took their katanas to bed with them because they needed to be combat-ready at all times.

Now that I was completely awake, there was no way I'd be able to fall asleep again, so I might as well get up, even if the outside is still pitch black. Unfortunately for me, the rooms in this inn didn't come equipped with their own toilets, so in order to use one, I had no choice but to go out of my room. After finishing my business there, I decided to go down to the lobby. The corridors and the stairs were all lit with candles placed at regular intervals, making the inside of the inn lit just enough to avoid tripping over your own feet.

「You headin' off to the Labyrinth?」

When I got down to the inn's ground floor, I heard a voice talking to me from behind.

「Uwah!」

That scared the living hell out of me! I legitimately thought I was going to have a heart attack there for a second! Taking a look behind me, the one to call out to me so suddenly was the Lv. 28 Innkeeper.

「If you do want to head out there now, just mark my words and be careful, ya hear me?」

「So I'm not breaking any rules by going to the Labyrinth at night?」

「Of course not. Truth to be told, many Adventurers choose to go to the Labyrinths during the night hours. That might not be the case here yet since the Labyrinth has been discovered only recently, but normally that's what you'd do if you want to avoid stumbling upon too much traffic during the day.」

I see. That certainly makes a lot of sense. Inside the Labyrinth, the concept of night and day does not apply. Many people were going into them at night, taking advantage of the fact that the inns for Adventurers were open practically 24/7.

「Isn't it hard on you? Having to be at the front counter here at all times I mean?」

「Not really. You see, I am one of the Emaro. I guess you can say that we are kinda special, because we don't require as much sleep as normal humans to maintain the proper functioning of our bodies. Explaining it to everyone who asks about that is kind of a pain in the ass, so let's just say that I require very little sleep a day and just leave it at that, alright, kid?」

「Sure, but that sounds pretty rough.」

That has to have something to do with how the brains of those Emaro fellows function. I remember that some animals on earth are like that too. Dolphins, for example. It is said that the left and right halves of their brains take turns sleeping, because if both of them fell asleep at the same time, they would straight-up drown.

「That's why I said that it'd be best to just leave it as it is. You get it?」

「I'm not that bright of a person so I might not be able to grasp the finer details, but I think I understood the gist of what you wanted to say.」

「You don't say? That's gotta be the first time a human has dropped the subject when I asked them to.」

The Innkeeper seemed to be happy with me not being too pushy regarding his race. Can't say that I blame him for being fed up with questions, but I don't think that many people in this world would know that a brain has left and right halves and how each of them works, so that goof cannot be assigned to them entirely, but still... if someone does not want to delve too deeply into any given subject, you shouldn't grill them about it against their will. Only total douchebags do that.

On a side note, following my dolphin digression, I wonder if Emaro have something to do with the creatures of the ocean, like mermaids, or should I say merfolk?

Glance~~~

Nope, he has a pair of two perfectly normal-looking legs.

「I'm glad to hear that.」

「And that is why I'm going to do you a solid and willingly talk about some things, so be sure to listen carefully because I'm only going to say this once. Emaro people hate settling and being tied down in one place for too long, and that's why most of us will choose to become Innkeepers and work in the establishments run properly by the Guilds. I guess you can call it our race-specific Job. Since we can always be ordered to transfer to another place if need be, this is a perfect Job for us.」

「It would really seem so.」

Maybe his race really did evolve from some seabound species if the very concept of settlement appears unattractive to them. Anyways, I left the key to my room at the reception desk after I briefly went back upstairs to get my backpack and prepared myself for another round of money-hunting in the

Labyrinth. If I am to just sit around doing nothing, then I might use that time to do something productive.

「Hey kid, maybe you should consider taking a lantern with you, huh?!」

「It's okay, I think I'll manage without one just fine!」

I left the Inn, shouting that to the Innkeeper. I mean really, what's a little darkness going to do? I'll be fine.

Except I wasn't.

It was so dark that to say that I wasn't able to see shit was an understatement of the century!

「Oh fuck me!」

Part 13

It's really, really dark outside, to the point where I can't even see one meter ahead of me. Why is it so dark in here? Is there no moon in this world at all, or is it that it is being covered by the clouds or something? When I looked toward the night sky, I saw the sea of stars way above my head. It was shining brightly, but their light was not enough to light up the path ahead of me. For someone like me who grew up in Tokyo all his life, the darkness of this night was a real shocker.

Maybe I should go back and borrow the damn lantern after all? But something tells me that even if I had a light with me, going to the Labyrinth while being surrounded by all that darkness would still be scary. I mean... what if a ghost shows up and suddenly jumps at me from behind? Normally I don't believe in the existence of ghosts and other supernatural beings, but if this is a world where magic exists, then it really wouldn't be strange for it to also have ghosts.

Oh jeez, what should I do?

I cannot get to the Labyrinth's entrance straight away since that is a Skill of an Adventurer, and I've yet to acquire that Job for myself (and I don't think I'm going to get it anytime soon). However, I do remember that one of the Bonus Skills available for me was the Warp spell. The specifics are not clear to me, but just by the name itself I could tell that it was a spell belonging to the Movement Magic category.

The real question here is: will I even be able to cast the damn thing? Because I had my doubts, bearing in mind my experiences with how quickly Overwhelm has sucked me dry of my MP. Then again, Warp was not an

offensive type of magic, but Movement Magic just like Dungeon Walker, so it shouldn't use as much MP as Overwhelm, or, let's say Meteor Crash (the name sound cool as heck, but I'm not going to bother with picking it now, since I probably would not be able to cast it even once with my current stats). Plus, the levels of all my Jobs are higher now and I had a good long rest, so maybe that will also be a factor in the successful usage of magic, just like in Dungeons & Dragons?

Alright, you know the drill, Michio. Character Reset time!

Getting all of my Bonus Points back I used them to remove the shopping discount and got Durandal back. Then I also removed any Skills that won't be of any use to me during the Labyrinth exploration and used the Points that I got from doing so on the Bonus Spell option until I got the Warp spell. I turned towards the side of the inn and prepared myself to cast it, praying for it to work in the corner of my mind. Next, I summoned an image of the Labyrinth's entrance room. Then, with my eyes still closed, I reached out with my hand, but instead of stopping where the wall should be, it went right through it.

I did it! Holy cow, I did it! Success! I have succeeded!!!

Successfully casting that spell made me immensely happy, but at the same time I could feel a slight prick of sadness in the depths of my heart. I wonder why that is. Successes, no matter how small or insignificant, should always be a reason to rejoice, not feel down in the dumps. Be that as it may, all I could do now was to step forward, wondering if everything will be exactly the same as during my maiden raid, or will some things will change and the Labyrinth will try to throw a curveball at me?

Just like before, the chamber I have ended up in was the very first one with three corridors stretching in different directions. Yup, that's the entrance alright. Good thing that I managed to get here first try without any unfortunate accidents happening.

Even in the middle of the night, the room was still sufficiently lit. If I ended up in the middle of total darkness I think I'd cry then and there. Same if I was sent anywhere else than my intended destination and was forced to use Warp

again. And speaking of Warp, let's have a look-see at the amount of MP it consumed.... *sigh* almost as much as Overwhelm. I guess I should have expected an outcome like that. It's a Bonus Spell for a reason. So what I'm getting from this is that the general principle with Bonus Spells is that they consume a fuckton of MP, but their effects are that much more powerful in return? Great, that's fucking awesome! This second visit to the Labyrinth is going great so far! Not even two minutes in and I'm already down to $\frac{1}{4}$ of my total MP! And if that wasn't clear by my current manner of goddamn speech, the negative effects of MP consumption are already kicking the fuck in! I feel depressed, dejected and overwhelmed (no pun intended) by an intense desire to strangle everything in my immediate vicinity!

But ok, whatever, it's fine! No, I mean really, it's all good. So what if I made an oopsie at the very beginning? It just means that I have to use Durandal's MP Absorption effect to recover all of the MP lost for that Warp spell. See, simple as that. Now I only have to thwart that crippling feeling of not wanting to be here and the urge to go back to my room at the inn to sleep and go forward to continue the process of money farming! Yay! Fun times ahead!

I entered the Labyrinth's corridors once again with such a mindset.

Just like the last time, Needlewood was the first enemy to appear before me. Pushing back any thoughts of running away I unsheathed Durandal and assumed my combat stance.

「Well then, here goes nothing...LEROOOOOOY!!!!!!
JEEEEEEENKINS!!!!!!!」

I was worried that the monsters roaming the Labyrinth's halls today might be stronger than the ones I have encountered yesterday, but thankfully the encounter was still decided with a single slash of my trusted Holy Sword. Needlewood disappeared in a cloud of green smoke, leaving some of its branches behind.

「Ahh, that hit the spot!」

Getting some of my MP back from the defeated Needlewood, I finally felt better. I exhaled heavily in relief. That demerit of losing MP is really

something else, man. A really nasty shit. And don't even get me started on how slow the actual procedure of absorbing MP from defeated enemies is. Even with something as OP as Durandal, I was only recovering a portion of it at a time, so if I wanted to get it all back I'd have to fight more enemies, which won't be hard, but extremely bothersome. If possible, I never want to experience something like that again, but there's not much that I can actually do about it except for holding back on using any Bonus Spells until I increase my levels and get myself some more MP.

After regaining some of my composure, I resumed the hunt for the monsters. In this Labyrinth, you had to walk around for a few minutes to encounter an enemy. I don't know if it's a rule for all of them or maybe just this one in particular, but what it means is that I won't be able to have as many encounters as I originally wanted. Right now, if I'm able to battle 10 enemies in an hour I'll call it being lucky. Assuming I've entered the Labyrinth around 3:00 AM, I'd need at least 3 hours to get a decent amount of drops from defeated enemies. Maybe I'll be able to hunt down 20, but there's absolutely no way for me to get 30 of them.

Part 14

So after hunting down twenty enemies and obtaining twenty Needlewood Branches I decided to leave the Labyrinth. I was not in the mood nor condition to use Warp again, so I just went back to the entrance room and used Dungeon Walker. When I got outside, the sun was just about to rise, so I daresay that my timing couldn't have been more perfect.

I got back to the inn just in time to eat breakfast. Today's menu consisted of two items.

「Good morning sir. Shall I take you to your table? Have you already decided what you are going to eat?」

「I haven't made the decision yet, but I'll probably settle for that one.」

I said pointing towards the plate that had more food on it than the other one.

「Understood. Your meal will be delivered to you shortly, so a moment of your patience, please.」

I was then guided to the same table where I was eating dinner yesterday. It would seem that every room has its assigned table, which was nice. At least it's going to spare me the trouble of looking for it myself every day.

Even if it was called breakfast, I was astounded to see how much food it actually included. I guess since this world has only two meals, breakfast in the morning and dinner in the evening then both of them need to be filling so that people wouldn't get hungry in the middle of the day after eating too little. Or maybe that is only the case for meals served at the inns?

After eating breakfast I went back to my room and laid down on the bed for a bit. I guess now would be a good time to sort through my Jobs again. My current lineup is as follows: Villager Lv.5, Hero Lv.2, Explorer Lv.3, Thief Lv.3, Warrior Lv.1, Merchant Lv.1, Swordsman Lv.1.

The number of my Jobs is steadily increasing. I knew that some of the levels have increased before, since the total amount of my Bonus Points was higher than it was the last time I performed the Character Reset to get Durandal, but I wasn't aware of the fact that I got myself some more actual Jobs. I guess Warrior and Swordsman were obtained as a result of defeating monsters, and I must have gotten Merchant due to all the items I sold. So going by that logic as long as you continue to do things associated with a given Job, you should obtain it sooner or later. Also, me getting Villager up to Lv.5 might have also been a factor here. Right now I was considering setting Explorer as my first Job, but I wonder if that will really be the smartest thing to do here? Even if I set the third Job, keep the shortening of the Skills cast time and Character Reset, I should still have around 100 Points to use. Things like warp and Job Settings can be applied whenever that will be necessary. However! If there are Jobs that can only be acquired by reaching Villager Lv.5, then there might be Jobs that I will only be able to get when Villager will reach Lv.10, right? And what about Lv.20, 30, 40 and so on, all the way to Lv.99? If that would be the case, then I still have a long way to go ahead of me, huh?

With all that being said, I decided to switch the first Job to Explorer after all. Hero will remain a second Job. As for the Third Job... maybe I'll set Warrior to it? But first, what are the specifics of that Job anyway?

Warrior Lv.1

Effect: Small increase in STR, Small increase of Skill damage

Skill: Rush

I can already tell that the effects of that Job are much better than that of Villager or Thief. And it even comes with a Skill! Swordsmen and Merchant were more or less the same, but if my memory serves me correctly the Slave Merchant said that by increasing the level of the Swordsmen Job I could eventually become a Bounty Hunter.

Skill-wise, Item Box and Dungeon Walker are essential to the maximum

effectiveness of my money farming. Hero Job only has Overwhelm as a Skill, but it gives nice boosts to my stats so I would have to be a total idiot to remove it of my own free will. Currently I can only have three Jobs equipped at the same time, so ditching the Villager, a Job that has meh passive effects and no Active skills to speak of as well, seems like the best course of action. I finished adjusting my Jobs and took out the item Box. Since my Explorer Job is now at Lv.3, then the number of available slots should have increased accordingly. I tried jamming the backpack in there, but it didn't want to go in no matter how hard I pressed down on it. I thought that maybe its size was the problem here, so I tried putting the coin purse there instead, but it was also to no avail. Maybe they cannot be placed inside because the system does not recognize them as proper items? Next I tried with branches, and they went in without a hitch, all nine of them. Then how about... coins?

I was able to store three gold coins inside of the Item Box. Just to be doubly sure I used Identify on them and sure enough, it showed that the gold coins in my possession were indeed the genuine gold coins. Great, so that does make it clear that those coins are recognized as items and eliminates the possibility of people trying to scam me with fake money. It was the same for the silver coins as well. But there was one restriction, albeit a small one: gold coins cannot be mixed with silver ones. One slot in the Item Box can hold either three gold coins or three silver coins. With the Explorer set as the first Job, it looks that the schematic is 3 items into one item slot. Oh, and the copper coins were a no-go as well. I don't know why they are not treated as items when silver and gold ones are.

Next came the inspection of skills. Judging by the names, the Skill of Warrior's Job, Rush and the Skill of Swordsmen's Job, Slash are probably Skills meant for attacking. I wanted to use Rush to test it out, but I wasn't able to do that since it wanted me to specify a target to use it against. But if I have Durandal which can pretty much one-shot every opponent so far, then do I really need those Skills? What about Merchant? It had the Skill called Calculation. I added the Merchant as a third Job and tried to use it by thinking about it, but nothing happened. Like, at all, just like when I didn't even know how to use Skills at all.

Maybe I should try to actually calculate something? Hmm. Let's see...

maybe 224×365 ? When I thought about that equation, the number 81 760 immediately came into my mind. Is that the answer? So Calculation has to be a passive Skill then. Okay, so how about something more complicated, just for the hell of it? If I were to earn 224 Nar every day for an entire year (365 days, assuming that the year has the same length here as it did in my old world) and kept it going for around 60 years that would give me... 4,905,600 gold coins total, so around 500 gold coins. With 500 gold coins, I could live in this inn literally until the day I died. Is that really right? It has to be. If I were to calculate this on my own I would surely make a mistake somewhere, but I was doing it with the Skill's aid, so it has to be accurate. $100 \times 100 = 1\ 000\ 000$, and $1\ 000\ 000 \times 1\ 000\ 000 = 1\ 000\ 000\ 000\ 000$

Okay, that's enough quick mathing for today. My poor brain can only take so much until it will be fried from too much thinking.

Chapter 5: Prize Money

Part 1

Player Name: Kaga Michio

Current Level and Equipment:

Explorer Lv.3

Hero Lv.2

Warrior Lv.1

Equipment:

Copper Sword

Leather Armor

Sandals

Taking a light power nap in my room I decided to take a short break from grinding in the Labyrinth to walk around the town some more. I had some time to think about my current situation, and I have to sadly conclude that with the current amount of money I can obtain from my dungeon-crawling expeditions, getting enough money to buy Roxanne will be impossible. The exact amount of money I can make by grinding monsters on the Labyrinths first floor for several hours is 200-300 Nar. At best I could earn a 1000 Nar, but only if luck was on my side. But then I had to consider the amount of money required to pay for an inn. It wasn't that much, but it's going to keep piling up, hindering my finances even more.

In the end, it all boils down to getting more money. All for the sake of buying Roxanne.

Even if I decided to go down to the Labyrinth's deeper levels, it would be foolish of me to expect that I'll ear 10 or 20 times more coin there. Maybe my luck would turn for the better if I happened upon a treasure chest, but so far I didn't stumble upon even one of those, making me feel like I shouldn't count on finding them at all.

I should focus my efforts on making money outside of the Labyrinth after all. There was one option that was available for me from the beginning, the one that might net me the highest profit.

Bounty Hunting.

When it comes to searching for possible Bandits, I just so happen to have a natural advantage in that field called Identify. With it, I can just take a casual stroll around town and scan everyone within my sight to see if their Job will point to them being a criminal. Making money just by looking at people and reading the information about them, that really seems like a dream job!

To be honest, I am still kinda reluctant about this Bounty Hunter business, but the fact that this line of work seemed to be made specifically for someone with my abilities is a fact that absolutely cannot be denied.

There seems to be no Thieves or Bandits or any other scum like that walking around Veil at the current moment, at least as far as I can tell. As expected, no one suspicious would be mad enough to walk around town in broad daylight. But if I want to increase my chances of finding someone like that, then maybe I should make my way to the northern part of the city, where Picker-san said the security was considerably weaker?

The center and the south of Veil were filled with big, beautiful-looking buildings and structures, but the further I went to the north, the more the quality and the size of the houses deteriorated. These have to be the quarters where the poorer citizens live, but it didn't quite have the look of a typical slum I was expecting to see. But just one step later...

... Yeah, it's a slum alright.

From where I was standing, I could see many more ruined buildings in the

distance, and the smell of the air also worsened considerably. The same could be told about the people and the overall atmosphere of this place. With each step, the houses, became more and more dirty and unkept and the air grew even more stagnant. Looks like some of the residents here didn't even have a place of their own, because they were just sitting or laying on the streets. There was even a small child standing in the middle of the road. It wasn't doing anything in particular. It was just standing there, looking absent-mindedly into space. It looked like it was sick for a very long time. I wonder if it even knows what a medicine is?

Anyway, hanging around here for too long might be a bad idea. This place is just too dangerous. Maybe it's because it's my first time being in a place like this, but my sixth sense was screaming for me to get the fuck out of here the entire time.

There's just something about the atmosphere of this place that just seems... off somehow, and I don't like it one bit.

Compared to this dumphole and its inhabitants, delinquents crouching outside of a convenience store with their bats and pipes in the dead of the night almost seemed friendly to me now. Yup, I think the best thing to do will be a tactical retreat. Yes, falling back to a safe place now!

Do I really have to go in there to find criminals? That place is just too dangerous for someone like me! I mean, of course it is, and I knew it well. Even in my old world, slums were never a place that was safe for proper, upstanding citizens to be in. And even if I managed to track even a single Bandit down without any major difficulties, there's no telling if his or her buddies won't be laying in wait to shank me when their buddy will be in danger. So for the time being, I retreated to the very edge of the slum area. If I don't know the terrain, it'd be best not to go in too deep.

A little bit to the east there were women who looked like prostitutes standing in front of the building that was most likely a brothel, because the men who were walking past it kept casting glances towards it and the girls in front of it, which wasn't all that weird because the outfits they were wearing were rather... eye-catching, so to speak. Maybe I would have gone in and used their services myself if I wasn't warned that each and every one of them was

supposedly riddled with STD's according to both Picker-san's and Alan-san's words. But putting the matter of their health aside, wouldn't you say that brothels are the exact place that comes to mind when talking about hangout spots for suspicious dudes?

Some distance away from the brothel, a crowd of people was forming up, with lots and lots of slum dwellers gathering in one spot. I wonder if something happened over there. Maybe I should go have a look at it myself? While preparing to use Identify, I joined in with the rest of the crowd. Let's see, what the hell is that whole commotion about?

The source of the growing uproar was a patch of dirty, cracked road where someone has apparently fallen down. When I used Identify to appraise the guy who was lying on the ground, the information that showed up was not the person's name or Job, but the name of a piece of equipment: Leather Armor.

In other words, whoever that poor lad was, he was dead. How do I know this? Because apparently corpses are no longer recognized as human beings, and therefore they cannot be properly Identified.

「That's a filthy thief! That man was robbed I tell you!」

「How do you know that?」

At the back of the crowd, a merchant was talking with an older-looking Adventurer. They were talking in Brahim, so I could understand everything they were saying.

「Isn't that obvious?! Just look at his hands! See? The left one has been chopped off!」

「Ah, now that I take a closer look, you're actually right.」

「Oh, looks like he's been offed less than half an hour ago.」

I couldn't see it properly from where I was standing, but it looks like the corpse in the street was missing its left hand. Maybe it was because the culprit wanted to hide the victim's identity? After all, it takes up to 30

minutes for the Intelligence Card to disappear naturally after death. But I better not say that out loud. The last thing I want is to attract more unnecessary trouble towards me.

「Make way! Make way I said! Let me through!」

Someone must have already reported that there was a crime, because the knights from the guardhouse have already arrived on the scene, with the beautiful female Knight from earlier leading them. So I guess that in this city the knights act like the police, huh?

「A Bandit. Go and clean the body up. Once you do, dispose of it.」

「Yes, ma'am!」

The female Knight barely even glanced at the body before issuing her orders. This was obviously a murder case, and they're going to do literally nothing about it? That's cold.

「Our business here is done. Everyone, back to the guardhouse!」

She ordered her company to return to their station, climbed on top of her stallion and headed back as well. Wait, is that it? Are they really going to leave this case as it is?! And everyone is fine with that?

Apparently everyone was indeed fine with it, because as soon as the female Knight left the crime scene the crowd naturally dissipated and everything went back to normal as if nothing had happened.

Part 2

Now that this mini-event has finished I just walked around the vicinity, listening to the conversations that people around me were having in Brahim. Out of all the people who were forming a fired-up crowd just a second ago, no one seemed to be complaining about the knight's behaviour towards handling the murder that apparently took place. Is that response considered to be normal here? Does no one really care that much?

「The Bandits who have been driven out of town came back to exact their revenge.」

I suddenly heard someone speaking behind my back.

Revenge? Someone was killed for such a petty reason?

I hurriedly looked over my shoulder. I have no idea who said that just now, but it had to be someone who witnessed the gathering of the crowd and the arrival of the group of knights. So if that mysterious voice is to be believed there is a group of Bandits in the city that is out for blood. Without knowing the source of that information it might not serve as enough of an evidence if I chose to go to the town guard with it, but even so this is a matter that simply cannot be overlooked. If what that beautiful Female Knight was saying was true, the Bandits who attacked the village were originally from the slums of this town. Maybe the ones who did this were their friends or acquaintances? And most importantly, did only one of them wanted revenge, or were they all hell-bent on it as well?

Suddenly I felt my stomach tying itself into multiple knots and a wave of cold sweat rushing down my back. What... what if I'm one of the targets of

their revenge?

No, nononono, that cannot be it. That's absolutely not possible. Think about it calmly, you moron! Them being out for revenge probably has nothing to do with me at all.

First and foremost, the most likely reason for their revenge is the fact that they have been kicked out of the town, and I had nothing to do with it since I literally wasn't even existing in this world until a few days ago.

Secondly, none of the Bandits who attacked the village survived. I have slain all of them together with the rest of the villagers (although I did the lion's share of the work).

Thirdly, even if some of them managed to survive the attack, finding someone without having a nice long look at his face should be borderline impossible in this technology-free world that probably never heard of something as abstract as photographs.

But that does not mean that I can feel relieved just yet. Even if their goal is to take revenge for being driven out of town, I cannot imagine a group of Bandits willingly going against an entire Knight Order. It would be nothing short of suicidal unless they'd have the advantage of both numbers and equipment, which I'm sure they don't have right now. But if the grudge they are holding against Veil is strong, Then I don't think a setback or two would be enough to discourage them from pushing through with whatever it is they might be planning. They might have even obtained information about me through some illegal means unknown to me.

Whatever the Bandits intentions might be, I still can't rule out the possibility that I might end up being targeted myself. Until I find and deal with them, I won't be able to have a peaceful night's rest. With all that said, looks like my decision to switch from dungeon crawling to Bandit hunting was the right one after all.

I have spent the next two days exploring the town of Veil while avoiding getting too close to the slums. I wasn't able to find any of the Bandits, but at the very least I got the general feeling of the topography and the layout of the

terrain in the slums. At the very least that's going to save me some MP I would otherwise wasted on using warp to get around here.

I also understood why the slums were build in the northern part of the town.

Two rivers run through the city of Veil. Both of them enter the city from the south and exit through the north. That water is used a well behind the inn I am currently staying at, acting as the source of drinking water, and probably bathwater for the customers as well, and all the inn's sewage is probably drained to the sewers that run all the way beneath the city. The water that enters the town from the south is clear, but the further it travels downstream to the north the dirtier it gets. While I was making my way through the slums, I could faintly smell the smell of bad, almost rotten water in the air.

Nobody would want to willingly live in such a place. The distinction seems to be clear here: the southern part of the city is where the rich people and the business canter dwells while the northern part is comprised entirely of slums and the quarters of the poor and those who could not afford to live in the southern part. I wonder if I didn't see any Bandits or other criminals because they were being careful not to be spotted? I don't think that many people can use Identify besides myself, but maybe they just don't want their faces to be seen or they are only active in the middle of the night? Also, the possibility that I won't even be able to meet them inside the slums at all was extremely likely. If they were exiled from the town, they might as well have their base of operations outside of it.

With nothing better to do at the current moment I made my way to the Labyrinth. Instead of worrying about the things beyond my reach, I might as well try to get myself a treasure chest. That, and I also might try to gain myself some levels, just to be on the safe side if I really end up fighting against the Bandits. I know that technically I don't have to worry about anything as long as I have Durandal, but you know what they say: if the wielder's shit, even the greatest of weapons will be shit as well.

I gained a few levels, so now using Warp should be that much easier for me. Maybe I will even be able to use it two times in a row without exhausting my MP pool? The number of available slots in my Item Box has also increased accordingly. My current levels are as follows: Explorer Lv.6, Hero Lv.4 and

Warrior Lv.4. Since Explorer has been set as my first Job, it should now figure as my main Job on my Intelligence Card.

Usually labyrinth's often tend to have secret passages and hidden doors in them, and this one was no exception from that rule. Way in the back of the first floor there was a small room behind a hidden door. When you passed it, you ended up in another small room similar to the one at the entrance. Just like that one, it also had a number of branching pathways extending from it, which created a truly magnificent maze. After checking every nook and cranny at the first floor, I made my way over there. When I stopped in front of one of the walls, a part of it made a rattling noise and then slowly slid down, revealing the pathway I was looking for. I went through it to proceed with my search. At first I didn't even realized that there was even a door since all I did was going back and forth between the places I have already explored. That was the safest method, but admittedly it was not very efficient, so the discovery of that new hidden passage was truly a Godsend to me.

I might have not made any progress when it comes to the Bandit search, but as a consolation prize the exploration of the Labyrinth entered a brand-new stage!

Today my current excursion into the Labyrinth occurred towards the end of the day, after I spend the daytime on another fruitless Bandit search in the slums of Veil. I wanted to do so mainly to improve my mood as I waited for the situation in the city to change.

I once again made my way to the end of the first floor and waited for the portion of the wall to slide down, allowing me a passage to the hidden section. I wanted to go inside immediately, but...

「.....」

But someone was already there.

Brown bodies with green heads. And not just two or three. There was so many Needlewoods here that they could make an entire bush or a small forest if they were to be placed beside each other, and they were all staring at me as if they wanted to say 「What the fuck are you looking at?!」, or 「You picked

the wrong cave, fool!」。

「*Sigh*..... fuck.」

I said brandishing my Durandal as the enemies rushed towards me like an army of green, spiky toddlers.

Part 3

Even though the enemies had an overwhelming numbers advantage over me, avoiding their attacks was nothing difficult. I avoided the ones coming at me from the right by stepping to the side and pulling my right hand back, and then I raised Durandal in front of me to block the attacks that were coming at me from the front. Then I spun around on my heel and sliced the monsters around me in half from top to bottom.

At one point I thought about using Dungeon Walker to get myself some more maneuvering space, but even with the complete chant the black portal on the wall did not appear. I suspected that something like that might happen. Looks like Dungeon walker cannot be used in the middle of combat. I should try that again when there will be only one enemy, but for now let's ditch the experiments and focus on the task at hand!

The number of enemies was much bigger than I have initially anticipated. How many does that make now? A dozen? More than a dozen? Anyway, there is just so many of them. I'm lucky that I began to fall back towards the room's entrance, otherwise I would have been surrounded in no time.

Maybe I should really consider escaping? Unfortunately, that does not look like a possibility here. With their numbers, even if I tried to make a run for it, they would just come right after me and swarmed all over me. Nah, if I have time to think about such what if's, then I should just divert the energy spent for that towards cutting them all down.

I slashed at the Needlewood that came at me from the right. After that, another Needlewood attacked me from the left, but I failed to block its attack in time, which resulted in a sharp pain pulsating from my left shoulder.

The entrance to the cave was small, but it will be impossible for me to keep defending myself here all the time. If the battle goes any longer, then the Needlewoods in here might call for reinforcements, causing me to be attacked both from the front and the back. Maybe at the very least I should put my back against the wall to protect it from a surprise attack?

I ignored the monsters to the left and moved to the right. I was wondering if I should try using Overwhelming? No, I shouldn't do it just yet. If I end up using all of my MP on ordinary mobs, I won't be able to cast Skills when I will really need them.

I was beginning to get a little tired, but I did my best to push that feeling out of my mind and continued to slash at the Needlewoods that tried to approach me. I simply continued to hit the enemies before me with my Durandal. Next, with my right foot planted firmly forward I started two-handing Durandal, cutting down anything that dared to approach me, be it from the front, the sides or the back. To be honest, it felt as if the time around me had slowed down considerably.

As I continued to swing my arms I was moving fore=ward, step by step. All this time I delivered painful attacks to the Needlewoods while sustaining very little damage myself.

Finally I reached another small cavern. When I placed my back against the wall, I have effectively reduced the monster's range of attack to only 180 degrees instead of 360. If I could freely move between all four corners of the room that would allow me to reduce that range by another half, to 90 degrees, but in my current situation such greed was probably ill-advised.

For a moment, my sudden movements were enough to disrupt the swarm of enemies, but nothing I did was able to change the fact that they were still coming in after me.

Soon there will be so many of them that they will completely fill up the cave, leaving me no space to move myself.

I pulled back and fixed Durandal's position in my hands and blocked the strike that was coming towards me from the left and whacked the

Needlewood, but in return I was struck in my exposed right shoulder.

Guh!

Another slash took care of another two Needlewoods, but got me another hit, this time on the left shoulder.

Gwaah!

Another monster was split diagonally from the shoulder, but its needles pierced into my right side.

Damn this hurts like hell!

More and more of their attacks is hitting me. If this was still a one-on-one fight I would not have been hit even once, but this is one vs. many here, with me being at a clear disadvantage, so I do what I can, that is to say I swing Durandal left and right, up and down. Thankfully Durandal has the MP Absorption Skill, so if I wanted, I could have unleashed some of them just as long as I'd have enough enemies left to replenish the MP I have spent. But that goes only for MP. If I continue to get randomly hit like that, at some point my HP is bound to get critically low to the point that not even HP Absorption is going to recover it fast enough, and that is something that I wanted to avoid at all costs.

Sigh... Alright, I guess it's time to pop Overwhelming. If using it can help me get out of this sticky situation, then so be it!

Instead of expending all of Overwhelming's power in one strike, I tried to suppress it so that I could use it continuously, and then slashed at the two monsters that were the closest to me. When the Skill's effect ended, I have slammed my back against the wall again. This might be working, but I still have to be mindful of getting myself surrounded.

As I was moving along the wall to reach the room's corner on the right I avoided another Needlewood that tried to slash me with its branches. Damn, just when the Overwhelming's effects stopped working! And just 1 Needlewood won't be enough to get back the MP that I just used. As a result,

I could feel my head being gradually filled with negative thoughts. Urgh, I knew I should have used that damn Skill only when the MP bar has been completely filled! Now I'll start acting more and more like an emo, and I don't want that in the middle of the fucking combat! And the worst part here is that if the negative thoughts begin to accumulate, they will have a huge negative effect on my battle performance. On the other hand, even if it costs me the mood swings, I should be using Overwhelming as much as I can to cull the enemy's numbers as much as possible. Everything to come out on top here.

Another attack came at me from the left so I deflected it, only to be struck in the right shoulder again. For now HP Absorption manages to keep me afloat, but I cannot feel relieved by that at all. If the barrage of enemy attacks continues like that, the total damage should be enough to put me in the red zone of my HP bar. I guess you could say that I'm balancing on a really, reaaaally thin thread right now.

As it is now, the battle was going back and forth over and over again without any clear sign that the impasse I have found myself at is going to be broken.

A certain thought has popped into my head. What if I die in here? Even though this world is totally different from my old one, it is my new reality, so being felled by monsters would spell the absolute, unavoidable death for me.

Death.

Death is close at hand. It's so close that I can practically feel its icy embrace closing around me. It's scary, but at the same time it is not. I'm not shaking in my boots, but I'm also not laughing about it either. Maybe that's because I was in the middle of a battle? Is it always like that? Are warriors able to calmly stare death right in the face and not feel a single thing?

The next few Needlewoods that came closer to me got sliced into pieces. Even when some of their attacks manage to reach me and inflict damage I'm letting it slide as long as I can reach them with my blade to get back the HP that I lost. Little by little, this back and forth we're having is starting to create a path that I can use to advance and move forward as I continue to slice & dice the branches that aim for me and cut their owners with Durandal in

return.

I guess that's all there really is to it. Even if death is literally knocking at my door, all I can do is to continue to fight. So as I continue for another corner of the room, I'm trying to defeat as many monsters as possible. And before I knew it, the number of Needlewoods between me and the right corner of the room were reduced to only two.

That is my chance!

Part 4

I unleashed Overwhelming once again. First I slaughtered the Needlewood right in front of me and immediately followed with a diagonal slash to the right. The Skills effects have diminished by that point, but despite that I still followed the previous two attacks with a third one where I raised Durandal high into the air and slammed it into the ground with all my strength, slashing the third Needlewood cleanly in half.

I finally arrived in the corner that I wanted to reach so desperately, all the while avoiding the attacks of the monsters who were still right on my tail. With this, the angle they can attack me from has been reduced to about 90 degrees. Lowering Durandal to the level of my waist, I looked through the room to assess my current situation.

First thing I noticed almost right away was the enemy's numbers were greatly reduced. I only saw that now because I actually had the time to look around calmly, without having to swing Durandal left and right to avoid being overrun by the brownish-green abominations. Now there was only ten or so of them left. This made me realize that one of my earlier statements was a big fat lie: while I thought I was staring death in the face calmly, I was never calm at all. All this time I was simply thrashing around like a scared child oblivious to everything that's been going on around it. If I just took a damn moment to actually observe what was happening around me maybe I wouldn't be so obsessed with going from corner to corner like an idiot. Yup, my observational skills are truly of the Godly levels it seems.

The next thing I noticed was the fact that my hands were sweaty as fuck. Like seriously, they are like friggin waterfalls right now. That's why I have to be extremely careful. If I end up dropping Durandal, even by accident, that's

probably going to be a game over for me. So I did the only thing I could have done in this situation: even if I knew I'm going to get attacked, I wiped my sweaty hands in my pants. Several vines of the Needle woods attacked me during that short while, but there was nothing I could do about it, since that was more important to me. I gripped Durandal again, this time with sweat-free hands and run to the right.

First I dispatched the farthest Needlewood to the right. Now that so many enemies have been dispatched, I should be able to move however I want, or in other words: Go wild with my OP as shit holy sword!

I jumped forward, swinging Durandal all around me, ruthlessly decimating the branches that were shot in my direction. They are being cut down as if they were no more than the blades of wilted grass, and their owners soon follow after them. Continuing the battle with the leftover enemies in such a manner, I kept on pressing forward.

Another two Needlewoods came at me from the front, so I cut them down. Another one tried to ambush me from the left with its branches, but I dodged them and immediately countered with a slash that went upwards and to the left, and used the created momentum to deliver another powerful downward slash that instantly killed another Needlewood in front of me.

There are only three enemies remaining.

I am not going to run away now, and it looks like they are not going to run away either. I invoked Overwhelming again, defeating two of them with a single slash of my sword.

Only one enemy remaining now.

It rushed towards me head-on with its spiky army and vines, but before they could so much as reach me, I strongly stepped down with my left foot and swung Durandal from the last Needlewood's left shoulder all the way to its right leg.

「Haaah...」

When it was all over, I finally had the time to catch my breath in peace. That should be all of them, right? I have defeated all of the monsters that ambushed me back in that room, right? Apparently that has to be the case, because when the last of the Needlewoods finally evaporated into a puff of green smoke, there was no more of them coming out to get me. Even though it was finally all over, it still took me a good while for my ragged breath to return to normal.

Okay...now that that's taken care of... maybe I'll finally have a chance... to look around the room I am currently in.

Characteristics-wise, it was the same small cave as all the other caves I have passed through on this floor. Same walls, same ceiling and the same doorway that you would find in the other parts of this Labyrinth, in other words: everything here was perfectly ordinary, except that the floor was now littered with the branches that all of the defeated Needlewoods left behind when they perished by my sword.

Is there anything else here that's noteworthy? No, I don't think so. I mean, it would be great if a treasure chest or a piece of some legendary equipment were to appear before me right now, but come on, what are the odds of something like that happening? But just in case...

As I went around the room collecting Needlewood Branches from the ground I made sure to scan the entire area with my sight again, but regrettably I have truly found one big pile of nothing. So was that simply a room filled with monsters? Because if so, then that's truly a pity. That was the worst random event I could have stumbled upon here. Let's face the facts here: if I didn't have Durandal with its OP as fuck abilities with me, I would have been killed like some random rookie Adventurer who wandered into the Dungeon unprepared, underlevelled and underequipped because he thought that everything's going to work out just fine because that's the first Dungeon in the game, only to be brutally buttraped by reality (**TL NOTE: Looking at you, *Goblin Slayer***). This Labyrinth... I have to admit that it is much more dangerous than I have initially anticipated.

Does that mean I should just ran away from here with my tail tucked between my legs? Absolutely not! As long as I have Durandal and my Skills, I can

still fight, even if the enemies might be stronger than me. I have already made my decision to live in this world, so I cannot allow a minor setback such as this to discourage me from going forward!

I finished gathering all the branches, and since there's nothing else here in this room, I'd best be on my way. I already wasted enough time here as it is.

I brought up the Job Settings menu. My current levels are as follows: Explorer Lv.8; Hero Lv. 5, Warrior Lv.6, Villager Lv.5, Merchant Lv.1 , Swordsman Lv.10. I also didn't get any new Jobs, which is strange, because I was sure that singlehandedly defeating so many monsters was bound to get me at least one new Job. Also, the levels of my Jobs start to look really nice. Not to mention that when I used that last Overwhelming during the end of the battle, I wasn't feeling depressed or swarmed by the dark thoughts. That was probably due to the fact that my level had increased and my MP regenerated at that moment. That would also explain why am I not experiencing that gradual feeling of mental recovery that I used to feel whenever my MP was going back to the certain amount.

It is a little bit early, but let's leave the Labyrinth for now. After a round of walking around the town I returned to the inn. As expected, I caught no sign of bandits at all. If I want to find them, I guess I'll have no other option but to go deeper into the slums.

「I'd like to rent a room for another night. I'll also be having a dinner, and after that, give me a some hot water and a lamp.」

「As you wish, kid. So a diner, hot water and a lamp... you know what, I'm feeling generous today, so I'll be charging you only 245 Nar for all of that.」

The Innkeeper told me. A single batch of hot water costs 20 Nar, and If I'm remembering correctly the rent for the lamp (an oil lamp, by the way) was certainly 10 Nar. Curiously enough, when I bought the hot water yesterday my 30% discount didn't work, but today it worked like a charm! Maybe the discount is not taking effect if you're only buying a single item? That is a possibility that I'll have to check later.

「Do I have to show you my Intelligence Card again?」

「No need for that if you're renewing your stay. Your room is the same one as before, do go ahead and enjoy our stay.」

And he offered me a familiar key, which I took upstairs, feeling glad that I won't have to flash my Intelligence Card every time I'll be renewing my stay here.

Part 5

After I ate my meal and returned to my room to have a short rest, there was this thought that stuck in my head and didn't want to leave no matter how hard I tried to divert my attention away from it.

Whether it's my death or the death of a common Bandit or even an ordinary citizen or members of the nobility, this world is the one where death is incredibly cheap and easy to come across. And whether I like it or not, I have to live in such a world now. This is one thing that is similar to my old world: if someone is standing in your way, all you have to do to ruin that someone's life is to make him a criminal in the eyes of the public, and that would be enough for his reputation to be destroyed. As much as I want to say that it's nice to see that some things do not change even in different worlds, this is one thing that I would have gladly got rid of.

And speaking of criminals, it would seem that I have no other option but to go deeper into the slum area if I want to find where the Bandits are hiding. What was that old saying again? "*You won't catch the tiger's cub if you won't enter its den*" or something like that? Or was it actually "*You won't get a fetus unless you stick it in the hole*"?

Anyway, after leaving the inn I made my way to the slums, but instead of only lurking around its edges this time I actually went inside, making my way to the north along the slums' "main road". Along the way, I saw that one of the street corners was especially bright and lively. It was a building like any other, about one story high with the entrance and the windows facing the road, but that was most definitely a brothel. How can I be so sure of that? Well for starters, the woman standing in front of the building had only the bare minimum of clothing covering her body, and the other similarly dressed

women were peeking from the windows on the first floor, seductively beckoning any men who were passing by to come inside. I have to admit, it all looked very inviting, totally different than it was during the daytime, and if I wasn't warned about the dangers of such establishments before, maybe I would have allowed myself to be swallowed up by that atmosphere and my adolescent desires as well...

No! I didn't come here to visit brothels! I am on a much more important mission! I won't be entering, but maybe, just maybe I could look at them girls some more... oh man this is exciting. Just from looking at them practically flashing all the goods out in the open like that my heart is racing like crazy...

Wait. Dude, just stop, take a deep breath and calm yourself down! Remember the warning you claimed to have known not even a minute ago. If you go there, you will most certainly catch some nasty illness. You also might end up ripped off and robbed. So what is the obvious solution to all those problems? A very simple one: NOT GOING INSIDE! Besides, those prostitutes might be attractive, but upon closer inspection none of them is as beautiful as Roxanne, so even if I did enter the brothel I don't think I'd be satisfied with any of the girls in there. So instead, I decided to keep my distance and eavesdrop on the prostitutes in front of the building. Who knows, maybe I'll be able to learn something interesting? Assuming that the bustling of the main street will allow me to hear a damn thing.

Thankfully, the noise of the surroundings wasn't the problem in the slightest, but another obstacle has presented itself before me: I can't understand a word of what that prostitute was saying. I heard her talking without any issue, but she was not speaking in Brahim. She was using some language that was totally unknown to me. In fact, none of the people around the brothel seemed to be speaking in Brahim at all! I guess I wasn't paying attention to that little detail up until this point because I could communicate with the Innkeeper and the workers in the guilds just fine, but it looks like the linguistic situation is the same here as it was back in the village: the people who are able to speak Brahim appear to be a strict minority. Instead, they must be speaking with a language, or perhaps a dialect used only by the locals. Well, if I search around some more, then maybe I'll be able to find a prostitute who actually

speaks Brahim, so that might be worth a shot.

I wandered around the slums until the light in my rented lantern went out, and then decided to head back to the inn by using Warp. I could have returned back on foot, but after concluding that strolling around the slums without any light at such an hour might not be the best idea I decided against it. Besides, even if I had to back on foot, I don't know if I could find my way around the slums in complete darkness. I could probably get back to the brothel area because it was not that far away from the main part of the city, but anything other than that would just be plain risky.

In order not to attract any needles attention to myself I warped behind the inn and then casually went to the front. After returning the lantern to the Innkeeper, I went back to my room to catch some z's.

I woke up around midnight, went to the lobby, left the key at the counter and headed for the slums one more time. The Innkeeper gave me a glance, but didn't ask any further questions. The streets were dark as all hell, but I managed to go back to the brothel area without much difficulty. I wanted to eavesdrop on the prostitutes again, but it looks like all of them either went to sleep or retreated to the brothel's rooms with the customers they manage to score for themselves. Welp, in that case, let's scan the surroundings with Identify, maybe that is going to yield some results.

The information of a single person appeared before my eyes. So there is someone here after all. Also, I already kinda knew it from my excursions to the Labyrinth, but it looks like the ability to Identify something does not depend on the light in your immediate surroundings, since Identify also worked in the dim light of the caverns.

The person I detected was a lone 26 years old Villager woman. It looked like she was some distance away from me, but in this darkness I couldn't tell exactly how far it really was. But that is not important right now. The biggest question that has to be answered right now is: what the hell is she doing alone in such a place at such an odd hour?

I tried to follow her while making as little noise as possible, but after a few steps I had to duck behind one of the nearby house's walls because the corner

of the building on the other side of the street has suddenly became very bright. Looks like someone who was carrying a torch was coming in the direction of the woman.

There were three men in total. And their designation... Bandits! All three of them are labeled as Bandits! That is the first time I have actually found Bandits ever since I've come to this town a few days ago. But their levels are quite low. All of them had a single digits. Out of all the Bandits who attacked the village, only two of them had decent prizes for their heads: the Bandit Leader and the guy who looked like his second-in-command, in other words, the only Bandits who had their levels consisting of two digits. By the looks of it, if the Bandit does not have a level consisting of at least two digits, so Lv.10 at minimum, the prize for slaying him will be so laughably minuscule that hunting them almost seems like a waste of one's time.

The three Bandits began to move apart from one another, but close enough to each other to stay withing the light of their torches and jump at the potential prey should the need arose. Man, I already feel sorry for whoever is going to stumble upon them. I was seriously contemplating if I should just get the fuck out of there by using Warp when I heard someone scream. Alerted, the three Bandits turned their heads sharply and headed for the scream's source. But who could have been...

Oh no. Oh fuck. Oh fuck no.

Part 6

As the three Bandits moved forward the light of their torches eventually revealed the presence of the Villager woman to them. She tried run away, but she tripped over her own legs and hit the ground pretty hard after only a few meters.

[XXXX! XXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXX!] [XX! XX
XXXXX! XXXXXX XXX!] [XX! XXXXXX XXX! XXXXXX
XXXXX!] [

The Bandits caught up to her in no time. They slowly surrounded her while screaming at her. I couldn't make up the exact words, but I was sure they were mocking her.

[XXXXXXXX!!!]

After another scream, one of the Bandits kicked the woman in the stomach so hard that she ended up coughing up blood. The other two followed after him and joined in on the “fun”, even though the woman was already on the verge of losing consciousness after that first kick. Eventually the one who started the beatdown, the guy who looked like he was the boss of the other two grabbed her by the hair and began to drag her away into one of the back alleyways.

[Now we're going to have some fun. And you can be sure that we'll take our sweet time with you!]

The man, a Lv.9 Bandit spoke in Brahim. He and his comrades dragged the woman behind another corner, and then the light of their torches slowly

disappeared as they kept on getting farther and farther away.

After that incident, the area became silent again. Almost eerily so.

The Bandits are now gone, so I can probably leave my hiding spot. There's no one here who would be alerted by my presence anymore, so I can stop worrying about that. But what I have witnessed right now... that was a rather unpleasant experience. I didn't like it one bit, and I'm not happy that I saw it. Even though it was kinda her fault for walking alone around such dangerous neighborhood this late at night, I don't think that girl was a whore. She was probably just a regular citizen who happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. If she was not a prostitute going back to her brothel from visiting a customer, then maybe she was just visiting a friend and ended up staying at their place too late? Whatever her reasons might have been, they are not important now. What matters is that due to her misfortune she got beaten up, and now she will probably become a plaything for those guys.

Of course, I'm not proud of myself for not helping her, but even if I tried to do so, attacking those three blindly would have been a bad idea. That group only consisted of three Bandits, but who knows if there are no other, larger groups nearby. It's true that I want to find Bandits so I can take them down and collect the prize money, but nothing good would come to me from recklessly starting a war with them without any information about them.

At the very least, that encounter showed me that they are a violent bunch. Maybe that violent tendencies were one of the reasons for their banishment from the city? I also pretty much confirmed that they are present in the slums, and that they are quite possibly ruling it from the shadows with an iron grip of violence.

With the knowledge that I have obtained from this chance encounter, my current plan of action will be as follows: wait until tomorrow night and go to the part of the slums with the brothels (let's call it brothel district) around the same hour as today. If I happened upon three random Bandits by a complete accident, then if I play my cards right I may be able to find the Bandits that I'm looking for.

And just like that, after going back to the inn and sleeping until morning I've

spent the majority of the day in the Labyrinth (making sure to avoid any suspicious-looking pathways in order not to bring another ordeal like that previous one down on myself, and after that I got back to my room and slept until dinnertime.

And now, sometime after midnight, my mission to infiltrate the brothel district in search of the source of the Bandits begins!

My first observation: even though the brothel district is quite busy, the closing hours come relatively fast. I wonder if that is a principle that holds true for all the brothels in this world, or is it a phenomenon unique only to the ones in Veil? Well, I call them closing hours, but I'm sure that just means that some of the richer customers simply stay in them overnight. Come to think of it, that's actually a pretty valid strategy: get as many potential customers right before the closing hours arrive and coerce them into staying the entire night, adequately increased prices be damned.

The hour was late, the shops were closed, and no people to be seen walking around on the streets. A perfect time for the Bandits to start appearing out of nowhere, and they did. So my initial assumption was correct: they really do come out during the nighttime, I just failed to nail the approximate hour correctly. Now they were casually walking around the streets like they owned the place, unafraid of being found out by the guards, because let's face it, no guardsmen with his sanity still intact would willingly go on a patrol to the slums in the dead of the night. Some of them simply walked around, and some of them were entering bars and houses that I thought were long closed. So it looks like that they have their own places for entertainment, hidden away from the prying eyes of those who would seek to deliver them to justice. If I hadn't decided to come here this late, I would have never learned that valuable piece of information. But that is still not enough for me to just go and randomly attack them.

For now I have to continue observing them from the safe distance.

Observation number 2: the Bandits who wander around the slums probably do not belong to a single group, but must be divided into separate ones that might be rivaling one another. I have arrived at that conclusion after witnessing that some of the smaller groups of Bandits avoided making any

kind of contact with certain other groups, and that not every group was going to all the establishments opened for criminals. Maybe that has to something with some kinda turf wars between them? Anyway I didn't bring any lanterns with me this time, so as long as I stick to the shadows I probably won't have to worry about being caught.

Some of the Bandits walked together and were chatting with each other, but those were always the ones who were dressed in similarly looking attires of possessing some article of clothing that made them distinguishingly different from the others, and it would seem that those groups were going in circles around specific areas while maintaining a safe distance from the other groups. Maybe they really are patrolling their respective territories?

The ones I am tailing now wear the same clothes that that the Lv.9 guys I have encountered yesterday wore, and the area that they are going around is close to the place where they ganged up on that 26 years old Villager woman. Is this their territory? If so, then it does not seem to be very wide.

After tailing them for a few more rounds, I had a stroke of luck, because the guys I have been following actually met with the Bandit from yesterday who could speak Brahim! Awaiting how the situation was going to develop, I gently approached them while making sure that my presence was being obscured by the darkness the entire time. Maybe their territory really is that small, or maybe there is just not that many people patrolling it at the moment, but this is definitely near the place I saw the Brahim speaking guy yesterday, so could it be that their hideout is somewhere nearby? If that is the case, then maybe their group really isn't that big after all. If so, then maybe I'd actually have a fighting chance against them?

[X X X X X Hugo X X X X X.]

Well that's something new. Another Bandit from a different group has appeared, and he started talking with my Lv.9 target, but not in Brahim so I obviously couldn't understand a word they were saying and that was driving me nuts! Just what are you bastards talking about?! I didn't come this far to be cockblocked at the point of entry now!

Part 7

Huh? Did I just hear that correctly? I could swear that in the middle of the sentence that I couldn't make heads or tails of. I heard a single word that I was able to understand: Hugo. Or was it just my imagination? Hugo. Hmm... If I remember correctly, that was the name of the Bandit Leader who attacked the village together with his people. There could be no doubt about it, because back when we were making appraisals after the battle ended that was the name that was present on the Bandit Leader's Intelligence Card. Why did his name come up now of all times? And another question: is the leader of those Lv.9 Bandits also one of the criminals who were cast out of the city, or is he perhaps just someone related to them, but not directly involved?

A few hours later, just before dawn when it was still dark I went to the back of the brothel district again. But this time instead of walking all the way there I used Warp to teleport there in an instant. Apparently as long as it was a place that you saw with your own eyes, you could use Warp to get there without any issues. In other words, it's like I have my very own fast travel system.

I warped to the back of the building that was at the opposite side of the street to the brothel. It was the perfect observation spot, since even during the day most of that building was hidden in the pitch black shade. The only part of it that was a little brighter was the eastern part. While camping there, I patiently waited for the sun to rise and for the people to leave the brothel after the night they had spent there.

Most of the people who were leaving the building were labeled as Male Villagers. Wow, who knew that so many of them were using such establishments? Then again, seeing as how this world is modeled after the

middle ages, perhaps I shouldn't be too surprised. Most of them were carrying lanterns in one of their hands, most probably the one they brought with them yesterday night. Understandably, I didn't bring my own with me again in order to avoid gaining too much attention. When the men were leaving the brothel, almost all of them were making their way towards the exit from the slums. The lights of the lanterns they were carrying around with them were a real hindrance, making it difficult to get a good look at their faces, and that makes my investigation that much more difficult. If I could just see the faces of the customers who were leaving the brothel, then maybe I could spot someone suspicious or someone whose face practically screams "Hey, I'm a criminal!". Not to mention that the Bandits might be hiding their Bandit Job in the same way I have kept my Thief Job hidden from everyone. That's why for the current moment the visual clues might be my best bet, but as I have already said, those pesky lanterns are not exactly making my job any easier! Ugh, if only they didn't have as many of them! Why did they even bother with setting the light in them again when the sun is going to be illuminating the entire slum any minute now?! Sigh, now when my initial plan has officially gone out the window, I guess there's no reason for me to stay here in this corner anymore, so I left my hiding spot and proceeded to walk along the street, just like everybody else around me. Using the increasing stream of people to blend into the surroundings of the slums I made my way across the brothel district, but before I go anywhere else I have to check that alleyway where the Villager woman has been dragged by the Bandits.

The alley itself was a rather short one, and at the end of it was a perfectly ordinary one story house. This clearly isn't a brothel. Maybe this is the Bandit's hideout? It certainly doesn't look like it, but it is exactly that quality that makes that option all the more viable. I can't just stand outside of it and stare mindlessly, so I will just pass it by without stopping or glancing in its general direction.

I just noticed it right now, but in the morning the brothel district looks like a perfectly normal town, all things considered. It certainly doesn't feel like a part of the slums. I guess it has to do so, because if it reeked like the rest of the slums then no one would want to visit it, since normal citizens want nothing to do with the poorer parts of the city at all. I hanged around the

slums for a bit more and then once again headed back to the inn. I went out there again during the proper daytime, but I couldn't spot any thieves at all. As expected, they must be holed up in their hideouts throughout the day.

[One night with dinner, hot water after the meal.] [As you wish. One night stay with dinner and hot water. And since you've been behaving so far and you're not stirring any trouble, then I'll give you a special discount. 238 Nar please.]

That was the exchange I had with the Innkeeper as soon as I returned to the inn in the evening. This time I got a discount even without asking him to borrow the lamp. Looks like the only time when my 30% discount is not kicking in is when I ask him for just the hot water and nothing else.

[You know, a few days ago there was a murder not that far away from here.]

Under the guise of striking a casual conversation I wanted to see if I could get some useful information out of him.

[Ahh, that incident, huh? You don't have to worry about anything as long as you're staying here since this place is one of the safest in the entire city, even more so if you're staying away from the slums and its brothels.] [How can you be so sure of that?]

He really seems to know something. If that's the case, then I want him to spill as much beans as possible. The knowledge he is privy to might be the exact thing needed for the continuous peaceful existence of this inn and it's guests, and who knows, maybe even the inns and their guests around the entire city?

[That was a part of a battle for the influence between the criminals nesting in the slums.] [Really? Well I heard something entirely different. From what I have heard, the victim was killed as a part of the vendetta the Bandits of the slums are carrying out against those who banished them from the city.] [Oh, so you know that much, huh? Okay, just between you and me, that is a load of horse shit. A hoax.]

The innkeeper said to me, leaning over the counter and lowering his voice to a barely audible whisper.

So that murder wasn't for revenge?

[Uhm, could you perhaps... go into a little bit more detail about that?] [So basically some time ago, the slums were divided between the two groups who fought with each other for dominance. As the result of that conflict, the faction that lost got cast out of the town by the one that bested them. And in order to vent their frustration over losing what they believed will always belong to them, the banished faction attacked some small village outside near Veil.]

Small village? Bandit attack? Uh-huh, looks like the pieces of the puzzle are slowly falling into the right places. He must be talking about the group that I killed when I first arrived in this world.

[So then...] [Yup, the poor sap that got offed the other day belonged to the group that emerged victorious from that turf war. I know that rumors state that he was killed in revenge, but to me that seems very unlikely and suspicious. My money's on the bet that one of the other groups is responsible for it. Worst case scenario, we might even be on the precipice of another turf war in the slums. But enough digressing. To answer your question: no, that murder does not look like the work of the Bandits who were cast out.]

Well I'll be damned if that conflict between Bandits is not complicated as hell.

[Is that conflict still going on?] [Nobody knows for sure. But as messy as the slums may be, no one from them would dare to cause trouble for the city in broad daylight with the Knights watching them. That's why we are all safe here, kid.]

I'm sure that's his catchphrase when he's trying to get himself new customers, but it was still reassuring to hear. With all the things that he knows, maybe he'll finally be the one who will point me in the right direction when it comes to finding the Bandits.

[If the Knights have an eye on the slums, then wouldn't it be better for them to go and kill all the Bandits that are hiding in town? Because I was under the impression that they want to totally annihilate them.] [Oh, they will surely

annihilate them, kiddo. Right after they're done with throwing everyone who's littering behind bars and ridding the city of its rat problem. See? Simplicity itself!]

And the Innkeeper laughed through his nose. So I guess the Knights are unable to do anything of importance when it comes to the Bandit problem, and it's the open secret among the citizens of Veil. Kinda like the police back in Japan, actually.

Part 8

Putting the matter of the usefulness of the Knights aside, if what the Bandits are after is not revenge for being cast out from the city, then wouldn't that mean that I'm going to be targeted as the one who killed the group that attacked the village after all?

The next day, I went to the slums a little earlier, sometime before midnight. The promised day of my payment to the Slave Merchant is almost upon me, so I have to do something about the rest of the money for Roxanne's purchase today.

Once again I went out without borrowing a lantern, and observed my surroundings while blending in with the darkness around me.



It took me some time, but I finally found him near the house in the alley I discovered yesterday: The Lv.9 Bandit who dragged that woman away, the one who was able to speak Brahim. He was leaning against the house's door, probably standing on guard duty, but luckily for me it doesn't look like he's got company. Assuming that we're alone in here, I called out to him.

「Have a minute to spare?」

「Who the fuck are you?」

「No one in particular. And certainly no one suspicious.」

Yeah, that's the most suspicious line in the book. You can't get any more suspicious than that even if you tried.

「The fuck do you want?」

The Bandit lifted the lantern he was holding in one hand to illuminate me. I on the other hand could not see his face at all, since he was wearing a hooded cloak that covered the entirety of his face.

「I want you to tell me something. But not for free of course. I assume you know what this is?」

I reached under my own cloak and produced the Bandit Bandana from under it.

「This is...!」

「Tell me what I want to know, and I'll be willing to part with it for as little as one gold coin.」

「Just one coin, huh? Alright, what do you want to hear?」

「Tell me about Hugo.」

As I suspected, just showing the Bandit Bandana to this guy loosened his lips immediately. Offering it to him at such a dirt-cheap price was a nice finishing blow on my part as well. After all, if what I learned about the Bandit Bandana

is true, meaning that it amplifies the abilities of whoever is wearing it as long as he or she has one of the criminal Jobs, I'm willing to bet that he would pay every amount of money to get his hands on it, even if I wanted 10,000 or 20,000 Nar for it.

「It would seem that Hugo Boss got killed. (TL Note: the term used here is “Aniki”, a word used to describe a Yakuza of older, or senior rank within the family, and is said as a title of respect from a lower ranking family member to a higher, therefore the word “Boss” is used here instead.)」

「I see, so he's dead, huh? Could you go into more details about that? I'm afraid I didn't hear the full story of how it happened.」

After feigning feeling sorry for the dead Bandit, I asked the one in front of me to continue. So the Hugo who got killed must be the same one that I heard him being mentioned last time in that conversation I have been eavesdropping on. That must be the name of the Bandit Chief whom I have killed during the attack on the village. Since this guy called him Boss then I guess he was either on friendly terms with him or respected him a great deal. If he was a member of one of the factions opposed to the one this Bandit in front of me belonged to then he wouldn't be talking about his death with such sorrowful voice. So in order to get on this guy's good side, let's keep the act of me feeling sorry for his loss a bit more.

「Sounds good to me. I'm keeping the dough in my room, so we're going to continue our talk there. What do you say to that?」

「No objections here.」

I nodded in agreement. The man started walking, and I followed after him as he entered the house. So that really is a Bandit's hideout then? I had my suspicions about it, but I thought it would be too convenient to actually be true. But hey, if life's handing me an easy solution to my current problems then of course I'll take it without a second thought! This is so convenient for me, and worked out better than I expected. As I follow the bandit inside the house, I'm darting left and right with my eyes to check my surroundings and keep my sword arm steady. If I get a good look at this place, I will be able to

add it as one more location I can warp to should the need for that ever arises.

「Wait here for a bit. I'll go get the money.」

「Kay.」

The man told me to wait as we proceeded down the hallway. We stopped in front of the door at the very end when he told me to wait outside. He then opened the door and entered inside. Before he closed the door behind him, the light of his lantern illuminated the inside of the room just enough so that I could also have a good look at it. The more spots for me to warp to in case of an emergency, the better.

「Sorry about that. That was the leader's room. Today's my turn to keep watch, so I also have to check up on him every once in a while. Good thing that he's a super heavy sleeper. He also knew Hugo Boss, you know? Want to greet him later?」

He told me when he came back to me. The faction he belongs to really must not be a hostile one.

「That would be nice.」

After that, I followed the Bandit without saying anything. Arriving in one of the other rooms, the Bandit laid down the lantern and looked back at me. His lantern was shaped like a square without a lid. When I peeked at it from above, I could see the small flame as it flickered about. I guess this has to be this guy's room. Other than a simple bed there was pretty much nothing else in here. Now this is a one bleak room. Compared to this one, even my room back at the inn has more things in it.

「Before I give you the money, I want to confirm that this is really a Bandit Bandana and not some kinda fake. You don't mind that, do you?」

「Sure. Just a second.」

I reached under my cloak to take the Bandit Bandana out...

「Kuh...!」

Suddenly, the guy swung his fist towards me! I dodged the blow at the last possible moment, but as a result, the Scimitar I was carrying on my waistbelt was now being held by the Bandit. He must've snatched it away from me when I was busy avoiding his punch.

「That Hugo really was a moron. I assume you know about the turf war that happened some time ago, right? The one who was supposed to emerge victorious from it was supposed to be him, so my faction joined forces with another to get rid of that pest! We only wanted him out of the city so that he wouldn't get in our way anymore, but imagine my surprise when I heard that he tried to raid some random village and failed, actually getting offed in the process! I swear, I thought I was going to laugh my balls of when I heard that!」

「I see.」

「That I'm going to get my hands on the Bandit Bandana, I will become a force to be reckoned with! But I'm not just going to stop at taking control of the slums, oh no! My ambitions are bigger than that! Much, much bigger! It's no use trying to escape, kid. Nobody else is here beside us, nobody saw us coming in here, and nobody is going to come to your rescue. Now, hand over the Bandit Bandana and don't try to do anything stupid, or else.」

Now that he mentions it, I really haven't seen anyone else since we entered the house.

What this guy said just now matched with my own information. I also think it is safe to assume that his aim was to steal the Bandit Bandana from me this entire time. That is why he has brought me here to this secluded place away from the eyes of other people. He can rob me of my item here and then kill me, and no one would ever noticed that anything happened here at all. He probably didn't even bring any money for that little act of his. But if he thinks he's got me cornered, than boy do I have news for him!

Part 9

「Well, I thought you might try to pull something like that off since you kept glancing at my waist as if you knew that I am carrying a weapon there.」

「Oh really? And how is that going to help you now that you don't have any weapon on you? Or are you saying that you're going to fight me bare-handed?」

「I'm not that suicidal yet. I'll give you the Bandit Bandana.」

I placed my right hand under the mantle again in search of the Bandit Bandana while hiding my left hand behind my waist in such a way that he wouldn't notice. As far as this guy is concerned, I'm just rummaging through my belongings in search of the item he wanted. Good, let the poor dimwit think that, because unbeknownst to him, I do have another weapon on me, I just don't have it equipped yet.

Keeping the Bandit Bandana in my right hand, I showed it to the Bandit who reached out for it. But before he could claim his prize, I threw the Bandana into the lantern's flame.

「WHAT THE FUCK DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?!」

And he rushed towards the lantern to try and salvage the Bandit Bandana before the flames consumed it. That was his final mistake.

「.....! Gh...aaaaaa....」

He didn't even realize what was going on until he looked at his own chest,

out of which the Durandal's blade was now protruding. That's right, when he was overcome with panic at the prospect of losing the Bandit Bandana and showed his back to me, I used that moment to summon Durandal into my left hand and stab him in the back. I wasn't putting much attention to where I was stabbing him, but I think I either got him straight through the heart, or somewhere around it. I killed him when there was no one around to witness it, just like he wanted to do with me. Turns out that we both had the same idea in our minds.

Soiled with his own blood, the Bandit's body fell to the ground with a silent *thud*. Bandit Bandana was also consumed by the flames, but I didn't consider that to be that much of a loss. I wasn't going to wear it myself because of the stigma it would have inevitably brought down on me, and selling it at a high price would be extremely difficult too. But I gotta say, using it as Bait to upset this guy so much that he would drop down his guard was a brilliant idea on my side. I was worried that this little provocation might fail, but apparently the Bandit Bandana is of such a high value to the criminals that they are willing to risk their goddamn lives to get their hands on it. And speaking of hands, I picked up the Scimitar that the dead Bandit dropped and cut off his left hand with it. Next, I wrapped a piece of the bedsheet around the wound to stop it from bleeding and then placed the Bandit's body in the bed and covered it with the sheets. Now it's looking like he's just sleeping, so that should delay the discovery of his body for at least some time. I waited until the Bandit bandana Burned completely and then put out the lantern's flame. Now I can warp to the room where the big cheese is supposed to be sleeping.

The room was pitch black, making it impossible to see farther than my outstretched hand. There was no light source in my immediate vicinity, and nothing was making any sound. No, wait, actually, I do hear something if I listen calmly. It's the sound of the breathing of someone who is asleep. Someone is here with me after all! I used Identify to carefully apprise my surroundings. Man, I am thankful to whoever it was who designed the Identify in such a way that it can be used even without any light around the user.

There was a total of four people in here: Lv.11, Lv.14, Lv.35 and Lv.38

Bandits. A little surprising, but it shouldn't be anything that I wouldn't be able to handle with my Durandal. The levels of the Bandits are not that high, but they should be enough to fetch me a nice prize money after I'll dispose of them. Now, the room itself may be bathed in darkness, but thanks to Identify I also know where the enemies are in relation to my own position. Two of them, Lv.38 and Lv.14 are in the back, and lv.11 and lv.35 are in the front of the room. They are sleeping in two male/female pairs. Oh, la la, looks like somebody was enjoying themselves last night.

Okay, there's no telling when any of them might wake up, so I'll have to move as quietly as possible. Slowly but surely, one foot in front of the other to avoid tripping over them like some kinda idiot.

First, I made my way towards the Lv.35 and Lv.11 pair. I crouched next to their bed and poked them lightly with my fingers to determine if I am at their feet side or head side. Yup, those are their feet. Moving to the other side it is then. When I got to the right side, I confirmed the position of the Bandit's neck and placed Durandal on it. All that is left to do now is to pull the blade towards me as strongly and quietly as possible.

SLIIIIIIIIIT!

The sound of the skin being cut open was so silent that I was the only one who could hear it. The Bandit died without uttering as much as a single word because I cleanly cut all of the arteries in his neck. With hat out of the way, I proceeded to cut off his left hand. I mustn't forget why I'm here. Not to defeat the Bandits, but to claim their Intelligence Cards. With the second wrist in tow I opened the Item Box and placed it in the same slot as the first wrist, and wrapped the body in the sheets. Since this Bandit was Lv.35, I'm bound to get a nice sum of money for his Intelligence Card, I'm sure of it. Now to collect the Card of that other Bandit. And if something unexpected happens, I can always run away with Warp. I moved to the other side of the bed and placed Durandal's blade at the Lv.11 female Bandit's neck. This time I pulled it diagonally upwards.

「Gu.....！」

The female Bandit moaned weakly. Looks like I overdid it this time because I

pushed the hip of the blade further than I have originally intended and misjudged the distance. The second Bandit is dead, but there are still two of them remaining. And with that moan just now, there's no telling if they won't wake up, so I grabbed the third wrist and made my way to the other bed as fast and quietly as possible...

「Ugh... who's there...?」

The other woman's voice echoed throughout the room. Fuck, so she woke up after all! I confirmed her exact position with Identify, and cut off her head with one swing of Durandal. The head fell onto the bed without making any sound, but even so I heard that something was moving hurriedly across the bed. That must be the Lv.38 Bandit attempting to escape. He rolled off the bed and hit the ground pretty hard, but seconds after that I heard the sound of something being picked up and swung around. Looks like my current enemy equipped himself with a Copper Sword. It must have been hidden under the bed. Dude, I understand that you might be confused, but who in their right mind would be grabbing a sword first thing after being awoken?! Were you assuming that you might get attacked in your sleep?! Anyway, this puts me at a disadvantage here. I don't know the exact layout of the room, so the wisest option is to fall back to the corridor where I will have more space to move around. So, I warped there without a second thought and waited outside the door. Just like the room, the corridor was now pitch black. I readied my sword, assumed the stance and braced myself.

Seconds later, the door to the room where the Bandits slept seemed to have opened with a *click* sound. The real question is: what should I do now? If I allow the Lv.38 Bandit to leave the room, he's surely going to try and call for help, assuming that there are still more people in here. If I allow him to do it, I will learn their location, which will in turn allow me to take their Intelligence Cards if their levels will be high enough. But that option might as well backfire against me if the numbers of the enemies will be too great for me to handle by myself. No, that is a risk that I absolutely cannot take. Alright then, I'm offing this guy as soon as he walks out of that door.

Part 10

I waited until the last possible second and thrusted Durandal forward the moment the Bandit's silhouette appeared out of the door. Durandal's blade pierced the guy's chest as if it was made of melted butter instead of flesh and bone. But when it came to getting it out of there, I felt a good amount of resistance before I finally succeeded. The lv.38 Bandit's body hits the ground. I cut off his left wrist and placed the body back in the room. With the Bandit's wrist in tow I went back to the corridor.

I could hear noises coming from the outside. I should have seen it coming that defeating the four Bandits in a not-exactly-stealthy manner is going to attracts unwanted attention sooner rather than later. Perhaps some of the Bandits outside heard the commotion we were making and they were now rushing in to check what has happened? I looked around the corridor with Identify. It showed that there was no more Bandits around in my immediate surroundings. The only thing my Identity shown was the Copper Sword laying on the ground where the Lv.38 Bandit dropped it.

Initially I wanted to have a look around the house in hopes of finding some Bandit treasure, but it looks like doing that might prove to be a tad difficult under the current circumstances, so I just grabbed the last wrist firmly and warped to the safest place I could think of right now where no one would come looking for me: the Labyrinth.

I did it.

That was the first thing that sprung into my mind.

No, it's not like that. No matter what might be the reason behind it, murder

should never be a case for rejoicing. Oh, hell no, I can already feel the effects of using too much MP kicking in. It might not be the same kind of moody trip I had when I used Overwhelming or Warp for the first time, but it's still going to be inconvenient, not that I could do anything about it. After all, I ended up using Warp three times in quick succession: first to move from that Bandit's move to the room where his boss was sleeping, second to get out of that room into the corridor and third to escape from the house in the slums to the Labyrinth here. I did it all so I could finally achieve my goal of getting enough money to buy Roxanne, but even so I felt like crap for killing those Bandits. Good thing that guilt is only induced by my MP dropping too much, because those guys were most certainly the worst scum there was, so dispatching them on a one-way trip to the afterlife should not be all that big of a deal. Okay so now, in order to improve my mental state, let's kill some Needlewoods to regain my lost MP. Michio, you need to remind yourself once again that this is how things are done in this world. This is not modern-day Japan. If you want to see something done, you have to haul ass and do it yourself, whether that something would be killing monsters to improve your mental stability or murdering Bandits to trade their ID's for money. There is no police force here to do your dirty work for you, and law and human rights seem to be more like guidelines than a thing to be upheld at all times.

After killing a bunch of Needlewoods I have regained my confidence and stability. It good that I didn't have to do it longer, because exploring the Labyrinth, even if it was a floor I was fairly familiar with now might not have been a good idea in the mentally impaired state. Before I returned to normal I had some slight difficulties with moving around due to the waves of the anxiety attacks that were constantly washing over me, basically I only fought the ones that tried to stop me from reaching the Labyrinth's exit.

After getting my shit together I walked out of the Labyrinth. I got the Intelligence Cards from the hands that I managed to snatch and threw the remaining left hands and bloodied rags into the nearby bushes, and ditched my bloodied mantle in a separate location. If nobody will see me walking around in clothes that are dirty with blood, then nobody will suspect me of anything, which will in turn allow me to avoid troublesome questions. When I finished disposing of the evidence of my involvement in the battle with the Bandits, I just casually returned to my room at the inn where I washed my

hands and face with warm water, and then lay on the bed after hiding the Scimitar under my pillow as a precautionary measure. At first, I was having trouble with closing my eyes due to adrenaline still rushing through my veins, but eventually I managed to drift off to sleep. And this time, I woke up only after the sun has completely risen. Maybe it was because last night I slept very little before I went to deal with the Bandits, but today I slept better than I expected. I was in high spirits after reminding myself of what I managed to pull off just a few hours ago, but even more than that, I felt relieved.

Right now, in this moment, obtaining Roxanne for myself no longer feels like an impossible dream to achieve. Of course, I cannot be sure of anything until I'll go claim the prize money for the Bandits, but for now I guess I've done all that I could. So if it turns up that after all my efforts I still won't have enough money, I guess I can't be helped anymore. For now, all that I have left to decide is where I am going to redeem those Intelligence Cards. That was what I was thinking about even as I was well on my way to the land of dreams. The specific problem that I was mulling over was if I should go do it at the Knight's outpost here in Veil, or should I go somewhere else with it? Also, I can't help but to wonder how much of a stir my little stunt is going to cause throughout the slums? I guess I just have to wait and see, but if they know what's good for them, they'd better sit quietly. Or maybe they won't make any kinda fuss at all, since murders in the slums are an everyday occurrence, so they might treat it as not that big of a deal.

Still, I've already cashed in some bounties for the Bandits five days ago. If I go claim another prize for myself in such a short amount of time, I will be bound to get some unwanted attention to myself. If I go to other towns, the possibility of that happening could be greatly reduced, but if I go for it, I have no guarantee if I'm not going to get scammed since I don't know if the system of converting bounty to cold hard cash is the same in every city in this world, or if every town has its own separate systems. There is still too much that I don't know. As far as I'm concerned, it might be that a bounty that's valid in one town will not be valid in another, because one town does not care about the problems of another. It is also quite possible that the money may not be paid on the same day the inquiry will be made, and that would be quite a problem since today is the day when I agreed to get the money for Roxanne's purchase to the Slave Merchant.

Another thing that I have to look out for is the unwanted spreading of the information that another group of Bandits has been defeated. I didn't say much when we were at the station to claim the prizes from the attack at the village, but I don't now if Picker-san didn't come back for some additional questioning. It also might be possible that the Knights and the merchants who come to do business in Veil are well acquainted with one another, or maybe they are working with each other behind the scenes? It wouldn't be that strange, since as the only merchant in the village he'd be a perfect source of information on everything that's happening there. But if that was the case, then the more probable scenario would be that the Knights would have alerted the village that they might get attacked, and he'd report back to them right after the attack instead of waiting until his next shopping trip. Or maybe that's because he's actually a double agent, working with both Bandits and the Knights without them knowing?! Nah, now you're just picking at straws here you idiot! There's no way something like that would be true!

What I'm getting so paranoid about is essentially this: will I be questioned again with regards to the circumstances of obtaining those Intelligence Cards? Cause if I bring them to Another town where I'll get to be interviewed by someone who's too inquisitive about the details then it will be rather troublesome for me. And if I told my interviewer that I cannot share any details such as where I defeated the Bandits because they would want to investigate the site that would only make me look distrustful and would induce further questions, like *[If you defeated Bandits in Veil, then why didn't you bring those Intelligence Cards to them?]*, and I wouldn't want that to happen. So considering all of the above, I guess it's going to be the safest for me to claim the prize money from the Knights here in Veil after all.

Part 11

After finishing my breakfast in the morning, I left the inn and made my way to the building opposite of it, the Knight Order guardhouse. After I walked inside, I noticed that the Knight who questioned me before and the beautiful Female Knight were nowhere to be found. Well, what should I do then? I guess it works out for me because it eliminates the possibility of the Knights being extra suspicious of me, but now that I think about it, the whole process would be a lot smoother if I could report to someone who's actually well aware of the situation in the city instead of just some pencil pusher who couldn't give two shits about it. In that respect, being recognizable might be to my advantage in the future, so I better make a mental note of it now so that I won't forget about it.

For the time being, I'll just have a walk at the brothel district to see how's the situation there. According to the information I have gathered the Knights should have a duty rotation around noon, so I'll wait until then and come back to see if any familiar faces showed up.

I walked around the slums for two hours and then some, but from what I saw it does not look to be any different from the usual. Maybe they have yet to find the bodies of the Bandits with their left hands cut off, or maybe the residents of the slums really just don't give a fuck about gang wars happening in their immediate neighborhood? Anyway, if the situation here is stable, then I guess there's no need for me to be here anymore. Enough time should have passed, so let's make my way back to the guardhouse. Waiting turned out to a good decision, because when I came back, I saw a familiar-looking Apprentice Knight behind one of the desks.

「Hello there. Working as hard as ever I see.」

I called out to the Apprentice Knight

「Ah, yes, welcome.」

When I looked at him with Identify, I saw that he is still an Apprentice Knight, but now he was lv.5. Last time I was here he was only Lv.4, so that means that in the last five days he managed to Level Up his Job once.

「May I take a moment or perhaps now is not a good time?」

「Oh no, by all means, please, do have a seat.」

And I did just that.

「So, what can I help you with today?」

「Actually, last night when I was out on the town, I had a run in with some pretty shady guys. I think they might have been Bandits.」

I took out the Intelligence Cards of the Bandits I defeated and handed them over to the apprentice Knight.

「Bandits, you say?」

「Yes. They were the ones who attacked me first so I had no choice but to defend myself. They probably took me for an easy prey since I'm still relatively new to the city, but I managed to turn the tables on them.」

I exclaimed somewhat proudly. That was my plan here: to make myself look like a capable guy who could stand his ground even when faced with the enemies such as Bandits. As to whether or not this plan will work, I guess we shall see, but judging by the fact that the Apprentice Knight smiled faintly when he heard me say that, I think he successfully bought my story. Or at least that's what I want to believe.

「I understand. Can I see your Intelligence Card?」

「Of course. Here you go.」

I placed my left hand in front of the knight. After he confirmed my identity, he said that he's going to run a check on the Cards belonging to the Bandits and told me to wait for a few minutes as he disappeared deeper into the building. And he did so without asking pretty much any questions at all, which is a huge success in and out of itself. Alright, so far, so good. Now let's just wait and see if we can keep it up. Eventually the Apprentice Knight came back with a pouch of coins. The beautiful Female Knight came together with him.

「We've confirmed everything we needed to confirm. The owners of those Intelligence Cards were Bandits without a shadow of a doubt. Two of them had a bounty placed on their heads, so you'll be getting the prize money for getting rid of them.」

Without any further comments he handed me the money pouch, so I took it and left the guardhouse. They didn't even want to hear about the details such as where the battle took place, what happened to the rest of the bodies. It was exactly the same as the last time: confirmation, handing of the money and that's it. I was once again reminded just how horrible the treatment of the outlaws seems to be in this town, and who knows if it's not like that in this entire world? But since I can't do anything to change that (and I don't even know if I'd want to change that) I guess there's no use thinking about it. What I can do now, is to go and count how much of the prize money I have obtained, and be glad that this whole event went much smoother than I have initially expected it to go. I quickly moved to some shaded place and looked inside the pouch. How much gold and silver coins have I got this time?

After confirming that the pouch contained more than seven gold coins, I felt a sense of satisfaction and unconstrained joy surging in my chest. If I add those to the 33 gold and 228 silver coins that are already in my possession, it will be more than enough for me to finally buy Roxanne!

Returning back to the main street, I made my way towards the Slave Merchant's shop with incredibly light steps. These last five days have been filled with nothing but stress, tension and uncertainty, but soon it will be all over. But the closer I got to the shop, the more my heart was being filled with nervousness and anticipation. You cannot feel relax just yet, Michio! There is still one last hurdle for you to jump over. I have to make sure that this whole

transaction is legit, and Alan the Slave Merchant won't just run away with my money after I hand it over to him.

「It's Michio. I'd like to have a word with mister Alan. Could you please get him for me?」

Finally, I arrived at the shop and asked the clerk who opened the door to get Alan-san for me.

「Please wait here. Master Alan will be with you shortly.」

I passed through the room next to the entrance sat in the waiting room. I also summoned Durandal and placed it on my waist. Normally I would have kept it hidden, but in this case, it might be better to present myself with the most expensive looking equipment got so that the Slave Merchant will know that I absolutely mean business, even if I can't exactly tell if Durandal is all that gorgeous-looking. Also, its going to be my countermeasure against any attempts at robbing me of my hard-earned 40,000 Nar. But for the time being, let's try to improve his image of me as much as possible, and maybe I'll get on the list of his best customers, or something along those lines. To that end, maybe I should have worn something a little more extravagant than a simple Leather Armor?

「I'm sorry for the wait, oh most esteemed customer!」

Alan -san has finally come to greet me.

「No worries.」

「Since you've come here, then am I correct in assuming that you have all of the necessary funds?」

「Of course.」

「Then please, come with me.」

「Alright.」

And so, he guided me to the room I have visited twice in the past. This will

be my moment of truth.

Part 12

I sat on the sofa and drank the herbal tea that was brought to me by a female servant who was not Roxanne.

「Please enjoy your drink, dear customer.」

When she left, the Slave Merchant urged me to drink. So I placed the cup at my mouth and pretended to drink the tea. If he wanted to take me out and take my money, the fastest way to do so would be to slip some poison into my drink, so in order to prevent that I'm just not going to drink any of it. I took the backpack off my back and removed the drawstring bag from it. I removed all of my silver coins from it first. All 228 of them.

「I hope you don't mind so many silver coins?」

「Of course not. Such an amount was well within my range of expectations.」

Then I also took out the 40 gold coins.

「This should be enough, right?」

That is all the money that I so desperately collected. I don't know what I'll do if it still ends up not being enough.

「Most certainly, that's all the money we agreed upon. Dear Roxanne will be here in just a moment, so please wait patiently for her, alright?」

After diligently checking the number of coins, the Slave Merchant placed them all on a table in neatly arranged piles and had another servant take them

away. I'm actually impressed that he managed to count all of them up so fast and that he remained so calm and collected, because what I did was essentially pulling an equivalent of paying a multi-yen bill with 5-yen coins. Worst case scenario, you could even get sued for harassment. While we waited for Roxanne to arrive, I continued to fake-drink my herbal tea.

And then she finally came.

We heard a quiet knocking on the door, so Alan the Slave Merchant stood up to open them for her. She was wearing a simple yellow tunic and the pants of a matching color. She entered the room and timidly hid behind the Slave Merchant. Aww, that's so cute, but it's alright. I'm not going to do anything to you, so there's no need for you to hide. Then she stretched her neck and looked at me shyly from behind Alan-san's back. Ahh, her face is still beautiful. She is a beautiful girl through and through! I was afraid that the last time I saw her I might have beautified her in my mind due to how horny I was, but thankfully that was not the case at all! If anything, the real thing was even more beautiful than I remembered!

「I'm sorry for making you wait. Thank you for purchasing me. I will be in your care from now on.」

Roxanne looks at me, but when our eyes met, she immediately averted them back. Her dog ears also shook due to the motion she did with her head. Those ears are so uber cute! I want to touch them! I want to pet them! She could be a little less shy, but I guess there will come a time for us to work on that. I also don't think I did anything she should be thanking me for, but then again, that might be just common courtesy, so it would be best to respond to her in kind.

「Likewise. I hope we will get along together just fine. I'll be looking forward to it.」

「I am looking forward to it as well, but first, allow me to express my heartfelt apologies to you!」

And she bowed her head down low. Why is she doing that? Could it be that she's apologizing to me for the Slave Merchant who wanted to screw me over

by not giving her to me and running away with the money?

「Can you... explain?」

I gently asked her.

「Master, even though I told you I would wait those five days for you, to come buy me, I doubted if you will be able to get all the money needed for that! I thought you will be incapable of doing that, and that you would not come back for me! I beg you to forgive me for my lack of faith in you, and I will understand if you will no longer be willing to have me as your slave!」

Sweet rock'n rolling Jesus on a fish stick girl! If I could, I would have changed your name to Moexanne without a second thought!

「Roxanne my dear, this is all so very touching, but I think our customer is dead-set on going through with the purchase. To that end, let us finalize the deal by signing an official contract. Michio-sama, your Intelligence Card, if you would?」

「Ah, okay.」

「Roxanne, you as well.」

「Y-Yes.」

I walked up to the Slave Merchant and placed my left hand in front of him, and Roxanne did the same after a bit of initial hesitation. So apparently, she doubted if I will ever come back to actually buy her, and that's why she felt the need to apologize to me. Honestly, after hearing how much the Slave Merchant wanted for her, I had every right to do just that: forget about buying her, turn my back on her and never come back to this shop. But how could I have done something as cruel as that after witnessing how beautiful she was?

Slave Merchant placed his own hand in front of ours and casted as spell, after which our Intelligence Cards emerged from our wrists. So not only authority figures, knights and innkeepers can manifest it, but merchants are capable of doing so as well. Then he murmured something that I did not understand.

「And that concludes your contract. Please check your Intelligence Cards to see if everything is in order.」

「Understood.」

Roxanne showed her own Card to me.

Roxanne: Female, 16 years old, Beast Warrior.

Owned by: Kaga Michio

「I see. And with that, the master-slave pack between you has been officially made.」

Roxanne's Intelligence Card now lists me as her owner. So I guess the Slave Merchant wasn't a scammer after all. But I don't regret being distrustful of him. One cannot be too cautious when it comes to the well being of his money after all.

Anyway, since all the formalities have now been completed, I made the best smile I could muster and showed her my own Card.

「Uhm, are you really sure about that?」

Roxanne's beautiful eyes peeked at me when she asked me if I was fine with her inspecting my Intelligence Card.

「If it's you, then I have no problems with it being seen.」

「!!! Yes!」

And she took it in her small, gentle hands. When I glanced at it as she did so, I noticed that it has been rewritten indeed. The contents were now as follows:

Kaga Michio: Male, 17 years old

Job: Explorer, Free Citizen

Owner of: Roxanne

The Job that was displayed as my first one was still the Explorer. But now, it also listed that I am Roxanne's owner.

I can't wait to see what life in this new strange world is going to have in store for us from now on.

⟨To be continued in 『A Harem in the Fantasy World Dungeon Volume 2』⟩

異世界
迷宮で
ハーレムを

2



Shachi Sogano

蘇我捨恥
illustration 四季童子

「尻尾って動かせるのか」
ロクサースの腰が情熱的に揺れた。

Shachi Sogano
蘇我捨恥
illustration 四季童子

異世界迷宮で 尻尾を

②



お湯をすくつてロクサーヌの髪にかける。
指でさきながら、もみ洗つた。
何度もお湯をかける。



現れた! ハードルウッドに
木の魔物が火にまみれた。
おおつ。すくい。さすが魔法だ。



「味わつてもいいかな」



押し倒す代わりに
イヌミミを。ぱふぱふ
して気分を落ち着かせる。
柔らかくて弾力もあつて、いい感じ。・

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Chapter 6: Double

Part 1

Kaga Michio

Levels & Equipment:

Explorer Lv.11

Hero Lv.6

Warrior Lv.9

Swordsmen Lv.8

Equipment:

Durandal

Leather Armor

Sandals

「Now that you have become Roxanne's owner, there are some things that you have to remember, Michio-sama. As the owner, you are obliged to provide for your slave and keep her in good condition at all times by providing her meals, clothing and a place to live, as well as paying the slave owner's tax. If you fail to provide her with her basic needs or treat her in an unreasonably cruel manner without any proper explanation for such unjust treatment, the contract you've made today can be null and void. If you so wish, you can visit my humble shop again should you desire to acquire another slave, or modify the contracts of the ones you already possess, since modification of contracts is also a part of my profession.」

Alan the Slave Merchant flooded me with a barrage of information, but the

plain, emotionless tone of his speech, which was reminiscent of the performance from low-budget American dramas suggested that it was a routine that he must have been through thousands of times already. That has to be a signature statement that he's saying to everyone who buys slaves from him, but it didn't make any kind of impression on me, probably due to how bland its delivery was. To him it was just another sale, even though the merchandise he was selling, slaves, would be considered a highly illegal type of goods back in my own world, and if anyone found out that he was involved in slave trade, he would be thrown behind bars without even the right to remain silent. But no, in this world buying yourself a slave was nothing all that unusual, just like buying yourself another article of clothing or a new piece of furniture.

That's right, I, Kaga Michio have bought myself a slave after, for whatever bizarre reason, I was transported into the world of the game I intended to start playing as an alternative to committing suicide.

From what I was able to gather, this world is just like you any other cookie-cutter fantasy world, magic, dungeons and monsters/demons included. It would seem that for the people like me, called Adventurers, the main source of income (or just a thing to do in general) is to form a Party with other like-minded individuals and conquer the dungeons, which are called Labyrinths in here, but you have to look out when you form a Party, because if you do it with someone whom you do not absolutely trust, then you're risking being robbed of the spoils from the dungeon raids or even being killed in the worst case scenario. But once you'll have yourself a team of trustworthy companions, then you can search the Labyrinths for real, and if you're lucky, you might just land a jackpot and stumble upon a treasure that will allow you to live out the rest of your life comfortably and without any worries about your financial stability.

As for me, I'm way too suspicious of other people to form a Party with them, and that is why I bought myself a slave. That way, I can have a companion whom I know won't ever think about stabbing me in the back (because if the master dies by the slave's hand, the slave dies as well), effectively killing two birds with one stone. And to those of you who think that using another human (or in my case, demi-human) being in such a nefarious way, I have two things

to say: one, no one said that such a practice is not allowed, and two, she is my slave, not yours, therefore I'm the one who gets to call the shots! Besides, what did you expect me to do? Back in Japan I was an ostracized loner my entire life, so I wouldn't have been able to create lasting relationships even if my life depended on it, much less entrust my back to anyone else but myself. Unfortunately, for someone like me who's not especially smart or clever and exploring the Labyrinths is the only way of obtaining money for daily necessities like food and a place to sleep. I mean, technically I could go challenge the Labyrinths on my own because I have the advantage of the game's interface, which allowed be to obtain uber OP Skills and equipment right from the get-go, with me, but if I want to seriously become a full-fledged Adventurer and explore the deepest depths of every Labyrinth, then a backup is going to necessary. That is why I have decided to buy myself a slave.

As a complete outsider, I have no idea what is considered common sense in this world, so I need someone to teach me everything from scratch if I don't want to stand out like a sore thumb everywhere I go. If asked someone randomly, they might think that I'm crazy and give me false information or just shrug the matter off and not tell me anything at all. With a slave, there won't be any such danger, because a slave won't gain anything from deceiving their master. Also...

I glanced sideways where Roxanne, my very own slave stood and swallowed my saliva. She is the most beautiful girl I have ever met in my life, an absolute bombshell of a babe. She totally looks even better than those girls you would meet in those fancy-ass night clubs in Ginza, not that I ever been to one myself mind you. She also has a cute pair of dog ears adorning her smooth chestnut hair, but she's not a dog. When I identified her last time, it showed that her race was a Beastman, and even more specifically, a Wolfkin, pointing to her being a werewolf. But her human ears are also cute. And most importantly, she has a big pair of perky boobies which are perfectly visible even through all the clothes she was wearing. All in all, I have to say that I couldn't have land a better catch for my first slave ever. Right now, all the signs on heaven and earth seem to be telling me that my nights are going to be much more fun than the used to be...

Whoops, that's no good, no good at all! Michio, try to keep your little Durandal in your pants, at least for now! Right now, I need to concentrate on what the Slave Merchant is talking about. It might be a routine for him, but I'm hearing it for the first time ever in my life, so the least I can do is to hear him out from beginning to the end and try to remember as much of it as I possibly can. According to him, I have an obligation to provide Roxanne with food and a place to sleep, but that is the part that does not require any explanation at all, since it's just common sense. Initially I wanted to ask what did he mean by "unjust treatment", but I guess that is a question that I should not ask with Roxanne by my side. It would be a real problem if she misunderstood my intentions and began to fear me because of it. There's also a question of what is going to happen to her if I happened to die prematurely, like, should I make a testament in regards to that or something? But first and foremost, I think I should learn more about the taxes Alan-san mentioned.

「What about that taxes you were speaking of?」

「A poll tax. It is not being paid by the slave himself. Instead, it is being paid by the slave's owner.」

Such was the answer to my question that I have received. Well of course there would be fucking taxes here. I mean, why wouldn't they be? After all, there are only two things which are certain in this world (or at least my old one, but I think the saying can be applied here as well): death and taxes. It's a good thing I heard about it now, otherwise I would have probably ended with tax office on my ass for committing tax fraud, and I absolutely do not want that, no siree!

「Is there anything more you'd like to know about slave related taxes?」

「N-No, thank you. I'm good for now.」

Maybe Roxanne knows something about it, so I'll just ask her about those things later.

「Is that going to be all?」

「Yeah, I'm good to go.」

I nodded to the Slave Merchant.

「Then I hope to see you again in the future.」

After being sent off by Alan-san, it was high time for me to leave the slave shop together with Roxanne. When it comes to personal belongings, all she has with her is a single big case which she is holding in front of herself with both her hands. If possible, I'd like to buy her something nice as a gift to commemorate the beginning of our life together. A small gesture, but before she died, mother once told me that those are precisely the ones that matter the most, and since I am Roxanne's master from now on, I want her to have as comfortable of a life as possible.

Part 2

Roxanne and I continued to walk down the main street amidst the hustle and bustle of the street merchants and the city dwellers who were just passing by. I wanted to openly stare at her, but felt too embarrassed to do so. But I have to admit, when viewed in the full brilliance of the sunlight, her beauty shines through all the more. Her glossy hair, small pink lips, her snow-white skin, literally everything about her is absolutely perfect!

And that chest, oh lawd that chest of hers! How can it be so big yet so shapely at the same time?! Her shirt can barely contain those voluminous bulges! Yup, our nights are certainly going to be quite fun. I'm probably smirking like an idiot now, but I don't care about that. More importantly...

「Isn't it a little heavy? Want me to carry it for you?」

I said, pointing at the case she was carrying. She might be my slave, but she's also a girl, so she has to be at least somewhat uncomfortable carrying something so heavy around. Since I'm a guy, I should do the heavy lifting for her. With my stats, this should be a piece of cake.

「J-Just a little bit, but do not worry master, I can handle it just fine!」

「Aw come on, don't be like that! I asked you myself, so it's fine, really.」

「..... T-Then, I would be very much obliged.」

Roxanne handed her case to me after she wavered for a moment. I grasped its handle with my right hand. Making it easy on Roxanne was the main reason why I wanted to take her luggage off of her, but now that I got my hands on

it, it's going to serve me another purpose. Instead of carrying it in front of me like Roxanne did, I held it over my back in such a way that the case covered the Holy Sword Durandal I was carrying on my back. Now I will be able to do a Character Reset without alerting anyone with a sword suddenly disappearing off my back.

Character Reset is one hell of a convenient function that allows me to redistribute all of my Bonus Points to obtain different Bonus Equipment or Bonus Spells. With the amount of Bonus Points that I got myself while I was creating my character for the first time, I was able to procure myself this baby that now rests on my back, the Holy Sword Durandal, awarded for investing in Bonus Equipment Skill up to Lv.6. Normally I'm keeping it hidden because I don't want to risk anyone seeing it and recognizing how stupidly awesome it is, but I decided to have it on me before I went to the Slave Merchant's shop in order to look more professional, even if just by a little bit. Also, I was going to use it to cut down the Alan-san if he tried to scam me and run away with the money, but since he turned out to be a pretty okay guy there was no need for me to use Durandal at all, and now that my business there is done, I can safely remove it.

「You know, it certainly looked heavier than it actually is.」

「I'm glad to hear it. Uhm, master... if you don't mind, could you... hand my case back to me? I'll be fine carrying it for the rest of the way, so...」

「Sure, if you say so.」

Since she has specifically requested it, I handed the case back to Roxanne without any complaints. We'll be reaching the inn soon enough anyway. At first, I wanted to act like a gentleman and carry it all the way, but then I reminded myself that I do not know all of the customs and common sense of this world. As far as I know, slaves might be expected not only to carry their own luggage, but the one belonging to their master as well. Another reason is that I have another sword in my possession that I could use in case of an emergency. Out of the two of us I am the one armed with a weapon while Roxanne is bare-handed, so if anyone attacked us right now, it would be my job to defend us.

To begin with, the idea that the man should carry a woman's belongings at all times originated in the modern society where there is no need for men to carry swords around with them at all times, but in this world violence in the cities might be an everyday occurrence, as was evident by an incident I witnessed recently where a man was killed in broad daylight in the middle of the street. Truth to be told it happened in the slums, but still...

Having Roxanne carry both of our luggage might be more convenient for me, but on the other hand it would put her at risk of being attacked while she's defenseless instead, so that's all the more of a reason for me to carry an easily accessible weapon on me at all times. Servant carries the belongings while master carries a sword to protect both himself and his servant. Yeah, that sound like it might actually be one of the laws ruling this world.

Returning the case to Roxanne, I opened my own Item Box and took the Scimitar out of it. When she took the handle back from me our fingers touched for a brief moment, causing my heart to beat faster. So that's how it feels to touch a girl's hand, huh? It's soft, smooth, and so incredibly warm. Man, what is going on with me? For some reason I feel like such a kid again. Keep it together man, you have to show Roxanne how manly and dependable you are!

「A-Anyway, for the time being we'll be staying at an inn. It's not that far from here, all we have to do to reach it is to go back to the main street and go along it until we reach the rotary...」

「So, we're going to the vale Pavilion then. Understood.」

I didn't even know that the inn I was staying in for the past few days had such a fancy name, but whatever. I placed the Scimitar on my waist and started walking again. Roxanne was following half a step behind me. I have to admit, being seen with a girl carrying a large case by herself as she followed me was a tad bit embarrassing, or rather it made me feel like a dick.

But I guess Roxanne must be feeling even more nervous than I am now, because, with a few exceptions, she only replies with 「yes」, 「I see」 or 「understood」 to everything that I try to say to her.

「By the way Roxanne, can you read kanji?」

「Kanji? What is that?」

When I tried asking her if she could read, she only looked at me strangely. My God, her face is a marvel to look at no matter how many times I do it. Wait, no, that's not what you should be thinking right now! I just realize that she could not read kanji, because kanji could not be converted into Brahim language.

When I arrived here, the Chief of the village of Somara told me that the language I am speaking with is called Brahim. Even though that was the first time I have ever heard this strange-sounding word, for some reason I could speak it and understand it as if it was my own native tongue. But the written letters were still displayed as kanji for me. They were not converted into Brahim. Since Brahim does not have the concept of kanji, it must have treated them as the element of a foreign language.

「Okay, alright, let's try this one more time. You can read the contents of the Intelligence Cards, right?」

「Y-Yes, I can do that without any issues.」

「And the writing on the Intelligence Cards that you're seeing is written in what language?」

「In Brahim. It's, well... it's because the Intelligence Card interacts directly with the consciousness of whoever is reading it, displaying the information inscribed upon it with the letters of the language that the person who's reading it knows best.」

So that's how it is, huh? I get it now. So, the information on Intelligence Cards are not actually written in kanji, but the game's system is converting the letters written in Brahim into kanji for me, because Japanese is my native tongue. Now this makes me wonder, how would Intelligence Cards look like to someone who was completely illiterate?

「Can you read Brahim?」

「I can, although I learned just a little of it.」

「And what about writing?」

「I can do that as well.」

Okay, so that confirms that Roxanne knows both how to write and read in Brahim.

「To be honest, I cannot read or write in Brahim, so I would like to ask you to teach me how to do it.」

「O-Of course! I don't know if I'll be a good teacher, but I will try to do my best!」

「Thank you. I'll be in your care then.」

Part 3

We went past the Explorer's Guild. Heh, from now on I won't need anyone to be my substitute reader, so suck on that, guild clerks ripping illiterate people off!

[I want to apologize in advance if I'll be of not so much use. If we had met earlier I would have probably learned much more, but there was only so much information I could learn in five days.] [Hm? So you learned Brahim in the Slave Shop throughout those five days I had to get all the necessary money?] [Yes. When I heard you and the shop owner were talking in Brahim, I thought learning it myself might prove beneficial to you, and that's why I decided to learn it myself.]

So he could actually do that much for her, huh? Normally I would say that it was quite nice of him to do something seemingly so selfless, but that was probably one of the strategies to elevate the value of the slaves he's selling. It wasn't an act of goodwill, but a pure business move. After all, a slave who can read and write will always be seen as more competent than the one that does not have those skills, but precisely because of the his/her price can be that much higher.

[The place we'll be staying at is just over there, see?] [Right!]

Since Roxanne has her luggage there's no sense in us doing any detours, so we just headed straight back to the inn. On our way there, I noticed that a surprisingly large amount of guys (some of them even with female companions on their own) were staring at Roxanne with envious eyes when we were passing by them. I know, right, she's a real cutie, there's no doubt about that. Knowing that I have such an eye-catching slave filled me with a sudden sense of superiority. But let' make one thing clear though: I'm fine with others looking at Roxanne, but if anyone of those guys tried to make a

move on her I would have cut the bastard down without a second thought. The only one who's allowed to do any dirty stuff to her is me, her rightful owner, and no one else. And if anyone has any objections to that, they are going to get their assholes really well aquainted with the business end of my Durandal!

We entered the inn, or perhaps I should call it by its proper name: Veil Pavilion, now that I know it, and approached the reception desk.

[I would like to rent a double room this time. You have any of those vacant?]

I said to the Innkeeper.

[We sure have. So, a double room for you this time, huh?]

He replied, eyeing Roxanne with a look that was curious, but not in a malicious or mocking sort of way.

[Right. Also, add dinner for two to it.] [Double room with a dinner for two, that would be 380 Nar, but with your special customer discount it will be 350 Nar per night.] [Coming right up.]

I placed the money, 3 silver coins and 50 copper coins on the table in front of him. I have to say, that 30% Reduced Prices is a really handy Skill, although I still don't fully understand the mechanics behind how it works and the total extend of its limitations. For now the most important thing is that hanks to I can have lodging and meals at 30% cheaper prices, but I wonder what other services can it affect? Oh, and on a side note: 30% Reduced Prices is another one of my Skill that I have set up During that Character Reset I've done on our way here. Just as the name implies, it allows me to buy items and pay for various services 30% cheaper. You know, just a handy little lifehack.

[Okay then, can you show me your Intelligence Cards?]

Oh, so now he wants to check them? Well, I don't really mind, but I don't understand why would he need an additional confirmation when it should be clear that Roxanne will be coming with me since we came here together. Maybe he thought she was actually a prostitute I hired to make my evening

more entertaining? In that case, I wonder what's his reaction is going to be when he'll see that she's my very own slave! I extended my left hand to him, and Roxanne did the same right after me.

[Double room are on the 5th floor. Allow me to guide you there.]

Much to my chargin, the Innkeeper did not comment on our Intelligence Cards in any way. Maybe it is because commenting on thigs like having slaves is actually considered as rude, or maybe it is a straight up intrusion of privacy? Whatever the case may be, I grabbed the keys he handed me and proceeded towards the stairs.

[Your luggage. Gimme.]

I asked Roxanne to hand me her case once more. Now that we are inside an inn where we're safe, there's no need for me to constantly think about defending us from potential attackers, so I can allow myself to me a bit gentlemanly.

[Th-Thank... you.]

Roxanne stuttered a bit and her cheeks flushed, but she followed me closely to the upper floors.

[Before we go any higher, you might want to grab your things from your previous room.] [Oh, right. I completely forgot about that.]

When we reached the 3rd floor we stopped at the room I have been using up until this point, room 311. The Innkeeper unlocked it with his key, and I handed the case back to Roxanne and went inside. I quickly proceeded to pack all of my belongings into the Item Box, leaving the jersey from the closet and a pair of leather shoes from the lockable shelf for last. When I was done, I left the key on the shelf next to the door.

[Alright, that should be all.] [Then let us continue to the 5th floor.]

The Innkeeper locked the room with his own key and we resumed our climb to the 5th floor.

[Want me to take it again?]

I said, pointing at Roxanne's case.

[Thank you, but I'll be fine now.]

If she says she's okay with carrying it the rest of the way, then I have no reason to distrust her words. There are only two floors left for us to go, so she should manage without any issues. On the other hand, I could really use an elevator right now. It's a damn shame that it's way too early for this world to even think about creating those. Climbing to the third floor was not that big of a deal to me, but two additional sets of stairs really started to make a number on my legs. I was beginning to feel as if someone took my kneecaps and capped them with a spiked baseball bat. For a second I thought about going there by using Warp, but then it occurred to me that I have never been to the floors higher than the third, and that it would certainly raise a lot of suspicion if someone who was supposed to be a simple Explorer.

[Fifth floor is where the rooms for two guests are located. The inn's topmost floor is where the special double rooms are located.]

The Innkeeper explained as if he heard the complaints in my mind. To be honest, I couldn't really wrap my head around such reasoning.

[Hmm...]

I could only reply to him in such a way.

[And this is the room the two of you will be staying now.]

He stood in front of the second doors to the right after we arrived at the fifth floor.

[This room, huh?]

I went inside. The room's furniture was kept to the bare minimum here as well; it contained only a large double bed and a desk in the back, and two simple chairs. Is it called a double room because of that bed for two people? Anyway, I placed all of my belongings on the desk. Size-wise, this room

wasn't all that different from the room 311 I stayed in for the last few days, the only difference being that it was a little bigger and didn't have a closet, but that could have well been just my imagination. And then...

[The closet is built into the wall on the right. The shelves below it can be locked, but just like last time, I generally wouldn't advise you to keep any valuables in here. Go on, try opening it yourself.]

Urged by the Innkeeper I walked to the wall to my right, which turned out to be a sliding door. The inside really was just like a closet, and a pretty spacious one at that. So I guess that really makes this room bigger than room 311. After that the Innkeeper gave me the same explanation he did when he brought me to my previous room, handed me the key and left, finally leaving me alone with Roxanne.

Oh, that's right. We're finally alone.

I sat on the bed, which was softer and comfier than the one in the previous room, but when I looked back at Roxanne, she was still standing at the entrance, visibly nervous, and maybe even a little scared.

Hoo boi, here we go.

Part 4

「Come on, why don't you have a sit over here?」

「Oh, r-right!」

Roxanne slowly walks inside the room. I don't know why, but somehow her nervousness is being passed onto me, making my heart race and my palms all damp with sweat. Come on, Michio, think of something to talk about! What are some casual conversation starting topics??!

「Uhm... is that number a five?」

I asked Roxanne while pointing at one of the symbols engraved on the key to the room. I know that the room's number is 517, but I'm so desperate to keep the conversation going that I'm literally willing to try anything, even if it makes me look like an idiot in her eyes.

「Y-Yes, t-that's right.」

「And this here is seven?」

「Yes... that is seven indeed.」

Aaaarggghh, just as I expected, the conversation is not going well at all! I feel like we talked more naturally while we were heading to the inn from the Slave Merchant's shop, but now everything seems to be getting to a standstill, not to mention that Roxanne's uneasiness started rubbing itself on me. But I understand why her current situation might be filling her with fear. After all, she is now completely alone in one room with a guy she barely knows, and there is only one bed in here. As far as she is concerned, I might be planning to push her down and take her by force. Just so we're clear on

this, I absolutely do not intend to do that! I might be a garbage human being, but I'm not a rapist!

「So, uhm, like... I hope you won't take it the wrong way but... can I... can I touch your ears?」

Feeling like I have nothing left to lose, I made that rather abrupt request. It might have sounded like something totally pulled out of my ass, but I really wanted to try touching her animal ears as a method of taming.... I mean convincing Roxanne that I have no ill intentions towards her. We'll see how she responds, and if she says yes, then maybe that will be a good sign that she will be willing to do some more wild things in the future. Perhaps. Probably. Maybe.

「M-My ears? Y-Yes, of course, I don't mind... as long as you're fine with someone like me....」

FUCK THE HELL YEAH!

「Then please, have a sit here next to me.」

I once again beckon Roxanne to my side in a true Chris Hansen fashion. And remember, everyone, what we're about to do here is nothing indecent. It's just skinship between a master and his servant. That's right, just wholesome skinship, with no lewd ulterior motives behind it! After all, when it comes to interpersonal relationships, skinship is one of the most important methods of deepening the bonds between people. Right now, Roxanne is nervous and filled with anxiety, but if I show her that I am genuinely interested in getting to know her better then I'm sure she will come to accept me and trust me, no matter how long that would have to take. And if I play my cards like, maybe she will really become interested in doing more daring... activities with me, or at least I hope so. But that is a matter for the future. For now, let's focus on the task at hand: deepening our trust by petting her cute dog ears!

Roxanne came to the bed, but instead of sitting next to me she sat on the floor in front of me. Looking at the situation we're now in, it probably would have looked like an intro to a hentai anime for anyone who would watch us from the sidelines. But today is not the day for us to do hentai stuff, only

wholesome bonding. Which is why I have to keep my little Durandal in check. Keep calm little one, your time to shine will come one day. I know it's hard to keep yourself in check with such a first-class beauty right in front of us, and our instincts are telling us to take advantage of this intimate one on one situation, but we have to be rational here. We have to be like the... how did English people called it again? Oh yeah, The Person of Reason, or something along those lines, I don't really care all that much. The bottom line is: I have to keep myself from doing anything indecent to her if I want her to stop being so wary of me. That is the goal that I want to achieve here.

「Uhm, Roxanne?」

「Yes?」

「You can sit right here beside me. You don't have to sit on the floor.」

「Really? It's fine?」

「Yup. So come here. Right here.」

I patted the mattress right beside me in an inviting manner.

「...Okay then.」

Roxanne stood up and sat next to me, on the very edge of the bed, as if she didn't want to take any more space than it was absolutely necessary. Not what I was expecting, but at least she won't be sitting on the floor like an animal. Now that she's so close to me I wanted cuddle to her or straight up hug her, but she can take such an action the wrong way, so I'll better hold on with that for the time being.

I hope that by doing this I'll be able to soothe her anxiety, even if just for a little bit.

「Just... just be gentle... please?」

I swallowed my saliva and silently placed my hand on Roxanne's head. Her face is so beautiful even when viewed from the side, and her hair slide through my fingers like the strands of the finest silk. It is also unbelievably

soft and fluffy, making me want to touch it forever.... Yeah, right, we all know that what I truly want to do now is to just push her down, but I cannot allow that urge to overcome me! I need to keep my will strong and unwavering!

Uwaaaah, this is a great feeling, one that could eliminate all sadness and purify even the evilest of spirits. After thoroughly enjoying the feeling of her hair, I finally tried touching her dog ears. They are large, droopy and even softer than her hair. There is also a certain pleasant thickness to them. They are not hard, and every inch of them is like a quintessence of fluffiness. A fluff incarnate, so to speak.

Oh my God, this is so addicting that it might just become a habit for me! What am I going to do if I won't be able to last a day without touching those fluffy cuties of hers?! Ah, screw it, we'll worry about that later! For now, let's take it up another notch, shall we? At first I only touched her ears with one hand and I tried to be as delicate as possible not to hurt her or make her uncomfortable, but since she's not protesting to any of my caresses thus far, then I think I can try petting her with both of my hands.

「You know Roxanne, ever since I first saw you I thought you were a beautiful girl, but your ears are on a completely different level.」

I allowed myself to be upfront with her. It's true that I think that her beauty is exceptional, but her droopy, cute ears multiply her beauty factor at least ten, no, a hundred times! Roxanne herself is incredibly erotic (especially those boobies of hers) and her ears are cute, and those elements combined result in the birth of the ultimate combo able to melt the heart of every guy: erotically-cute (**TL Note: ero-kawaii in Japanese**)! There's just something calming in them, something that's calm and comforting, yet arousing at the same time.

「I, uhm... thank... you?」

Unable to look me in the eyes after I gave her such a direct compliment, Roxanne's cheeks turn red and her eyes start to wander all over the place, until finally she just casts her gaze down.

So... goddamn... CUTE!!!!

Seeing her as she is now, and after she filled my heart with peace and tranquility, there's no way I could do anything impure to her! I just continue to stroke her ears like an innocent child. It took a few solid minutes, but it looks like she finally stopped being so anxious and relaxed a little. I, on the other hand, still had to give it my all to remain as calm as possible.

Looking at her from the side again, she really didn't look like she disliked what I was doing to her. Or maybe she does, but she's doing her best to accept it? Maybe she also understands that skinship is important in deepening the bonds between a master and servant?

UwU, and what's this? When viewed from the side, her chest looks like its even bigger, and it jiggles up and down with every breath she takes! I want to touch those tasty melons! I want to fondle them! But I can't! Be patient, Michio! Rid yourself of the earthly desires to focus on what you have to do!

「M-Maybe it's not the best time to say this, but... once again, I'll be in your care from now on, Michio-sama.」

「And once again, likewise. I'll be in your care as well, in all sorts of ways.」

Roxanne bowed to me while still having her ears stroked. When she raised her head, I patted it again.

「Those ears of yours are really nice. We should do this more often, if it's fine with you of...」

「Uhm... Michio-sama?」

「Yes, what is it?」

「Can... can I call you my master from now on? Or perhaps you'd prefer some other title?」

....

.....

.....

That's it. I'm done. If there is a God in this world, then let him strike me down right where I sit for I have achieved the ultimate fulfilment!

Part 5

Maybe our skinship was already taking effects, because Roxanne initiated another conversation of her own volition. And she chose a wonderful subject to boot! I was so happy that I wanted to start jumping on the bed with joy, but that would probably scare her, or worse, creeped her out.

「Hmm, let's see... I think master is perfectly fine, so you can call me that if you want.」

「Understood. I shall do just as you wish, master.」

Oh lord. When she called me 「master」 just now, I felt as if something has awakened inside of me. This is bad, this is really bad. I want to hug her! Keep your cool dude, keep your god damn with about you! Calm your pubescent heart filled with raging hormones!

「Anyway, isn't it kinda strange that there is only one bed here even though I asked for a room for two people?」

I tried to keep the conversation going while I still played with Roxanne's ears. No, wait a moment. Is it really okay for me to be starting such a topic?

「Eh? But didn't you ask the Innkeeper for such a room specifically?」

「... Come again?」

Roxanne said something really strange now. Did I really make a request like that? Because I don't think so.

「Did I, really?」

「Yes, you did, master.」

「Are you sure about that?」

「Yes. Without a shadow of a doubt you have asked for a double room for us.」

「Well of course I... oh...」

Oh indeed. Holy fuck, she's right! Now that I think about it, the way I have phrased my request really could have been taken in such a way. I see. So in this world 「double room」 does not mean 「one room with two beds for two people」 but rather 「one room with one bed *for* two people」. If that's the case, then this is really my fault for not properly understanding what I was asking the Innkeeper for, but you know what they say: there are no mistakes in life, only happy accidents. Good job, Mr. Innkeeper, omega good job!

「You really had no idea what you were asking for?」

Now Roxanne was looking at me with visible concern. Well, of course I knew that it was going to be a room with one bed, but I cannot tell her that straight to her face! I need to phrase it in such a way that won't make me look like a total degenerate who knew what he was doing all along and was just feigning ignorance.

「It is exactly as you say, but I have a good reason for it, so let me start with that.」

「Okay, I'm listening, master.」

「I am not from around these parts. I am a traveler who came to this kingdom from a land far, far away to the east that you probably wouldn't believe it if I tried to calculate the exact distance.」

The best thing I can do right now is to tell her half of the truth. But I'm not going to stop touching her ears while I'm at it. Skinship is important after all. I cannot tell her everything because I have no idea if she's going to believe me, and even if she did it could just be an unnecessary burden for her, but I

also don't want to lie to her about everything. That's why I will tell her the most important bits while omitting or changing the ones that are not absolutely necessary for her to know.

「When you say far, far away from here, do you mean even farther away than Cassim?」

「Yes, even farther than that.」

「Is that so? Then your journey here must have taken quite some time indeed.」

Roxanne seemed to be deep in thought as she stroked her chin with her fingers. I don't know what that Cassim place she was talking about is or where it is, but as long as it is very far away from here then that works fine for me. And on a side note, Roxanne looked very charming when she was thinking.

「Also, I am a bit of a country bumpkin, born and raised outside of any big cities, so I'm afraid I don't have that much of a common sense and knowledge, so I would like you to educate me in those matters.」

「Okay, I think I understand so far. As I said before, I will try to help you to the best of my abilities, master.」

「I'll be much obliged, although I have to warn you that my knowledge of what can and cannot be done in this country is so severely lacking that I'm afraid we'll have to start from the very basics.」

「It's alright. I'm sure we'll be able to figure something out.」

Phew, that's a dodged bullet right there. It's good that I managed to convince her, but it doesn't change the fact that not telling her the entire truth didn't sit right with me. However, for now half-truths are a necessity if I want to ensure a smooth sailing for us from now on. So now that we have the issue of my background out of the way, let's start talking some more serious business.

「Also, you might have heard that already, but I am also exploring the

Labyrinth. If possible, I'd like you to help me with my future expeditions as well.]

「Of course. I think I'll be able to be of use to you during battles, so you can leave that to me, master.]

When I mentioned the Labyrinth, Roxanne immediately looks me in the eyes. Is it just me or are her eyes shining with some sort of mysterious light now? And the atmosphere around her has changed drastically. Apparently she must be very confident in her combat abilities. It was reassuring, but also somewhat scary, as if her bestial instincts took her over for just that one brief moment.

I think that's going to be the best moment to stop petting her ears for now. All things considered, I'm glad that she's so confident in her own abilities, because that means I will be getting a fine addition to my Party.

「Can I put my clothes into the closet? I don't want them to get all wrinkled.]

Since our skinship session was over, Roxanne stood up from the bed. For a moment I thought she was going to dash straight to the door to run away.

「Y-Yeah, please, go ahead.]

「Thank you very much.]

Thankfully she just placed the case she brought with herself from the Slave Merchant's shop on the bed and opened it, and took the maid outfit out of it. Isn't that the uniform she was wearing during my first visit to Alan-san's establishment? I wonder is she brought that with her out of sentiment?

Next she took out another maid outfit that we ended up buying on the way here. It was a pretty expensive purchase that cost me 4000 Nar, but I think that it was a good one. Unfortunately, since we were buying only one item, my 30% discount that I obtained by once again resetting my character did not work this time. Also, I think that for it to be effective I have to be the one making the purchase, so I need to keep that in mind in case I'll ever send Roxanne to do some shopping alone.

The effect of my discount works perfectly on the things from this inn, assuming that I'll pay for more than one thing at once, so if I'll take the room for the night coupled with dinner, the overall payment will be cheaper than if I tried to pay for those two things separately. But if I were to get, for example, just a basin of hot water, the discount would not activate. In the same fashion, if Roxanne tried to buy the maid uniform without me around, the discount would not activate as well, even though she's my slave. And speaking of slaves, it was thanks to that Skill that I was able to buy Roxanne at such an affordable price. If I didn't have it on me at the time of visiting Alan-san's shop, I would have never been able to assemble the money for her original price, so I guess that was one hell of a lucky coincidence for me. Or maybe I shouldn't call it coincidence, because I clearly fell for Alan-san's clever business trap. By showing me Roxanne, he stimulated my young and impressionable (**TL Note: in other words, horny**) heart, imprinting the desire of claiming her for myself in it. In that sense, I am guilty of falling for his clever schemes, but I guess it all turned out all right in the end so I have no real reason to complain about anything anymore.

Anyway, let it be a lesson for all of you kiddos out there: You shouldn't be greedy; greed is bad and greedy people end up penniless, homeless and dead. So don't be greedy.

Part 6

Roxanne took her clothes and started putting them into the closet, allowing me to have a splendid look at her curves from the back, since the clothes she is wearing right now are a rather tight fit. Ahh, what a magnificent view it is! I want to hug her from behind, and then proceed to doing more inappropriate things! Yup, that purchase was a good one indeed.

When it comes to the characteristics, I think Roxanne is rather slim for someone with such well endowed chest. She is of the same height as me, but her limbs are also more on the thinner side. Mind you, I'm not complaining about her proportions, but rather to accentuate how feminine she is.

「Huh? Wait a minute... Roxanne, you're not wearing any shoes?」

I was so absorbed with looking at Roxanne's nether regions that I only just now noticed that she was barefoot.

「Ah, yes, that's right.」

She replied as if it was the most natural thing in the world to say and didn't pursue the matter any further. Could it be that slaves not wearing any shoes is another element of the common sense of this land? So she came all this way here from the Slave Merchant's shop without me even noticing that she was barefoot. Heh, some master I am, failing to notice something as basic as that.

「Could you take care of that as well?」

I took my jersey from the desk and handed it to Roxanne.

「Of course, master. As you wish. Oh my, this is...」

「Hm? Something wrong with it?」

「N-No, not at all! It's just that I have never seen a material quite like this one. So elastic, and yet so firm at the same time.」

I'm sorry to let you down, but it is nothing that impressive. Just a cheap article of clothing made of synthetic fibers, probably put together by Chinese or Indian children. But if I remember correctly, according to some people synthetic fibers were created to be a substitute for silk, so I can understand why someone from this world, where there are no such fibers at all would consider it something amazing. Even back in my old world, Nylon is sometimes considered to be more beautiful of a material than silk, or at least that's how the story goes.

Roxanne admired it for a bit longer and then carefully placed it in the closet next to her own clothes. From what I have seen up until now, it doesn't look like she's forcing herself to do anything, nor was she giving off the feeling that she doesn't want to be here. She also showed incredible understanding when she listened to my made-up origin story, even though she could have used the opportunity that my monologuing gave her to escape. Maybe that means that she's willing to give me a chance to see what kind of master I will turn out to be?

Honestly, the fact that I actually managed to buy her and make her mine still feels like a dream to me. So much so that I question if it actually happened in the first place. But she is here, and she even allowed me to pat her head and touch her cute ears. Looking at her behavior up until now, is it okay for me to think that she has fully embraced her position as my slave and acknowledged that I am her master from now on?

I don't know what is going on inside her head, but even if she hates the idea of being the property of someone like me, then at the very least she's making sure not to let those emotions show on her face. The question here is: can I allow myself for a more... direct display of affection towards her? If my guess is correct, she will allow me to do it. But if it's not... we'll cross that bridge when we get there.

I stood behind her and gently hugged her from the back. I have no experience

in those things, so I'm not even sure if I'm doing it properly, but I don't care.

「M-Master?」

「It's okay, I won't do anything more than that. Just think about it as my way of saying "thank you". But if you tell me to stop, then I will stop.」

「W-Well it was rather sudden... but I do not... dislike that.」

She answered in a small voice, making me feel weak in the knees. When I hugged her she obviously tensed up, but now it looks like she relaxed her body ever so slightly... can I take it as a sign that she wouldn't say no if I tried to push her down here and now? Not to mention that I hugged her in such a way that a part of my arm is obviously touching her chest, but so far she didn't say anything about that. She really is more forgiving than I expected... but no, I mustn't take that farther than I already did. Control yourself, and don't let you lust take over. There are still things that have to be done. That's one thing. And the other is that a part of me still feels guilty about buying her, while the other is completely fine with that. To be completely honest, I don't understand it myself. And here I thought that I have already made my peace with the fact that buying slaves is the same as buying clothes or groceries in here, and that there's no need for me to feel guilty because of that.

「Roxanne.」

「Y-Yes, master?」

「I have an order for you.」

I released Roxanne from my hug and presented her with a pair of Sandals, the very same ones that I supposedly "stole" from the barn in Somara village when I was first transported to the world of this game.

「I want you to take these Sandals and wear them. I'm sorry if I'm breaking another custom again, but as long as you're my slave I don't want you to go around barefoot, needlessly hurting your feet.」

「Master, I'm glad that you think this way, but... is it really okay for me to take them?」

「Of course it is. It might not be much, but if you're going to explore Labyrinths together with me, you will need your own equipment as well. May I?」

「Huh? O-Oh, of course!」

Having received Roxanne's permission, I knelt down and slipped the Sandals onto her feet. Even though she's not human, her legs and feet are no different than the ones of the ordinary human girls (says someone who never saw them from this close) with how glossy and smooth they were. Even though she is supposed to be a Wolfkin, that is to say, a member of the species that should have some werewolf-like qualities to their physique, she had not strand of hair or fur on them. I'm just surprised that we are roughly of the same height. Personally, my ideal strike zone are girls who are just a wee bit taller than me, but that is just my personal preference that has nothing to do with my current situation. Roxanne is an overall top-notch beauty so that one shortcoming is being totally offset by her other assets.

「There, all done.」

「Thank you very much.」

「How are they? Not too tight? Maybe walk for a bit to see if everything's okay with them?」

「Thank you for worrying, but that won't be necessary. You see, every piece of equipment is magically enchanted so that it can expand and contract to fit itself to the wearer's body. That's why everything will be fine.」

Roxanne explains while looking down on me, since I was still kneeling at her feet. And since I had no idea that every piece of clothing has such a function, that's another useful piece of information I have obtained. And since she didn't do anything to me when I was putting the Sandals on her feet, I also learned that she's not creeped out by my flimsy attempts at flirting through physical contact. That is more than fine with me, since her legs are so fluffy

and cute to the touch that I could just touch them for an entire day and not be bored with it.

「I see now. So that is one of the features of the equipment here, huh?」

「Yes, that's right.」

Such a feature is quite convenient indeed. Implementing it means that whenever we'll go buy clothes and armor, there won't be any need to order them to be custom made.

「Is this also a part of this country's common sense?」

「Yes. I think that most people do know about this.」

「Then it looks like I will have much more to learn than I have initially thought. I hope you'll show me the ropes, Roxanne.」

「Yes, of course!」

And that was my very first lesson in the common sense of the new world I have found myself in.

Part 7

Looks like I have a pretty long and bumpy road ahead of me if I want to learn all about the laws that govern this place. Learning about the equipment automatically fitting itself to match the wearer might be not that important in the grand scheme of things, but at least it will allow me to avoid some silly misunderstandings. And it's all thanks to Roxanne patiently teaching me about it.

「When it comes to weapons, like swords, which would you prefer? One-handed ones or two-handed ones?」

I got up and asked Roxanne about what type of weapon she would prefer.

「I think I'm leaning more towards one-handed swords, so I'd like to go with that. Is that a problem?」

「Not at all. Here you go.」

I grabbed the Scimitar from the desk and handed it over to Roxanne. Under normal circumstances doing something like that might have been awfully foolish and risky, but judging by her attitude and actions thus far, I concluded that I could hand it over to her without worrying about it too much. Of course, the possibility that she is collaborating with the Slave Merchant in order to kill me and get all of my money and belongings still lingers somewhere in the back of my mind, because let's face it: if Alan-san is the one in charge of making the master-slave contracts, how hard would it be for him to leave some kind of loophole that would allow the slaves he's selling to kill their masters without having to worry about dying themselves?

Should I be more careful around her after all?

If she really is as confident in her battle abilities as she seems to be, then I guess taking me out wouldn't be a problem to her at all, especially since she's have more than her fair share of chances to do so, considering the fact that we share a room and will be sleeping in the same bed. Sooner or later we'll be entering the Labyrinth, so I would have to give her a weapon anyway, so now is a perfect occasion. If I give her the sword now, it could be read as a sign of my trust in her. If she's going to use it to kill me anyway, then maybe she will be considerate enough to at least wait with it until the next morning, after I'll have her take my wretched V-Card away from me... man, I really have to tone down the paranoia. Why am I even worrying about such things now that she showed me that she bears no hostility towards me? Have some more trust in her, me!

「Hmm, it's not in a bad shape, but its maintenance leaves a lot to be desired.」

Roxanne inspected the Scimitar with a serious look on her face.

「Eh? You can tell that just by looking at it?」

「Yes.」

Her eyes are surprisingly sharp. Looks like she'll be able to help me in more ways than just teaching about the common sense of this world, fighting monsters and (possibly) bedtime entertainment.

「Do you have any other pieces of equipment besides this one?」

And that was my very first lesson in the common sense of the new world I have found myself in.

「Of course I do.」

「I see. That's good.」

All in all, her evaluation of the Scimitar I gave her was spot on. I haven't performed any kind of maintenance work on it ever since I bought it.

「Master, from now on I will handle the maintenance of our equipment, but please do be sure to put more attention into the state of your weapons and

armor in the future. It might seem like a trivial thing, but you never know when it might become a decisive factor between our life and death.]

「O-Okay. I'll be sure to remember about that from now on.]

Roxanne leaned towards me and preached on, to which I could only react by submissively leaning back.

「Good. I'm glad that you're so quick to understand, master.]

And she just casually returned to putting her luggage into the closet as if nothing had happened. She also took off the Sandals and handed them over to me.

「Uhm... you don't have to give them back to me. I gave them to you, so feel free to wear them from now on. They're yours. Now, come on here and put them back on, it would be bad if you caught a cold.]

I took the pair of my Leather Shoes, sat back on the bed and once again beckoned Roxanne to join me at my side, after which I put the shoes on and tied the shoelaces. The difference between Sandals and Leather Shoes was clear as the difference between night and day: not only did Leather Shoes provided better defenses to the entire foot, they were also of much better quality. To begin with, I only wore those stolen Sandals because at the moment of being transported to this world I had nothing on my feet and didn't want to go around barefoot in an unfamiliar environment. I don't think we're going to encounter any monsters that target the legs and feet specifically, but it's always better to be safe rather than sorry. Also, I don't think it has to be pointed out, but between the master and the slave, master should always be the one with better/higher quality equipment.

「As you wish.]

「No, not there. Here.]

I once again patted the space next to me, seeing as Roxanne instinctively tried to sit on the floor again. Slightly embarrassed, she covered her mouth with her hand and sat next to me, and wore the Sandals again. They really

have adjusted themselves to the size of her feet in a matter of seconds.

「Alright, now that that's done, I was thinking of doing some shopping since I don't have anything urgent to do at the current moment. Is there any other equipment you would need, Roxanne?」

「If it's not too much to ask, then I think I could really benefit from having a Wooden Shield to complement the Scimitar. Would that be acceptable?」

「A Wooden Shield, got it. Anything else?」

「I think it would be best to get me an armor that matches yours when it comes to quality, master. Nothing too fancy or pricey of course, just enough for it to provide better protection than an ordinary set of plain clothing.」

「Sure thing. Whatever you say.」

And I started another round of petting her cute doggy ears. It was just a short while ago, but now she is not as scared or nervous as she was when he first entered the room. This must undoubtedly be the result of my skinship with her. You see guys? The old words do ring true: every woman will warm up to you if you just touch her in the right places (made up quote, not backed by personal experience).

「And what about things other than weapons or equipment? Do you need anything like that?」

「An oil so I can take care of my hair and ears. You wouldn't happen to have any on you right now, would you?」

「Can't say that I do, sorry.」

「In that case I think a small bottle of olive oil should be enough to last me for some time.」

Olive oil, huh? I wonder if it could be utilized in some kind of “play”...?

「Duly noted.」

「Ah, in order to clean I would also need a rag or cleaning cloth. Do you have some worn-out underwear that could fill that role?」

「Nope. Just the pair I have on me right now and the one over there.」

「Hmm, it still looks new so that won't do.」

Going through the laundry, Roxanne noticed the Pumpkin Pants I bought five days ago and inspected them thoroughly as well. For some inexplicable reason, I felt as if she was examining my own crotch by doing so. Not a pleasant feeling in the slightest.

Oh, and by the way, since today was the day when I was supposed to buy Roxanne, I donned my best clothing available before I headed to the Slave Merchant's shop. All for the sake of looking my absolute best so that he would raise his opinion of me.

「You can go ahead and use them as a cleaning rag, I don't mind in the slightest. What else?」

「A container for holding water, like a bottle.」

Bottled water, huh? I have to admit, I never even thought to bring one of those with me into the Labyrinth excursions. Certainly, if we ever planned on making longer escapades there, having a source of water would be a tremendous benefit. It's not that light to carry around, but its importance would completely justify such a purchase.

「Okay, I'll be sure to buy two water bottles. What's next on the list?」

「A backpack or something similar so I can carry all the necessities with me no matter where we'd go.」

「A backpack, understood.」

「And I think that's about it for the things that I'd need.」

We had this entire conversation while I was playing with Roxanne's ears. I'm honestly afraid that playing with them might become an incurable habit for

me.

「So to sum up: shields, olive oil, washcloths, water bottles, backpack, armor and shoes for you. Something I missed?」

「No, you memorized everything perfectly, master!」

Seven items in total, huh? Looks like we're going to do some bigger shopping.

Part 8

Oh, since we're already at the subject of shopping, I might as well ask about that one thing.

「Do you have soap around these parts?」

It should be fine for me to call the soap “soap”, because I already confirmed that this word exists in the Brahim language.

「Soap, you say? We do have it, but it tends to be quite expensive. For cleaning purposes, it is much more common to use the bran of the Kochi fruit.」

「In other words, it's another nice thing that only the rich can afford, huh? What about sham... you know what, never mind that. We'll just buy that Kochi fruit thingy as well.」

「Of course.」

I bit myself in the tongue before I finished articulating the word shampoo because there is a risk that this particular word might not exist in Brahim, and that would only cause further confusion. So yeah, if this is a world where just your plain-ass soap is considered to be expensive, then I think it is safe to assume that beauty & aesthetics products such as shampoos, rinses, treatments and hair conditioners also do not exist here.

「And what about brushing your teeth? Do you have something for that here as well?」

「We have tuffed toothpicks made from the Sucre Branches. If my memory serves me correctly, they should be sold in every city.」

So instead of toothbrushes they use toothpicks?

「Shields, olive oil, cleaning rags, water bottles, backpacks, armor, shoes, Kochi fruits and tuffed toothpicks. Nine items in total. Let's both make sure not to forget about any of them.」

「Roger!」

I got up from the bed and grabbed my backpack. As much as I want to continue to play with Roxanne's ears (preferably forever), doing something too much is almost as bad as not doing it enough. Right now, we have an errand to do, so let's get it over with quickly. For this little shopping bout, I think a Copper Sword from my Item Box and a backpack with money are all the things I'm going to need.

「Well then, shall we be on our way?」

「Understood!」

Roxanne also stood up and followed after me. Alright, onwards towards our shopping bout!

We left the key at the front desk and left the inn.

The first things we bought were the water bottles, backpacks, a small bottle of olive oil, the Kochi fruits and the toothpicks at the general store, although the bottles could hardly be called as such, since they looked more like goatskins to me, but hell, what do I know? Next item on our agenda, the Kochi fruit bran looked like one of those scented powders sold in sachets that I saw in the beauty shops in the shopping malls in Japan, so presumably I should be able to use them in the very same way, i.e just dump it into the water for it to take effect. The toothpicks were next, and they were dirt cheap, only 1 Nar per each, but that should come as no surprise considering that they were literally just ordinary small branches, similar to those that dropped from Needlewoods. Who knows, maybe some of them were actually manufactured from the Needlewood Branches that I've been bringing to the Adventurer's Guild these past few days? Haha, would be fun if that was the case. After the first round of shopping has been concluded, I took everything we bought,

placed it into the backpack and handed it over to Roxanne.

After buying the toothpicks we went to the shop next door that was selling towels and other cloths where I bought two cleaning rags. Roxanne said that one would be more than enough, but since she's going to be using them to care for our equipment I saw no harm in buying an extra one.

「Since they are also selling socks here, go ahead and pick whichever two you like the most.」

「Is it really okay for me to do so?」

「I don't see why it wouldn't be okay, so go ahead.」

「But I don't know the size of your foot, master.」

Hoo boi, here we go again with a botched attempt at communication.

「No no no, when I said that you can pick two pairs of socks, I didn't mean for me. I want you to pick two pairs for yourself.」

「For me? Really?」

「Yes, it's alright. Believe me, if it won't be alright, you'll be the first person to know that.」

As I continuously nodded, Roxane started to look through the various kinds of socks with an overly serious expression, which made me chuckle in my mind a little. She's wearing Sandals for now so there is no problem with her going barefoot, but it's better for her to have some socks now instead of waiting until she gets some other casual footwear. I'm curious which of them she's going to pick in the end. As for me, I still have my socks from Japan, and they are slightly bigger than my actual foot size, but that is purely because I like them better this way.

「I think I'm going to go with those.」

「You sure?」

The two pairs she chose could only be described as the plainest among the plain.

「Yes. I am positive that I want these two.」

「Okay then. As long as you're fine with them then I have no complaints.」

Then we brought the socks she selected to the shopkeeper to pay for them, placed them in the backpack along with the rest of our stuff and the we finally moved on to the armor shop. There, Roxanne's expression became even more steeper than earlier as she went from shield to shield and examined them, so thoroughly that a part of me thought she was going as the shop owner to test them in practice. I don't know if can call her a devilish customer just yet, but it was clear that she won't accept anything half-assed or subpar. But in this particular case I can at least understand where is she coming from. After all, those shields are going to be our lives insurances in the Labyrinth. If possible, I'd like her to pick the one which has an empty Skill Slot, but how exactly should I go about that? I mean, I could tell her about the Skill Slots, but without the certainty that she could also see them I would have only made a fool out of myself, so I think I will settle for the best sub-option: I'll pick some shields with Skill Slots myself. Fortunately, I was able to find three of them across the entire shop.

「I think those three might be pretty good.」

「Indeed, they seem to be of good enough quality. You have a good intuition, master.」

「You think so?」

「Umu!」

In response to Roxanne's words I nodded as confidently as I could. Truth to be told, if it wasn't for the Skill Slots I would have never picked them up because to me they all look the -frickin'-same.

Roxanne took the shields from me and began to compare them to one another. But seriously now, she's such a beautiful girl and yet she willingly

frowns so much just to make sure that she's going to choose the best possible equipment for us. What is she going to do if she gets wrinkles from it though? Anyway, it doesn't look like I'm going to be of much use to her now, so I better give her some space by heading to the portion of the shop which held various pieces of armor on display.

The most affordable one is, of course, leather armor. Now that I think about it, the Thieves who attacked the village of Somara all wore armors exactly like the one that is now before me. Damn, now a part of me wishes that it didn't sold the armors they left behind when I killed them all. But even if I didn't do that, what good would that made me if I didn't even have an Item Box on me at that time? A shame indeed, but that's in the past and there's no use dwelling on that now. Another thing on display is a Leather Jacket. Hmm, maybe I should go and try this one? Sure, it looks more than a little edgy, but also incredibly cool at the same time. And most importantly, it comes with an empty Skill Slot as well. Price wise it is... more expensive than Leather Armor, but such a purchase might not be a bad one in the slightest, especially if you will think about it in the categories of a long-time investment. Okay, that settles it: I'm going to buy it. But first I'll go to the changing room to try it on.

Part 9

I went towards the gloves section next. Up till now, the possibility that I wasn't taking into consideration was the one where my hands or fingers might get injured or even cut off during a monster attack. If something like that happened to me, I would end up unable to hold up Durandal, meaning that I would become defenseless, and I don't want to test if its HP Absorption Skill can also heal mutilations. That is why I thought that I should also wear something to protect my hands. While we are on the matter oh what I want right now, I want something that is going to make my DEF stat skyrocket, but it needs to be at an affordable price. It wouldn't be worth it if it made me blow all of my hard-earned money on it, don't you agree? And it should also look good, making others look at me with jealous eyes. That being said, price is the most important factor to me right now, and by the look of it, the only category of equipment that has all of the above marks checked out is the Leather brand of equipment.

In the gloves section, there are two available choices: Leather Gloves and Leather Mittens. The difference between the two lies in the fingers: gloves have the spaces for all five fingers properly divided, while a mitten is divided into a thumb part and the rest of the fingers, making it similar to a protective glove used in kendo practice. When it comes to the sheer usability they are probably more or less the same. However, none of those two goes beyond the wrist, all the way to the elbow, covering the entire arm, but since the store does not have anything else besides those two, I just bought one pair of each. I'm sure that both of them will prove useful in different situations, I just have to figure out what those situations will be.

Next I moved to the helmet section. That is the only part left to get since I've already bought myself something for the torso, arms and feet. Just like with everything else, I think I will go with the Leather series, because you know,

consistency. And also, price. But just from a first glance alone I can already tell that it's not going to be something that I would like to wear on my head at all times, because it looks like one of those oversized bicycle helmets worn by the road racers.

「Master, I have finished picking the Wooden Shield. I have ultimately decided to go with this one.」

Roxanne showed up with a Wooden Shield in hand. It was one of those three with the Skill Slots which I have presented to her.

「A question for you: do you have anything against headwear?」

「Not at all. Moreover, it's always better to have something protecting your head if you're going into battle, be it with a monster or a human.」

「I see. Then here you go.」

I placed a Leather Hat on Roxanne's head, and it immediately adjusted itself to the size of her head. That magic is amazing, but the way how it works remains a complete mystery to me. Now it completely covers her doggy ears, hiding them from view. Depending on our situation something like that might be necessary if we wouldn't want to attract too much attention to ourselves, but if I had a say in the matter then I would opt for not hiding Roxanne's cutest characteristic from the rest of the world. They are just too fluffy to be treating them like that!

「Okay that should give me six new Skill Slots.」

I muttered quietly to myself. I took all the items we gathered here and presented them to the shop's owner at the counter.

「Thanks for stopping buy. Do come again!」

We paid for everything, and I placed the items neatly into the Item Box. But when I finished doing that, I noticed that Roxanne was looking at me with some suspicious eyes. When I summoned the Item Box I made sure to turn away from the shopkeeper and to murmur the incantation as quietly as

possible, and it looks like I was successful with that, but apparently Roxanne must have heard each and every word I said perfectly. For now, I've avoided casting any spells, as explaining to her how am I able to do it despite not being a mage would be painful, awkward and needlessly long, but maybe I should tell her about it without hiding anything? Or maybe I should still wait for a bit?

「W-Well, now that the shopping's taken care of, how about we go back?」

「Yes, master.」

Roxanne, however, didn't make any comments on it just yet. Maybe she wanted to wait until we were out of the armor shop to avoid making unnecessary scenes in the public space? But on our way back to the inn, I kept on noticing that she was glancing at me as if she wanted to say something. Oh my fucking God this is so not good! What if she feels really offended by me not telling her about it?!

When we were back in front of the inn, I noticed that there was a clothing store right across the street from the entrance. It had a lot of neatly looking clothes folded and arranged on a display stand. I thought that most of the goods offered by the stores in this world are going to be second-hand quality at best, but a surprising amount of them, including this one, looked like it offered the things that were brand new. But if their quality really is as good as they look, then they are undoubtedly going to be more than a little expensive. Maybe they are classified as a luxury item. One of such items was a black, hooded mantle. Seeing it made me think that maybe I should have bought something like that instead of the leather one I got for myself, because let's face it, if I'm going to fight monsters while wearing the Leather Cloak, it is definitely going to get stained with their blood, and washing it away from it after every single bout in the Labyrinth is undoubtedly going to be a pain in the ass for Roxanne. Ahh, if only I noticed that shop sooner, I would have saved myself the money wasted on the purchase of the Leather Cloak. Just thinking about how much of a vain purchase that was and how hard I had to work to get all that money both in the Labyrinth and by doing the Bounty Hunting is giving me a headache.

「Excuse me, what is that mantle made of and how much does it cost?」

「You mean the cloak over there? It is made of flannel and costs 4000 Nar.」

The shop clerk explains to me. So that's a cloak, not a mantle, huh? And just as I expected, its cost is abnormally high. The number of days I would have to spend in the Labyrinth farming mobs to get that much coin... my headache is only getting stronger. And it's not because I can't afford something like that. It's more about the feeling that I have just taken a fistful on money and thrown it down the sewer.

「You're going to buy it?」

「Yeah, most probably. Just tell me, does it just look cool, or does it also provide good protection from the rain and wind?」

「That it does indeed. It might not look like it, but it is also quite warm, so it's a good choice of clothing even for colder days.」

So that basically covers the protection against all the basic elements no matter the weather.

「Yes, I think I'm going to take it after all.」

If it's going to be so handy, then I think I would've bought it even if it was not available in the black variant.

「Of course. That will be 4000 Nar, please.」

Wait, 4000? Wasn't there supposed to be... oh, right.

「On second thought, lemme grab something else real quick. You want a cloak as well, Right, Roxanne? Oh, who am I kidding, of course you want. Go ahead, choose whichever one you like, and don't forget: you're choosing for yourself, not for me.」

That was a close one. I almost forgot that if I buy only one thing then my 30% discount won't activate, just like when I ordered only hot water back at the inn. So, in order for it to kick in, I just have to buy another thing. I do feel kinda bad though, using Roxanne as a means of getting a discount, but it's for her benefit as well so hey, silver lining.

「Uhm... are you sure it's okay to buy something so expensive for me if it's not absolutely necessary?」

Part 10

「Absolutely. It's my treat, so don't hold yourself back and go a little wild if you want.」

「Is that so? Then... thank you very much, I will be sure to do just that.」

Despite her initial reservations, Roxanne bowed to me thankfully and proceeded to chose a coat for herself. For some reason, this whole situation reminded me of when mother took me with her when she went shopping to all the brand shops in Akasaka and Hiro-o. The details are kinda blurry since I was nothing but a small kid back then, but I vaguely remember them to be some nice-looking shops at the 2nd or 3rd floor of some building, most likely a shopping mall. It also had those big windows where you could see all the cars speeding through the highway outside. It was a particularly shiny day, so the cars would reflect the rays of sunlight, hurting my eyes if I looked at them for too long. Why did I look at them in the first place, you ask? Well, the reason behind that should be obvious, right? Because I was bored out of my ass and I had nothing else to do. In case you didn't know, it's quite difficult for young boys to enjoy such a dull activity as shopping the way their mothers do. I think I also complained a lot, which earned me a slap on the wrist. That was the first-time mother took me with her when she was going shopping, and yet there she was, disciplining me for not enjoying it. Even now, I sometimes wonder what was she planning to accomplish by having me tag along on that day? Was there something more to it, or did she simply wanted to spend some quality time with her child?

That was both the first, and the last time she ever took me with her before she died. Sometimes, when my mood was especially foul, I wondered if there was anything I could have done to make that day more enjoyable for her? And then she died so suddenly that I never got the chance to make it up to her

for that. That was the first out of many cruel pranks that fate would pull on me.

I had the knowledge that women enjoy shopping ever since I was a kid, but I never had the chance to actually put that knowledge to good use. Until today.

Now, thanks to my suggestion to pick whichever cloak she liked the most, Roxanne was going through all of them with a big smile on her face.

Actually, she was so into it that I felt like she is going to go through all the items in the store in a manner of minutes. I mean seriously, the speed at which she is flipping through everything is nothing short of terrifying. She's like, taking the cloak, has a thorough look at it, tries it on, checks if the sleeves are not too long or too short and if the collar and the hem are done properly, puts it back and takes out another cloak, all of that in a matter of seconds. There are no exceptions to that. She even takes into consideration the color of each and every cloak and how it combines with the rest of her clothing. This is one of those situations where even if I wanted to comment on it in any way I wouldn't have been able to find the appropriate words to do so.

The shopkeeper does not say anything and just watches her patiently. I don't know if he's actually enjoying that little spectacle or if he's just not able to hasten the clients even if they're trying something for too long. And besides, in Roxanne's case it looks like asking things like 「Do you need help with something?」 would be an entirely futile endeavour, because she would have most likely replied with 「Thank you, show me everything you've got!」. So, mister shopkeeper? What are you going to do now?

「Ma'am, if I may, I recommend this one here. I have no doubt it would look great on you.」

Ohh, so the absolute madman actually recommended something to her, huh? He's got balls of steel, I'll give him that.

「Uwaaah!」

Hey, what's up with that super girly, overly cute reaction?! Don't tell me...!

「This is it!」

Yup, the cloak that the shopkeeper presented to her seems to be Roxanne's favorite one out of all the ones she looked through so far. And, well, I have to say that this time the guy was spot on. Granted, the one he presented Roxanne with is a little expensive, but I cannot deny the fact that it combines greatly with all of her best features. She looks outstanding, and I mean it in a non-ironic way. My gut feeling is telling me that she's ultimately going to buy that one, but for the time being she returned to flipping through the rest of the cloaks the store had to offer.

As for the shopkeeper, he moved towards the other customers who entered the shop. As far as he is concerned, he secured another purchase, and since it's going to be added to the one I decided to make, it's that much more of a win to him. And as for me, I will just lean against the wall and continue to quietly observe Roxanne's shopping spree. Now that I am older and (supposedly) wiser, I have to make sure not to repeat the blunder I did when I was shopping with mother. So I just have to watch her without complaining and everything should be fine. At least now I can be sure that I won't get bored with just watching, because I have something beautiful to feast my eyes upon. But the true curve ball came upon me at the end, when Roxanne approached me with the cloak she ended up choosing (the one the shopkeeper recommended, as expected) and asked 「What do you think about it, master?」. This question is a taboo topic to somebody like me, who has no fashion sense whatsoever. I desperately tried to find some words that wouldn't sound too forced, but the only one that came to my mind were 「It really suits you... I guess？」. And judging by her happy reaction, at the very least I managed to prevent a tragedy from occurring. I hope so. Man, I really should think about some ways of improving my ability to communicate with the opposite sex. Since Roxanne and I will be inseparable from now on, it might as well turn out that I will be dragged in those kinds of situations and conversations more and more often. Also, it turns out that I was mistaken about one thing: Roxanne wasn't done with the shopping after she saw the cloak the shopkeeper showed her.

At this point, she narrowed her selection down to two possible choices. The candidates were: in her left hand was the shopkeeper's recommended cloak,

and in her right was one of the ones she found at the end of her spree. Both of them were in really similar colors.

「Which of them do you think is better, master?」

She turned to me, expecting to choose one of them for her. I looked at the cloak in her right hand and then at the cloak in her left, and continued to alter my gaze between the two of them for a solid minute. If you asked me for my casual opinion, then my answer would have been 6:4 in favor of the one that the shopkeeper recommended to her. She should just pick that one so that we could be done with it, but what if she actually wants me to pick the other one? If I fail here, if I will make the wrong choice then all the progress I made with Roxanne will be lost! For example, if I tell her to get the cheaper one, I will be 100% done for since that is an all-to-obvious landmine, even though personally I do think that cheaper is better.

Now let me think... the cloak she's keeping on her left arm is the one from the shopkeeper, so that would mean that she kept it because she really liked it. If that is a hint, then the cloak on her left arm is the correct choice here.

When I was a kid I wasn't able to take the hint, but not today. Today, I will definitely make the right choice!

Part 11

「I like this one here better. It has a nice, relaxing, gentle and calm color that suits you better.」

I confidently recommended the cloak on Roxanne's left arm. I also believe that the argument behind my choice was solid and rational. It looks like it would be easy to repair if it was ever torn, and the color scheme makes it really easy on the eyes. I honestly don't know how else I could describe it. To me, it's good because it's not all that eye catching

「You think so? I have to say, it looks like it would be comfortable to wear and easy to sew any eventual tears without ruining the design, but isn't the color a bit too heavy?」

「O-Oh yeah?」

Oh-oh, could it be that the right answer was the cloak on the right arm due to its color?

「But...I guess you're right, master. Now that I look at it, it really is a nice, calming color after all. Alright, I think I've made my final decision. I'll be taking this one.」



「I'm glad you finally made your choice. Is there anything else you want?」

It would seem that the debate over which cloak to buy is now over, and the winner is the one from the left arm. I received the cloak from Roxanne and she puts the other one away.

「No, I don't think I need anything else. Anything more than that would be...!」

So there is something more, huh?

「If there is something else you want to buy then don't hesitate.」

「But...」

「No buts! Today is a special day, so think about it as a way to celebrate.」

I whispered that last part after bringing my face closer to hers. That statement is not wrong. After all, today is the first day of my life together with Roxanne, so I guess you could call it our first anniversary.

「Well, in that case... would you mind if I also bought some underwear for myself?」

「Sure, go right ahead.」

「Thank you. I will!」

I nodded affirmatively and Roxanne went to pick some underwear for herself. And do my eyes deceive me or does female underwear look similar to my pumpkin pants? Unlike in my old world, it would seem that in this world the undergarments of both males and females are not all that different. Both of them lack any kind of sex appeal at all. Then again, I might be thinking that they have no sex appeal whatsoever because I'm looking at them with the eyes of a human from 21st century?

Contrary to how she was openly checking all the cloaks in the store, Roxanne was a lot more secretive about going through the various kinds of underwear. Maybe she didn't want me to see them because she was embarrassed? And on

a side note, the case she brought with herself when we were leaving the Slave Merchant's shop contained only her main set of clothing. Other than that, she seemed to have very few personal belongings. Did she have a spare pair of underwear with her? Or maybe she id not, and that's why she wanted to buy it now?

「You sure you want to buy only one pair?」

I asked Roxanne, who finished making her choice relatively quickly this time.

「Eh? Uhm, I, b-but...」

「Just go ahead and buy some more. Hell, maybe I'll take some spare ones for myself as well. Excuse me, we would like to add four pairs of underwear to our previous purchase!」

I told the shopkeeper.

「T-Thank you very much, master.」

「Understood. Four pairs of underwear plus two cloaks then. That's going to be... 5656 Nar in total.」

This time the 30% Price Reduction worked like a charm. Total success! I paid the money to the shopkeeper, gave Roxanne her cloak, and placed the rest of the items inside the backpack.

「So, ready to head back to the inn now?」

「Yes!」

When we walked out of the clothing store, I noticed that the day was slowly coming to a close. It's not that big of a deal, but we have spent as surprising amount of time in there. Maybe I should mentally prepare myself for such excursions from now on? Even if I had to, I guess I know that I will be able to endure it now, because watching Roxanne is never going to bore me.

「Yo, welcome back.」

When we returned to the Veil Pavilion, I quickly grabbed the key to our room from the front desk.

「I have some stuff to drop at the room, but in the meantime, I'd like to request a dinner for two people. After that, please prepare two basins of hot water and two lanterns.」

「A meal, two basins of hot water and two lanterns. 35 Nar please.」

Leaving the money on the counter, we made our way back to the 5th floor and our room. As soon as we got back, Roxanne placed the coat I bought for her in the closet with the utmost care.

「Thank you for today, master.」

「Don't mention it.」

I'm grateful to her as well, because if it wasn't for her I would have probably not been as interested in that shopping bout as I ultimately was. I approached Roxanne as she was taking my coat out of the backpack, and stroked her head and ears. This really has become my habit, and who knows if I'm not going to get addicted to it? But it doesn't look like she dislikes it either. She doesn't look scared by it anymore.

Heaving a satisfied sigh, I left her side and plumped down on the bed, but Roxanne didn't join me, standing next to it instead.

「You don't have to stand around like that. Come on, sit down.」

「Yes.」

「No Roxanne, not on the floor, we've been through this already.」

「Of course, as you wish, master.」

She tried to sit on the floor once again. This is really something that we'll have to work on if I want to make her stop doing it. Without saying anything I just patted the spot next to me, and understanding what I meant by it, she replied with a short 「Yes」 and sat next to me, but she moved somewhat

slowly and hesitantly to an almost frightening degree. Is she being wary because she realizes that I might try to push her down if she sits on the bed? And yet she still fulfilled my order.

「Roxanne, I want you to remember one thing. You might be my slave, but that does not mean that you have to sit on the floor.」

「But... but the bed is yours, master, so...」

「It is yours as well. And I want you to sleep in it.」

「Ah....!」

Part 12

I hugged her and declared that as confidently as I could. And don't worry, I realized how that sounded.

「I... I'm thankful for your kindness, master, but there's really no need for you to go so far for me. I can sleep on the floor just fine.」

Roxanne murmured quietly.

Make her sleep on the floor? What kind of an evil degenerate would I have to be to do something like that?!

Inside of me, something seems to be screaming 「Keep it up! Keep going and she'll be yours!」, but I'm doing my best to ignore that inner voice. I've already decided not to rush with those things so that I won't break this fragile bond of trust that has been forming between us. This is going to make the eventual payoff that much sweeter.

「Is that what's considered normal here? To have slaves sleep on the floor?」

「I heard that is how most masters treat their slaves, so that is probably the case.」

「Well, not in mine. The floor is too hard cold and uncomfortable for someone as delicate as you, so you're going to sleep in this bed with me where it's nice, warm and soft.」

「Y-Yes! Thank you for your endless kindness towards me, master.」

「Good.」

I wrapped my arms firmly around her and enjoyed the hug. Her body is so soft, and yet so elastic. She is just as tall as I am, but so thin and small at the same time. It's complete mystery to me how the girl's bodies can be so delicate. Roxanne still does not move away from me, staying firmly in place, not doing anything to avoid the hug, proving that she does not dislike it. Looks like she really accepted me as her master, and herself as someone who belongs to me.

The bulges of her chest touch my arms. T-This is so tempting! So irresistible! If she keeps doing that to me, then...

「We still have some time before the day draws to a close, so I can use it to perform the maintenance of our equipment. Can you hand it over to me, master?」

Roxanne's remark and request cleared my mind and changed my mood in an instant.

「Do you really think that a maintenance is necessary? I mean, we just bought all those things today, so...」

「That won't do!」

Roxanne raised her voice and glared at me with sharp eyes. Her current gaze was filled with a strong sense of conviction.

「Eh?」

「When you enter the Labyrinth, your life or death will depend on the state of your equipment. If you want to ensure that you will always come home safely, you have to take care of it whenever you can.」

「I... I guess you're right.」

I know that what she's saying is true and that we'll only benefit from it, but what I still do not understand is why is she being so insistent about it? When I released her from my arms, Roxanne stood up and took the small bottle of olive oil in her hands.

「So, uhm...」

She turned around and bowed her head to me. The atmosphere around her went back to the usual, gentle one.

「Yes? What is it?」

「Since I bought myself new underwear, I will make the ones I am wearing now into cleaning clothes I will perform the equipment maintenance with.」

「Okay, I see nothing wrong with it.」

「In the meantime, you should go eat dinner, master.」

「Wouldn't it be better if you could take care of it first so we could go eat together?」

By the time we will finish eating, the sun will most likely set, and if she wants to take care of the equipment maintenance, then it would be better to take care of it while it's still bright outside. The lanterns might help remedy that, but their light will only be enough to keep the room lit for one hour at best. If possible, I would like to enjoy it while there is still light outside.

「But...」

「It's okay. We can go eat together, there's nothing wrong with that.」

「Are you certain? The meals here look like they are pretty expensive, so they would be wasted on someone like me. That's why you can go eat the luxury meal yourself, while I will find myself some cheap place to eat on my own...」

Is she just extremely shy or does she not want to eat together with me that badly? Well, be that as it may...

「Nice try, but I have already paid for dinner for two people, remember? It would be a damn shame if it went to waste just like that, don't you think? Or is it that you don't want us to be seen eating together?」

「No, that was not what I wanted to say. I'm sorry if it sounded like that!」

「No worries. I take it we're good then?」

「Yes, we are. Now then, with that said...」

I placed all of my equipment: Copper Sword, Leather Armor and Leather Shoes onto the desk, just as Roxanne requested.

「N-Now, if you'll excuse me.」

She suddenly began to take off her pants. I was a little bewildered at first, but thinking about it, that's perfectly logical. She said she's going to use her old underwear as a cleaning cloth to perform the maintenance on our equipment, then it would stand to reason that she has to take it off first. Even though I have the best seat possible for such a spectacle, I don't know if I should just outright stare or be more tactful about it.

「Ah, my bad. Please, don't mind me.」

I waved my hand lightly and turned my gaze away from her. Truth is, I want to look at her as she changes, but I cannot make it too obvious. Ideally I would like to see her chest, because that would be a soothing sight for my sore eyes, but I probably won't be able to see anything because of her tunic. But in exchange, maybe I will at least get to see her butt? Yeah, right.

Ah, I can see a tail. A tail! Roxanne has turned sideways to me (of course), so I could see her tail. It's made of the same chestnut-colored bushy hair as her hair and ears. Now that I saw that her tail is just as fluffy as the rest of her, I will have to make sure to pet it later.

Roxanne changes her clothes fast. And when I say fast, I mean it like, really fast. I wanted to see if I will be able to catch some more glimpses of her body, but I guess it can't be helped. I guess there's no point in complaining about that.

Sitting on the chair, Roxanne's expression once again changes to a serious one as she began taking care of our equipment by adding a little bit of olive

oil onto the cloth and polishing it.

「If you take care of it like this, you will be able to keep your equipment in good condition at a relatively low cost for as long as you need.」

「So if you won't perform regular maintenance then the equipment's performance is going to drop, is that right?」

「Exactly. And if the user cannot wield his weapons and armor comfortably, it will hinder his overall performance.」

So it's also a matter of personal feelings, huh? Be that as it may, I don't think that Durandal also needs to go through maintenance today. For now it is good to go as it is.

When Roxanne finished cleaning our equipment, we went down to the cafeteria and proceeded to select the meals from the menu.

「I'll take the dish #1 and herbal tea. Which one would you like, Roxanne?」

「Uhm, is it really okay for me to choose for myself?」

「Of course. Pick whatever you want to eat the most.」

「Right. In that case, I will also have dish #1 and herbal tea.」

「Understood.」

We made our orders and were guided to our table for two.

「You'll be sitting here, Roxanne.」

「Uhm, are you sure about that? What if...」

「It's fine. Just sit down already.」

I might have sounded really irritated just now, but what was I supposed to say? She has to sit down to eat. I would have been in a whole lot of trouble if people witnessed me eating normally while a girl accompanying me was

standing all the time. When I finally managed to persuade her to sit down, our meals were brought to us shortly after.

「This is... incredibly delicious!」

「Right? It truly is.」

All in all, the food served in this inn proved to be much more delicious than I could have ever imagine. I'm glad to see that even in such a world there is still food that I can enjoy. And seeing how Roxanne is munching on her own portion with such vigor that her ears shake left and right, she must think so as well.

Part 13

When we finished eating and thanked for the meal, we have returned straight to our room.

「It was a really good meal. Thank you.」

Thanking me for treating her was the first thing Roxanne did when we got back upstairs.

「I'm glad you enjoyed it.」

「Yes, I found it very enjoyable. And to add to that, you even allowed me to eat at the same table as you when I really would have been fine just eating on the floor.」

Sigh, and she's still going on about that?

「Have you seen anyone else eating off the floor? Exactly. If you did that, you would have caused a scandal for sure.」

「Maybe so, but I thought that this is the kind of place that won't allow slaves to eat at the same table as their masters.」

Ah, so that is how you have interpreted this?

While I was having difficulties with finding the right words to retort to this, the Innkeeper came with hot water and lit lanterns. While we were having dinner, the sun has indeed set already. He placed the items we ordered next to the door and them immediately left.

「Now that we have hot water with us, can I ask you to wash my back for me,

Roxanne?」

Since we are sharing this room and there are two of us, we agreed that when it comes to the matters such as washing ourselves we would help each other out, and now the time for that has come.

Okay, you can do this, me. Just keep calm and keep your wits about you at all times. If you're going to get all flustered now, then you will embarrass Roxanne as well. First, I undress myself. Fully, pants and underwear included. What is there to be embarrassed about anyway? All human beings are born naked after all, making us all equal in that one regard. I place the lantern on the desk, and sat next to the basin with hot water.

「Alright master, here I go.」

Roxanne then proceeded to wipe my naked back from behind. Okay, so far so good, I'm successfully managing to keep my head cool and composed. When she was done with wiping my back, she dowsed the towel in water, squeezed it, dowsed it again and passed it onto me so that I could wipe myself from the front.

「By the way, can we use this?」

I grabbed the Kochi fruit sachet that we bought earlier and showed it to Roxanne. In order to do that I had to turn around, so I ended up showing my little Durandal to her, a fact that I have realized all too late. But something like that shouldn't be that much of a problem, right? Right?!

「Hmm, I do not think that people use it to wash their bodies all that much.」

I thought she was going to be at least a little embarrassed, but she didn't react in any exaggerated way. This lack of reaction makes me feel really lonely and defeated. My little dude is in perfectly good condition! I know that better than anyone, because when I went to the toilet earlier I was able to bust a nut without any problems!

「I thought as much, but still, that's kind of a letdown.」

「I don't know how it is back where you come from, but in this kingdom people usually just scrub themselves with wet towels, and that's pretty much it.」

「What about taking baths then? You're not taking those here?」

The word bath got translated into Brahim without any problems.

「Only aristocrats are able to afford those.」

So that pretty much confirms that bats are something of a high-end luxury in here. Both the Somara village's mayor's house and this inn didn't have one, so that pretty much confirms it.

「Right. And how do you use those?」

「Like that, and you have to remember that they have to be kept away from the water.」

She showed me how to use them, but it looks like I'll still have to rinse my mouth with water afterwards. I'll have to make sure to do it later.

After I finished cleaning myself, I put on my Pumpkin Pants.

「Okay, you're next, Roxanne.」

I tried to be as calm as possible when saying that, as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. And thinking about it, it actually is. Just like she helped me clean myself up, now it is my time to return the favor.

「Y-Yes.」

Roxanne squeezed out a quiet response, and began to take off her tunic. She turned around and squatted in front of the basin.

「Okay, I'm ready.」

I turned towards her, but from here I couldn't really see anything, so I just doused the towel in water and squeezed it again.

「Uhm... I am a Wolfkin, so some parts of my body might be a bit hairy. I apologize for that.」

「Oh really?」

She might be claiming such things, but I'm sure it won't be that bad. Finally, she undid the last button of her tunic, and with that action her marvelous body has been set free, looking all the more beautiful in the weak light of the lantern. Her breasts violently erupted from the gap between her clothes and her arms as if they were a pair of cannonballs. It was so erotic that it was almost unfair. They look so big and soft, to the point where my fingers would probably sunk right into them if I tried to squeeze them. It feels like they are no longer simple breasts, but rather a pair of lethal weapons of mass destruction that would annihilate any male who would look at them with the ultimate happiness.

「The truth is, my back...」

Noticing my line of sight, Roxanne covered herself up and turned her back towards me. What a shame. If you ask me she didn't have to hide them, especially since they are so big that even by turning away she was unable to hide them completely, but if she wants to do this then I shouldn't forcibly stop her. All I can do now is to approach her with a towel in hand and clean her up the same way she cleaned me.

Looking at Roxanne's back, it was covered with hair all the way to her waist. Or maybe it was not hair, but fur? And I don't mean it in a 「her hair were so long that it reached her waist」 sense, since it was too short for that. The best way to describe it would probably be that the entirety of her back was covered with a light-brown, few milimeters long fur. Kinda like a crew cut hairstyle, but except its even shorter than that.

Next, Roxanne removed her pants and underwear, setting the tail to hang freely between her legs. One thing particularly worthy of noting is the fact that only her tail was covered with fur, while the rest, by which I mean her butt, was deliciously smooth. I stroked Roxanne's back hair with my right hand which was free from holding the towel. I thought the fur is going to be more on the rough side, but it was surprisingly supple and soft, and very

pleasant to the touch.

「It's so bushy and soft, I really like it.」

「T-Thank you very much.」

I gently wipe her back from top to bottom, tracing my movements along her bodyline.

「No problem. The pleasure is all mine.」

「Uhm, well...don't you feel inconvenient, having to wash a body like mine?」

「Why would I be? Besides, it's faster that way.」

That is only half of the reason why I'm doing this. With the position I am currently in, I can see the two mountains of her chest from above. Two sacred summits, waiting to be claimed by the brave explorer. Roxanne wiped the front of her body herself, but with the movements that action required, she is not able to cover herself up all the time, allowing me to sneak a more direct glance here and there.

Hers are truly the breasts worthy of worship. I want to worship them... no, I will worship them from now on! Praise be to Roxanne! Viva la Roxanne!
Amen!

Part 14

No, in this case, something as simple as mere worship might not be enough! I have to pay the appropriate tribute to them! And in order to do that, I hugged her from behind again. May the radiance of her holy bulges bless me!

「Ah...」

「What?」

「N-No, it's nothing...」

Roxanne tried to say something, but I promptly silenced her. Then I proceeded to use my hands to clean her holy peaks of sacredness, and the springy and elastic response that I got from them was simply marvelous. This is wonderful! While polishing their every inch very carefully, I made sure to savor every second of their heavy sensation weighting down on the palms of my hands. I wash them both gently, attentively and ever so carefully in order not to miss any nook and cranny. Oh my God, they are so incredibly soft that this is unreal! I can feel their fluffiness even through the fabric of the wet towel. When I grabbed her gentle hills more firmly, my fingers really started to sink into them. Normally I would have thought that this is all a dream, but this is all too real, and it's happening to me right in this moment! That is how big and soft they actually are, to the point that a man's hand is unable to contain them in their entirety. Now I switched to doing rolling motions with my entire hands, which finally allowed me to get a solid grasp of them in their elastic entirety. They have such an overwhelming shape and weight. When I tried to slowly push my fingers into them, they molded under my touch only to bounce back to how they originally were, as if they were trying to assert their existence.

「They are absolutely the best.」

Obviously the whole process took much longer than if Roxanne wiped herself up, but she didn't protest, so she mustn't think that it was too big of a problem. And even if she voiced some complaints, I don't know if I would be able to heed them, in all honesty. I have gone too far down this bunny trail to come back.

After spending a substantial amount of time making sure that Roxanne's breast were as clean as they could be, I finally released her holy mountains from my grasp.

「So, like... can I also wipe your tail for you?」

「Pardon? N-No, there's no need for you to do that, master. I can take care of that on my own.」

「Aww, don't be like that, what's the harm?」

I move to the next step in an attempt to touch her some more. Yes, I am now going to wash Roxanne's tail for her! The hair it is being composed of are bristly, and contrary to most of the normal dogs it looks like it doesn't have a core, which makes it similar to the tip of the painting brush. I have already established that the feeling of Roxanne's droopy dog ears is irresistible, but the fluffy texture of her tail, which is composed of nothing but soft hair is also quite addicting.

「T-Thank you very much then.」

「So, can you tell me how does your tail work, exactly? Can you move it around freely?」

「Moving it around is actually somewhat difficult. Unless I do this...」

Roxanne shook her hips, and in response the tail between her legs also swung left and right. No, it's not the tail itself that's moving. She's clearly making it move by shaking her hips. She continued her demonstration by moving her waist passionately. Depending on how you look at it, it can be viewed as incredibly erotic, and that's the option that I'm going with. I feel like I just witnessed something truly nice.

「Hmm, I see, so that's how it works.」

「Well, also... when I'm happy, or in a really good mood, it happens to twitch on its own.」

「Oh, is that so? Well then, I guess now it's my job to make it twitch as much as possible, huh?」

I whispered that into Roxanne's ears. Not the doggy ones, but rather the normal ones at the side of her head.

「Y-Yes. T-Thank you for being so considerate of me.」

Ah, I saw that! Your tail just shook slightly!

Next, I took care of cleaning those perfect hips and feet of hers. Knowing what makes her happy is going to be quite a useful perk to have.

「Now, how about trying out a little experiment?」

「An... experiment? What kind of experiment?」

「You'll see. For now, just lay on the bed facing upwards, but with your head hanging off the edge of the bed please.」

I instructed Roxanne. This little experiment that I want to perform is to see if it'll be possible to wash your hair. It's something that I really wanted to try, because I don't even need a mirror to know that my hair is probably one giant, sticky, greasy mess. After all, it has been more than five days since I arrived in this world, and throughout the span of those five days I haven't washed my head once, and there is only so much that you can do by simply rubbing your hair with a simple wet towel. If I asked Roxanne about it she would have probably told me that this is just another part of the common sense of this kingdom, and perhaps this entire world, but even for someone like me five days without washing my hair is where I draw the line.

I lifted the basin off the ground and placed it on the chair. I hope the fact that the basin is a little large won't be a problem here.

「Is this okay?」

「Yes, now keep it up just like this, and try putting your head just above the basin.」

「Okay.」

Heeding my commands, Roxanne places her head right where I told her to. I thought that such a position might be harmful for her back, but apparently she was fine with it. The only complaint that I have is that when she got on the bed, she covered herself up with a blanket instead of staying naked. What a shame. I mean, it's good that she still feels embarrassed, but with how thin the blanket is, it doesn't really cover anything all that much, so she won't cover her bulges or body line no matter how hard she tried.

「Are you all right? You don't have to force yourself if you're feeling uncomfortable, you know?」

「It's okay. I'm fine.」

With a green light to go ahead, I scooped some of the hot water and applied it to Roxanne's rich hair, rinsing them thoroughly with my fingers, after which I hot water on them over and over again. Since this world does not have any shampoos, this is the best thing I can do. Then I carefully proceeded to wash her doggy ears as well. Dogs have very delicate ears, so I have to make sure to be as delicate as possible in order not to hurt her by accident.

「Doesn't your neck hurt?」

「No, not at all.」

「Then raise your head a little.」

After washing her hair, I told her to raise her head as I held the non-wet towel beneath her, which I then used to dry her hair until all the moisture was gone from them.

「Thank you very much.」

「No problem. I enjoyed washing you quite a bit, so if you'll ever want me give you a hand with it again just say the word.」

「Understood. Do you want me to wash your head as well, master?」

「Please do.」

Part 15

When I finished washing Roxanne's hair, I placed the towel on her shoulders and switched places with her.

「Maybe we should use the other basin for it?」

「There's no need for that, it's fine just like that. I will use the other one to wash our clothes and underwear.」

I just lay on the bed, stretch my neck beyond the bed's edge and entrust myself to Roxanne so that she could wash me. Soon after, Roxanne's smooth, wet fingers got entangled into my hair as she gently washed them, and she did that with such a tender care that I almost felt like my body was floating in the air.

Oh no, it feels so good that I can feel my little Durandal slowly emerging from its sheath! I closed my eyes and tried not to think about the pleasure too much, but much to my horror it had the exactly opposite effect to what I was intending to achieve! Just... just try to clear your mind and do not think about anything else! Focus on your head being washed!

It feels so good to have your hair washed after so many days of keeping them dirty. They might just be rinsed with hot water, but it still feels greatly refreshing. I raised my head and had it wiped with a dry towel. But when I finally opened my eyes, I saw the true paradise spreading before my eyes.

Roxanne was wiping my hair not from the back, but from the front! Both of her hands are on my head, so she had no way of covering her chest, which seemed to be even bigger from up close than it was from the distance.

「I'm going to do the laundry now.」

Perhaps she knew where my sight was glued to, because Roxanne proceeded with her next task as soon as she was done with washing my head. I also don't know when it happened, but I was now wearing my Pumpkin Pants. Sigh, this is such a shame. And here thought we were actually onto something here, but no, Roxanne just crouched next to the water basin and began washing her socks, making her glorious chest sway left and right with every movement.

This... THIS IS PARADISE!!!

「Are you not going to use the Kochi fruit?」

「I'm going to use them to wash the cloaks that we have bought today. Besides, if you would use it every single day to wash your clothes, you would have destroyed their material sooner rather than later.」

「Is that so? Then I guess I better make sure to remember that.」

We briefly talked about that as I was taking the other water basin off the chair. I thought that since I have bought it I could use it every single day, but apparently that is not going to be the case. Well, that's understandable I guess. Even back in Japan clothes could be damaged beyond repair if you went overboard with too many cleaning agents in one washing cycle.

「W-What is this?! This... this is amazing!」

Roxanne suddenly exclaimed quite loudly. When I glanced in her direction, I noticed that she has finished washing her own socks and moved on to wash mine, only to be captivated by the bizarre thing that was the rubber in their upper part. She was pulling it back and forth, watching with great wonder and curiosity as the socks expanded, only to go back to their original shape when the rubber bands contracted back. She repeated that one action many times.

「Judging by your reaction I take it that you don't have something like that in here?」

「No, we do not, and even if we do, I have never seen something like this in person.」

「Oh really?」

So rubber can be considered as a rare material in this world. That must be the reason why my Pumpkin Pants are of the string-tied variety. Once she is finished with the laundry, she hangs it all back into the closet. And that means that all of the work that she was supposed to do is now finished.

「Well, I'm going to wear these clothes for now.」

Roxanne says, taking the other maid uniform from the closet.

「Ah, no, you don't have to worry about that. There's no need for you to wear that now.」

「Eh? B-But...」

「Remember what I have told you when we were buying it earlier?」

「That it would make you happy if I wore this.」

The maid uniforms, both the one she had from the Slave Merchant and the new one we bought, were both excellent clothing, so of course Roxanne would make me happy by wearing them. But...

「And it will make me happy if you wear this, but during the day. But now is the nighttime, so there's no need for you to wear that. Understood?」

「Yes.」

Roxanne places the maid uniform back into the closet and then silently approaches the bed. When she's close enough to me I reach out and grab her hand with mine, pulling her onto it. She fell on top of me, and when she did, I hugged her. She does not move away and does not try to resist.

In our current position, I reached out with my hands and firmly grabbed the rich bulges of her chest. Prompted by the obvious intent behind my actions, she brings her face closer to mine and closes her eyes. That is when I kissed her on the lips. Her lips are touching mine now, and we stayed pressed together like that for a while. I want to go more on the offensive, but I have to

remain patient. I think that I have heard somewhere before that only inexperienced fool jams his tongue into a girl's mouth from the get-go.

「From now on, I would like us to kiss every night before we will go to bed and every morning when we will wake up.」

「Yes, as you wish, master.」

「Then... let's do it once more.」

We separated our lips from each other and then immediately moved back to devour one another, but this time I'm going to try being a little more forceful. I also tried to sneak my tongue inside her mouth to see how she would react.

Roxanne's answer is accepting it obediently without any complaints.

And so, our tongues kept entangling around each other.

Chapter 7: Party

Part 1

Kaga Michio

Levels & Equipment:

Explorer Lv.11

Hero Lv.6

Warrior Lv.9

Swordsman Lv.8

Equipment:

Durandal

Leather Armor

Sandals

When I woke up the next morning, the first thing I saw after opening my eyes was the sight of Roxanne hugging into my arm as if it was a dakimakura (TL NOTE: Japanese hugging pillow). In order not to wake her up just yet I slowly tried to free myself from her embrace and lay her to my side, but her grip on me was still tight. Now this is what I can call a pleasant awakening. But wait, wouldn't it be better to say that I didn't have a 「pleasant awakening」, but rather that my awakening was pleasant because of what I saw right after I woke up?

Roxanne's skin feels so good with how smooth and pleasant to the touch it is. The feeling of being hugged by her is also wonderful. I just can't get enough of that moist, elastic feeling around my arm, but it's not limited to just that one spot, oh no! Every part of my body that was in contact with her was filled with the pleasant, squishy sensation. Also, even though she was kinda pressing down on my arm with her body, it didn't feel like she was too heavy or that it was starting to go numb, even though we presumably spend the entire night cuddled like that. I guess that all I can do for the current moment is to hug her gently and stroke her back, enjoying the sensation of her short,

fluffy fur.

The only piece of clothing that both of us are wearing are the Pumpkin Pants. Roxanne did not have a brassiere at all. Maybe they do not exist in this world at all, or maybe they are just too expensive for everyone to buy them? Then again, I haven't seen a single one of them at the clothing store where we got our cloaks yesterday. Well, if it means that I will get to enjoy the feeling of Roxanne's boobies on my arm every single day, then I guess I have nothing to complain about, do I?

And then suddenly, my lips have been sealed again.

Roxanne kissed me. Did my sudden movements wake her up after all? Yes, that is what I am concerned about the most, not about the act of being kissed in itself, because I was the one who asked her to kiss me everyday before going to bed and after waking up. To be honest, I didn't really think she was going to go through with such a request, but apparently she is that kind of slave who takes her master's orders very seriously. Nevertheless, I allowed myself to be fully engrossed in the sweet sensation of her soft lips and slimy tongue. If this is how each and every one of my mornings is going to look from now on, mornings might become my new favorite time of the day.

「Good morning, master.」

After sucking on my lips for quite a while, those were the words she greeted me with.

「Thank you. And good morning to you as well, Roxanne.」

It was still somewhat dark outside so I couldn't see her beautiful face clearly, but I tried to do my best to pay her back for that wonderful good morning kiss. I have to do it, even if I can't see her properly!

I slowly inserted my tongue between Roxanne's half-opened lips. Slowly and methodically I found my way around her inviting mouth until my tongue could envelop itself around her damp tongue once more. I thought she wouldn't be as passionate about it as she was the first time, but much to my satisfaction she responded to my vigorous caresses with equal enthusiasm. So, since she's doing such a thing with me, is it okay for me to think that she

does not dislike me or those kinds of activities? Well, even if she's forcing herself to cope with my selfish request, at the very least I do not think the situation is so bad that she would try to escape from me, and if that's the case, then I want to push her down, but for now kissing was all I was capable of, since I was still tired after last night, and I also wanted to use the chance to have some serious rest now that I was finally given it.

Come to think of it, all I did for the last five days was the same unchanging routine of going to the Labyrinth before sunrise and making the rounds around the slums and the brothel district so that I could search for Bandits in order to obtain enough money to buy Roxanne, so I didn't even have a moment to truly appreciate how comfortable the lodging here at the Veil Pavilion is, especially in this double room. I mean seriously, last night after we were done I slept so well like I never slept before. I am truly glad that I decided to take this room, and I'm thankful to the Innkeeper for it, but I'll better keep quiet about it around him. Technically what the guests are doing in the rooms shouldn't be his business, but one can never be too cautious.

While I was kissing Roxanne, I placed my hand on her head and stroked her hair. After enjoying their smoothness and fluffiness, I finally let her lips go.

「I would like the two of us to go explore the Labyrinth.」

「As you wish, master.」

With a great lot of regrets, I release Roxanne and decide that it is high time to get out of bed. Do not worry, Michio. You'll be able to continue this tonight. And tomorrow. And the day after tomorrow. Unless Roxanne decides to run away from me of course, which I sincerely hope won't happen.

As I was putting on my leather shoes, Roxanne approached me from behind and helped me put on my shirt. Oh wow, this feels... unexpectedly good. Kinda makes me feel like a king, actually.

「Sorry for troubling you with this.」

「It's alright, master. Just let me do this.」

It might be because I'm not used to such a treatment yet, but this is making me somewhat embarrassed. Also, during the process of putting my arms through the sleeves our arms have accidentally collided with one another, probably because our eyes are not used to the pitch-black darkness that surrounds us.

「Do you not handle darkness very well?」

「Well, yeah. I'm sorry to say this but I am neither a nocturnal creature nor can I see in the dark.」

「It's alright. Just don't overdo it and make sure not to push yourself too hard.」

「Oh, you don't have to tell me that twice, believe me.」

All that is left for me to put on now are the pants, which I sadly had to put on myself. I also summoned the Item Box and took the Leather Jacket out of it. Since I bought it, might as well give it a shot at wearing it right off the bat.

「That reminds me: do you know anything about empty Skill Slots, Roxanne?」

I was interested in them ever since I happened upon them, so now might be a good moment to ask about it. After summoning the Leather Jacket from the Item Box I Identified it. Well, what do you know, the Leather Jacket also has an empty Skill Slot. I just hope that Roxanne won't get confused by how I called them, but I have no idea how else could I describe them. To me, empty Skill Slots are exactly that: empty Skill Slots.

「What about it?」

「I want to know if you can place Skills in the equipment's empty Skill Slots, and how exactly can I do it.」

「In the equipment? I'm not sure I follow, but wouldn't you have to place them in special pockets or sockets?」

Thank you for the very insightful answer, but that is a definition of a 「Slot」

taken straight out of a dictionary. Okay, maybe I should try approaching from a slightly different perspective then. Here goes nothing.

Part 2

「You can add Skills to equipment.」

「Yes.」

「Can you add more than one Skill into an empty Skill Slot?」

「I'm sorry, but I do not know. All I know is that nothing will happen if there are no Skills infused with the equipment.」

So apparently it doesn't work like that. To begin with, the Weapons Merchant was not even aware that something like Skill Slots even existed, so I can probably assume that the availability of the Skills is not a part of the public knowledge.

「And how exactly do you add Skills to equipment?」

「Well, normally you just buy weapons and armor that are already infused with them.」

「Okay, but what if I wanted to do that myself rather than buying them every time?」

I grabbed the Leather Armor from the Item Box. I wanted to hand it over to Roxanne, but I cannot see her well because of how dark it still is. For all I know, she might be changing right now.

「Only a Blacksmith can combine Skill Crystals with Equipment.」

Okay, so it seems like I would have to obtain a Blacksmith's Job if I wanted to do it myself. Not much, but that's a start.

「What is a Skill Crystal?」

「Supposedly it is a crystalized accumulation of monster's abilities that can be found within the Labyrinths on rare occasions. When it is being added into a piece of equipment, the wearer will be able to use that Skill as if it was their own.」

For now it's all pretty much just as I imagined. With that said, let's confirm one more thing.

「So if there are no empty Skill Slots on the equipment, then it cannot be infused with Skill Crystals, right?」

「Exactly. Also, it is said that the strength of the Skill's effect once it is infused into a weapon or armor depends on the quality and condition of the Skill Crystal that was used, as well as the skill and luck of the Blacksmith who performs the infusion.」

「Luck? So it is possible to fail the infusion process?」

「Most certainly. Moreover, the percentage of failures seems to be much higher than the number of successes.」

So it's kinda RNG based. If you won't try it you will never know whether you will succeed or not, but if you do end up failing, you will probably lose the Skill Crystal you wanted to infuse. But if that is really the case, then I am going to have a natural advantage with it since I can use Identify. As long as I'll be using it, no Skill Infusion will ever fail for me.

「Do you know what the requirements for becoming a Blacksmith?」

「I am sorry, but I do not know. The only thing that I am aware of is that it is a race-specific Job available primarily for Dwarves.」

Depression Intensifies

Does that mean that I cannot become a Blacksmith myself?! And more importantly, there are Dwarves here in this world as well? But I haven't met a single one so far.

Is there really no way for me to become a Blacksmith? Well, Roxanne did say that it is a race-specific Job, but I wonder what does that mean, exactly? Maybe that the specifications or requirements of this Job can only be satisfied by Dwarves alone, making it impossible for the members of the other races to obtain it? Well, that sucks.

「I see. So I guess we have no choice but to leave it to a professional to create the equipment with Skills for us. Not an ideal solution, but what else can we do?」

「There's one thing you need to know though: most Blacksmiths dislike Skill Infusion requests. By any chance, do you happen to have a Blacksmith who is willing to do them among your acquaintances, master?」

「Would it be a big problem if I said that I do not?」

「That depends. When an infusion fails, you lose the Skill Crystals. That is why most of the Blacksmiths usually do not offer Skill Infusions in their services, and even if you find the one that does offer it, there's no telling if he can be trusted.」

That particular tidbit got me curious, so I asked her why that is. But when I heard the answer, it all made sense to me.

When the Skill Infusion fails, you lose your Skill Crystals. But the thing is: when you lose them, you have no way of knowing if you lost them due to a failed infusion, or maybe because the Blacksmith whom you ordered the fusion from decided to screw you over and steal your Skill Crystals. After you make the request, there is always a possibility that the Blacksmith might not even attempt the infusion and pretend that it was unsuccessful in order to get your items for himself with literally no cost from his side at all. As much as I don't want to admit it, that does sound like a pretty neat strategy: you tell the client that you failed the infusion, but in reality you sell the Skill Crystals you appropriated for yourself, or even better, you fuse the client's Skill Crystals with your own equipment, which will in turn allow you to sell that equipment for a pretty hefty sum.

「Let me get it straight then: infusion of Skill Crystals is nothing but a source of trouble?」

「That's right.」

「But if that is the case, then wouldn't witnessing the infusion process with your own eyes solve those problems?」

「Of course it would, but nowadays it's just not worth it. You see, master, in the past there were many Dwarves who made their fortunes by charging their clients with an additional fee if they wanted to be present to witness the entire infusion process. To say that those fees were outrageous would be an understatement.」

「No shit, really?」

Well, that is certainly one way of committing fraud. Similarly, if a magician tried to cheat at a card game, I guess very few people would actually be able to call him out.

「Precisely. Ever since then, people only asked Blacksmiths to perform Skill Infusions in very rare cases, and Blacksmiths started to turn down such transactions. When you get the Skill Crystal, you sell it, and if you want equipment with Skills in it, you buy it from the weapon or armor shop.」

Certainly, if dealing with them resulted only in distrust and suspicion, avoiding such troublesome work was the most obvious solution to the problem.

However, that poses a huge problem for me. If I can't become a Blacksmith myself because it is a race-specific Job and if no Blacksmith will accept a request for Skill Infusions, then it means that finding a way out of this particular pickle is going to be that much more troublesome. Even if I use Identify to reveal if the equipment has empty Skill Slots or not, it won't do me any good. And here I thought it's going to help me gain some advantage over the rest of the world. Then again, maybe I shouldn't dismiss it so soon, because it did allow me to see the Jobs of other people as well as the locations of monsters and that is something that I have really come to

appreciate. The question now is: if I cannot obtain a race-specific Job myself and I don't have any connections with the Blacksmiths at all, then what can I do to remedy that?

As it turns out, there is one more possibility available for me: get myself a Blacksmith as a Party member. But I fear that just getting him as a simple Party member might not be enough to eliminate the possibility of him trying to scam us. Unless...

「Getting myself a Blacksmith, huh?」

「Hmm?」

「No no, it's nothing.」

At first I wanted to ask her about her opinion on getting myself a Blacksmith as another slave, but at the last moment I decided against it. Since I just got her as my first slave yesterday, mentioning getting another one so fast after purchasing a first one might have been a full-blown display of extremely bad taste and a lack of tact. I should go straight to the Slave Merchant with that particular matter. Another one will be how much money he's going to charge for it this time.

Feeding Roxanne with an excuse for me to go out, I made my way towards the door, relying on my intuition throughout most of the way.

「Can I open the door?」

「Yes, I'm done changing, so it's fine.」

I waited for her reply and opened the door leading to the corridor.

Part 3

「Roxanne, when we'll go to the Labyrinth, make sure you'll be wearing the Leather Armor, okay?」

「Yes, I will definitely do so, thank you very much.」

I grabbed my socks and put on my Leather Shoes, and then I glanced at the water basin on the floor. Last night we used it to clean ourselves up afterwards, so the remaining water was tinged with slight traces of both red and white. If I just leave it lying around as it is, the Innkeeper or the cleaning crew will surely connect the dots when they comes around to clean the room, figuring out what we were doing last night, and I don't want that to happen under any circumstances, so I did the only sensible thing I could do: grabbed the basin, headed to the toilet on the corridor and dumped all of the water there. We definitely could have saved that water for later, but it'll be better that way. Now that the evidence has been disposed of, I don't have to worry about anyone finding out.

When I got back to the room, the light of the lamps hanging in the corridor illuminated Roxanne. She was now fully clad in the Leather Armor, just as I instructed her to be. And I have to say... I didn't expect it to look quite like... that. Roxanne herself informed me that every piece of armor is magically enchanted to fit itself to whoever is wearing it, but in Roxanne's case it looked less like an armor and more like a corset, visibly exposing the chest area. Well, of course it did. It had to do so to fit itself to Roxanne's figure after all.

This... this might be dangerous for me. For all kinds of reasons. Really, really bad.

「Uhm... just a suggestion, but maybe you should try wearing a jacket over

it?」

「I'm sorry. Usually, Leather Armor is not something worn by women.」

Roxanne apologized, but I really don't think there was any need for her to do so. If anything, I should be the one apologizing for not realizing something like that sooner. In fact, I will just do it right now!

「No, you don't have to apologize for anything, since me and my lack of common sense are clearly at fault here, so from now on, if I'm about to make another blunder like that, feel free to stop me, alright?」

「U-Understood! If that is your wish, then I shall do exactly that!」

And so I helped Roxanne put on the jacket. Now her curves will be hidden from the eyes of everybody else on the streets, and I will no longer be at risk of getting distracted by her boobs in the Labyrinth. Two birds killed with one stone. Now I just have to get the backpack on my back and the Copper Sword at my waist and I'm all geared up and ready to go.

Ah, but wait! There's one thing I have forgotten! We haven't formed a Party yet!

I believe it should be here in the menu under the Party Organization section. But how do I even use this? I have no idea because I haven't teamed up with anyone up to this point. Literally.

When I tapped on the Party Organization, I was asked to specify a target, so I specified Roxanne.

「Oh.」

Roxanne twitched a little all of a sudden. It would seem that she has been successfully added to the Party. Am I assigned to it by default? I tried selecting myself and assigning myself to the Party formation.

「Ah...」

「Oh...」

.... I found out that the Party has been disbanded.

I guess that was to be expected. I am a Party Leader, so it would stand to reason that if the Leader leaves the Party it's going to get disbanded.

Party Organization is a feature that allows the formation of the Parties between the Leader and the members that have to be selected. If the Leader leaves the Party, then the entire thing will be disbanded. Note for the future taken.

With that in mind, let's try that again. Once again I formed a Party with me as the Leader, and then chose Roxanne, praying that this time everything will be as it should be and our Party will be formed properly, without Roxanne being kicked out of my Party.

「Uhm...」

「Sorry. I'm experimenting a little, so please give me a moment.」

「I see.」

I have to select her as a Party member without kicking myself out of it at the same time. I'm a little worried if I'll be able to do it properly this time, but let's be positive here. Alright, here goes: Party Organization, select target, Roxanne. Okay, looks like this time I was able to successfully add Roxanne to the Party. Now that it was done, I also saw some curious words in the corner of my eye.

「What is this Party Effect?」

「If you have more than one person in your Party, then Movement Magic will transport all the members, not just the caster himself. Even if you lose sight of your Party members, you will be able to locate them without issues. I was also told that the Experience gained from defeating monsters is being shared between all the Party members.」

「Shared experience, huh?」

Does that mean that earning EXP points will be that much easier when you

are in a Party? And also, I wonder if the EXP will be distributed evenly between all the Party members?

「Yes. Since the gained experience is shared between the Party members, the nobles have adopted a certain strategy: They form a six-man Party with the newborn child as the Leader and they enter the Labyrinth with it so that it could effortlessly gain experience since its early days to ensure its growth.」

Now that's what I would call foul play. As expected of nobles, forcing others to do all of the heavy lifting for them so that they could hog the profits all for themselves.

「Huh? But then, when such a child grows up, there won't be any need for it to go into the Labyrinth anymore...」

「Most of the nobles continue to utilize that strategy by making use of the multiple of their vassals, but there are also people who never entered the Labyrinth even once in their entire lives.」

Really? But then, if they won't even go to the Labyrinth themselves, then what's the point... unless...

「Is it possible... to continue sending only your vassals or servants to the Labyrinth and live by leeching the profits they have made in there, without as much as lifting a finger yourself?」

「Uhm... I, well...」

「Ah! No, please, do not get the wrong idea. I'm not asking about it because I want to send you to the Labyrinth by yourself. I would never do something as scummy as that!」

I fully grasped the gravity of my words only after I have spoken them out loud.

What would happen if you could just send your slave to the Labyrinth and then just take the money they earned there and the valuables they found for yourself? That would be, from a lack of a better word, quite a lifehack, but

not of the good kind.

「Such a strategy could theoretically be used to increase your Explorer level, but you don't hear about people utilizing it in such a way all that much. You must have heard what happens when someone finds anything valuable in the Labyrinth, right? They are being disposed of then and there, so as you can see, sending someone to go there...」

Is less than an ideal scenario. I guess that's true enough. But at least now I know a lot more about it.

「All right then. Shall we go?」

「Yes, let's go.」

We left the room, after which I closed it shut and we made our way down the stairs. As usual, I left the key with the Innkeeper at the front desk. Yes, just like usual. It might have been only a few days since I have arrived in this world, but this process has already become a part of my new daily routine.

「Careful now.」

We went outside of the Veil Pavilion. It was still pitch-black.

「Come with me for a second.」

I grabbed Roxanne's hand and dragged her along with me. I took her to an alley behind the inn, hoping that there will be no one there at the moment. Once I confirmed that the coast was indeed clear, I used Warp. The visibility was rather poor here, but I managed to place it on the inn's wall without any major difficulties.

「There, all set.」

「Huh?! U, Uhm...」

Roxanne looked like she wanted to say something, but before she could voice her concerns properly I simply dragged her with me to the other side of the Warp portal, into the Labyrinth.



Part 4

「Looks fine to me.」

「Eh? Ehhh?! Ehhhhh?! This is... the Labyrinth?!」

Roxanne seemed to be more than a little confused. But once she had a good, long look around and realized that we were indeed in the Labyrinth she immediately calmed down and returned to her usual, stoic expression. I would even go as far as to say that she's gotten unexpectedly serious and just a little bit scary, just like when we were talking about going to the Labyrinth back at the inn.

「Yup. This it the first floor of the newly-discovered Labyrinth just outside of Veil.」

「But Dungeon Walker should only be usable inside of the Labyrinth. If it was Field Walker then you would probably be able to use it from inside the city, but then it shouldn't be possible to enter the Labyrinth directly with it.」

I see. Well, that was something that I was already aware of, but now I at least got confirmation of my suspicions. So if you use Field Walker, you would be able to go near the Labyrinth, but not inside of the Labyrinth itself. It also checks itself out with what I saw during my first expedition here: that one Party of Adventurers that materialized that black portal wall on a tree near the entrance before they proceeded inside.

「So that's how it was.」

「But master is an Explorer, so you shouldn't be able to use Field Walker at all!」

It's natural for her to think like that, since Explorer was the First Job I had written on my Intelligence Card when she saw it back at the Slave Merchant's shop.

「You're half right, but also half wrong. That was not Field Walker just now. It was a type of Movement Magic called Warp.」

「Warp? I have never heard of such magic.」

So I guess that Bonus Spells are not all that well known here.

「It is a spell that only a few people beside me can use, so I would be grateful if you could keep it a secret for now, alright?」

「Y-Yes, of course!」

「Good to hear it.」

It's great that she agreed to keep this matter under wraps without any additional convincing.

「You're amazing, master.」

Wow, she's certainly not one to mince her words, huh? But it's great that she understands it, and yet she's still being respectful and kind towards me.

「You think so? Nah, you're giving me way too much credit.」

I gotta say though, being praised so much by a cutie like her is not a bad feeling at all.

I took a Leather Helm out of the Item Box and placed it on Roxanne's head, staring into her beautiful, glittering eyes. The only downside was that the helmet covered her head completely, hiding the cute doggy ears from view. It seemed like a huge waste to me, but I guess in Labyrinth safety should always come first above all else. That said, I also wore a Leather Helmet myself.

「Uhm, was the thing you took the helmets out of an Item Box, or perhaps

something different? Because the way you used was a little strange.]

「No, this is just an ordinary Item Box, nothing else to it.]

「Ah, I see?」

Roxanne tilted her head to the side as if she was contemplating something. I always thought that this was just an ordinary Item Box, but maybe it was really something different entirely?

Next I took out the Leather Mittens and gave them to her along with a Wooden Shield. As for myself, I wore the Leather Gloves, took out my Durandal and that was the end of my preparations. I could see that Roxanne was eyeing Durandal quite intensely, but she wasn't saying anything. Was she staying quiet because she didn't want to say something that I as her master might have taken for an insult? In that case, let's make it a little easier for her.

「By the way, take a look at my sword. What do you think about it?」

「It a wonderful weapon. And beautifully crafted at that.」

She sure is quick to comment on such things.

「Say, Roxanne? Have you ever been to a Labyrinth before?」

「Yes, but only about three times.」

「Are all the Labyrinths like this one here?」

Since she already has some experiences with Labyrinths, might as well take advantage of that and get as much information about them as I possibly can. Although, maybe I should limit myself to asking about specific things that might be the most important for us right now, in this very moment in order not to be too hard on her with all that 「please teach me!」 stuff.

「Yes, they are, but that is something that you might have already know this since you are an Explorer, master.」

「No, it's okay. When it comes to the Labyrinths, I haven't been to that many of them myself.」

「Is that so?」

Okay, so maybe she will have to tell me everything she knows after all.

「Uhm, so... monsters are not going to attack us in this room out of the blue, right?」

「That's right. Monsters do not appear in small rooms that can be moved to by using Dungeon Walker, but I have no idea if master's magic is going to follow the same rules.」

「I think we will be fine. This is the entrance to the Labyrinth's first floor, after all.」

I pointed to the black wall behind us. Right now it serves as both the passageway to the entrance and the way to the other floors.

「Yes, it would certainly seem so.」

「Alright. Now that we're here, let's try going a little further in.」

「Yes, leave everything to me, master!」

「Ah, I appreciate your enthusiasm, but the monsters on this floor all die in a single hit, so you don't have to be so nervous and keep your guard up all the time.」

「A single... blow?」

Yup, a single blow, baby (Durandal's single blow that is.).

「Well then, let's go!」

「Uhm, before we go any further, I would like to borrow a Magic Crystal from you, if it is not a problem of course.」

Roxanne stopped me before we even got out of the small entrance room.

「Eh? What?」

「A Magic Crystal.」

「Magic Crystal?」

「Yes, a Magic Crystal.」

Roxanne nodded her head silently.

「It is a crystal made from the magical power that is stored in the bodies of monsters. If you possess one, then the magic will slowly transfer to it upon the monster's defeat. Magic Crystals that have enough magical energy stored inside them can be used as the energy sources for various establishments, like Guilds, temples and the like.」

「Can't I just hold onto it instead?」

「If you do not have the Magic Crystal on you while defeating monsters, then their magical power won't be accumulated in it.」

Seemed kinda far-fetched to me, but it won't make me any difference since I don't even have such an item on me right now.

「In other words, if you have that Magic Crystal on you, it will continue to gather the energy from defeated monsters each time you slay one, correct?」

「Yes, that is exactly right.」

「While we're on the subject, do they sell for a high price?」

「I believe they are the most wanted item from the Labyrinths, so that makes them quite valuable.」

Say what?! Now I just feel like I've been robbed! And also:

Have I been a huge fucking dumbass this entire time?! I was, wasn't I?

Part 5

「Ha, haha, hahahahahaha... I see... *sigh*...」

「Ah, no, don't take this the wrong way, master. While it's true that Magic Crystals can be sold for a very high price, filling them completely takes a huge amount of time. No one will be able to sell more than a few Magic Crystals across the span of their entire life, so even if you don't have one with you now, it is not that big of a loss as you seem to be thinking it is. So... don't let it get you down.」

Is she actually trying to comfort my stupid ass? That is so sweet of her.

「So? How can we get our hands on this Magic Crystal?」

「Normally they can be found in the chests found in Labyrinths, but the Adventurer's Guild also sells the depleted ones.」

「Then we'll go do that later. As for the ones found in chests, I can't say that I saw any during my previous forages here.」

Yes, I don't think I ever happened upon an item like that when I was grinding the money to buy Roxanne. But now that I think about it, maybe there was something like that here, but I just ignored it because I didn't know what it was?

「This Labyrinth has been discovered only recently, correct?」

「That's what I heard. Supposedly it has been discovered only a few days ago.」

「In that case I don't think we're going to find any Magic Crystals in here. It

takes a long time for the magic to gather and the crystals to materialize.]

Then I probably didn't miss any of them. Good to know.

「Is there any other way of getting money in the Labyrinth other than looting monsters and collecting the power in Magic Crystals?」

「We could always try finding treasure chests.」

Treasure chests, huh?

「Regrettably, I haven't seen those around here as well.」

「That's because they rarely appear in newly-found Labyrinths like this one. I heard that they are the most common in the ancient Labyrinths.」

「Oh really, that's a shame then, but nothing we can really do about it. Let's just go and focus on finishing this run safely, okay? Now, where should we go from here?」

Now that I also know that I didn't miss any treasure chests due to my own negligence, I can fully focus on going forward without worrying. Onward ma....!

「Master, wait!」

But once again, Roxanne stopped me before I could so much as set foot outside of the room.

「What is it, Roxanne?」

「There is a monster nearby. To the right.」

「Oh? You can sense them?」

「Not sense, but I can smell them.」

What the hell? I can't smell anything out of the ordinary in the air.

「Does you being able to do that has anything to do with you being a Wolfkin?」

「Precisely. Even among other Wolfkin, my nose is said to be particularly sensitive, so detecting monsters through smell is my specialty.」

「That's amazing!」

「Thank you very much, master.」

I followed Roxanne's advice, and instead of heading straight like I initially wanted I chose to go through the passageway to the right, and sure enough, not even a minute of walking down the right pathway and a Needlewood appeared right before me.

「Wow, you were right. There really is a monster in here.」

Roxanne's sense of smell truly is amazing. She has it all: stunning looks, she's great in bed, and now she's also of great help in the Labyrinth! A perfect hat-trick for someone like me.

「Let's do this then.」

「Alright. I'll be right behind you, master.」

「Nah, you just sit back and let me handle this one.」

This time I was the one who stopped Roxanne from charging at the enemy. I brandished Durandal and went ahead. I ran up to the Needlewood and slashed at it from the left downwards. The Needlewood fell onto the ground and turned into a puff of green smoke, disappearing.

「It... it really fell with just one hit. Amazing!」

Roxanne caught up to me and showered me with words of praise and gave me a look of admiration. I gotta say, being praised by someone as beautiful as her was the best feeling ever, and a massive ego boost for me. It's moments like that that make me really glad that I decided to invest enough Bonus Points in Bonus Weapons to obtain Durandal. Looks like the value of my

stocks in Roxanne's eyes have risen again, and I have it to thank for it.

「As I thought, this sword is truly remarkable. Very well maintained at that. It's practically as good as a brand-new weapon.」

Roxanne says as she inspects Durandal carefully. She seems to be really pleased with its condition and how well-maintained it is, but I think that's because apparently all of my equipment's condition is brought back to its highest value whenever I am performing a Character Reset. If it wasn't for that, then considering that I have been using it nonstop ever since I came to this world a few days ago, its condition would have probably been even worse than the ones of the Copper Sword or the Scimitar, and Roxanne was quite angry with the state those two weapons of mine were in. If it wasn't for her, I probably wouldn't even have thought about performing any kind of maintenance on the at all, and that would have probably came back to bite me in the ass sooner or later.

「If I can ask this of you, then please keep the existence of this sword a secret, alright?」

「You want to keep the fact that you have such an amazing weapon confidential?」

「Yup, it needs to be kept as secret as possible. If it is not, then, for example...」

I grabbed Roxanne's hand and forcefully pulled her towards me. Then I turned her around and placed Durandal's edge next to her throat.

「Eh?」

「*If you care about this bitch's life, then hand that sword over to me or else...!* Something like that might happen.」

「Y-Yes, you're right, master. If that sword really ia as amazing as I think it is then that is certainly a possibility. I understand. I won't tell anyone about it.」

「Sweet.」

I released Roxanne from my villainous grasp. What I did just now might have been confusing, but just like Roxanne said just now, it's a scenario that might end up happening for real if we were to brag left and right that we have such an amazing weapon with us.

「But if such a thing do ends up happening, then please, be sure to choose the sword over me.」

「Now that's a promise I cannot make, because if I had to choose between the sword and you, then I would choose Roxanne without a second thought. You are more important to me than the sword. But if it was at all possible, then I would have like to to avoid losing either of you.」

「I... I see. Thank you, for thinking so highly of a simple slave such as myself.」

I know I just said that such a thing might happen, but I don't even want to think about such a scenario.

Roxanne knelt down and picked up the branch that the Needlewood left when it died. She then handed it to me, and I have safely placed it in the safety of my backpack.

「Alright, which way should we go now?」

「If we continue to head straight, we should eventually reach the point where we will be able to go to another level.」

「Okay, straight ahead it is then.」

「Th... thank you very much.」

Roxanne said that out of the blue while bowing her head down deeply.

「Huh? What for?」

「In the past, when I was taken to various Parties as one of the members everyone either ignored or disregarded my opinions simply because I was the newbie of the group. Not only that, whenever there were battles, I was always

ordered not to get in everyone's way or to try and launch sneak attacks on the enemies.]

「What a waste of your talents. But fear not. You have such amazing skills on your disposal, so I intend to put them to good use. I mean, what's the point of having some useful abilities if you're not going to utilize them for the good of the Party.]

「Yes! I am happy that I can be of service to you, master!」

So Roxanne was being disrespected in the previous Parties she was a member of? So the relationship between Party members can also be like that, especially when we take into account the difference in experience between the veterans and the newcomers.

Great, another thing that I had no idea of because I a a newcomer to this world myself. Just fucking great.

Part 6

「I hate to be the one to calm your enthusiasm, but I can pretty much one-shot everything on this floor, so you'll have to put up with it for a while longer.」

「I do not mind, because that just proves how strong you are, master. The monsters here are clearly no match for you. That being said, are we not heading up to the next floor?」

「Up? I thought this thing will be going down.」

「No, it actually goes up. And if you pay a small fee to one of the Explorers at the Labyrinth's entrance, they will take you to any floor that you have previously been to, and higher than the level that you're currently exploring.」

「Duly noted, but since that would be my first time in there, I think it would be best if we didn't get too ahead of ourselves. Let's fully explore this floor first before we go advancing to a higher one.」

The prospect of getting my hands on some nice treasure from the upper floors is certainly appealing, but I prefer to play at a steady pace for now. That being said, I'm quite surprised that the Labyrinth actually goes upwards instead of extending further underground like in most video games that I encountered in my life. And then there's also that stuff about the Explorers at the entrance taking you to the higher floors. I'm learning quite a lot of things that I previously had no idea about today.

「Of course. If that is your wish, master, then I will do my best to follow it to the utmost of my abilities.」

It's great that she's so eager, but it would be foolish of us to think that we will be able to clear the entire Labyrinth in just a few short days, and it's halls

are bound to hide dangerous monsters that we won't be able to defeat just yet or floors that we will not be able to access right now. And let's not forget that running into a room filled to the brim with monsters like that last one I had encountered is the last thing that I wanna do right now, so in order to avoid plunging head-first into such dreadful traps, the best approach is to proceed carefully.

「Now then, allow me to lead the way.」

「Please do.」

For the next part of our current Labyrinth excursion I allowed Roxanne to take the lead and we proceeded along with her guidance. Having her around was a huge improvement, because due to her keen sense of smell we were able to go from one monster-filled spot to the next in a matter of a few minutes, making the exploration process at least twice as effective. And we managed to get so many items while prioritizing not combat, but exploration! No monster group was able to harm us, and soon we covered pretty much the entirety of the first floor. Towards the end of the exploration, both our backpacks were filled with so many branches that I began to worry that they might end up bursting from being overfilled.

「Amazing.」

「And it's all thanks to you, Roxanne. Your ability to detect monsters with nothing but your nose is nothing to sneeze at. Are you able to tell their types apart as well, by any chance?」

「I can recognize them if they are of the species that I have fought before, and I can sort of tell how many of them there are, but not perfectly. Also, if the enemies will be hiding behind hidden doors then I might not be able to detect them, and there's no guarantee that my nose is going to lead us down the shortest path to get to them.」

「Be that as it may, your ability is amazing enough as it is.」

Since our backpacks weren't able to hold anymore items even if we tried to stuff them there, we decided to go back through the Warp portal and head

straight to the Adventurer's Guild to sell the entirety of today's haul. Even though it was already bright outside, it was still too early for the reception counters to be manned by the guild's employees, so we just returned to the inn for the time being. Once we hit the room to drop our luggage off, we went down to the dining area to have breakfast. When we finished our meal, we returned to the room to have some well-deserved rest.

「Thank you for taking me to breakfast together with you again, master. But, do we really have to eat so much?」

「Well, since they are serving meals here anyway, then I say why not go all-out once in a while, especially since today we definitely had a reason to celebrate. Seriously, if it wasn't for you then I would have never been able to accomplish so much in a single day.」

I thanked Roxanne and sat down on the bed. In fact, her help was invaluable to me. Her ability to detect monsters is going to be a huge asset to me, and I intend to utilize it to its full extent to make the Labyrinth bouts as easy as possible for us.

「Yes, thank you very much. That was the first time I saw someone single handedly defeating so many monsters. This just goes to show how incredible you are.」

「That was my first time killing so many of them as well. After all, I am still relatively new to this whole Adventuring business. I also had your guidance and expertise to rely on, so the success of today's foray into the Labyrinth was largely possible thanks to you, so I'll be looking forward to our expeditions to the Labyrinth from now on, Roxanne.」

「Not at all. The deciding factor was still your overwhelming strength and abilities. Therefore, I'm looking forward to continuing working with you as well, master.」

Roxanne bowed to me as she continued to stand near the entrance to the room. Looks like that habit of hers still needs some working on. And here I thought that all those compliments and praises might have helped her to loosen up with her servant-like behaviors.

「Well, what are you standing there for? Come here.」

「Y-Yes, of course!」

I invited Roxanne to come sit next to me. If I work on it hard enough, then maybe the day will come when she will start doing so without specifically being told to?

「Listen up, because what I'm about to say will be really important, okay? From now on, whenever we'll be coming back here, feel free to sit wherever you want without waiting for me to order you to do so... or you know what, scratch that. I want you to sit as close to me as possible. I know that you might feel somewhat uncomfortable because of what happened last night... but it's not like I will always push you down and do that sort of thing to you, you know?」

Roxanne came to the bed and awkwardly sat next to me, so in order to prove to her that I was telling the truth, I gave her a hug that had no ulterior motives behind it; just a friendly embrace to ease her tension. That being said, I'm going to have to work on my own restraint as well, because right now, just a glimpse of her white skin peeking from under her tunic was enough to tempt me with a myriad of lewd thoughts going through my head.

「I-It's... alright with me. I didn't really mind that, so...」

I could only respond to such a declaration by hugging her more tightly. This is bad. Whenever she's saying things like that with such an innocent expression, she doesn't even realize how dangerous she is to me!

But then... does that mean that she really wouldn't mind if I pushed her down again? Ahh, I want to do it again so badly! But I can't! I have to stay true to my own words and grab a hold of myself! So in order to calm myself down, there is only one option left for me!

I gently grabbed her doggy ears and started playing with them. Ahhh, so soft and elastic, a true ointment for my tormented soul. Touching them feels so good no matter how many times I do it. So maybe...

「May I have a taste of your ears?」

「Eh? But I don't really think they are going to be all that tasty, given how furry they are.」

「Just kidding, I'm not really going to eat them. Just wanted to try saying that at least once. If it hurts or makes you feel uncomfortable be sure to tell me right away and I'll stop immediately.」

「Alright, but I'm really fine with it, as long as it's not anything too strange. Also, uhm... it, it feels really good... when you touch me like that...」

Oh my God I want to gobble that angelic creature right away!

Part 7

Jesus Christ, what are you saying, Michio?! I know, okay? I want to eat her out, but I know I shouldn't. But when she's sitting in front of me like that, all flustered and embarrassed... then it should really be alright for me to... no! Don't fall into temptation! Just... just find something to divert your attention from how erotically-cute Roxanne is right now! Something! Anything!

Oh yeah! Her ears! Her doggy ears totally remind me of something! Something puffy and delicious... cream puffs? No. Marshmallows? Nah, not even close. Chiffon cake? No, that's not it either. Something... something even puffier... That's right, isobeyaki! (**TL NOTE: Mochi rice cake with seaweed**). How come I didn't notice that earlier?! Those droopy ears have the same feeling as those stretchy roasted rice cakes, and have the same softness and elasticity that can melt even the most stone-cold of hearts!

Isobeyaki, huh? This used to be one of my absolutely favourite foods that I loved to stuff my face with, but I don't think I will ever have another opportunity to eat it. I don't even know if this world even has the ingredients necessary to make it such as mochi, seaweed or soy sauce to begin with, but if I searched hard enough...

「You wouldn't happen to know if there are any places that serve isobeyaki here, wouldn't you?」

「Isobe... yaki? I have never heard of such a dish. What is it?」

「Oh, right, I guess you wouldn't know it under that name, huh? It's one of my favourite dishes from my homeland, consisting of a sweet rice cake wrapped in seaweed.」

「I don't know about anything around here, but if you want seaweed and

grilled fish then your best bet would probably be at one of the cities located near the sea that have beaches.]

Yeah, I figured as much, but what I wanted to eat right now was isobeyaki, not grilled fish. Maybe that's how isobeyaki was translated into Brahim? But that would mean that the concept is not always properly translated, since grilled fish and isobeyaki are two entirely different things, with their only common element being seaweed.

「Is that so? Then we might as well go try it out whenever we will get the chance.]

「U-ummm, master? Are you planning to... to return to your homeland one day?」

Roxanne asked me. She must have been quite worried about that matter.

「My homeland, huh?」

「Yes.」

「I am way happier with what I have here so far. And you don't have to worry about that.」

As I continued to play with Roxanne's ears, our conversation has taken a rather serious turn. Time after time, I have to remind myself that this is not Japan, which has both its advantages and disadvantages. On one hand, I will probably never be able to eat isobeyaki again, but on the other, there is bound to be a multitude of dishes that can serve as its substitute. All I have to do is to put in an effort to find them. Worst case scenario, anything that is soft, smooth and elastic will do. Also, I know that the matter of my returning to my old world is something that I will have to consider eventually, I guess that for now...

「I'm not going back to my homeland. Or rather, even if I wanted to go back there, I can't.」

Roxanne contemplated my answer in silence.

「So you really won't be going back?」

「Yeah. As I said, at the current time I cannot go back there, so I guess that means that I won't be able to set you free.」

「No, that is not why I asked about it...」

「It's fine. I understand.」

I picked her ears and shook them playfully.

「It's just... it's a common practice here to sell your slaves when you no longer need them, so I thought....」

I see. Another part of the twisted common sense of this world? In any case, I get it now. So Roxanne was worried that I might sell her to someone else if I wanted to leave this kingdom and go back home.

「You don't have to worry one bit. I plan on keeping you with me for as long as I live.」

「Understood, thank you very much. Your kindness truly knows no bounds.」

「But in order to get our Party stronger, we will definitely need more members, so I intend to gather them up in the foreseeable future.」

「Yes, of course, such a thing is only natural.」

What I said just now could very well be interpreted as a proclamation of getting myself a harem, but Roxanne doesn't seem to have any qualms about that. And let's be honest here, if anybody wanted to nitpick, I specifically said that I'm going to increase the number of Party members, not my personal slaves. But if I had to choose between making a dude or a beautiful girl a member of my Party, then I think that my choice would be obvious to anyone with more than one brain cell in their head.

Just like Roxanne said, increasing the number of Party members is the natural thing to do for any aspiring Adventurer who wants to make a living out of Labyrinth exploration. Sure, more Party members means more expenses for

me as a Leader if I wanted to ensure that each member is going to have the best equipment in top condition, but it also means earning that much more money to split between all the members. Not a bad way of living, but I cannot stop wondering if there is another way to go about it?

But what can I do? I do not have any specialist knowledge in the areas that might be useful in this world such as agriculture, cooking, commerce or transportation, and I have no guarantee that if I tried to make something based on my modern knowledge it would actually work.

Once upon a time long, long ago I happened to read the biography of that one fellow, James Watt was his name, I think. He was a great inventor who came up with the steam engine, but his success in that field only came after he won the patent trial with his rival. I wonder if this world even knows the concept of a patent to begin with?

What about midwifery? It might be under a different name, but they should have midwives in here, and I bet that a vast majority of them are women. And if they don't, then that would be a great niche to fill!

When taking care of the children right after they are born they could disinfect their hands with limewater. Medical instruments such as scissors and the like could be sterilized with boiling water. Sheets and towels could be sun-dried and sanitized. Those steps alone should be enough to significantly reduce deaths from infections and puerperal fever.

Yes, the more I think about it, the more prosperous the prospect of introducing the profession of midwife becomes. With enough work put into it, maybe the day where gynecology and abortions could be implemented into the healthcare system (assuming this world has something like that to begin with.) That was the theory, but as we all know, the theory and practice can be worlds apart from each other, and from the practical standpoint this whole endeavor was not very realistic.

First of all, it would be difficult for Roxanne to be a midwife due to the differences in biology of humans, elves, dwarves and beastmen. And even if she could work with all the races concurrently, the incidence of puerperium might be different for all of them. Not to mention that with the current level

of medicine, which should be about the same as that of medieval Europe, there's no way that I would allow her to touch the babies with her hands washed with just some hot water mixed with plain old herbs. Nononono, such unsanitary practices are absolutely out of the question!

Part 8

So now that we've thrown the idea of Roxanne being a midwife out the window, what are the other thing she could be doing in order to earn money in a peaceful way? Hmm, maybe we could form a band and have her play an instrument, or be the lead singer?

If there is one thing that you can be sure of, it is the fact that no matter where you go, music will always be popular, so with my knowledge of music from my old world, we could definitely try giving it a shot. Of course, not every song I am familiar with is an international masterpiece, but we wouldn't have to worry about it here. If I were to count them off the top of my head, then I guess you could say that I am familiar with, give or take, two hundred or three hundred musical pieces from various genres, like popular songs, oldies, children's song or even some kuchi showa (**TL Note: method of learning and teaching songs played on the Japanese drums, taiko. Wikipedia is your friend here if you want to know more**) and classical music pieces. And the best part if we decided to this way? It's that we wouldn't have to worry about those pesky patents and copyright deals if we wanted to play songs that are not originals written by us, so we could just go to town with the songs of all the popular musicians of my world without worrying about giving away some of the earnings, and if we really included all three hundred or so songs that I know into our repertoire, we would probably have a lineup of songs that could last us for 10 years at worst, or if we decided to take the slower approach, then maybe they would even be enough to last us a lifetime! Then again, the biggest obstacle here is, once again, my sorry little ass, because truth to be told, I can't read musical sheets, I am unable to play even the simplest of instrument and I wouldn't be able to carry a tune even if my life depended on it, so Roxanne would have to carry us with it once again, and relying on her to do literally all of the heavy lifting would be straight up pathetic of me.

So, in the end, I guess going into the Labyrinth is the most solid option of earning a living, considering the abilities of the both of us (especially mine).

Of course, going into the Labyrinth is not all bad, ‘cause it definitely has its merits. If there was ever a case of emergency where we would have to fight for our lives, additional levels and new Jobs gained from such excursions would be of invaluable help, especially since the Labyrinth itself turned out to be not as dangerous of a place as everybody painted it to be. Then again, I might be thinking like that just because I got myself a cheat-like weapon that makes fighting monsters a total cakewalk, therefore I should fix that slack mindset of mine if I don’t want to be sorry one day. There’s nothing worse in life than getting used to things being too easy only to be slapped in the face by reality at the worst possible moment. Then again, everything should be fine as long as I won’t suddenly decide to do anything stupid, like challenging powerful enemies without preparation 「just for the thrill of the challenge」. Basically, all I need to do is to take things slowly at a steady pace, get more levels and grow stronger while doing so.

Also, instead of going to the upper floors, we can always stay in the lower ones some more. Now that Roxanne has joined me in my Party the hunting of monsters became more efficient than ever, up to the point where we could earn more than a thousand Nars per day, so we should have no trouble earning enough money for a decent living this way.

「By the way, the contract mentioned that the owner is responsible for providing his slave with food, clothes and a place to live, but are you really okay with living in an inn for the time being?」

「Yes, of course. I find nothing wrong with it.」

「And sleeping in the same bed as me?」

I asked her in hushed voice while giving her a hug.

「Y-Yes, I am thankful for that opportunity as well.」

She replied with her voice tinged with embarrassment. What kind of monster would I have to be to allow her to sleep on the cold hard floor after seeing

that?! That was such a cute reaction, maybe I should tease her more often? Also, when I hugged her, the soft elasticity of her breasts enveloped my arm. Looks like she's going braless under her clothes.

This is bad.

I want to push her down again, but I just promised her that I won't be doing it literally every chance I get. But... on the other hand, she said that she didn't mind it... so if she said so herself, then maybe it would be okay for me to actually do it?

「It's the least I can do for you to repay you for going along with my selfish whims. Now that I can bring you to the Labyrinth with me, I feel like my life won't be as hard as it used to be anymore thanks to your exceptional abilities.」

「Not at all, master. You're able to defeat monsters with but a single blow, so that in itself is pretty amazing.」

Oh, come to think of it, while we are on the subject of daily life... I completely forgot about taxes.

「By the way, can you tell me more about taxes and how do I pay them?」

「Oh, ahh, um.... About taxes...」

Roxanne had difficulties assembling her words. Did I say something I shouldn't have said?

「I'm sorry, is something wrong? Did I say something bad?」

「I'm sorry, there was nothing wrong with your question. But, you see... taxes are a bit of an... unpleasant memory for me. You see, master, after my parents died I have been living with my aunt's family for a while, but my presence soon became a burden on them to the point that they were unable to pay their taxes, so...」

「... I see.」

So she was sold because her family could not pay her taxes. I always thought that stuff like parents selling their children to get out of debt was something made purely for those cheesy historical TV dramas, but apparently it is a practice that is all too real.

I placed my hand on Roxanne's head and patted her gently to reassure her.

「As for how the taxing system works, the tax itself is counted individually for every citizen of the kingdom, and in the winter it is being collected and delivered to the local lord. Usually taxes are one hundred thousand Nars for a Free Citizen, and ten thousand Nars for a slave. But you don't have to worry about paying the taxes this year, because I think someone has already paid master's tax.」

「I see. That's good to hear.」

To whoever it was that paid the taxes for me this year: thank you. Dear sir or madam, you are a true MVP.

So for the both of us, the total tax we would have to pay would be one hundred ten thousand Nars, huh? I have to take that into account for my future plans so that I could always have that much money safely stored away.

As I continued stroking Roxanne's head, I brought her closer to my chest.

「Uhm, I... if I may, I am very happy to be able to be of service to you, master. And, well... I am happy to have you, and that you're so kind to me.」

She spoke those last words quietly, and then she leaned her head against my shoulder.

Part 9

After that, I asked Roxanne to tell me about the Labyrinths in as much detail as possible, and in doing so, learned something that was quite strange. Namely, that in this world, the Labyrinths are apparently treated as living creatures (**TL Note: So, like giant Mimics then? Dark Souls PTSD blasts in full force.**).

What's up with that, you ask? That was exactly my reaction.

Anyway, as for the reason why Labyrinths are scattered in seemingly random places across the entire world is because the creatures that act as their cores live seemingly everywhere.

「So basically they are like the larvae of flies inside of antlions, so to speak.」

「Ant... lions? What is an antlion, master?」

「Nothing that we need to concern ourselves with, thankfully.」

To borrow another analogy, the Labyrinths can be likened to Venus Fly Traps, only instead of luring flies, they lure humans inside them. They use monsters that spawn inside of them to defeat the adventurers so that they can absorb them and use the nutrients gained from them to grow larger and eventually multiply.

The creatures use magic to create Labyrinths around them, so I guess it can also be said that it acts as their shield, or barrier, or a protective shell, and that is also why they cannot be damaged or relocated by digging around or inside them. That might also explain why they are always going up instead of down.

The only known way to dispose of the Labyrinth for good is to climb up all

the way to the topmost floor and defeat the Boss Monster, and exterminating the threat the Labyrinths possess is the responsibility of every Lord who governs an inhabited area the happened to spawn in.

「... Moreover, if you dispose of the Labyrinth in an area that was unable to be populated because of the threat of that very Labyrinth, you will obtain the right to becoming the Lord of that land yourself!」

Roxanne's explanation has gotten quite enthusiastic.

「I see. I understand now. Thanks for explaining it so thoroughly for me.」

「You're welcome!」

Well, that should do it for the lessons about the Labyrinths for the time being. After we gathered our belongings, we've decided to go out once more.

「By the way, how many days are in a year here? I want to know if there are any differences to the calendar we used back in my homeland.」

「Well, the entire year is three hundred and sixty days long, give or take a few days.」

According to what Roxanne told me, the year is divided into four seasons: spring, summer, autumn and winter, each of them lasting for about ninety days, with one or two days off before the season switches each time, so I think it would be safe to assume that the year in this world is the same as the one back in my old world.

「And do you know which day it is today?」

「We have just entered the early spring period if memory serves me correctly, but as for the exact date... I'm sorry, but I do not know.」

She said that taxes are paid in winter, so we still have a long way to go before we enter another taxation period.

Our next destination was the Adventurer's Guild to sell off the branches we were carrying in our backpacks. We managed to sell everything we had for a

total of six silver coins and a few bronze coins, meaning that we got... around six hundred Nars. One of the factors here was my 30% Increase in selling prices, which is as amazingly reliable as ever, but we never would have gotten that much if it wasn't for the other backpack packed with the branches we obtained thanks to Roxanne being in the Labyrinth with me. I know that I'm probably sounding like a broken record now, but Roxanne is amazing.

Our next order of business will be the purchase of the Magic Crystals, just like Roxanne suggested during one of our earlier conversations.

「I would like to buy two Magic Crystals.」

I said to the lady at the reception counter.

「Of course. Are Black Magic Crystals okay with you, sir?」

Oi, Roxanne. What's the deal with those Black Magic Crystals? That's the first time I've heard of them!

「Uhm, that is how the Magic Crystals completely depleted of magic power are called.」

Seeing my confused expression, she offered a fast explanation.

「Two Black Magic Crystals then, please.」

「As you wish. Please wait a moment.」

「I will, thank you very much.」

The lady took the branches we gave her from our backpacks and headed to the back of the building. As we waited for her to return, Roxanne seemed to be reading through various announcements posted on the nearby bulletin board. I gotta say, being able to actually read the letters yourself instead of having someone else do it for you all the time sure is convenient.

「There you go, sir. That will be 10 Nars each.」

Eh? 10 Nars each, as in, the original price? Huh? Why didn't my 30% discount work here?

Even though I made sure to change my Skills properly, the discount didn't work for whatever bizarre reason. Why? I'm doing everything as I always did so far and the Skill is active, so why didn't I receive my 30 % discount? I honestly don't know what the deal with this Skill is anymore. Normally, when I bought more than one item it would work like a charm, so why did it choose now of all times to suddenly stop working? I'm not sure, but I definitely don't like it.

There is nothing I can really do here now, so I just handed the twenty bronze coins to the lady. She took the first ten coins and handed me one Black Magic Crystal, and then she did the same with the other ten coins and Crystal, after which she carefully counted everything to check if there was no mistakes in the transaction.

As for the Crystals themselves, they were the oval gems about the size of a chicken egg. Just as their name implied, they were jet-black in color. Now that I look at them, I am 100 % positive that I haven't seen something like that in the Labyrinth, be it as a monster drop or just laying around. Then again, maybe I really did overlook them due to their size?

Looks like I can perform Identify on it, so let's see... hmm, the appraisal says that the name of this item is not Black Magic Crystal, but simply a Magic Crystal.

「Sorry you had to wait, Roxanne, but we got what we came for: two Magic Crystals. Black ones, to be exact.」

I showed Roxanne the Crystals that we got.

「You're right, they really are black indeed.」

「Is there any significance to their color, or is it a purely aesthetic thing?」

「The color of the Magic Crystals changes depending on the amount of magical energy that is being stored inside them. It will turn red when you slay

ten monsters, purple when you kill one hundred, blue after one thousand, green after ten thousand, yellow after one hundred thousand and white, meaning that it will be full, after one million monsters have been defeated.]

So the color changes indicate how full the Crystal is with magic power. Got it memorized.

「Then, since it doesn't have any magic power stored in it, it is black, hence the name Black Magic Crystal, right?」

「Yes, exactly. One thing worthy of noting is that the price of the Magic Crystal changes along with its color. Normally people sell them the moment the color changes, since it is more profitable than holding onto it until it turns white. Most common selling colors are green or yellow.」

So even if I were to kill anywhere between hundred and nine hundred monsters, because the color of the Magic Crystal would still be purple, meaning that the price for selling it wouldn't go up. And it takes one hundred thousand monsters to turn the crystal yellow and million monsters to make it white, then it becomes obvious why people are not waiting with selling them. Simply put, the amount of time and effort required to do it was just not worth it. Let's assume that it would take an entire day to slay a hundred monsters to turn the Crystal purple. Following that assumption, turning it yellow would require three years of continuous, day-today monster hunting, and turning it white a whooping thirty years! Effectively one third of your average human lifetime just to sell one item at the highest possible price? Now that's a turnoff if I ever saw one.

「Okay then, now that our business here is done, shall we go to the Labyrinth again?」

「Umu!」

And with that we have left the Adventurer's Guild.

Part 10

Even though we've spent quite a lot of time talking back at the inn, the sun has just risen. In the rays of the early sunrise, I looked over my shoulder, glancing back at Roxanne. Or rather...

Holy shit dude, dat Roxanne's chest!

With each and every one of her steps, her bountiful boobies sway left and right. It's like a drug for the eyes that you just can't help wanting more and more of, even when you know full well that you shouldn't stare, but you just can't help it because you're subconsciously drawn to them, and all of that thanks to the fact that the Leather Jacket she's wearing on top of her regular clothes adjusts itself to her figure due to some fancy magical gimmick!

BounceBounce! *BounceBounce!*

Uwaaaaah! They are doing it! They are definitely shaking!

I had my doubts due to the dim lighting of the Labyrinth's halls, but now the undeniable proof is right before me, or should I say, right behind me! It is not an illusion!

My guess is that the shoulder straps of the backpack have something to do with it as well, judging how tightly they are grasping her from both sides. Thanks to them, the big, soft fruits are getting pressed against one another in a bouncy rampage.

「.....」

As I continued to stare at that magnificent spectacle, our eyes suddenly met, and Roxanne smiled awkwardly at me with slightly red cheeks.

「.....！」

Damn it, she knows! She knows that I was staring at her chest all this time!

Ahhh, it's over. All the trust I have accumulated, all the respect of me being an amazing warrior (thanks to my Durandal) gone in an instant!

No, don't think about it, man! Roxanne is not that type of person, so you're probably still good, so just hurry it up and go to the goddamn Labyrinth already and hope that she is not glaring daggers at you from behind!

Arghhh, if we were to just walk side by side I could sneak as many peaks at her as I want, but that's not gonna happen, because for some strange, unexplainable reason I haven't seen a male-female pair walking side by side ever since I came here. *Sigh* so much for my shaky boobies.

And to top it all off, the longer we were walking among the growing crowds of people, the harder it was for me to hide Roxanne's bazoongas from the lecherous eyes of other males who were passing by us. Thankfully, we soon reached the alleyway behind the Adventurer's Guild, where I used Warp to get us to the Labyrinth without attracting any more unwanted attention.

「A group of monsters to the right, master.」

When we finally got into the Labyrinth, Roxanne used her keen sense of smell to confirm the location of the first group of enemies. If it wasn't for it, I would have probably gone straight ahead and got ambushed by them.

「So how are we going to use this Magic Crystal? Are we supposed to hold onto them, or can we leave them in the Item Box?」

For the time being I have taken both Black Magic Crystals from the Item Box and gave one of them to Roxanne.

「No, if we leave them in master's Item Box then they won't be able to gather the energy from the defeated monsters. However, it should be fine if we keep them in our backpacks.」

I got the backpack off my back and placed the Black Magic Crystal inside.

With that done and Durandal firmly in my hand, we proceeded along the pathway to the right.

「Uhm, I don't know if I should be asking you this, master, but...」

Roxanne said as we were nearing the entrance to the larger cave.

「What is it?」

「When you summoned your Item Box, you did so without using a chant. From what I know, every time someone uses a Skill or a spell, they have to chant it first. So I was simply wondering if the magic master is able to use is the one that does not require the use of chants at all. I apologize if it's something that you don't want to talk about, but I just wanted to know.」

Well would you look at that. She figured it all out from simple observation of me muttering things under my breath so that other people wouldn't hear me. And here I thought that my method of whispering something that vaguely resembled a chant in order not to draw unnecessary attention to myself was quite effective. Normally the fact that I was called out on that would be extremely bothersome, but I guess I don't have to keep my guard up so much around Roxanne.

「Tell me, Roxanne, are you familiar with Character Reset?」

「Character... Reset?」

「How about Bonus Points?」

「Is that some kind of special reward for quests or bounties?」

So it would seem that she doesn't know anything about either of those things. But there's no way in hell that I'm going to explain how Character Reset and Bonus Points work, and that I can omit the chanting process (or shorten it, to be precise) thanks to them.

「Roxanne, look, I'm going to let you in on a little secret, because you're one of the few people I think I can trust with it, alright? It's exactly as you think: I can cast spells and use Skills without chanting, and I don't think anyone

else beside me can do it, or at least I haven't met anyone who would be able to do the same yet.]

「T-Thank you for putting your trust in me!」

「You might have figured it out as well by now, but this is something that I wouldn't want to just casually show around other people, so I would be extremely grateful to you if you could keep it between us, okay?」

I can't just outright tell her that I'm essentially using cheat-like abilities to make my life in here that much easier, and even if I did tell her that, she probably wouldn't believe me, or she'll just think that I'm lying. Besides, if I went around sharing my secrets with everybody, someone is going to expose me one day, and all my secrets will be leaked to the public, and I don't want to get Roxanne involved in something like that, so my only option here is to take that secret with me to the grave.

「Okay, I understand. I won't tell anyone about it.」

「Much obliged. Anyway, it doesn't look like there are many people around here besides us, huh?」

「It would seem so, but that's understandable, because the Labyrinth Search Conclusion Announcement hasn't been issued out for this Labyrinth yet.」

「Labyrinth Search Conclusion Announcement?」

I don't know what that is, but since Roxanne says that it hasn't been issued yet, then it must mean that there was nothing about it on the bulletin board in the Explorer's Guild. Come to think of it, if an announcement like that was posted, it would be bound to make quite a stir among Adventurer's, right?

「It is an official announcement signaling that the exploration of an entire floor has been completed.」

「And from your words I'm guessing that the number of people who'll come here will increase after that announcement is posted?」

「Yes, because there will be no more Trap Rooms active.」

「Trap Rooms?」

「The rooms filled with lots of monsters. They are very dangerous for beginner-level Adventurers who can be overwhelmed by their numbers alone, thus meeting an untimely end.」

Ah, that one. The seemingly empty room with a fuckload of Needlewoods that I stumbled into by accident. So it is called a Trap Room, huh? Wish I knew about it earlier.

「Those rooms will disappear when the exploration of the entire floor will conclude?」

「Yes, that is how it usually works.」

「Hmm... how are those rooms made, exactly? Is there some kind of rule to it, or is it random?」

「Uhm, let me think... when monsters materialize in caves like this, they rarely stay in one place for too long. They will all move eventually, since they are subconsciously drawn to one another. Sometimes, it just so happens that so many monsters converge in one smaller room that they are no longer able to leave it, so they just remain there, waiting for an unlucky Adventurer to open the door and set them free.」

Roxanne explained further. I see, so that's how rooms like that are made.

「As I thought, even with good weapons and equipment, the Labyrinth is still incredibly dangerous. Maybe we should also wait for the Announcement to pop up?」

Even if I get hit, I can always recover the HP that I've lost with Durandal's abilities, but Roxanne has no such option, which makes her vulnerable. If we were to end up in a room similar to the one I was trapped in, the one with a literal legion of monsters in it, I worry that I wouldn't be able to protect her properly.

「The announcement is targeted mainly towards the beginners, and only at the

lower levels at that. It is to inform them that there are no more Trap Rooms on the floor that has been cleared. Also, the monsters on the lower levels are all relatively slow and weak, so they shouldn't pose that much of a problem for us. So there's nothing to worry about, master! If we'll be scared of every small room filled with monsters, we won't be able to advance to the higher floors, so we need to go bravely forward!】

「Y-yeah...」

We should be fine for now. Everything is going to be okay. Or at least I hope so, because for some reason, I can't help it but to keep being worried.

Part 11

「Even if we were to happen upon a larger group of monsters, their smell will be so strong that my nose will catch on to them in no time, so we won't have to worry about getting ambushed.」

「Yes, you're right.」

She's absolutely right. As long as I have Roxanne's keen sense of smell on my side, all ambushes, except maybe for those very elaborate ones, will become meaningless against us. I myself am nothing more but a muscle head, so I wouldn't even be bothered with any precautions and just charged ahead, slaughtering everything in my sights. But now that I am no longer alone, such loner strategies are no longer necessary for me to employ.

「There it is!」

In the back of the new cave we have entered, a lone Needlewood could be seen. I ran over to it and slashed it in half with Durandal, felling it instantly. Heh, as long as there is only one enemy, I don't have to worry about anything else other than taking it on an express train to poundtown.

「There, done in a flash.」

「Another enemy defeated with just one hit. As expected of you, master!」

Roxanne catches up to me and expresses her amazement as she picks up the branches left by the lone Needlewood and packs them into her backpack.

It's true that as long as there are not too many enemies I can pretty much take all of them on myself, I'm worried what would happen if we suddenly had to fight a large number of enemies all at once. Therefore, I think it is high time

that I secure some means of attacking many enemies across a large area at once, or in other words, the means of inflicting AoE (Area of Effect) damage.

My Skill associated with the Hero Job, Overwhelming, is a Skill that inflicts slow onto enemies to the point where they basically get frozen in place. If used continuously, I guess it would allow me to attack greater number of enemies, but that is not a genuine AoE that I'm looking for. I don't want multiple attacks on single targets, but preferably something that would hit a large number of them at once.

Warrior Job's Rush and Swordsman Job's Slash are strong attacks as well, but they too are not multi-target abilities. Well, if we were to examine this problem from a practical perspective, hitting multiple enemies at once is almost impossible with a melee weapon, even the likes of two-handed swords, spears or greathammers. Normally, this would mean that I am done for since there is seemingly no solution to my particular problem.

But, there is one more possibility available for me. If the sword and swordsmanship cannot give me what I want, then maybe I should try learning magic? Since this is technically a game world, then there is bound to be at least a few magic spells capable of inflicting AoE damage. Every fantasy game worth its salt has some, so this one should be no different.

「Is there a type of magic that would allow me to attack multiple enemies at once?」

I asked Roxane while we were once again on the move.

「Magic? I have heard that there is, but to be honest, I don't know much about magic and mages. I'm sorry. The only things that I know for certain is that you need to be child of a nobleman or a very rich person and consume a special kind of medicine before turning five years old.」

「Special medicine and age restriction, huh?」

When I came to Vale, the merchant from the Somara village, Picker-san, told me more or less the same story. That “medicine” that is supposedly needed to be able to use magic is probably some kind of special item. But even if I

somewhat managed to obtain it...

I took a sarcastic look at myself. Yup, there's no sugarcoating it: my seventeen years old-looking ass stopped being five years old ages ago, and that means that the only way left for me to get a Job that would allow me to use magic... was to actually use magic.

If nothing else, I have to admire how straightforward the system of obtaining most of the Jobs is in this game. Steal something and you get the Thief Job, save the village from bandit attack and become a Hero, get an Explorer Job by entering the Labyrinth. This simple reasoning stays true for the Jobs such as Warrior, Swordsman and Merchant, although those have an additional condition of having your Villager Job at Lv.5. Going by that logic, I should obtain the Mage Job as soon as I use any magic spell.

At first I also thought that it was strange that I didn't get the Mage Job when I used Item Box or Warp multiple times, since both of those are technically magic spells, but if that was the case then pretty much every explorer could easily become a Mage, so I guess that makes at least some sense.

The solution is obvious here: if you want to be a Mage, you cannot do so by using Space Magic or Movement Magic. What you need is specifically Attack Magic. Use a spell belonging to that category, and you will become a Mage capable of casting Attack Magic.

Buy and sell items to become a Merchant, fight to become a Warrior, and swing your sword to become a Swordsman. I did all of those things, and they were pretty effective so far. Then, if I will use Attack Magic, I will definitely become a Mage.

It might sound weird, but this is a typical egg or chicken dilemma, and that's probably why that special item is necessary. But, as I mentioned earlier, there is a way for me to bypass off of that crap.

Bonus Spells.

That's right. Even though I am not a Mage, as long as I perform another Character Reset and invest enough of my Bonus Points into Bonus Spells, I

should still be able to pull that off.

「Master, do you know someone who's a Mage and who we could add to our Party?」

Roxanne asks after we defeated the next Needlewood. Since we're on the subject of magic, I guess having another person capable of using it might not be a bad idea, but since I have no acquaintances, much less those who can use magic, then I guess that particular alley is as much of a dead end as it gets.

「I do not, unfortunately. Not a single one. Which is a shame, since we'll have to bolster our ranks eventually.」

「As long as slaves are concerned, I think finding a one who is also a mage might be pretty difficult, but if you somehow managed to do that, that would be a great help, especially on the Labyrinth's upper floors.」

「I think it's still a little bit too early to be thinking that far into the future, but when that time comes I will be counting on you.」

「Yes, of course!」

She seems eager to welcome another member into our Party, even though it will mean an increase in the members of my harem as well.

Now that my declaration of increasing the number of my harem members have been accepted, I performed another Character Reset, focusing on getting the first Bonus Spell, Meteor Crash, the spell that I was unable to use due to a severe shortage of MP back when my Hero Job was only Lv.1. Now that it has grown all the way up to Lv.6, will I be able to use it properly?

If using this spell will get me the Mage Job then that's fine. Well, even if it doesn't, my goal of obtaining an AoE magic attack will be achieved either way, so I'm going to test it out on the next enemy that's going to come around which is.... This guy over here!

Eat this! METEOR CRASH!!!

I shouted the name of the spell in my mind, but nothing happened. The

Needlewood just stood there, and I could swear I saw it looking at me as if I was some kinda idiot.

FUUUUUUUUU.....

I ran towards it and slashed it with Durandal.

Sigh another failure, huh? And I even went as far as omitting the spell chant to avoid embarrassing myself in front of Roxanne is it didn't work. In my defense, Meteor Crash's MP cost is pretty hefty, so I guess it just means that I still don't have enough of it. But if I don't have enough MP at Hero Lv.6, then I wonder how much MP does it need? Okay, alright, so my first attempt didn't exactly go as planned, big deal. Not yet! I'm not done yet! There are other spells that I can try!

Alright, next!

Part 12

Next spell on the list: Gamma Ray Burst! Suck on that, next Needlewood!

「.....」

No good either, huh? And here I was, expecting some cool-looking beam attack to obliterate that Needlewood to smithereens. Oh, well, on to the next one.

Extreme Drop Dead!

「.....」

Oh, come the fuck on! The name suggests that it should be one of those instant-death spells, the ones that kill you on the spot no matter how much HP you have, so this Needlewood should be dead! And yet it is not! He's just standing there as if it was the most obvious thing in the world! You know, I'm slowly starting to feel like even though I have access to Bonus Spells I can't actually use them. Here's to me being wrong about that.

Sighhh... NEXT!

「..... Yup, steering clear of that.」

The next spell on the list was called Suicide Bomb Attack. Well, technically I guess it could be classified as an Attack Magic that would surely obliterate my enemies if I were to use it, but you see, the problem here is that I would end up blown up as well, and as you can probably guess that's something that I would rather not do to myself (**TL Note: Hmm, I swear to God, there is a terrorist joke somewhere in here but I can't seem to find it... ah well**). But wait, since this is technically a game, then wouldn't that mean that even

if I were to blow myself up in a suicide attack, I would still live through it, but with like, 1 HP point left or something? Anyway, the only time when using a spell like that would be somewhat justified would be the encounter with the Last Boss, where defeating the BBEG (**TL Note: Big Bad Evil Guy, courtesy of D&D**) would end everything and restore peace to the world, and even then I would have used it as an absolutely last resort measure if my sword was broken beyond repair and all other measures have failed. Until that day comes, it'd be best to forget that such a spell even exists.

Now then, let's just keep scrolling down and see what else we have here... oh, this one looks promising: Equivalent Exchange. The name itself doesn't suggest it, but this must be an Attack Magic as well. If my understanding of this spell is correct, it is a spell that reduces the caster's HP, but at the same time does the same to the enemy. I guess it can be classified as a suicide magic as well, albeit not as dangerous as the Suicide Bomb Attack. On top of that, I think that it is best to use it in one particular case: when your maximum HP value is higher than your opponent's maximum HP. Basically, the user and the receiver have their HP drained until one of them drops dead. It might sound needlessly dangerous, but in reality it is a very simple and straightforward mechanic: as long as you have more HP than the person or monster you are using it on, you will survive.

Yeah, I can definitely picture myself using this.

Of course, this spell also has a few downsides. First things first, I don't know if it works only on a single target, or if it can be used against multiple enemies at once, unlike with the Suicide Bomb Attack, where it is painfully obvious that a bomb-like explosion is going to be effective in a pretty broad radius.

Second, what about using it in a battle where I would be pinned against multiple opponents? That would definitely require more strategizing, because mindlessly draining one enemy out of its HP while the others could still attack me is just like asking to get myself killed. And while we're already on the subject of monsters, another matter is that I have no way of discerning how much health the monsters I'm fighting with have (at least not yet). It won't be anything groundbreaking when I will say that humans and monsters are not equal to one another, so the total HP of a Lv.1 Human won't be the

same as the total HP of a Lv.1 monster. Between those Needlewoods and myself, which one of us has more HP? That is a question that might be the proverbial line between life and death for me. But even if I was absolutely sure that I have more HP than my enemy, it still doesn't make Equivalent Exchange less of a double-edged sword in my opinion.

For now, I have reached the following conclusion: Suicide Bomb Attack and Equivalent Exchange are too dangerous to be used against normal mobs. If I am ever going to make use of them, I should limit myself to doing so only if I am going to be fighting against an overwhelmingly strong enemy that cannot be brought down by the standard means available in my current arsenal. Ugh, the more I think about it, the more my head starts to hurt. Looks like leveling up enough so that I could use Meteor Crash might be the only sensible option left for me after all. This sounds a bit tedious as well, but as long as I have Roxanne by my side even that process should be finished that much faster.

With all of that in mind I have defeated about ten more Needlewoods, which was a cakewalk, considering that Roxanne was guiding me towards them every time with her superior sense of smell. Without her I truly wouldn't be able to be as efficient as I am now with monster hunting, for which I am grateful to her beyond measure.

「Thank you for being so vigilant all the time, Roxanne. I think now would be a good time to check on our you-know-what.」

「Yes, Magic Crystals, right?」

Right indeed. I took the backpack off my back and took the Magic Crystal out, taking a good, long, inquisitive look at it. While it was initially black, mine has now turned red, so I guess instead of Black Magic Crystal I should call it Red Magic Crystal.

「It's red already. What about yours, Roxanne?」

「My Magic Crystal is still Black, but that was to be expected. Magic power is stored only in the Crystal of the person who dealt the finishing blow to the monster.」

I showed Roxanne my Red Magic Crystal, and she answered me with another explanation. So only the person who actually kills the monster gets to cash in on its magic energy for his Magic Crystal? I thought that it worked for all the Party members simultaneously, but apparently I was mistaken. On that note, I remember that one of the Bonus Skills available to me through the Character Reset was something called Crystal Acceleration. I dismissed it earlier because I had no idea what was it doing, but right now I think I understand it. It is probably something that speeds up the process of gathering energy for your Magic Crystal.

I performed another Character Reset, this time focusing on Crystal Acceleration. With the amount of Bonus Points at my disposal, I was able to secure myself of x4, x8, x16 and x32. Since I need to have Durandal with me I can't put anymore points into it, but if I were to increase it to Lv.6, the multiplier would have hit x64, but for now, a multiplier of x32 should be more than enough.

「Just as a quick reminder: ten monsters = Red Crystal, hundred monsters = Purple Crystal, right?」

「Yes, that is correct.」

I confirmed the selection of Crystal Acceleration x32 and defeated three more Needlewoods with it, after which I checked my Magic Crystal again. I couldn't stop myself from smiling.

「Roxanne, wanna see something cool? Well, I'm going to show it to you either way, so just come here and have a look.」

Without waiting for her to reply, I took out the Red Magic Crystal from the backpack and showed it to her. Except for the fact that it was no longer red. Right now, it was a Purple Magic Crystal. That's right, baby! Ramp the respect points that I have lost earlier back with interest!

Defeating three monsters with a x32 multiplier gave me, the end result was ninety six, and since my Crystal was already red from those ten kills from earlier, that gives me a total of one hundred and six, triggering the change of the Red Magic Crystal into Purple Magic Crystal.

「Eh? It's already purple?! How did you do it, master?!」

「I'm afraid that's a secret~~」

Oh yeah, being looked at with such admiration hits all the right spots for me.

「Ah, okay! Master, you truly are amazing!」

I am, right? But please, don't stop, praise me some more!

I know that I shouldn't keep using that same old excuse of secrecy every time I do something outstanding, but as long as Roxanne understands and doesn't ask any questions I guess that is fine.

Part 13

「What is the typical price that Magic Crystals can be sold for?」

「Green are usually worth 10,000 Nars, and as for the yellow ones, it should be 100,000 Nars.」

Normally we can assume that one slain monster equals 1 Nar, so Green Magic Crystal would equal 10,000 monsters. With my current multiplier of x32, or x64 if I will ever need it, it is more efficient way of making money than selling the items that drop from the monsters.

In order to make a lot of money I can use Crystal Acceleration, getting stronger is covered by Skills that will increase the amount of the EXP I'll gain from killing enemies, and for fighting against strong enemies I have Durandal from the Bonus Weapons Skill. I'm doing pretty well for myself, all thing's considered. And since I am not exactly in dire need of getting more money for the current moment, so I think I can remove Crystal Acceleration for now, and instead focus on gaining more EXP points and keeping Durandal on me, so I did just that by performing another Character Reset.

While scrolling through the list of Bonus Skills, I happened upon three curious ones: Break Level Limit, Break Damage Limit and Party Data Release. When it comes to the first two I can roughly understand what they are about, but it's not like I had any problem with my damage threshold or the ability to Level Up, but what is this Party Data Release one supposed to be doing? As long as I was going solo things like that didn't really matter to me, but now that I've made a Party with Roxanne, maybe there are some restrictions placed upon us? Maybe I should take a moment to actually test it out?

I tapped the Party Date Release window.

Immediately after that, the Party Settings screen got refreshed. Looks like some new options have been added to it, and to the bonus Spell list as well. It now contains something called... Partification? What the hell is that? Something related to the Party, maybe? Or something related to its organization? Well, no harm in checking it out I guess.

Another change that took place was in the Bonus Skills menu. The Job Settings have been replaced with Party Job Settings. So, a new option that looks like a variation of the old one. As long as I have no idea how it works, taking it through a trial by fire seems to be the most logical conclusion. You'll never know how something works if you don't witness it with your own eyes, am I right?

Partification!

When I thought about it, a new window popped up, asking me to do something. The exact text in the window was 「『』use」. What does it want from me? An item? Or maybe something else? Could it be that Partification is a spell that spreads the effect of an item to the entire Party?

「Roxanne, do you feel like there was any change in you just now?」

「Hmm, no, I don't think so. Why do you ask?」

So it does not look like there were any changes to Roxanne's status, meaning that the change occurs only for the user. Well, that was to be expected I guess. Good thing that she does not seem to realize what I'm doing though.

Next, I focused my gaze on Roxanne and thought about the Party Job Settings. In the next second, a full list of her Jobs appeared before me.

Beast Warrior Lv.6, Villager Lv.8, Farmer Lv.1, Warrior Lv.1, Swordsman Lv.1, Adventurer Lv.1

So those are all the Jobs she managed to obtain, huh? It's great that she doesn't have a Thief Job or anything else like that. This means that before she

became a slave she led a proper, pure life where she didn't have to resort to criminal acts just to see another day.

Beast Warrior Lv.6

Effects: Medium AGI Increase, Small STR Increase, Small DEX Increase

Skill: Beast Attack

The Beast Warrior Job seems to have a very good effect and her stats are decent, so I think she can continue with this one as she was. Speaking of it, aside from my Hero Job, the effects of Swordsmen and Warrior are not terrible, but they are not mind-blowingly good either.

Yup, for now we can continue adventuring without making any alterations.

The ability to change the Job of your Party members can prove to be a very powerful Skill, depending on how you will use it of course. Regrettably, however, the Character Reset did not result in Roxanne's Character Reset as well.

As a Party we can now conserve MP by travelling together and dispatch enemies way faster due to not being alone on the battlefield anymore. I guess noticing that Skill and unlocking it when I did might actually turn up the be one of the best decision I made here so far.

「Now, the only remaining issue would be recovery.」

「Recovery? As in healing?」

「Yup. Are there any Jobs that have Skills or spells capable of healing?」

I asked Roxanne.

For now we are not in that much of a dire need to get ourselves some method of healing because Durandal can essentially one-shot everything it comes into contact with, but there will eventually come a time where healing will become a necessity, I am sure of it. Remembering how I panicked back in

that monster-filled trap room, we should always have a quick and reliable method of recovering our lost HP from any kind of attack and any number of enemies.

Durandal can circumvent that to a degree thanks to its HP Absorption effect, but that would only work for me if I was going to the Labyrinth solo. I could always hand Durandal to Roxanne if she was in a pinch, but that would in turn leave me without any means of defending myself if I didn't have other weapons with me. Not to mention that such a method would simply be too uncertain and unreliable.

Even with my Durandal around we might not be one hundred percent safe. For example, if we were to end up in the middle of a particularly steamy battle with a lot of tough enemies, then throwing Durandal back and forth between Roxanne and me might be impossible. I've seen this kind of thing in movies, games and anime. The moment the character gets confident that he'll be able to heal himself on time, he suffers a critical injury at that exact moment. Also, there will be times where we won't be able to wait with the healing for the battle to end, even if we stocked up on potions and other healing items.

So that settles it: one of my next goals should be securing myself a Job that can use healing!

「So, how about it? Any Jobs capable of healing that come to your mind?」

「Actually, I think there are Jobs capable of doing just that. If my memory serves me correctly, Priests and Monks are capable of using such Skills and spells.」

Oh, great, so there truly are Jobs like that. Good to hear. Now, if only I could obtain them without having to do anything tedious or time consuming, that would be even better.

「Well, do you know the details, like how can one become a Monk or a Priest?」

「I am certain that it requires large amounts of harsh training and iron-willed

discipline.]

Wow, talk about a tone-setter. Anyway, let's try inquiring about that training bit some more, because Roxanne's initial description was awfully vague and suspiciously nonspecific.

「What kind of training, exactly?」

「There are many methods of going about it, and they seem to be varying depending on the Guild you visit, but I heard that the most common one is meditation under an ice-cold waterfall in order to rid oneself of one's earthly desires.」

「A waterfall, huh?」

「There is also one where you have to go visit eighty-eight temples to achieve the clarity of mind.」

「So a pilgrimage, then.」

「Pil... grimage?」

Roxanne asked, but I ignored her.

The way I see it, waterfall training is aimed at achieving spiritual enlightenment and tempering one's body so that it can endure the training in secret martial arts, which monks in video games are famously known for.

Giving it some thought, it should be obvious that obtaining a Job that's clearly tied to faith and religion would be connected to some mystical experience such as meditation or visiting highly spiritual places in pilgrimage.

You become a thief when you steal things, and get to be an Explorer once you enter the Labyrinth. Using magic attacks will net you the Job of a Mage, and reaching enlightenment seems to be required in order to become a Monk or a Priest.

Anyway, looks like getting one of those might be more difficult than I

initially thought. For the time being, let's see if the simple act of prayer is going to do the trick.

「A~no ~ku~ma~ra~san~mya~ku~san~bo~dai. Amu namida butsu. Elohim essaim, allah akbar, amen.」

I checked my Job Settings, but no new Jobs appeared there. Hmm, maybe I'm not praying hard enough? I will try praying harder.

「Rin, Byo, to...」

But with each verse I recited, I was feeling more and more like an idiot.

「Ygnaiih... Ygnaiih, thflthkh'ngha! Ph'nglui...Ph'nglui... On Sochirishuta Sowaka. Wgah'nagl fhtagn!」

Oh no, this is bad. I feel like... as if something was awakening in the deepest recesses of my ignorant mind! Now come on Roxanne, come and join me in singing praises to the Great Ones!

「Nyar shthan, Nyar gashanna!」

Chapter 8: Monk

Part 1

Kaga Michio

Current levels & equipment:

Explorer Lv.12

Hero Lv.7

Warrior Lv.10

Swordsman Lv.8

Equipment:

Durandal

Leather Armor

Leather Jacket

Leather Gloves

Leather Shoes

To sum it all up, all of my attempts at reciting various chants, prayers and scriptures ended up in failure. Yes, that's right, I was making a fool out of myself for quite a while, and I still didn't unlock Monk's or Priest's Job as a result, so recovery magic and Skills were still beyond my reach. But I guess I can only blame myself for that. After all, if something as simple and trivial as a prayer was enough to obtain a Job, then it wouldn't require harsh training to begin with, right?

I always thought that prayers and such have nothing to do with magic, however, in this world, spells and Skills are both considered to be a type of magic. Right now, it looks like obtaining literally any Job that has access to healing spells and abilities might be more of a pain than it is actually worth it, but I shouldn't allow myself to get discouraged so easily, especially if it's going to help us in the long run. Also, I refuse to believe that training and pilgrimages are the only way of obtaining a Monk and Priest Jobs. Maybe I should ask Roxanne if there really isn't...

「Now that I think about it, I remember hearing that there is one more way to obtain the Monk Job, the one that was designed specifically for warriors, and it is to defeat monsters with your bare hands. And I don't want to brag, but I think I would more than up for this kind of task.」

Roxanne offered me a hint that I was waiting for at just the right time, most likely because she was starting to worry about my mental health. She could have told me about it before I started chanting random prayers like a madman, but I cannot say that to her, because that would be rude of me.

Well, it's good if she's confident in her own abilities, but if at all possible, I would also like to give it a shot. But can I really pull something as crazy as that off? And wait a goddamn sec! If Roxanne says she is fine with killing monsters with her bare hands, wouldn't that make her one hell of a scary lass?!

Then again, if defeating a monster with nothing but your fists wasn't possible, then it probably wouldn't be listed as a requirement for getting a Monk Job. It's the same as with the Swordsman Job or Mage Job: you get the former for defeating monsters with a sword, and the latter for using Attack Magic. Therefore, it would stand to reason that you should also get a Job for defeating enemies without the usage of any kind of weaponry.

But, you know... monks fighting with their bare hands? The only ones who fit that description to a T are the monks from the Shaolin Temple, since your typical Buddhist monks are more associated with sutras, Khakkharas (**TL Note: Those staffs with lots of rings on them**) and exorcising evil spirits. And even if I fail to get the Monk Job, maybe using hand-to hand combat will unlock some other offensive Job, like, maybe a boxer, brawler, or something along those lines? Either way, looks like it will at least be worth a try.

Still, there are various uncertainties regarding the exact conditions of unlocking the Monk Job by fighting monsters bare-handed. Most likely you have to 「defeat」 them without using any kind of melee weapon, but what does 「defeat」 mean here, exactly? Do I have to do all of the damage with my fists alone, or does it only have to be the finishing blow? And is it going to count if both of us will attack a single enemy?

For now, I guess we have no other choice but to test all of those options out.

「Roxanne, there's a little something I want to try.」

「Something?」

「Well, I guess you can call it an experiment.」

「An experiment, huh?」

「Yeah. For now, I would like you to put away your sword and try fighting a few enemies with just your fists.」

「Roger!」

However, I am still skeptical about this. Before I came to Veil, I had trouble defeating a friggin (Caerbannog) Bunny with a Copper Sword, and now Roxanne was going to fight something stronger than a Bunny with nothing but her own two hands? I couldn't help it but to worry, even if there are two of us now and we should have a level advantage over the Needlewoods. Just in case, I will have my weapon ready to strike at all times.

Oh man, if I tried doing it alone, it would certainly end up with my death, so let's just see how this goes without trying too hard. Let's try a single blow first.

I placed Durandal back at my hip and then jumped in front of the next Needlewood we encountered and I threw a straight haymaker at it with my right hand.

「Hng!!!」

Because I couldn't use my sword, I had no choice but to go up close and personal with it, which meant that getting hit myself was inevitable. Thankfully, it didn't hurt as much as I thought it will be, most probably because my levels went up, resulting in me being able to take more punishment now, but the numbing, burning sensation pulsating in the place that was hit by the enemy remained much the same.

Then Roxanne joined me and we attacked the Needlewood together, both

from its left and right sides. Faced with a 2v1 scenario, it wasn't able to respond to our strikes fast enough. While Roxanne kept its attention on herself, I stepped a few steps to the back and brandished Durandal. Noticing me, Needlewood waved its wooden fist at me. I blocked its attack with Durandal's hilt and then launched a counterattack, cleaving it cleanly in half.

While Roxanne was busy packing the leftover branches into her backpack, I checked the Party Job Settings once again, but much to my annoyance neither I nor Roxanne obtained the Monk Job. So it would seem that simply fighting the enemies with hand-to-hand combat was not enough after all. Maybe we should try defeating them after all?

The thing is, if we were to do that, then I don't know how long a brawl like that would take. I'd need to get closer to the enemy than when I was using the Copper Sword, so that's going to literally be a battle where my life will constantly be on the line.

At first, let's try only hitting it with our fists as a finishing blow. But in order to do that, we cannot use Durandal, since it is just too strong and it will kill the enemy in one hit. Copper Sword is out of the question either because it's just too weak. Luckily for me, Bonus Weapons Skill has six levels in total, so let's see what we are going to get when I choose Bonus Weapons 5, one level below Durandal.

It gave a weapon called Fragarach. It does not have MP Absorption, but it possesses HP Drain, Chant Interruption and Attack Power 5x, so it's not that much of a downgrade, if I am to be honest.

「Looks like you have quite a lot of weapons at your disposal, master. This one looks just as strong as your previous one.」

Roxanne praised me as she examined Fragarach with curious eyes and her hand on her chin.

「Thanks. I'll try using this one next and we'll see if it makes any difference, okay?」

「Right!」

Following Roxanne's guidance, we immediately found our next target. Having her in the Party is so convenient that it is unbelievable. If everything goes well, maybe we could really go to the Labyrinth's next level soon. Since all the monsters on this first level die in one hit from Durandal's one blow, then as long as we only go one level up we should still be safe.

However, the scariest part about this world is that even with all the things listed above, I still cannot be absolutely sure that everything will go exactly as I planned. It is a world filled with Labyrinths that are actually sentient creatures, monsters roaming the wilderness and a fuckload of Bandits and other villainous scum wherever you go. A world where you can never know what will happen to you next, and that is why it is imperative to keep getting stronger so that when the time comes that the world is going to hit you with a 「Surprise Motherfucker」 card, you'll just have to hit it back with a 「No U」 card and live your life in peace.

But that is a talk for the future. For now, we have to press forward without any regrets, hoping that our plan is not going to backfire on us.

Part 2

If we decide to go to the upper floors of the Labyrinth, it is quite possible that we're going to get more EXP points from defeating monsters. If we advance little by little without letting confidence to go into our heads too much, then we should be perfectly fine. We don't have to overdo it just yet. For now, my absolute top priority should be to guarantee our safety. As they say, slow and steady wins the race. If we were to force ourselves too much just for the sake of going forward, then I can already see us falling to the ground hard right before reaching the finish line.

That being said, we can't allow ourselves to be neglectful either. Even if it's one step at a time, we have to keep getting stronger by increasing the levels of the Jobs that we already have and continuing to acquire new ones.

That being said, I have delivered a "steady" slash with Fragarach towards the Needlewood in front of me, cutting it horizontally at waist-height. Now, let's see how much damage it did.

As expected, this time a single blow was not enough to kill it. Is that how big the difference between the Bonus Weapons is? And I just lowered it from Lv.6 to Lv.5 this time. Is every Bonus Weapon aside from Durandal useless? No, no matter how much weaker they are in comparison to Durandal, every Bonus Weapon should be stronger than the weakest of the weak weapons, Copper Sword.

But still, from the very basic equipment to The Holy Sword Durandal... the difference in the range of power on those things is a total bullshit. Not to mention that there's too many options in these things. If Fragarach from Bonus Weapon Lv.5 is that much weaker than Durandal, then what is a weapon from Bonus Weapon Lv.1 supposed to be, just a hair's width better than Copper Sword?!

While I was busy with my internal monologues, the Needlewood threw its wooded fist towards me. I've let my guard down too much, so there's no way for me to dodge it in time...

「Huh?」

... but then Roxanne jumped in front of me and started to shower the Needlewood with a barrage of punches. Left hook, right hook, left straight, right straight.



「Hah...」

She also dodges the enemy's attacks gracefully, after which she immediately jumps back into melee range to throw a jab or two its way.

Using the distraction Roxanne provided, I moved in with my second slashing attack, after which the Needlewood collapsed. So Fragarach takes two attacks to kill an enemy instead of one?

「W-Wow, amazing...」

「Yes, master. That new sword of yours is plenty strong as well.」

「N-No, I was talking about you, Roxanne. Those movements of yours...」

「Really? Then, thank you very much, I suppose.」

No no no, you shouldn't be thanking me. But even if she herself doesn't agree with me, that doesn't change the fact that her performance just now was outstanding. Huh? But wait a minute... if she doesn't think that something like that was amazing, then does that mean she wasn't serious just now?!

This is a world filled with dangerous Labyrinths and vicious monsters. Taking that into account, the fact that Roxanne is able to pull her own weight in a fight shouldn't be all that surprising. Still, back when I was at the Somara village, I saw with my own eyes that ordinary people were having trouble with repelling Bandit attacks and Slow Rabbits, and even if they all banded together they would be unable to defeat something like a Gumi Slime. But those with enough strength to enter the Labyrinth would obviously be different than normal people.

Anyway, as long as battling without Bonus Weapons is concerned, Roxanne is overwhelmingly stronger than me. Then again, maybe I shouldn't put that much thought into it and just accept it for a fact?

Guided by her superior sense of smell, we continued the exploration.

The next monster we happened upon was killed by me with the usage of Rush, which I successfully activated by thinking about it as I raised mu

sword in the air in preparation. I scored a clear hit on the Needlewood, which collapsed onto the ground with just a single hit.

Rush seems to be a Skill that allows the user to instantenously close the distance between him and the enemy, attacking them at the same time. I tried switching it with normal attacks, but I was unable to determine how much the strength of the attack rose with the usage of Rush.

Next, I tried testing the Swordsman Skill, Slash. Once again, the Needlewood unfortunate enough to be my test subject was killed with a single blow. Results? I don't really understand the difference between Rush and Slash. I guess I technically could run additional tests to test both of those Skills in more detail, but honestly, I don't want to do it. As long as they involve fighting against monsters, even the most harmless of experiments could quickly turn fatal if I wasn't paying enough attention. So instead, I'm going to try something a bit safer, the kind of experiment I can perform without much of a risk.

Character Reset not only allows me to redistribute my Bonus Points and change the Bonus Skills I want to use, but I can also change the values of my stats by adding and subtracting points from them. I was wondering what was going to happen if I tweaked them a bit, and now is as good of a time as any to find that out.

The stat that I'm going to fiddle around with is going to be STR (Strength), since it directly affects how much damage I am doing with my sword attacks, and my aim here is to always kill enemies with a single blow.

While keeping the points that I've put in Bonus Weapons to keep Fragarach (31 Bonus Points) and keeping the option of the Third Job, I used the remaining 75 Bonus Points to increase the STR value as much as possible, and with such settings I attacked the next monster. Surprising nobody, the Needlewood got obliterated with one strike.

Yup, that confirms it: more STR means increase in the attack power.

But even after increasing STR to 75 points, there wasn't really much of a change, by which I mean that my sword didn't feel lighter and my swings

didn't get any faster. No, maybe it did become somewhat easier to swing around, or maybe that was just my imagination playing tricks on me. Maybe my mindset has changed, and I subconsciously started thinking that I am now really strong, and that affected my muscles in some weird way? No, that actually sound way too far-fetched to be true. Even when my levels went up or Jobs were added and removed, there was no real change to the sensation. It remained the same the entire time.

I reverted my settings to the ones where I invested in increasing the amount of EXP gained (x10) and lessened the amount of EXP required to Level Up (1/10th), except this time I increased my STR to 45 points.

Now, let's see how those are going to perform, shall we?

Part 3

With an STR score of 45, the next monster I used Slash on died in one hit. A good result, but I don't want to use any more Bonus Points than it is absolutely necessary, so I might try lowering the STR value quite a bit before the next random encounter. If I want to min/max my stats, I have to figure out the exact number of points placed in STR to know how much should be enough to both one-shot the enemies and still have many points to spare for other abilities, so for the next battle I will lower my STR to 13 points and we'll see how this goes.

Okay, I can say that the result was not ideal, but it wasn't all that terrible either. With my STR at 13 the Needlewood survived the initial slash, meaning that I must have lowered my stats a bit too much. Thankfully, that's what Roxanne is here for. When I finished my attack she immediately jumped into action and showered The Needlewood with attack after attack without giving it time to breathe (or whatever it is that trees are doing). One of its branch attacks was faster and more unpredictable than the others, so I thought she was going to get hit by it, but she avoided it at the last possible second by leaning forward and slightly to the side. That move! That right there was the same maneuver that boxers back in my old world were using when they wanted to avoid their opponent's punch and launch a counterattack right afterwards! I think it is actually called a duck. Using her body flow to its fullest extent, she moved and dodged around the monster with a combination of both grace and deadly accuracy. Using the opportunity she created for me, I swung Fragarach at the monster when its back were turned against me, ending the battle.

「I should have expected nothing less from you, Roxanne. Your movements just now were amazing. Thank you for your continued support.」

「Yes, just leave it all to me, master!」

「I thought about it ever since I first saw you fighting, but you are quite strong, aren't you, Roxanne?」

「Thank you for the kind words, but I think that someone who kills monsters with a single blow is even more amazing.」

I'm happy that she thinks of me that way, but the entirety of my strength comes from my sword, not from myself. But that's okay, there's no need to be telling her that just yet, or ever. Next, I did another Character Reset to increase my STR by a few points so that I could kill Needlewoods with one attack with Fragarach. For a number of next encounters, I was gradually increasing my STR, trying to find that 「sweet spot」 that would get me what I was looking for. Every time when my stats weren't enough, Roxanne was there to finish the job for me.

「Alright Roxanne, listen up. Next time we run into a monster, I'm going to try to defeat it with my bare hands, and if that won't do anything we'll call it a day and go back to the inn.」

「Yes!」

With my current settings I should be able to damage the next Needlewood just enough not to kill but at the same time literally leave it at death's door. I have a good feeling about this. This time everything should work out, and there is no more room for mistakes.

The next Needlewood that came at us was slashed by my Fragarach, but it didn't die. All right, so far, so good. Now for the next step. I took a step back, unequipped Fragarach and placed it against the nearby wall. All this time, Roxanne was covering me up by dodging the swings of its arms as she danced around it. Then she proceeded to go on the offensive.

Roxanne punched it with her right fist, and lightly backstepped whenever one of the branches threatened to hit her. It tried to strike her shoulder but it missed, and as a result, its trunk swayed. When it got its shit together it tried to do another strike from the right but Roxanne avoided it once more, dashing straight back in front of it and making it eat a good ol' one-two combo and dodging it by half a step to the side. This exchange of dodge and hit

continued for a while.

It was spectacular. All I could do was to simply stare in amazement at what was happening right in front of me.

Roxanne avoided each and every one of the Needlewood's attacks. None of it was even close to reaching her. From where I stood, it looked like it wasn't even trying to hit her. Not only she makes it look like all of those branch swings are easy to avoid, but she's also doing it by the paper length, the literal skin of her teeth. The distance between the enemy's bushy fists and her body could be measured in centimeters, if not in millimeters.

At a glance it looks like she is constantly in a pinch, but it is actually the opposite.

The Needlewoods are rather big and somewhat slow, and that makes their attacks methodical and easy to predict. It also means that they wouldn't be able to dodge swift and agile attacks even if their lives depended on it. But that is how battle works. If you can clearly read your opponent's moves, it is generally better to dodge them at the last possible moment for maximum effectiveness.

All of Roxanne's movements were exactly like that. The way she moved her feet and twisted her body... it was just like she was dancing on the battlefield. Compared to her, the Needlewood's attacks are all just so... monotonous. I mean, what can you expect? It is just an oversized moving bush that can punch people, if you think about it. But this is a perfect moment for me to strike! I will also hit it now!

Right now, the Needlewood is sandwiched between me and Roxanne from the back and front, and to its sides are the Labyrinth's walls. It literally has nowhere to run. I slammed my fist against its bark, but did that really do any damage?

A branch was swung towards me from the left, so I dodged it by imitating Roxanne's movements, and what do you know, somehow it worked. Then another branch went flying towards me from the opposite direction, which I avoided by twisting my upper body to the side. Now that it has left itself wide

open, it was the time for me to strike!

My next two blows connected, and I avoided the counterstrike by pulling my body away from it, going back a few steps because of the momentum that carried me backwards. That was a close one. For a moment there I thought I fucked up, which would suck after I made such bold declarations.

On the other hand, Roxanne continued to brilliantly dodge the Needlewood's clumsy attacks. The more I watched her, the more I understood that moving the way she moved was simply impossible for me. No matter how hard I'd try, I cannot move as nimbly as she does, which would really come in handy now that I do not have a sword, which forces me to be within the monster's arm's reach all the time, making me work my ass off quite a lot, so being able to dodge properly would take at least a bit of the pressure away from me. A damn shame, really.

Moreover, Roxanne's punches were way faster than mine.

Fuck!

Using my rage and frustration as a catalyst, I dashed forward. First I threw a kick at it, and then followed up with a punch. When I was done, a branch was already coming my way. At this distance, there's no way for me to dodge it, so the only option left... id for me to put my everything into this next straight punch and push through with brute force alone!

With the impact of my fury-filled blow, the Needlewood's entire body shook. After a few seconds, it collapsed on the ground behind it.

Fucking... finally! It took like, forever, but we finally managed to beat it with our fists only. In this battle to the death, I was the one who emerged victorious. Of course, it was a death battle only for me, because Roxanne wasn't hit once throughout the entire encounter.

The monster turned into smoke and disappeared.

Almost immediately after it was felled I checked my own status. How was that, game? Good enough to finally get myself that Monk Job?

Well, apparently it still wasn't enough, because I still didn't have it. So what, all that unarmed brawling I just did was for nothing? No, let's not get all pessimistic just yet. I'll try checking the Party Job Settings next and search through Roxanne's Jobs. Now, let's see here... Beast Warrior Lv.6, Villager Lv.8, Farmer Lv.1, Warrior Lv.1, Swordsman Lv.1, Explorer Lv.1, Monk Lv.1 ...

Oh, would you look at that. Roxanne got it.

Part 4

「Roxanne, did you do something to that monster after I punched it?」

「Ah, yes, yes I did. After you delivered that punch that stunned it, I whacked it in the back one more time, causing it to collapse. Why are you asking, master? Have I done something that I shouldn't have done?」

「No, everything's fine.」

So she was the one who killed it, huh? Well, I certainly didn't saw anything that looked remotely like that, but to be fair, my eyes were pretty clouded with rage at that moment, so it's entirely possible that she truly did that and I simply missed it. But that gives me a crucial piece of information.

Based on what Roxanne said, it looks like the Job of a Monk can be obtained as long as you deal the finishing blow to the enemy with your bare fists, and that is supported by the fact that Roxanne, who dealt the last blow to that Needlewood got herself a Monk Job, while I, who was fighting the enemy unarmed, but did not kill it unarmed, failed to get it. That would truly mean that what is needed to obtain it is the last blow.

「That was some truly impressive dodging game there, Roxanne. I didn't know you could actually move like that.」

「Thank you very much, but it really wasn't anything that impressive. Because there were two of us fighting it at the same time it was distracted, which made seeing through the patterns of its attacks that much easier.」

I don't really care that much now that it's all over, but...

「Uh-huh, I see.」

「Everyone can avoid that kind of slow attacks as long as they pay attention and look closely enough.」

Yeah, right, not happening. Calling BS on that.

But once again, I am reminded why Roxanne is such a great person. Not only she knows a lot of things that I do not have a clue about, but she can also sense monsters with just her nose alone, as well as avoid their attacks like it was nothing!

Anyway, the lesson we have learned today is that you need to deal the finishing blow to obtain the Job, so now we can act on it properly.

「Okay Roxanne, the plan for the next battle is as follows: I will try to deal the finishing blow, so I would like you to keep yourself distanced, but not to engage the enemy unless it will be an emergency.」

That way I will be one hundred percent sure that my kill is not going to get stolen, accidentally or otherwise.

Or so I thought, but once again, the next Needlewood collapsed after only a single blow, which is strange, since I didn't do a Character Reset to change my STR value just yet. Apparently there is some fluctuation to the damage dealt to monsters, but at the current moment I have no idea if it is also affected by things like attack power or STR value, or just plain inconsistent damage.

Well, whatever.

For now, I was able to recover all of the damage I have sustained with Fragarach's HP Absorption, after which I added one more point to the STR stat and proceeded to hunt more monsters, waiting for the appearance of the one that wouldn't just drop dead on the spot after eating just one hit from me. It took some time, but finally such an opponent appeared again.

Now I know that fighting monsters without a real weapon is an unbelievably butt-hurting chore, but if I want to add Monk to my list of Jobs there is nothing I can really do about it.

All I have to focus on now is the enemy in front of me. Everything else will come after he will be dispatched.

If this guy is the same like that one which gave Roxanne a Job of a Monk when she defeated it, then that would mean that even if my slash with Fragarach didn't kill it, it should still be damaged enough to be felled by my fists alone, that is to say on the brink of death.

However, since I asked Roxanne not to interfere this time it means that it will still be incredibly dangerous for me since I'm going at it alone, doing fifty percent less attacks than we did before, resulting in the unnecessary prolonging of the battle.

Could it be that I fucked myself over without even realizing it?

Be that as it may, the battle has begun, and right from the get-go I had to deal with branch-fists heading my way.

I've been thinking: are Needlewoods able to distinct between their front, back, left and right. I don't even know if they need it in the first place, since they can technically attack in a 360 degrees radius with the branches protruding from their bodies. On that note, do they even have eyes? Because, to be honest, I never really bothered to look at them closely enough to check. Somehow I feel that even if they were surrounded by two or more people, it wouldn't place them at that big of a disadvantage. They are technically moving trees, so they should be sturdy enough to take a fair bit of punishment from both humans and other monsters alike.

Roxanne wasn't attacking just like I instructed her, but the Needlewoods behavior didn't change much because of it. If anything, it gotten a little bit more aggressive when the other target wasn't doing anything to retaliate against it.

Yes, I cannot forget that when it comes to hand-to hand combat, Roxanne is stronger than me. I told her not to fight with me this time... but it does not mean that she cannot distract the enemy to make my job of hitting it that much easier! That's it Roxanne, keep doing your paper-thin dodges for me. One of them is bound to leave this Needlewood in a vulnerable position.

This time I didn't simply unequip Fragarach, but completely erased it by doing a Character Reset mid-combat, pouring all of my remaining Bonus Points into STR. With that, by bare-handed attacks should be that much more effective. Roxanne continued to serve as a distraction, so I had plenty of room to prepare myself and launch a single, decisive strike.

..... There!

I jumped extremely close to the Needlewood while it was still recovering from a swing of its branches. It noticed me, but it wasn't able to get back into position in time. And like that, my outstretched fist collided with the enemy, sending it flying and tumbling along the ground. The Needlewood has fallen, and I was victorious once more.

「Amazing! That's another one hit victory for you!」

One-hit victory indeed, but there is nothing to gloat about here, because I cheated a little here by hastily allocating all of my remaining Bonus Points into STR.

Phew, that was tough, but since I was the only one who delivered the ass-whooping onto that Needlewood, then it should mean that this I should obtain that Job for sure. With those thought in mind, I opened the menu to check my Job Settings.

Monk Lv.1

Effects: Medium SPI Increase, Small MP Increase

Skill: Medical Treatment

Well, this is it.

I set up Monk as my First Job and immediately proceeded to check the effects of the Medical Treatment Skill. When I did, the pain that was permeating my shoulder due to one of my earlier attacks has completely disappeared.

「All right, the pain has subsided. From now on, if we ever get attacked by

monsters and end up wounded as a result, I will be able to heal us no problem.]

I told Roxanne.

「You can really do something so useful now?」

「That's right. And as always, promise me you'll keep it between us, capiche?」

「U-Understood. You really are full of surprises, master.」

To be honest, you can use that Skill as well, Roxanne. But it will probably be for the best if the one responsible for healing us in the middle of battle was me, since I have the Chant Omission from Fragarach and all that. One thing worth noting though: when I used Medical Treatment just now, a single usage used up $\frac{1}{4}$ of my total MP, so MP cost-wise it's going to be one of my pricier abilities to use, and that calls for going back to using Durandal, since it has the MP Absorption Skill.

Yeah, I will be in charge of our healing.

Part 5

After that, I tried experimenting with various settings and combinations of Jobs and Skills to see which one will allow me to kill the enemies in the least amount of time. First I tried to set my Job to Swordsman, which has the effect of slightly increasing STR, and checked if there were any changes to the amount of Bonus Points I still needed to add to the total STR in order to defeat a single Needlewood. If the total amount of Bonus Points required to do so, then it means that the added Job was a valid one. I am still not absolutely sure about it though, because there are the cases where I could defeat them easily, but sometimes I was unable to do so even when my Bonus Points remained distributed in the same way, but overall that little experiment ended in success.

Once that was done, I tried adding more Jobs at once to check if their effects will overlap, or is it going to be that the “better” effects with higher increase values are going to be prioritized over the ones with lower increase values. The result was that Job’s stats and effects do stack with one another, meaning that setting four or five Jobs at once is will be more effective than just having the regular two or three.

「I think it’s high time for us to be making our way towards the exit.」

We were inside the Labyrinth for quite some time now, so I concluded that maybe we should call it a day for today, considering the fact that the progress we’ve made today was substantial.

I opened the Item Box and placed all of our current equipment: Leather Helmet, Shield, Mittens and Gloves inside. Taking it off of us while we were still inside the Labyrinth might have been a little careless, but at our current level we should be alright even if we were to happen upon another enemy, and it is certainly a better alternative to doing so while being outside where

someone could very well see us and could start asking uncomfortable questions like “Why are you able to summon the Item box without chanting its spell at all?”. If I am able to avoid annoyances like that, you can be damn sure I am going to avoid them at all costs.

「Right!」

「How is your Magic Crystal doing, Roxanne?」

She showed me that hers was still black in color.

「No change from Black, huh?」

「Yes, unfortunately. It's because I wasn't able to defeat enough enemies. I'm sorry for not being more useful.」

「Don't say that. It doesn't matter if you defeat monsters or not. Your presence alone is a huge help to me.」

「Thank you master. Even though you are so amazing, you're still praising someone like me, who couldn't even defeat enough monsters to change the color of the Magic crystal.」

Assuring her once again, I placed both of our Magic Crystals, Black and Purple, into the Item Box as well. Right then, a question randomly popped into my head.

「Say, what if one person held two Magic Crystals at once?」

「I don't know. I have never heard of something like that happening.」

Well then, that's all the more reason to check this out. If I were to hold both of our Magic Crystals in my backpack, I wonder what would happen? Will the energy obtained from defeated monsters be stored in only one of them, or is it going to be split equally among the two? Then again, that would mean the amount going into each one would actually get halved, making the farming process unnecessarily longer. And finally, How would Crystal Acceleration affect both of them?

「If possible, that's one last thing I would like to try before wrapping things up for today.」

「I see. You want to make an experiment with the Crystals to see what will happen if you have two at once, right? As expected of you.」

I don't think it's anything like that, but okay, I'll just let her think it is like that. But I guess that somewhere deep inside, a part of me was really eager to find out the answer to that question.

Before we conducted the experiment we made a quick trip to the Adventurer's Guild to sell the items we've obtained from all the Needlewoods we have slain, and then returned to the Labyrinth. Initially I wanted Roxanne to stay int the Labyrint's entrance room since selling the going back to the town, selling the items and doing a trip back would take me ten minutes at best, but she insisted that since we are a Party we should always go everywhere together, so we did.

The experiment itself was actually extremely short. All I did was Reseting my character so that I would have Crystal Acceleartion x16, and then I just offed one, single monster with the two Magic Crystals in my backpack. Nothing fancy or complicated, just a trip from point A to point B without taking any unnecessary detours throughout the rest of the alphabet.

Results of this particular experiment: Black Magic Crystal remained black, and the Purple Magic Crystal remained purple. With the x16 multiplier, the black one should have turned red from all the accumulated energy, but it looks like it does not accumulate the way I assumed it would. If that test was successful, I was going to invest in Crystal Acceleration x64 and use it to gain magic energy for both of our Crystal at once, but thinking about it now, if something like that was possible, it would be nothing less of a game-breaking cheat, so of course it was a no-go.

「Okay, the next experiment will really be the last one. I know it's a bother, but please, just bear with me for a little while longer, alright?」

I said to Roxanne while giving her the Black Magic Crystal back.

「How was the experiment, master? You defeated only one enemy, so...?」

「So it means that I would rather not talk about it. Or to put it simply: it was a failure.」

「I see. That is a shame.」

Yes, but not quite. Such tests are also needed, because failure is the mother of success. That is why tests like that are also important.

「So, will you cooperate with me on this last one?」

「O-Okay, of course!」

I opened the Party Job Settings and changed Roxanne's Job to Monk Lv.1, and then I did the same for myself. Now, the experiment we are going to try is related to how the EXP points are divided between multiple Jobs. With both of us having the same Job at the same Level, we will see how fast the EXP for it is going to accumulate.

Normally I should be the one to Level Up faster because of my EXP Boost Skill, but if I set it up so that we the both of us would use it, then we should be getting EXP at the same rate, but because Roxanne has only one Job while I have multiple ones set up, she would be the one to Level Up faster, so I can judge the results by how many time her Monk Job levels up.

I went through a Character Reset where I only took the ability to gain x10 more EXP. I'm going to use Durandal for this, I won't have enough Bonus Points for anything more than that. Technically I could use Fragarach to achieve x20 EXP Boost, but I cannot do that, since I need Durandal's raw power to kill the enemies with a single blow.

x20 EXP Boost costs 63 Bonus Points, Fragarach costs 31 Points, 3rd Job is 3 Points, and then I also need Identify to check our statuses and Character Reset to make adjustments, which means that would have left me with an insufficient amount of Bonus Points to increase my STR enough to one-shot everything with Fragarach. I could try switching my Job to Warrior and fight by using Rush, but Fragarach does not have MP Absorption, and I absolutely

don't want to risk running out of MP.

Even though Fragarach is supposed to be only one level below Durandal, Bonus Weapon Lv.5 instead of Lv.6, it feels like it is so vastly inferior to it as if there was an insurmountable rift between those two weapons. But whether I like it or not, in the Labyrinth, mine and Roxanne's safety is my number one priority, and both stat and Skill-wise, the one that is better suited for this job is Durandal, hands down.

Part 6

「How are you feeling, Roxanne? Have you noticed any changes to either your mind or body?」

「No, not particularly. I feel the same as always.」

So when I change my Jobs or make alterations to my stats, I am the only one who is aware of the changes happening, and Roxanne was not even aware of it.

「We're just doing experiments right now, so make sure that you don't push yourself too hard, okay?」

「Are any of the other ones you have in mind dangerous?」

「No, I'm not planning on doing anything life-threatening. Our safety always comes first.」

I hurriedly denied it. Have I phrased something wrong that she thought I was going to place her in danger?

I don't know the differences between the Beast Warrior and the Monk jobs, so I just thought that being cautious for now would be for the best. Better safe than sorry, right? Also, with a new Job starting from Lv.1 she won't have stats as good as she did with her Beast Warrior Lv.6 one, and I suspect that until she leveled it up she won't be able to kill enemies with one or two strikes like she did before. Now, how can I put this delicately...

「It's just that your Job has been set to the Monk which is at Lv.1, so....」

「Eh?」

「Eh?」

「「Ehh!？」」

Holy balls, maybe I shouldn't have said that after all, or at least try to phrase that differently.

「But my Job is a Beast Warrior. I have never been a Monk ...」

「Well, you are now, so keep it confidential, okay?」

Sigh There I go again. Another secret that I am forcing her to keep on top of not telling her everything about me and my circumstances.

「You can do something like that as well? I probably sound like a broken record, but you are amazing, master.」

Roxanne seems to be convinced for now, so that's fine I guess.

Both of us obtained the Monk Job now, so we might as well go hunt some monsters to level it up as much as possible. Due to the settings I have currently set up, we gained EXP at the same pace, as if we were both using the EXP Boost Skill.

Most likely it's that the EXP you gain does not get divided even when you have multiple Jobs equipped, like twenty five percent of it for each of my three equipped Jobs, and its entirety to Roxanne's one Job. Maybe I should try how it's going to be when I use the Essential EXP reduction Skill? But as a result of that action, only my Monk Job quickly rose up to Lv.3, while Roxanne didn't Level Up at all. The skill that reduces the required experience value seems to be effective only for me, not for the whole Party.

「Okay, that should be good enough. Let's wrap up the experiments for today and go back to the inn. If my estimates are correct, it should be evening soon.」

「That's right. I think it really is getting quite late.」

After we both agreed that this was the best point to stop, we got out of the

Labyrinth. We ended up experimenting all day today, but I can't say that it was a wasted day. We managed to confirm quite a lot of my theories and suspicions, and we also obtained a new Job that might be essential for our survival when we go to the Labyrinth's higher floors. So overall, I'd say that this day was pretty successful.

From the Labyrinth's entrance, we Warped back to the alleyway behind the Adventurer's Guild, dropped by their reception counter to sell the rest of the Needlewood branches we had obtained today, and then we were on our way back to the Veil Pavilion.

Thanks to Roxanne being with me, the number of monsters we are able to defeat in a single foray into the Labyrinth has effectively doubled, and her radar-like nose allows us to always be aware of the enemy's location, which means the possibility of us falling into a trap has also been significantly decreased. And of course, double the numbers of defeated monsters mean double the income from the items that they drop. When we sold the rest of the branches we had on us, we got 2000 Nars from them alone, including my 30% Price Increase Skill, which means that I can put over half of it, 1000 Nars into my personal savings. If I can save 1000 Nars in a single day, then it means that ten days worth of savings will give me 10,000 Nars, and 100,000 Nars for a hundred days. With savings like that, the two of us could easily afford to venture into the higher floors soon, which would not be so bad, now that I seriously think about it.

But even if it doubles, we will still divide the earnings equally by half, so the income of each individual person will not change that much. Then again, Roxanne is my slave, so everything that belongs to her also belongs to me.

Excited by the prospects of what is going to happen to us in the future, we returned to the Pavilion.

「Double room for two nights, with dinners. After supper, bring two basins of hot water and a lamp to the room.」

I hope I didn't let any of my excitement slip just now, because he might have figured out that I'm planning on getting some action again tonight. I should stop thinking about it so much, because at this point, people might read me

like an open book if I won't be too careful.

「Understood. 385 Nars, special discount included.」

I paid the fee and received the key. We went to the 5th floor and entered the same room as yesterday. Out of habit, I patted the space next to me on the bed, signaling Roxanne that it was fine for her to sit next to me.

「Ah, uhm... Sorry for the intrusion.」

She lowered her backpack and sat on the bed next to me.

I immediately hugged her and played with her ears. Whenever I do this, I always feel refreshed no matter how tired I am. Ahh, this is the best!

「Thank you for your hard work today.」

「Y-Yes, good work out there as well... *Glance*...」

Her attitude is still a little stiff, just like her body, but at the very least she is sitting closer to me, just like I asked her to do. I moved my hands as gently as possible, stroking her shoulders, thighs and her cute doggy ears.

「How was the fight today? Was there anything strange or unexpected from your point of view, Roxanne?」

「No. You were as amazing and wonderful as always, master. I only wish that I could have been of more use to you. I'm sorry I didn't help too much.」

「You don't have to be. Your ability to detect monsters alone has been a huge help to me.」

As we continued the conversation, I found that Roxanne was getting more and more relaxed, as if she was entrusting herself to me. I held her tightly, leaning my face closer to hers. As we approached one another, Roxanne slowly closed her eyelids.

Th-This is...!

Am I supposed to take it as an invitation? Because this totally is an invitation, right?!

Her pale, soft lips shimmered like rubies in the red light of the setting sun.

Roxanne closed her lips tightly, but then she opened them ever so slightly.

With that gesture, her intentions became obvious, so there was only one thing left for me to do.

The next morning, the feeling of her soft lips on mine was the first thing that welcomed me as soon as I opened my eyes. Once again, Roxanne did exactly how I ordered her when I first brought her here, and gave me a good morning kiss. At first I only stuck out my tongue and traced it along Roxanne's seductive lips, but it slipped into her half-opened mouth only moments later. I don't really know if it is good to be so forceful and pushy first thing in the morning, but nevertheless, I appreciate that she is the one who's showing the initiative in those matters every day.

Gently and slowly, I move my tongue around hers to caress hers. I lightly hugged Roxanne's body. Her large, plumpious beauties are firmly pressed against my chest.

「Good morning, master.」

「Good morning, Roxanne.」

This is bad. If this keeps up, we might end up doing it more than once a day, and that is sure to catch somebody's attention at some point. But I guess there's no use worrying about it now. We will cross that bridge when we get there.

For now, I released Roxanne from her daily "duties", and we started another day of our life together.

Part 7

Even though we had our fun yesterday, we still went to sleep relatively early the next day, and woke up when it was still dark outside. Looks like we woke up even earlier than usual today. There was no point in us going back to sleep, so we decided to go do some farming a bit early. We're not doing any experiments today, so we're just focusing on the usual mixture of battles with the monsters and exploration. Roxanne guided me with her nose and I just one-shotted everything that had the misfortune of ending up at the business end of my Durandal. Compared to fighting the enemies bare-handed, these motions were as secure as they could be. I know that such laid-back exploration cannot last forever, but for the time being both Roxanne and I are fine with it, and that is all that matters.

After hunting monsters for an entire day, we left the Labyrinth, returned to the inn where we enjoyed our dinner in peace. When we finished eating, we went to the Adventurer's Guild to sell the items that dropped from all the monsters we managed to defeat today. Thanks to the fact that I do not belong to any particular Guild yet I can sell my stuff pretty much anywhere I want, but I usually just do my selling in the Adventurer's Guild since I have set up my Warp point on the wall of their guild building in an alleyway that is rarely frequented by anyone because that is the most convenient for us at the current moment, but maybe I should try going to the Explorer's Guild more frequently, since they have various information related to the exploration of the Labyrinths that might come in handy in the long run.

Finishing our item-selling business, we went to the Labyrinth again. It has become our routine to delve into it three times each day: once in the early, morning, once before noon and once in the afternoon. Because we're going there so often, we're trying not to stay in there for too long, since it would be bad if the fatigue from overexerting ourselves caught up with us when we

would least expect it, so we're always making sure to take nice long rests before going back in. We stayed inside all the way to the evening, and after we got back and ate another delicious dinner, after which we tended up to our equipment.

And now that all the bother some chores have been taken care of, it was finally time for us to have some quality time together.

As soon as the Innkeeper brought over the basins with hot water and was out the door, I hugged Roxanne. Ahh, it has been half a day since I could last enjoy the delicate, yet soft and elastic feeling of her body in my arms. Enjoying such an exquisite sensation two times in the span of a few hours, is today my lucky day or what?

I brought my face closer to hers.

「You're beautiful, Roxanne.」

「Th... thank you v-very... m-much...」

「Truly, seriously beautiful.」

She looked a little embarrassed, but didn't try to stop me from complimenting her, so I moved my hand to gently stroke her shoulders, arms and back... and then I slowly started to undress her.

Now that we've done this a few times, I know that I don't have to hesitate anymore. It is clear that whatever I will try to do to her, she will not resist.

「Ah, uhm...」

「It's fine, it's fine.」

Getting out of my own clothes was easy as pie, but when it comes Roxanne's clothes, taking all of them off took me more time than I would have liked. Honestly, being so clumsy about something so crucial felt embarrassing. I just hope that she won't think that I'm lame because of it.

「B-But...」

「Have some faith in your master, will you?」

I soaked one of the towels in hot water and proceeded to wipe Roxanne's entire body. My palms were literally sliding all over her beautiful skin, so I made sure to go slowly in order to savor this exquisite sensation for as long as I could. And when I got to a particular place...

「Y-You don't have to do this, master. I... I can take care of that myself...」

「And I said that's it's fine. It's not a bother for me at all. I'm not doing this out of obligation, but because I want to.」

It's a dream like situation that I never even dreamed of finding myself in while I was living back in Japan. I didn't have any friends back there, and the chances of me scoring myself a girlfriend were lower than zero, but now... now I found myself a girl who is not only obedient, but also strong, big-breasted, beautiful, and has an actual pair of friggin' droppy doggy ears! What more could you possibly want from life?!

Is this what people call the joy of being alive? Of experiencing your youth to its fullest? It might as well be, because, to tell you the truth, ever since I have been brought to this strange, game-like world, I have felt more alive than for the past seventeen years of my life. So in order to feel even more alive, I asked Roxanne to wash me as well, and to take care of my "special place"

「.....」

「.....」

What does it mean to be truly alive? And is it even possible in the first place?

Spending our days like this, we continued the exploration of the first floor of the Labyrinth. Every battle was an easy victory for us, because the only monsters we encountered were the Needlewoods, and since I had Durandal with me, all of them died after only one attack, so we were basically parading through them collecting their branches like it was a leisurely Sunday afternoon stroll. But one day, just as I was thinking that we've been making a great amount progress in exploration these past few days...

... We happened upon a certain room with a big double door at the far back of it after the path we were walking down have been closed off from the rest of the Labyrinth by a wall that came out from the ceiling and slid down all the way to the ground behind us with a loud, thunderous sound. There was no monsters in there, but the door itself looked like they were emanating some pretty bad, ominous aura.

What is this strange place, I wonder?

Oh, right, one more detail I should mention. This room was different from all the others in such sense that it only had one set of doors dead ahead of us and one back where we came from, while normally there would be four pairs of them: in the front, in the back, to the left and to the right.

「Roxanne, do you know where we are?」

「It's a Waiting Room, if I am not mistaken.」

「A Waiting Room?」



When I turned around to check if the doors were still there, they were still there. As I mentioned above, they were only behind us and in front of us.

「Well... behind this door is the Floor Boss of this floor. If we manage to defeat it, the door leading to the second floor should open. As per the old customs, only one Party can challenge the Boss at a time. If multiple Parties try to enter the Boss Chamber then it will not appear, and the door to the next floor will not open. As long as one Party challenges the Boss, the other Parties who wish to do the same have no option but to wait for their turn.」

Roxanne explained. It's a pretty standard in the most of modern MMORPG's, actually.

「I see. So that is what a Waiting Room is, huh?」

「Yes. This is a last safe heaven where you can check on the condition of your equipment, heal your wounds and make all the preparations necessary to challenge the Floor Boss.」

「Hmm, I see. You think we're ready to do this?」

「Master is super strong, so I don't think we will have any problems defeating it at this point.」

「Heh. Thanks for a vote of confidence.」

So we have finally reached this point, huh? Behind that door is the Floor Boss of this Labyrinth's first floor.

Part 8

Roxanne doesn't seem to be concerned about this at all, but I still have my doubts, to be honest. I really don't know if we should be facing this Floor Boss just yet.

We will only have one go at it, and no retries, because failure here means death, plain and simple. And we don't even know how powerful this guy is going to be, and we have no reliable way of judging that up. Sure enough, Needlewoods, the enemies of this first floor all die after one blow from Durandal, but Durandal is OP as shit, so that's not much of a milestone here. But then, what should I do? Grind and train until I could kill Needlewoods with the Copper Sword, the crappies of the crappy weapons? Technically that is perfectly doable, but I'm afraid that it would take too much of our time and ultimately accomplish nothing. And while we are on the subject of grinding, stronger monsters from the higher floor would truly be more suitable for it than the weaklings found here. To that end, ascending to the higher floors as fast as possible would really be a good idea. And you know, maybe the fact that the enemies here can no longer offer anything to us really is our cue that it is high time to face the big baddie and be out of here onto the greener pastures.

「Since it is a Floor Boss, then doesn't that mean that it is pretty strong?」

I asked her for confirmation.

「It's going to be all right, master. I believe that the Floor Boss here won't be any problem to you. For you see, both the monsters inhabiting the floors and the Floor Bosses are a set. As for the Boss itself... well, I seem to have forgotten the exact details about him... but anyway, since you have been able to kill all the enemies thus far with one or two blows, he won't stand a chance against you, master!」

「Okay, that's... cool, I guess?」

I feel like Roxanne's faith in me and my combat abilities might be a bit too enthusiastic, but on the other hand, she might be right. If we were fine thus far, then how hard this guy can actually be. If the normal Needlewoods are any indication, she shouldn't be much harder than them, unless we're in for a sudden difficulty spike of course.

「Ah! Master, look!」

While I was listening to Roxanne's explanations about the Floor Boss, the door to the Boss Chamber slowly began to open. Welp, if there was ever any chance for us to turn back, it just went and fucked itself out the window.

「I know you might be nervous, master, but do try to relax. Not many people have entered this Labyrinth so far, and I bet that even fewer made it this far! Now then, let us be on our way. And who knows, if we're lucky, then maybe we'll be able to salvage some of the equipment from the Parties that tried to conquer this Floor Boss before us.」

Whoa there, care to run that by me again?!

「Equipment from... previous Parties... as in...?」

「When a Party gets annihilated by the Floor Boss, the next Party to challenge him has all the rights to claim the weapons, armor and items of the ones who tried before them as their own.」

Should you really be calling that 「being lucky」 then? And more importantly, should you really be so excited about such a possibility?!

Without delving into the matter further, Roxanne went ahead and entered the Boss Chamber before me.

I don't know if I am just too cautious about this or is she being too casual, but a little caution never hurt nobody, but she's already inside the chamber so I guess there's nothing I can do about it now other than heading in myself, hoping that we are somehow going to pull through this.

As soon as I set foot inside, the door closed behind me with a loud bang. As for the room itself, it wasn't all that different from the rest of the first floor, just your regular cavern measuring about four to five square meters. When I looked at the floor and near the walls, I saw no pieces of equipment lying around anywhere, which could basically mean one of two things: either the Party who challenged the Floor Boss before us succeeded without anyone dying and they have ascended to the second floor, or no one has actually fought this guy before us. Honestly, I think possibility #1 is more probable.

Finally, when we reached the center of the room, clouds of green smoke gathered before us, revealing the figure of this floor's Floor Boss.

It is taller than me and the normal Needlewood combined. Its body is entirely green, and it has two massive branches that could very well be the separate tree trunks instead of arms.

Identify!

When I appraised it, its name has been revealed: Udownood (**TL Note: Udo: a type of medicinal plant related to ginseng, native to Japan, Korea and eastern China. It commonly is found on the slopes of wooded embankments. And that's your piece of useless trivia for today.**)

Udownood, huh? Well, to me it looks like an oversized, beefed up Needlewood, but sure game, let's pretend that it is something else entirely. It definitely is stronger than the usual Needlewoods, but thankfully it is at the same level as them, so maybe it's a rule that the Floor Boss's level cannot be higher than that of the mobs.

「Let's go, master!」

Roxanne run up to it and slashed one of its legs with her Scimitar. I hurriedly rushed in behind her.

Udownood raised its branch arm and slammed it towards Roxanne, but she avoided it like it was nothing by lightly twisting her body. I also avoided it by backstepping.

After recovering from its previous attack, Udownood attacked once more, this

time with its other arm. Roxanne dodged it once again and counterattacked by slashing it with the scimitar. I wanted to jump in to attack it as well, but I just couldn't find the right timing to do so.

Aside from its two main arms Udowood also had a second set of them located on its back, so it possesses the means of defending itself from being attacked by two people simultaneously.

Next time it attacked, Roxanne took its blow head on with her Wooden Shield and slashed back at it the moment it was briefly stunned after having its attack blocked. That was also a change for me to finally let it have a taste of Durandal's blade! Take thissssss!

My attack connected, but even after eating it in its entirety, the Udowood was still standing. As expected of a monster classified as a Floor Boss, it probably has so much HP that it didn't even flinch from that strike just now. By the way, even though it was nothing more but a small fry when compared to this guy right here, the Gumi Slime that I though on the road to Veil also could not be felled with Durandal's single strike, even though it was Lv.1, the same as this guy here. But that was to be expected, since even though their levels might be the same, different monsters will have different HP pools and damage resistances.

When it finally took notice of me, Udowood started employing its other set of arms to attack us more fiercely. Roxanne did her best to draw its attention away from me so that I could have another clear shot at it. Going behind it's back, I slashed it with a wide, diagonal arc. It was another successful hit, but once again, it was not enough to take this guy down. Just how much health does he have?! I'm hitting him with Durandal, the strongest weapon at my disposal for Christ's sake!

Comparing my movements to Roxanne's once more, it's obvious that they are completely different. It attacked her again, but she evaded and escaped his every attack like it was the most obvious thing to do in the world. After Roxanne's next dodge, I took another step back to get a better look at what we are dealing with. Those four arms are a problem, but I feel like as long as we will keep moving and attack it in a hit & run fashion, Udowood won't be able to keep up with us. It shook its branches and targeted Roxanne with its

next attack.

Yes, this might just work.

Part 9

Well, to be specific once again, I do not have the power to finish this guy off, but my Durandal does. But of course, Roxanne does not know about that, and maybe that is why she is acting a little bit bolder than usual.

Anyway, now that this guy's attention is focused sorely on Roxanne, I can switch my focus to another part of its body, specifically the back right above where its ass should be... and go all out and go in dry with another slash, the one that will hopefully end all!

Here it goes.... RUSHHHHHHHH!!!

SLAAAAAAAAAAAAASH!!!!!!

There was dull sound of metal cutting through wood when my attack hit the Udowood's back and slid all the way down to his cheeks. And after that, it slowly took a few steps back and fell to the ground, where it disappeared in a storm of green clouds.

Alright, we did it! The Floor Boss bites the dust, and we're both alive and well!

「Ah, look, master it looks like a leaf.」

When the smoke from the monster disappeared, what was left after it was a single leaf. This is Udowood's Drop Item? But it really looks just like any ordinary leaf with no peculiar qualities whatsoever. Even after looking at it with Identify, it told me exactly that: this is a normal leaf.

Roxanne went and picked it up for me.

Essentially, it has to be said that while it was my damage that secured us the victory, what made that victory possible to begin with were her godly moves. I mean seriously, they were something that would be totally impossible for an ordinary human like me. Even if I were to use Overwhelming, I am sure I would only be able to imitate her motions in a truly non-graceful display, and even that's something I cannot be absolutely sure of, since Overwhelming only slows the enemy it hits down, doing nothing to improve my own reflexes... ah! That's it! Maybe she's actually using Overwhelming, or a Skill that is similar to it? Wait a minute, what was the Skill of the Beast Warrior Job again? I'll have to check it in the Party Job Settings.

Roxanne's current Job levels are: Beast Warrior Lv.7, Villager Lv.8, Farmer Lv.1, Warrior Lv.1, Swordsman Lv.1, Explorer Lv.1, Monk Lv.2 and Herbalist Lv.1.

Oh? Looks like she unlocked one more Job! A... Herbalist?

「Roxanne, what is a Herbalist, exactly?」

「Herbalist? That is a type of Healer who can turn leaves and such into medicine, salves, potions and the like.」

Roxanne explained when I asked her about it. Oh, and by the way, the Skill associated with the Beast Warrior Job is called Beast Attack.

Now that we have defeated the Floor Boss, the door at the other side of the room opened in their own. Aside from the leaf that dropped from that Udowood, there was no other reward for us, no treasure chest, no pile of gold, no nothing. Maybe there was some kinda additional reward, but it was snatched by the Party that came here before us? That would suck serious ass. Just to be on the safe side we checked the entire room one more time, and when we found nothing we decided it is high time to move on.

「Can I see that leaf for a sec?」

「Of course.」

Roxanne handed it over to me. Yup, nothing unusual or out of the ordinary

here. This is just a normal leaf.

「So... about the Beast Attack. What kind of Skill is that, exactly?」

I asked while spinning the leaf in my fingers. What I specifically wanted to know was if it possesses any effect similar to that of Overwhelming. But if the name itself was to be any indicator, then I guess that it is a purely offensive Skill rather than a support one.

「Ah, so you wish to know about it? Well, from what I heard it's a Skill that all the Beast Warriors possess, and that it can inflict a great deal of damage to monsters... but that is all I know. Also, I'm sorry... but I cannot use that Skill myself.」

「Huh? What do you mean you cannot use it?」

「Every Skill can be considered to be a type of a magical spell that uses a chant that is composed entirely in Brahim language, and Brahim itself is a holy language so ancient that its words themselves became seeped in magic. Therefore, if you cannot speak Brahim fluently, then you won't be able to cast spells or use Skills.」

Is that so? Then it's a good thing that apparently I am able to speak it fluently. I always thought that it might be a very useful language, and I am happy to see that apparently I was right. So if you want to use Skills and cast magic, you have no choice but to learn Brahim, huh? At this rate, it might very well become a common language one day.

「But, like... weren't you studying Brahim before we met?」

「Well, yes, but actually... I am still not all that good at using it.」

「How so? You don't know the exact chants needed to cast spells and Skills?」

「No, that's not it. The chants do come to my mind whenever I want to use them... but there is just too much details and complicated nuances in them, like accent or pronunciation, and if you want get all those things right, the spell or Skill won't work at all. So as you can see, it is something way above

the level of a casual everyday conversation where you have to basically be able to understand the entire language perfectly, otherwise you might as well just give up.]

Chants just come to her mind whenever she wants to use the spells or Skills? That sounds oddly familiar, but does not concern me, since I have the ability to omit the chanting part entirely. Anyway, it's good to know that those rules apply to other people as well, not just myself.

「Is that so?」

「Also... whenever the chants popup into my head, they always catch me off guard so I am unprepared, but not being able to use them is not that big of a deal for me anyway, and beginners like me are generally discouraged from using them, so...」

「I see.」

Well, it sure sounds like a big deal to me. And personally, I don't think that Roxanne is a beginner at all. If she's so powerful now, then I can't help but wonder just how much stronger she would have become if she was able to properly utilize all of the Skills at her disposal.

We proceeded to the next room through the newly opened door. Behind them was a simple stone corridor with a black wall-portal at the very end.

「If we use this portal, we should arrive at the Labyrinth's second floor.」

「Let's go then. There's no point delaying the inevitable, is there?」

「Right!」

And with that we stepped right into the portal, eagerly expecting what was going to be waiting for us on the other side.

Part 10

After entering the portal and passing through the momentary all-engulfing darkness, we have found ourselves in a room that was awfully similar to the Waiting Room before the Boss Chamber on the first floor. It was a room four to five square meters wide, but this time, instead of having only two doorways, one in the front and one in the back, the passages to the left and right were also present, like in the normal room with the crossroads on the first floor. When we got here, the portal behind us didn't disappear, meaning that we can probably use it anytime if we want to go back to the floor below us.

But seriously now, everything here look exactly as it did below, to the point where it would be impossible to tell that you have ascended to the higher floor if you were blindfolded and kicked through the portal, because the process of teleportation itself didn't involve any kind of giveaways that you were being transported, like having goosebumps all over your body or that unpleasant, sinking feeling in your stomach. Also, if I'm not mistaken or missing something, Dungeon Walker should work here as well, so there is no harm in giving it a try.

「Roxanne, would you mind fighting the Floor Boss of the first floor again with me?」

「Yes, of course! I see no problems with it!」

All right. For now, this will be our number one priority.

When we defeated the Floor Boss, Roxanne obtained another Job: Herbalist. That is nice and all, but how exactly did she do that? What kind of condition she managed to fulfill for that to happen? You become a Thief when you steal things, and going into the Labyrinth makes you an Explorer. Going by

that logic, the most probable condition for becoming a Herbalist was picking up medicinal herbs. I do remember, although vaguely, that some leaves can be turned into medicine, therefore they can be classified as medicinal herbs, so picking it up will grant you the Job of Herbalist. Then again, I have not obtained it after I held it in my hand when Roxanne gave it to me, so I guess just holding it won't do. Maybe I have to specifically pick it up right after it is dropped after the Floor Boss gets defeated. At least, that is my hypothesis about it, we will see whether it is right or wrong. But if it would be as simple as picking it up, then my life would be that much easier. From now on, I guess we just have to make a habit of collecting every single item that the monsters drop, not that we didn't do that already anyway.

I gave the leaf back to Roxanne and then we went back through the black wall to the floor below. But instead of going back to the room right after the Boss Chamber, our eyes were assaulted by the flood of dazzling radiance.

We were back at the entrance to the Labyrinth, where the Explorer guy who could teleport you to the floor of your choosing was standing. So I guess that door is a one-way street, huh? I can't say that it ruins our plans, but it is a kind of a bother. I thought we could go back to challenge the Udowood right in a matter of seconds, but now, who knows if we won't have to go through the entire first floor again? Whoever designed it in such a way must have had a very weird definition of the word "convenience" written in his/her personal dictionary.

Roxanne looked like she wanted to say something, but just as she was about to open her mouth she decided not to do so, because right behind our backs, a group of six people appeared. Judging by how they were dressed, they must be a Party. She must have heard them approaching, and that's why she didn't speak up. Good going, Roxanne. The last thing we want is some rандос listening in on our conversations by accident.

The one who looked like a rogue, a tall man in a long cape came to the Explorer and started a conversation.

「How far?」

He asked. The Explorer answered him without even lifting his head or

opening his eyes to look at him.

「Fourth floor.」

Roxanne and I moved away to the side of the road where we pretended to organize the items in our backpacks so that we could eavesdrop on what exactly they were talking about. We're not doing anything bad, or against the law, before you ask. Information gathering is one of the most important skills an aspiring Adventurer is supposed to have, and how those information are obtained is not anyone else's business but ours.

The caped guy looked at his companions, especially at the one who looked like a Knight, and gestured them to come closer. Compared to the rest of them, the Knight's armor looked to be the most solid one, but that should be obvious, since in games Knights always fight at the frontlines, tanking the most damage. Good to see that some of the video game stereotypes I am used to still hold true here.

「What monsters are on the fourth floor?」

The knight spoke directly to the Explorer at the entrance.

「Minotaurs. Going up from the first floor to the fourth, there are Needlewoods, Green Caterpillars, Kobolds, and then Minotaurs.」

「We could deal with the Kobolds of the third floor, so I think we can try taking on the fourth.」

Everyone nodded in agreement, after which the Knight urged the caped guy. He held out his hand and said:

「*Bring forth the stored riches of eight hundred thousand five hundred. Item Box, open!*」

Was that the actual chant needed for the summoning of the Item Box? Ever since I have been able to use it I did so with the Chant Omission Skill, so I wasn't even aware that you needed to say something so mouthful just for it to pop out.

The caped guy, who, for the ease of reference I assume to be the Party's Explorer opens up the summoned Item Box and takes something out of it. I couldn't see it well, but Identify revealed it to be a silver coin. As usual, Identify proves itself to be handy in a situation such as this. The Party's explorer then tossed the coin to the one at the Labyrinth's entrance. He caught it midair and stored it in his own Item Box, the one where he probably kept all the money Adventurers paid him for his teleportation services.

「*Faith in companions, with pure, honest hearts, Party Formation!*」

The caped Explorer than sang another chant. What is it this time, some kinda Party-forming spell?

The two Explorers then entered the newly opened portal, and went inside. Just the two of them, while the rest of the Party stayed behind, but the other two were back at the entrance before long, and the Explorer casts the Party spell again after he whispered something to the Knight.

「Very well then, let us march onwards to the fourth floor!」

He declared that loudly, giving everyone else the signal to march through the portal. Watching them all as they disappeared one by one, I approached the entrance as well.

What was that all about?

Did those two went on to the fourth floor to scout out the terrain?

Since Dungeon Walker can let you travel to any place within the Dungeon that you have previously visited, then I guess that the leader of this Party must have been to the fourth floor before. The Explorer at the entrance serves as a guide, so he probably visited the fourth floor before as well. I imagine his services must be especially valuable to those who have never been into the Labyrinth themselves before, but joined the Parties of the Adventurers who did. If two people form a Party, a guide who has already been to the fourth floor could go back there with those who have yet to reach that floor themselves, and once they are taken to the fourth floor, those who have never been there before could now travel there with their entire Parties.

They went in with the Party of five people, but I cannot say whether those numbers will be enough to conquer the fourth floor or not. And more importantly, will the two of us even be able to go that far ourselves without enlisting additional help?

Well, I guess there's no use worrying about that now when we just barely arrived at the second floor. We have to do the best we can for now, and worry about the next floor when we actually get to them.

「Well, shall we go back inside, Roxanne?」

「Yes!」

Part 11

Going back to that talk about being able to visit places that you have yet to visit yourself though... I remember that when I was still gathering the funds for Roxanne's purchase, I once saw those two guys who appeared in the Adventurer's Guild building, asking if anyone wanted to get along for a ride to that one town with them. In that sense, I guess traveling to the places you have yet to visit yourself could also work like that. Let's assume that there are two Adventurers who can use Field Walker, but one of them visited a town that the other one did not, once they move to that town together, they both will be able to travel there from that point onward. It might not be on the level of cars, plains and trains from my old world, but I guess in this one people also can travel pretty much anywhere rather freely, as long as they will make an active effort to do so.

We approached the entrance to the Labyrinth once again. The Explorer at the entrance didn't even flinch when we went past him. He just stood there, back against the wall and his hands crossed on his chest, looking all cool. I wonder if there are cases where he takes people to certain floors but has to take them right back because they get overwhelmed by how strong the monsters are, to the point where they actually decide to skidaddle the hell out of there and re-enter the Labyrinth at a lower level? I just hope I won't have to make such an embarrassment out of myself, now and never.

When we approached the black portal's wall, I noticed that I could now choose the point that I wanted to be teleported to. Up until now we were only exploring the first floor, so I didn't have much of a choice of where to go, but because we have defeated the Floor Boss and ascended to the Labyrinth's second level, the options available to us have increased. Well if that is the case, then second floor it is!

Thinking about the second floor, I marched into the portal with lively steps.

The small room serving as the entrance point was not all that different from the one at the first floor, to the point where it could be said that they are basically identical. Well, since I came through the portal then we should be at the second level, so I don't think there is any reason for worrying just yet. Before we head back to face the first floor's Floor Boss one more time, I might as well test something out. Dungeon Walker!

One of the places possible to go on the list was {First Floor: Waiting Room before the Boss Chamber}. Choosing that travel point I wanted to go through the portal... but I couldn't do it. *Sigh* So I guess that confirms my suspicions that even when using Dungeon Walker, there are places where you can go, but also the ones that you cannot go to. Waiting Room before the Boss Chambers seem to be one such place. Could this be... a prevention method of sorts? Maybe against one Party challenging the Floor Boss over and over again, since it would bother the other Parties wanting to do the same?

「So you won't let me take the easy way out? I see, so that's how it is. I understand, I totally get it! But it's fascinating nevertheless. Who would have thought that it just wont work this way?!」

「Uhm... I... I see?」

Roxanne looked at me with worried eyes filled with pity.

Okay, alright. It's a bummer that we cannot go straight to the Boss Chamber, but that is nothing to be salty about. As they say, failure is the mother of success, much in the same way as boobs are the source of every man's libido (**TL Note: Well excuse me, what about those who prefer butts over boobs, huh?!**). For the time being, let's just move on to the warp point closest to the Boss Chamber. Maybe we would have been able to go straight to the Waiting Room by using Warp to get there, but there is always a possibility that other people might be there, and things would definitely get heated if they started asking questions about how we got there. And as for trying to use Warp to get into the Boss Chamber only to find out that that there is already a Party fighting against the Floor Boss... yeah, so I'm not even going to bother trying that.

「Okay, we're here. Do you know where we are, Roxanne?」

「Yes, we should be pretty close to the Boss Chamber, so we should be able to go back there without any issues.」

「All right, then let us go straight there. Without any needless stops, if at all possible.」

「Roger!」

I ask Roxanne to guide us there. We proceeded forward while swiftly dispatching any Needlewood that came into contact with us. The door to the Boss Chamber opened as soon as we reached our destination. Looks like we are in luck; no one seems to be fighting inside.

If it's like that then we could have Warped here no problem, but now it can't be helped since we're already here. Once we stepped into the proper Boss Chamber, clouds of green smoke began to gather, revealing the figure of Udownood. So, we meet again, huh? Can't say it's been that long since we last met or that I am missing you, so be a good monster and die now!

Together with Roxanne, we stood at the opposite sides of it. In response, it shook its branches at us. I hurriedly stepped back to get out of harm's way. Roxanne also dodged its attacks by twisting her upper body. I wish I could be right there next to her to help her, but with my sluggish, clumsy movements it is unavoidable. My safety is my top priority.

Roxanne, who evades the incoming attacks with barely any movements slashes at the Udownood's branches whenever she can. I firmly grabbed Durandal with both my hands and lowered my stance.

Udownood took a big step and swung its branches at her from overhead. Roxanne stepped back and avoided it, even though after such a strong attack the entire surroundings shook and trembled from the impact's force.

Now that we put some distance between us, I noticed that something started glowing at Udownood's feet. A geometrical pattern shining with a pale blue light...

That was a magic circle!

Crap, this is not good!

I don't know if it's an Attack Magic circle or Summoning circle, but whatever that thing is it's obvious that is nothing good! Literally every fiber of my body is screaming that I should not allow it to activate or else!

A Skill, spell, or summoning smaller monsters to aid it, which one of those it's going to be?! In any case, if I don't want to find out the hard way, I'll have to defeat it quickly!

I hurriedly smacked the Udowood with Durandal. When I did that, the magic circle, which started to glow so brightly that it began to hurt my eyes, disappeared. What the hell?

Then I remembered that one of Durandal's Skills was the Chant Interruption. That is probably why the magic circle disappeared when its blade came into contact with the Udowood's body. Come to think of it, that thing doesn't even have a mouth, so technically it cannot use chanting, so that's why it wanted to use a magic circle instead? In that case, the magic circle could really be called a substitute for chanting, meaning that it could also be interrupted with a Chant Interruption Skill. Yeah, that makes a surprisingly large amount of sense!

「Master, look out!」

Roxanne screamed towards me. I was so absorbed in my own thoughts that I didn't even noticed when a branch started heading my way. I was being targeted!

Oh crap! I won't be able to dodge it in time!

Part 12

「Ghaaa!!!」

Fuck! Even though this guy is nothing more but a walking piece of rotting tree, that one direct hit was more than enough to make me gasp for breath. Yep, its attack is definitely higher than that of the Slow Rabbit and the Needlewood's combined. Unlike the strikes of its smaller brethren, I can still feel that blow pulsating in my side and reverberating throughout my entire body.

I could hear the sound of branches cutting through the air, meaning that another strike was coming my way. I wanted to hurriedly roll to the side in a desperate attempt at evasion, but before I could do that, the thick branch was stopped dead in its tracks. Looks like Roxanne blocked the incoming strike with her shield, and then she avoided the other one that tried to hit her from the right.

I waited for the moment when the branches will go past me and launched an attack with Rush. Thanks to Durandal's HP Absorption I regained the health that I lost due that attack just now and I no longer felt like my lungs were about to burst with every breath. I tried to avoid the branch that was swiped at me from the left, and barely managed to do it, being literal inches from sustaining another injury. But at least now I know: if you watch their movements closely, even someone as sluggish as me will be able to dodge most of the attacks, it's just a matter of getting the timing right.

Roxanne blocked another strike coming her way with the shield, and I aimed my second attack at the moment where the Udowood was briefly stunned after having its attack parried. Unfortunately it didn't connect, because its second left branch forced me to halt my advance just as I was about to bring my sword down on it. Damn it, and I was this close!

Another attack was coming towards us from the right, right after the previous one. Roxanne moved swiftly and dodged it, but I couldn't avoid it in time. I was hit with another wave of dull pain, but quite ironically, this worked to my advantage, because the Udownood's movements stopped for a second again. That was the opening I needed for another Rush attack. It connected splendidly, and Durandal's blade cleaves through its body with ease. Udownood trembled, and then fell to the ground, and we were victorious once again. Eventually its body turned into the clouds of smoke and disappeared.

「Phew, we somehow managed to pull through... again.」

But this time I allowed myself to be hit by its attacks not once, but twice. No matter what, I have to get stronger so situations like that, where Roxanne has to protect me by putting herself in danger won't happen again.

「Yes. It was also good thing that master was able to get rid of its magic circle before it activated.」

「Yeah, but more than me, it is this sword that you should be thanking.」

「Y-Yes, of course. Your weapons are as amazing as you are, master.」

As I said to Roxanne, the most likely reason for the disappearance of the Udownood's magic circle was Durandal's Chant Interruption Skill.

When the smoke after the Floor Boss finally disappeared, a single leaf was left in the place it fell, just like before.

「Wait a second, Roxanne. Allow me to pick it up.」

「Oh, okay. As you wish.」

I stopped her just as she was about to pick the leaf. Now that I picked it up myself, I should have also obtained the Herbalist Job. I focused my mind and summoned the Job Settings screen. Ooooh, there it is. I have obtained the Herbalist Job. So it was just as I suspected, we really do have to pick up every single thing that monsters drop if we don't want to miss anything, and I have to be the first one to do it, otherwise Roxanne will be the one who will

unlock the potential new Jobs first. Now then, what Skill does this Job have...?

Looks like it's Crude Drug Creation. If I remember correctly, leaves could be processed into something like that. In that case...

I changed my third Job to Herbalist and tried generating the Crude Drug from the Udowood's leaf in my possession, and watched as it turned into a bunch of pills in my palm.

「There. Done and done.」

「Eh?! Umm... master, amazing! That's amazing!」

Well, technically Roxanne can do it as well, but I'd have to set her Job as a Herbalist first before she could use that Skill.

「But remember: your lips are sealed.」

「R-Right, of course. Master, the longer I am with you, the more you manage to surprise me.」

Roxanne look at me obediently. The way she doesn't question anything when I'm telling her to keep more and more secrets is truly awesome. That is one of the things that I admire the most in her. After all, I am nowhere near as amazing as she is making me out to be. All that is amazing about me is that I can have multiple Jobs equipped at once, and that's it. If anything, I am an amazing fraud.

「Can you give me you leaf? I'll make some medicine as well.」

「Ah, okay.」

When I appraised the finished pills, it turned out that they are Poison Antidote Pills. So just as their name implies, they are supposed to be curing various poisonings, right? No, wait just a gosh-darn moment...!

If something as Poison Antidote Pills exist, the status of being poisoned must exist in this world as well. Otherwise, there wouldn't be any need for making

Antidote Pills for the poisoning if there was no risk of getting poisoned in the first place!

If that's the case, then coming to the Labyrinth for so long without any methods of counteracting poison was very reckless of me. Ridiculous even.

「Roxanne, are there any monsters that can poison you?」

「O yes, there are, quite a lot of them, actually.」

.... FUCK!

Roxanne handed me the leaf left by the first Udowood we have slaughtered.

「Can you tell me more about it?」

I need to know as much about them as I possibly can.

「Well. I don't think we will have to worry ourselves with it on the first or second floor. And even then, I don't think it will be any problem since you are so capable, master.」

「I see.」

「In the first place, there is nothing to fear unless you get hit by such a monster's attack.」

Roxanne, it makes me happy that you're the only one who thinks like that.

「You sure are wise, Roxanne.」

「T-Thank you very much.」

Next, I turned Roxanne's leaf into Antidote Pills as well. I made around ten of them from a single leaf, which I think is a lot. When I was done, all of them went into the Item Box.

「Think we could sell those to the Adventurer's Guild?」

「Absolutely. Normally, if you're a Herbalist you'd only be able to sell them to the Herbalist's Guild, but you can either sell them to the Adventurer's Guild since you do not belong to any guild yourself yet, distribute it between Party members or simply dispose of it. Actually, Adventurer's Guild is the usual place for people to buy those kinds of supplies.」

So normally you buy that stuff from the Guild rather than making it yourself, huh?

If there is the medicine that can cure poison, then there are probably all kinds of medicine that can cure all kinds of different status ailments, am I right?

It was really dumb of me not to think about them before, but what could I do? Up until a few minutes ago I had no idea those things even existed, so I guess that makes for a pretty viable excuse.

Chapter 9: Mage

Part 1

Kaga Michio

Current levels & equipment:

Explorer Lv.16

Hero Lv.13

Herbalist Lv.1

Equipment:

Durandal

Leather Armor

Leather Jacket

Leather Gloves

Leather Shoes

After we defeated the first floor's Floor Boss for the second time, we headed straight to the Adventurer's Guild to sell the Crude Drugs what we made from its Drop Items. Technically we could go to the second floor, but we decided to postpone it until we get our hands on more medicinal items.

Roxanne told me that we won't have to worry about being poisoned on the first and second floors, but it's better to be safe than sorry. That way, if we do end up getting attacked by something that can use poison, we will be ready to counter it at any given time.

First off, we're selling the branches and Poison Antidote Pills I have made at

the Guild's counter. I know that a viable option here was to leave some of the pills for ourselves, but let's be honest here, if all it takes to make them is killing the Floor Boss on the first floor for the leaves it drops over and over again, then that won't be a problem for us. And since the both of us acquired the Herbalist Job, then we can cheat the system a little by having some of it on us at all times.

「Here you go.」

The very nice (and well endowed) lady behind the counter returned to us with the money for everything we have sold her plus the additional 30% from my Skill.

「So, do you sell any medicine besides Poison Antidotes?」

「Of course, sir. Besides Poison Antidotes, we also sell Potions and Remedies, the cheapest ones for only 60 Nar each. We also have Anti-paralysis Potions, Softeners and Cure-All's, 100 Nar each.」

My guess is that Potions recover HP while Remedies do the same for MP? As for the rest, they probably heal various abnormal status changes, but I have no idea which of them are going to be an absolute necessity for now, so...

「Give me two Softeners and two Anti-Paralysis Pills.」

For the time being that seems like the most practical thing to do. Since I don't know how many of them we are actually going to use, it is better not to buy anything in needlessly large quantities.

「Understood.」

The woman left her seat and returned with the items shortly after, placing two white and two yellow pills before me.

「And those are?」

「Allow me to explain: the white ones are the Softening Medicine, while the yellow ones are the Anti-Paralysis Medicine.」

Oh, so the effects are color coded? Neat.

Just to be absolutely sure I appraised them myself, and it was just like the lady said: white ones were Softeners, yellow ones were Anti-Paralysis, there could be no mistake about that. The name of the Anti-Paralysis Medicine was pretty self explanatory: it is the medicine that cures the Paralysis status effect. But then, what does the Softeners do? Going by the name, it should have something to do with fixing the stiffness of the body, so maybe it is used to cure Petrification, or however this effect is called here? Anyway, no further explanations were given to me, so I just placed four silver coins on the counter.

The lady counts each coin carefully and pushes the pills towards me one by one. But even though I bought more than one item, my 30% discount didn't activate, and it is starting to piss me off. When I was buying hot water and lanterns at the Veil Pavilion it always seemed to work as long as I was buying at least two of them, so I wonder why it didn't work this time?

「What about something for the recovery of both mind and body? What are the prices of those medicines?」

「The cheapest healing medicine are the Nourishment Pills, costing 60 Nar, and the cheapest exhaustion Remedies are the red Strengthening Pills, also costing 60 Nar.」

「Then give me two of those as well.」

I decided to buy them as well. I am sure that having HP and MP recovering medicines will benefit me, if not in the future then in the long run. The lady left her seat again and returned with another set of Pills: blue ones and red ones. According to the appraisal, the blue ones were the Nourishing Pills and red ones were the Strengthening Pills. In the end, I guess it's good that they all have different colors, since without it distinguishing between them would be pretty much impossible.

「Thank you for your purchase. That will be 240 Nar.」

「All right.」

So the discount didn't work this time either.

「Ah, I am terribly sorry to ask this of you, sir, but could you make your payment in bronze coins?」

「Sure, no problem.」



I said, handing two silver coins and fourty bronze coins to her. Is it customary to pay for those Pills with bronze coins? Because if so then I didn't know that and no one bothered to inform me about that. And besides, she should be able to tell that I gave her the exact amount of money she requested, 240 Nar, simply by checking the amount of silver and bronze coins.

「I am truly sorry for the inconvenience, sir.」

Well, if she honestly feels bad about it, then I guess there's no reason dwell on the matter any further. She then collected each coin separately, giving me one Pill every sixty coins. It took a while, but when she finished, I was absolutely certain that the total amount of money required for that transaction was 240 Nar indeed.

「Thank you very much for your patience, sir. I have confirmed that the right price has been paid for your items.」

Well duh, of course it was. It should be obvious to anyone who could perform basic calculations in their head. Unless... could it be that she is unbale to calculate the equation of $60 \times 4 = 240$ in a flash?

I don't know what is the level of education in this world, but judging by the fact that the percentage of literate people is so low that they had to create a profession of Substitute Reader, it cannot be very high.

I know for a fact that Merchants have the Skill called Calculating, which allows them to perform complicated calculations on the spot. But if this lady right here cannot do that, then that would mean that ordinary citizens or Villagers do not have access to it as long as they don't have the Job of a Merchant. And if they cannot calculate properly then that means the would be unbale to factor discounts into prices, because how can you know how to calculate 30% of something when you cannot even do basic multiplication and division. However, my 30% discount is supposed to be effective at all times, so why is it that it works when I'm buying things from the Slave Merchant or the Innkeeper, but from the clerk at the Adventurer's Guild?

「Who is responsible for calculating the prices for all the purchases?」

I asked the lady.

「All the prices are set by the officials at the Guild's temple, but that is something everybody who came there to have a Job Change should know about.」

Damn it, another sticky subject that I had no idea about! I should just drop this subject entirely if I don't want to get into unnecessary trouble.

So apparently this lady thinks I am an Adventurer. Well, I have my Warp point set up on the back wall of the Adventurer's Guild's building and I've been coming here quite often to sell my items, so I guess I cannot really blame her for thinking that, and honestly, I much prefer it to stay that way.

「Is there anything else I should know about the medicines?」

「They should be kept in your Item Box at all times to avoid them getting spoilt or damaged. If they do end up like that, the Guild won't buy them off of you, so please bear that in mind.」

「Okay, got it.」

Thankfully, she just offered me an explanation without asking any further questions. It might not have been much, but at least I have learned something new again today. After I packed all the Pills into my backpack, we left the Adventurer's Guild.

So the clerks in the Guild are not responsible for calculating the prices of items themselves. This makes sense. She doesn't have the skills necessary for the proper calculation of discounts, so my 30% discount won't activate. So maybe that means that it will work with Merchants who do have the Calculation Skill, and with them only?

Calculation. Looks like this Skill might be more important than I actually gave it credit for.

Part 2

So far, according to my personal knowledge the merchants that can use Calculate include: Slave Merchants, Weapon Merchants, Armor Merchants, Clothes Merchants and Innkeepers, although I don't know if the Innkeeper's Job allows him to use it or perhaps he also has the Merchant Job. As far as I know, if people don't have any of the aforementioned Jobs, they won't be able to use Calculate, meaning that my 30% discount will become effectively useless when doing business with them.

If the merchant possesses the Calculate Skill, my discounts will work without any problems, and the Skill itself is a passive one that triggers whenever a calculation has to be performed in one's mind, presenting you with the right answer straight away, factoring in the percentages from any increases or decreases the Skill in your possession might be giving you. Moreover, even though it is always active it doesn't use any MP. There is no need to use Calculate when you buy and sell things separately, because the numbers and their value won't change. 1 Nar is still 1 Nar, 100 Nars is still 100 Nars. That must be why my 30% discount didn't work, because when you buy and sell multiple things and the clerk's Calculate activates, the Prize Discounts Skills activate as well. Well, it is nothing more but a hypothesis, but knowing that might actually come in handy in the future.

Once our buying business was completed, we were ready to go back to the Labyrinth's second floor, this time for real.

「Stay vigilant, master. The enemy is really close by.」

We went forward with Roxanne's guidance, and soon we saw it, our first monster encounter on the second floor. Appraisal!

Needlewood Lv.2

Bah, what a killjoy. The first enemy we have run into on the new floor was the same Needlewood that was prowling on the first floor, except this one had a higher level. I wonder it is going to become a pattern where the enemies stay the same but their levels will progressively go up with each floor? But I must admit, a part of me was genuinely happy that the level of that monster is only Lv.2. That means we should expect Lv.3 monsters on the third floor and Lv.4 monsters on the fourth floor, right?

But the most important question for now is: how much stronger did it get now that it is Lv.2? To test it out I attacked it with Durandal, and it died after a single blow, just like its brethren the floor below. It might have became stronger when its level went up, but in the end, when faced with the might of my Durandal it was still not enough to save it from being one-shotted. Also, I think the fact that I am much stronger and my levels are much higher in comparison to when I first entered the Labyrinth's first floor might have something to do with that as well. Or at least I want to think that it does. Then, I noticed something.

「Roxanne, look. Isn't that another monster, right there in the shadows?」

「It's a Green Caterpillar. It is a monster native to this particular floor. It is a rule that aside from the new ones, the monsters from the lower floors may also be present on the higher ones.」

Roxanne imparted another piece of knowledge to me. I see. So the first floor only had Needlewoods because it was the very first floor. But here on the second floor, which is a native habitat of the Green Caterpillars (which are totally gross by the way), there is also a possibility of Needlewood's showing up, even though they are not this floor's main monster. So when we will go up to the third floor, we will encounter both Needlewoods and Green Caterpillars in addition to the third floor's main monster type, huh? I see, I see.

「Okay, let's take this guy down as well!」

「On it!」

Our next target was the Green Caterpillar Lv.2 in front of us. It was a

caterpillar in every sense of the word, meaning that it was all bouncy and slimy, and had those big, creepy segmented eyes, and to add fuel to the fire this monstrosity was the size of a medium dog. I can't say that I am afraid of bugs, but I am also not particularly fond of them either, so every time I saw it crawling forward by constricting the muscles of its entire body I couldn't stop myself from shivering. Thankfully a short mid-battle observation showed that it only possessed a few slow, telegraphed attacks, so avoiding it was much easier than with the Udowood in the Boss Chamber. Now if my guess is correct it shouldn't be all that mobile with a body like that, so it won't be able to dodge me when I will flank it from the side and swing Durandal down at it!

Yes, this one was also downed in a single blow! When the green smoke disappeared, the Revealed Drop Item was a bundle of threads. I'm guessing it's the thread that these guys would eventually use to encase themselves in it to wait until they could morph into butterflies... yeah, right, as if something so ordinarily cute was to happen in a deadly dungeon filled with bloodthirsty monsters.

As we made our way forward and fought more monsters, I started to notice a pattern of sorts. We are at the Labyrinth's second level, the enemies are all Lv.2, and so far all of them came in groups of two: either two Needlewoods Lv.2, two Green Caterpillars Lv.2 or a mixture of a Needlewood Lv.2 and a Green Caterpillar Lv.2.

「Two monsters ahead of us: one Needlewood and one Green Caterpillar. Shall we proceed that way, master?」

By the way, is it just me, or is Roxanne able not only to smell the presence of monsters, but also differentiate between their types as well? Depending on how I choose to use it, it might become a very powerful ability recoinassance-wise.

「As expected of my ever so reliable Roxanne. I am still not used to fighting two of them at the same time, but they die in one hit so I guess there's nothing to be afraid of. Lead the way then.」

「Right. Leave it all to me, master!」

Roxanne then guided me to the location of the two Green Caterpillars. They had their backs against us, so by the time they realized we were approaching them we were able to dispatch them in a swift and sure manner.

「I wonder if we will always fight pairs of enemies here.」

I said after the finished battle.

「Most likely. But we might as well happen upon just one enemy.」

「Huh. So, do you think that when we will go up to the third floor, we will fight a maximum of three enemies at once?」

「No. Based on what I heard, groups of three enemies start appearing from the 4th floor onward, and from 8th floor onward there will be groups of up to four enemies at a time.」

That's a relief to hear.

「So going with that tendency, there would be five enemies starting from the 16th floor, am I correct?」

「Yes, you understood it perfectly. That is exactly right. You are such a swift learner.」

That is nice to hear, but it doesn't change the fact that the further up we will go, things are only going to get scarier and more difficult. Even if the enemy numbers won't be increasing by one per each floor, we will have to face groups of three on the floors 4 through 7, and groups of 4 from 8th floor upwards. And if the Labyrinth will be big enough, we will probably have to face groups of 5 different monsters from the 16th floor onward, and six from the 32nd one.... And that one makes me more than a little worried. Hopefully this Labyrinth won't be this big.

Well, there is no point worrying our asses off with such a distant future. For now we only have to deal with a maximum of two monsters at once, so when the time comes for us to finally take on larger groups, hopefully we are going to be richer and stronger, and capable of taking on any number of adversaries

without breaking a sweat.

Part 3

The next pair of enemies we happened upon was a Needlewood Lv.2/Green Caterpillar Lv.2 pair.

「Take care of that Green Caterpillar, Roxanne!」

「Umu!」

I gave the battle instructions and we charged in together. Since the Green Caterpillars are just like their normal counterparts except for being really big, they are not all that mobile, which makes them vulnerable to the attacks from the back and the sides, since turning around takes them too much time. Because of that, in my personal opinion they might be even easier to fight than the Needlewoods, who are dangerous no matter from which side you try to approach them due to those pesky branches of theirs.

I slashed the Needlewood in half with Durandal, while Roxanne attacked the Green Caterpillar with her Scimitar. Green Caterpillar tried to retaliate with a Rush attack, but Roxanne just twisted her body lightly, making it miss the mark completely and slam into the Labyrinth's wall with a rather squishy, wet sound. She's just so awesome. Taking advantage of the fact that the Green Caterpillar must have blacked out a little after its collision with the wall, I swung Durandal on its back. It screeched loudly and exploded into smoke. The way I see it, it doesn't matter if we face two, three or six enemies at once. As long as I have Roxanne with me, I feel like nothing will be able to stop us.

Morning the next day. When I woke up, I noticed I was hugging Roxanne. Having her as my personal hugging pillow was the best thing ever, since she was soft, smooth and warm like no other, and when I pressed my face against

her chest, I was met with the sweet feeling of bouncy elasticity that threatened to suck me in at the same time. This is great. This is truly irresistible!

While still half-asleep, I received my good morning kiss from Roxanne. Her soft lips and mouth both taste so sweet, making all of my senses melt from the pleasure. While fully enjoying both the taste and the sensations, I slowly stucked out my tongue and made it twirl around hers. She welcomed me with little to no resistance, so I traced mine along its surface, taking my sweet time as I did so.

With each passing minute, Roxanne wanted more and more of me, which I could tell by the obvious movements of her tongue, which only grew in intensity. As I did my best to satisfy her needs, I felt a familiar firmness rising between my legs, but I did not care about that. All I cared about for now, was the union of our intertwined tongues and how they danced with each other.

When we both decided that we finally had enough, I let go of Roxanne's lips, although I did so very reluctantly.

「Good morning, master.」

「Good morning, Roxanne. Here's to another successful day.」

「Yes. May it be filled with success once again.」

We got dressed and left the inn, heading straight into the Labyrinth once more.

Our exploration of the second floor is going well. Surprisingly well, I would say. Even if we're facing two enemies at once, both the Needlewoods and Green Caterpillars die with a single strike from Durandal. It can be said that so far our victories were all an easily achieved ones. In fact, they were so easy that I asked Roxanne to guide me to a lot of places on this floor without taking the time to rest, because we weren't even tired, even after a few battles that happened in quick succession. Also, out of all the groups of enemies we fought against, only about half of them consisted of the pair of monsters. It

seems that Roxanne was right: even though this is the second floor, where the number of enemies per battle increased from one to two, the appearances of lonesome monsters were still quite frequent.

If we are only facing a single opponent, it can be defeated it with only one strike from Durandal without possessing any kind of risk to us. When we're facing off against two, we split them up between us, meaning that Roxanne takes on one monster while I clean up the other one.

Roxanne uses her tremendous moves to keep her enemy at bay by dodging, blocking with her Wooden Shield or parrying it with her Scimitar. Each of her actions is a display of splendid movements that makes me fall for her even more every time I see them. With her at my side, I cannot feel the increase in the enemy's levels at all, because the strength of our teamwork turns them all into an absolute cakewalk. Durandal has its role to play in making our battles even shorter. Whenever I happen to dispatch my enemy first and I see that Roxanne did not defeat hers after slashing it with the Scimitar a few times, I always Rush in to help her. Usually, one Rush attack to the back of the unsuspecting monster is enough to send it six feet under. The Green Caterpillars have an attack where they can spit their threads at you, but it is not a problem if you just move to their sides or behind their backs, since the threads only travel a little bit to the front in a cone-like pattern. Just be sure to do that, and you won't be in any kind of danger.

Roxanne does not allow monsters to hit her at all, and I myself am rarely attacked because I kill all of my opponents with a single strike of my sword and then help Roxanne deal with the ones that focus on her, leaving them entirely at my mercy.

The one thing that I am potentially worried about though, are the Trap Rooms, a.k.a the small rooms filled to the brim with monsters, just like that one I happened upon on the first floor.

I'm not worried about myself because of Durandal's HP Absorption Skill, but Roxanne is another story entirely. Even though her reflexes are superior to mine and she can evade almost every attack that is being thrown her way, I fear it would amount to nothing when faced with large number of enemies who could overwhelm us with their numbers alone, and that terrifies me. I

know she's strong, but if anything happened to her, I would have never forgiven myself for it. We got ourselves the Monk Jobs exactly for that, to be able to heal ourselves if we ever ended up in a bad situation, but the question here is: would we be able to heal ourselves in time if such a situation ever happened?

But you see, the problem here is that if we won't try to clear such a room with the two of us we won't even know whether we are cut out for it or not, but knowing the risk that it entails, I just don't want to push our luck more than we absolutely have to.

Despite my continuous concerns, today's hunting went extremely well. I guess that's the power of being overly cautious to you.

Roxanne took the lead and guided us to another cavern, casually approaching the wall at its end. When she did that, a part of the wall made a noise and slowly slid down, revealing a hidden passage leading to a small room. Could it be? Did we really stumble upon the dreaded Trap Room just now??!

Keeping all of my senses on high alert I re-grasped Durandal and readied myself for an intense battle... but there was no monsters inside. Is this place actually safe? I found it somewhat hard to believe.

「Roxanne, we should remain cautious.」

「It's all right, master. We should be fine, because the smell of monsters is very faint here.」

「I... I see. T-That's... that's good, I guess.」

Roxanne can locate monsters based on her sense of smell, but she also said to me herself that it is not a perfect method of detecting that might not be able to locate enemies in certain locations, like rooms behind closed doors or Trap Rooms.

Am I still being cautious? Or is my cautiousness bordering on cowardice now? Well, I do have to admit that when that door moved with that pretty loud noise it made me freak out a little bit, but can you blame me? The last

time I went into such a room I was in real danger of being gangbanged to death by Needlewoods, so forgive me for being a little on edge here, will ya?!

Part 4

If there is any place for us to get in trouble here on the second floor, then there is no place better for it than the Trap Room. Just imagine it: we're brimming with confidence, thinking that everything is going to be fine as long as we can one-shot everything with Durandal and avoid the attacks coming our way and then BAM and we're getting jumped by so many enemies that all our advantages can just go fuck themselves. That is also why I think that being wary of it is not a bad thing to do at all.

[In the first place, stumbling upon the Trap Room is already a pretty rare occurrence. It's that kind of luck that you just don't see everyday.] [Can you really call that "being lucky" though?] [Well, I guess normally you would call that unlucky, but since you're here, master, then we will be able to take care of all the monsters in no time! We might get surrounded if we're not careful, but isn't that why we worked so hard on obtaining the Monk Job for ourselves? So that we could use Healing Skills in the hour of need? That way, we will fight lots of monsters, waste them with one or two attacks and obtain a lot of their Drop Items. That's why I said we are being lucky.] [Y-Yeah.]

I know what she wa trying to say, but I still find that idea to be rather strange, but of course I'm not going to say that out loud.

Going beyond the would-be Trap Room, we happened upon another Needlewood-Green Caterpillar pair. Without even thinking about it, I charged at the Needlewood and slashed it with Durandal. Now that one nuisance is taken care of, I can focus on supporting Roxanne by attacking the Green Caterpillar from the back if the need for that arises. For now though, I can just stay on the sidelines and watch how it's going to turn out.

As expected, Roxanne was avoiding Green Caterpillar's attempts at harming her without much difficulty. What's more, she does so by only tilting her body ever so slightly to the sides, dodging the attacks at the last possible

moment without making any wasteful or unnecessary movements. After witnessing so many of her fights, I developed an absolute trust in her ability to avoid attacks, and I am confident that she can handle every normal attack thrown her way, probably as much as she must be. When the Green Caterpillar Roxanne was fighting missed its Rush attack and briefly stopped moving, that was a cue for me to whack it with Durandal from the side, so I guess that makes it another time where I have basically defeated all of the enemies by myself, and that makes me feel kinda bad about myself. But just a little bit.

The next group Roxanne guided us towards consisted of two Green Caterpillars. As per the usual routine, I ran up to the nearest enemy and promptly dispatched it with one strike. But just as I was about to turn around to how Roxanne was doing...

[Look out, master! Something's coming!]

She shouted a warning towards me.

Looking closely at the second Green Caterpillar, it had an orange magic circle glowing under its body. I was too far to interrupt it in time, so it had all the time it needed to finish casting whatever it was that it was trying to cast, and when the circle disappeared, it opened its ugly mouth wide and spat out something.

It's a thread.

Much like with that one other attack that we saw earlier, Green Caterpillar threw webbings from its mouth, only this time, the threads it spat looked a lot stickier and covered both more distance and had a much bigger radius, flying widely in all directions. Such a move was definitely more befitting of a spider rather than a caterpillar, but now is not the time to be worrying about such technicalities!

Sensing the danger behind it, Roxanne made a hasty retreat to put as much distance between herself and the flying wave of webbing as possible. I tried to slash it away with Durandal, but there was too much of it, so I ended up covered with the sticky stuff. The feeling was every bit as creepy as I

expected, and to top it off, the web that landed on me seemed to restrict the movements of my arms and legs, as if a sticky tape was wrapped all around my body. I writhed and trashed about, but no matter how hard I tried, the web just didn't want to come off!

Meanwhile, the Green Caterpillar that spat all over me turned its attention away from Roxanne and started to move towards me. Damn it! Does it prioritize the targets that it managed to immobilize with its web attack?! Roxanne hurriedly ran towards me with the aim of drawing its attention away from me with her Scimitar, but she will not make it in time.

If the Green Caterpillar's intent was to slowly devour me, then I guess it will try to do so by biting into me, in which case I should be able to endure a few bites, since with my current levels the damage I would take from a Lv.2 monster should not be all that big, but if at all possible, I would like to avoid being chowed down on altogether. So how about... if I try to do... THIS??!

The web bound my legs below the knees, so thankfully I was able to bend them and move them just enough to kick the Green Caterpillar in its ugly mug just as it entered my melee range. Following up on that, I threw my bound hand, which were still gripping Durandal's hilt tightly, into the air, allowing the gravity to do its thing for me. As a result, Durandal's blade was driven into the Green Caterpillar's back as if it was made out of jelly, splitting it almost in half, after which it just rolled onto the floor, green blood spilling out of the fatal wound I inflicted.

Not gonna lie, that was a closer one than I would have liked. I wonder if the webby restraints had no negative effect on my attack power, or they did, but it was so minuscule that I was still able to defeat the Green Caterpillar in a single blow despite being under their influence?

The Green Caterpillar disappeared in a puff of smoke, leaving its usual Drop Item, its thread, behind. At the same time, the threads that were restraining my movements also disappeared.

「Note to self: these assholes have not one, but two web attacks. Avoid at all costs.」

「It really does look that they possess such an ability. I'm sorry, master. Due to my incompetence you found yourself in a position where the enemy could easily target you...」

「It's fine, don't beat yourself up over it. There was nothing you could do about it, and besides, it's also my fault for letting my guard down around them too much, so it is as much my L as it is yours. One saving grace here is that as long as you defeat the monster that use the Skill, then the threads disappear. If it wasn't for that, then I guess you can say that we would have been in a pretty... sticky situation.」

「....」

「... Also, if we just watch the Green caterpillars more closely from now on, we should be able to easily avoid their attacks and stop them from casting that Skill.」

But the one who got caught in it was just me. Roxanne managed to avoid it without any difficulties.

「So from now on, let's defeat the Green Caterpillars every time we happen upon one, okay?」

「Yes, no objections here!」

Green Caterpillar can use the Skill that makes them spit sticky threads that seal the movements of whomever it touches. Still, we've been around the second floor for quite a while now and that was the first time I saw one of them actually use that Skill, so it has to mean that they do not use it all that often. If we just focus on dealing with them first. The only potential problem can happen once they start appearing in large numbers, like, for instance, in... yes, that's right, you guessed it, the Trap Room like the one on the first floor. If an entire room's worth of them were to use their sticky threads at all time, we definitely wouldn't be able to dodge them all or kill each and every one that used them.

And then there is also the other web attack that will slow you down when it hits you. My bigger concern with it is that if we get hit with enough of those,

we might end up becoming so slow that the fight might be grinded into a complete halt, and we will be opened for more thread attacks that will slow us down even more, Durandal's HP Absorption included.

That, I'll have you know, would suck some serious scrotum.

Part 5

What if we fail to annihilate the enemy on time? The answer to that was quite obvious: injury or certain death. Even Roxanne, who is quite adept at the art of dodging attacks might not be able to do anything when slowed down and faced with the omnidirectional attack, even if she tried to jump over the Green Caterpillar's bodies before they finished casting their Skills, which I can easily imagine.

「For the time being I think that the best course of action will be to avoid the Trap Rooms whatsoever, since they still might be too dangerous for us to tackle with just the two of us. Let's exercise extreme caution if we happen upon one of them ever again, alright?」

「Understood. As long as master is with me, I feel like I can take on any kind of challenge, no matter what it is!」

I wonder what is she basing that rather pompous assumption on? And why did it sound so sexual? Maybe she is going to try and show off by dispatching the Green Caterpillars in some overly flashy way, like a leaping charge attack on the poor bastards that won't even know what hit them? I know it sounds ridiculous, but I also know that Roxanne would be willing to do something like that, and she is more than capable of pulling such a crazy stunt off, especially with her Monk Job.

Maybe I should think of a way of pulling us out of the ambushes and other similar situations? For example, if I could use some powerful AoE magic that could hit multiple enemies at once, carving out an escape route wouldn't be a problem at all, even if we were facing off against a small army of monsters. Something tells me that Meteor Crash would be ideal for it, but regrettably I am still unable to use it effectively (read: I can't use it at all.) How much longer will I have to grind to change that? Even though I have been killing

monsters diligently in order to raise the levels of my Jobs, I have a feeling that they are starting to get harder to raise now, but there is nothing I can really do about it, since it is only natural that the amount of EXP points required for a Level Up won't be the same for a Job at Lv.1 and the Job at Lv.99. Now, should I just continue to do exactly what I was doing up until now until I can finally use Meteor Crash, or should I find some other way in case that does not work?

Well if this Labyrinth turns out to be more dangerous than it is actually worth it we could always try moving into another one, but I feel like that would be nothing more but taking the easy way out, so I don't want to resort to using such a drastic measure, if at all possible. *Sigh* what should I do here? What is the right answer here?

Finishing the exploration and leaving the Labyrinth for today, we returned to Veil and walked around it. The city seemed to be even livelier than usual, most likely because today should be the day of the bazaar. Yeah, come to think of it, it has been around five days since I started taking Roxanne to the Labyrinth with me, so that should be about right. Looking at what the various stalls had to offer, we went to the Explorers Guild. But before we could even set our feet inside...

「Master? What are you...?」

I stood in front of Roxanne and covered her with my body, hiding her from view.

「Roxanne, listen. Try not to make it too obvious that you're looking, but...」

Right now I am facing the Explorers Guild with my back with Roxanne pinned with her back to the wall, glancing sideways. Normally I would gloat about performing a splendid kabedon on her, but now was not the time for such trivialities.

「Ah, y-yes?」

「Can you see that man standing in the shadow of that building over there?」

「Umm... yes, I see him. He's standing there all alone.」

Roxanne turned her face to me and moved her gaze a little, so that it would look like we were just talking to each other.

「Does it look to you like he's looking at Alan-san's slave shop?」

「Yes, it doesn't look like that at first glance, but upon closer inspection, you're right. That is exactly what he is looking at.」

「As I thought.」

So Roxanne thinks so as well.

When we were going through the city earlier and headed to the Explorer's Guild I saw that Bandit standing across the road. How do I know that he was a Bandit? Because ever since I hunted Bandits to get the money I needed to buy Roxanne, I developed a habit of Identifying suspicious-looking people when I see them, and that guy over there... was the acquaintance of that one scumbag I killed in their hideout. And now he is just standing here, looking suss as hell. Could this be fate, or one of its sick jokes? Also, it is incredibly rare for Bandits to be seen in the good part of the city when the sun is till up. I never thought I'm going to see them going out of the slums, if I am to be perfectly honest.

「You think he might be a customer? Because he doesn't look like that to me at all.」

「I think so to as well. But if he is not a customer, then who is he?」

「Most likely a Bandit. And the one that is not probably not interested in your usual, legal transactions.」

「But what might he want form the slave shop I was in?」

That I do not know, but there is no doubt that he is eyeing up Alan-san's shop, the one located just across the road from where the Explorers Guild was.

「I don't know that. Maybe there are some pretty important customers inside right now? For the time being, let's go back inside the Explorer's Guild.」

「Alright.」

We went inside and sold all of our items first, and after we got our hands on the money, we proceeded to check the boards for any useful information.

Since this guild posts all of the information related to the Labyrinth and its exploration, it might be worth our while to check if there are any information regarding the Trap Rooms or the quests available at the second floor. If we're lucky, then maybe we'll find out that the End of Search Declaration has been posted? Once it is issued, we won't have to worry about stumbling upon any Trap Rooms, because issuing the End of Search Declaration means that the entire floor has been thoroughly explored and all the Trap Rooms have been cleared of the monsters inhabiting them.

「And? Found anything over there?」

「No, no declarations have been posted for the second floor so far.」

Regretfully, we found no such notice on the Explorers Guild's bulletin boards.

「Well? What do you want to do now? Should we at least go and give Alansan and a warning?」

I made sure that no one was listening in on us and asked Roxanne in a voice that only she could hear.

「I would be grateful if we could do that. One of the ladies who works there has always been nice to me, so I would like to keep her safe if at all possible.」

Even though she was sold there by her relatives, it looks like not all of her memories of that place are the bad ones. Yes, giving them a warning is the least we can do right now, because if we just chose to do nothing, it would leave a bad aftertaste in my mouth.

「Let's go then. And when we will be going past that guy, try not to stare at him or else he might catch that we are onto him.」

「Right!」

And we left the Explorer's Guild, heading towards Alan-san's slave shop while trying to behave as naturally as possible so that the Bandit didn't start being suspicious of us.

Part 6

When we arrived at the slave shop and knocked on the door, the young servant came to greet us.

「Welcome. What can I do for you?」

「Is Master Alan inside? Could you get him for us?」

「Yes, of course. And please, do come in.」

We came inside, just like the servant told us to. As I was going through the door I glanced back over my shoulder, but I wasn't able to see the Bandit, meaning that he must have retreated deeper into the alleyway where it would be more difficult to spot him.

Roxanne and I were guided to the back room, where Alan-san was meeting with all his customers. His servant opened the door for us and told us to wait inside, leaving us with a short 「Please wait here for a moment」.

I entered the room and sat on the sofa. If Alan-san is really meeting with some customers right now, then it is possible that we will have to wait quite a bit for him to come down to meet us.

「You can sit down if you want, Roxanne.」

「Thank you, master, but it's fine.」

「So you're just going to stand the entire time?」

「I think that will be for the best. Besides, I am used to it, so it's not a problem for me.」

I sat down, but Roxanne continued to stand up, just like she said she would, but I don't know about that. What does she mean by 「it will be for the best?」 anyway? I want her to be treated as my equal, so maybe I should tell her to sit down, or stand up myself? Well, Roxanne's judgement in those kinds of situations is probably way more accurate than mine, since I cannot read the mood of people's intentions for shit, so I just decided to nod and drop the matter entirely.

It wasn't long before Alan-san came down to greet us.

「Oh, now what do we have here? Welcome, and thank you for stopping by my shop once again.」

「Sorry to bother you. Weren't you with another customer just now?」

「No, not at all. I am free at the moment.」

「I see.」

Yup, now I am absolutely sure that this place is 100% targeted.

「So, what did you wanted to discuss today? Because I assume that is the reason for your visit?」

Alan the Slave Merchant sat on the sofa. After giving Roxanne a brief but stern look, he joined his hands together and leaned forward in front of the table.

Ahh, I get it. He thinks that I came here today to discuss a refund for Roxanne. I can't say I really blame him it that is really what he thinks. After all, if I was in his shoes and a customer who bought a slave from me returned after just a few days, I would also assume that it was either to make a complaint or to try and get his money back. *Sigh* Maybe Roxanne was right about not sitting down after all?

I remembered that the first time I came to this shop in order to sell the Villager who has become my slave because he tried to steal the Bandit Bandana that rightfully belonged to me, instead of being sent to this very

waiting room he met with us inside of the shop itself. But the fact that we are sitting here right now seems to be indicating that he is not treating me as a random customer anymore, but maybe that was because that young aide, or worker, or servant or whatever you want to call him didn't tell him I came here to sell Roxanne? Then again, assuming that would have been kinda dickish of him, when we only asked him to announce to Alan-san that we wanted to speak to him. Well, I guess there's nothing I can do about it right now. I just have to go with the flow.

「Allow me to cut right to the chase. This place is being watched.」

「Watched, you say?」

「Yes, that is indeed what I said. We came to warn you about it, because Roxanne said that she couldn't ignore the shop that helped her out so much and the people who work here.」

That should make it clear enough that I am not here to sell Roxanne today, but now everything hinges on how he is going to react once he realizes that I will probably not be buying any new slaves as well.

「Is that so? Ohohoho, I guess I'm getting so old that even I fail to notice such things more and more often.」

The corners of Alan-san's mouth rose a little.

「Duly noted. I will be sure to be more careful in the future.」

「That's it? I told you, there is a suspicious-looking man watching your shop from the outside.」

「I understood that, and I realize full well that things like that might be happening from time to time, due to the... peculiar nature of my business. Nevertheless, I thank you for your attention and the time you took to inform me about this matter.」

He told me with a gentle expression. Looks like he's not taking me seriously. Again, I can understand why he is acting like that. Everybody would have

done the same if someone suddenly came to them and told them that their business is being eyed by some shady individuals.

For him, I am not a regular customer, not a nobleman, a great knight, a big-shot or even someone well-versed in the matters of slavery. To him, I am just your regular one-time customer same as all the others he probably has to deal with on a regular basis, no different than a total stranger. Thinking about it that way, it's not surprising that he dismisses the words of such a nobody as a mere trifle.

「Anyway, we just wanted to give you this warning, so we will be on our way now.」

「Once again, thank you for going through the trouble of informing me about this, but running this kind of business often makes us a target of many-a-different people, many of whom are too indecisive to actually set foot in the shop, loitering around the entrance.」

「Trust me, the “customer” we saw outside definitely didn't look like that. He seemed to be one of the more “problematic” kind, the one that is not interested in simply “buying” slaves.」

「Or perhaps he was a private eye hired by a wife suspecting her husband of infidelity.」

Is he trying to say that this shop being monitored is an occurrence so common that he stopped paying any mind to it? I guess that's true given the shady nature of his business, but still...

「Uhm... the person who watches your store right now... is a Bandit.」

Perhaps she was bothered by the fact that we were not being taken seriously as well, so Roxanne chose to open her mouth with such bold words.

「Hou... a Bandit, you say?」

Alan-san's face tightened visibly.

「Yes, that's right.」

「What makes you think that?」

When I confirmed Roxanne's words without batting an eye, Alan-san inquired further. Well, I knew that sooner or later it had to come to this. Even if someone is really eyeing the shop, that alone does not make them a criminal just yet, so obviously he wanted to know what I based that assumption on. But I cannot tell him that I found out about it by using Identify on that guy, so I have to feed him the best possible lie I have in my repertoire.

「He's one of the people whom I got to “know” while I was making money to purchase Roxanne.」

I managed to scramble up the necessary amount of money to buy her only because I decided to do some Bandit Bounty Hunting, but I imagine that since he is a Slave Merchant then he must at least have an inkling of how someone like me managed to get that much money so fast. He might not be getting the entire picture here, but he can probably guess enough to know that I wouldn't be lying about something like that.

If you wanted to take on Bounty Hunts related to Bandits, naturally you had to know where to look for them and how to discern them from ordinary citizens. And I don't want to sound like I'm bragging, but after all the investigating that I carried out in the slums, I guess you could say that I got to memorize quite a few suspicious faces rather well.

「I see now. So that's how it is.」

Alan-san sank deeper into the sofa. He then closed his eyes and let out a big sigh. Was he finally going to seriously listen to what we had to say?

Part 7

「I am afraid that I cannot say much more, for the sake of one of your workers who was especially good to Roxanne whom she wishes to protect.」

「Yes, I am very grateful to her for all that she did for me when I was still in your care, so I would like you to pass our warning onto her as well. If nothing else, I don't want her or any of this store's employees to be caught in something disastrous.」

She bowed deeply to him.

「I see, I see. Certainly, I can't say I don't see where you're coming from, or what you are talking about.」

Alan-san acknowledged. So at the very least he has some inkling of what is going on here? Then why didn't he do something about it from the start.

「Do you, really?」

「When you run a slave-trading business for long enough, you naturally give many people more than enough reasons to target you, and before you will realize it, you will have a full plate of things to worry about....」

「That's how it is, huh?」

Sounds like a cheap excuse if you ask me, and frankly, I'm not buying it.

「... especially since we are getting more acquainted with our slaves and those who buy them than you might be thinking. For example, the man you came here to sell, the one that tried to rob you.」

「What about him?」

The man who tried to steal the equipment from the Bandits I had defeated back at the Somara village. He was caught stealing by his fellow villagers, which resulted in him being stripped of his Villager status and becoming my slave, whom we had taken to Veil in order to sell him at this very Slave shop. Thinking about it now, I guess I should be grateful to the guy. Because he did what he did, I had a reason to come here, and thanks to coming here, I was able to have my fated meeting with Roxanne. So yeah, thank you, random Villager. You have my undying gratitude, but you were quite a messed up matchmaker, I will give you that.

「He was sold just yesterday. The person who bought him has filled all the necessary paperwork that was required of him and finished all of the necessary preparations, after which he announced that he will come back to pick him up in two days time so that he could finish the preparations for accommodating him on his end.」

「Do you often have to deal with the cases that some slaves are unable to be sold?」

「I wouldn't say that such things never happen... however, now that I think about it there is something strange about that man's case. He was practically a fresh arrival, being in this shop for only a few days, and he wasn't even able to speak Brahim at all. As far as slaves go, he had next to no value, but despite that he was bought astonishingly fast. Moreover, the client who bought him seemed to have been decided on buying him in particular right from the very beginning.」

Once you've been made a slave as a punishment for theft, I can't imagine anyone would be willing to teach you Brahim, because that would be straight up too charitable. If you can't speak Brahim, I imagine your value as a slave would plummet down considerably.

「And that client of yours really decided to buy somebody like that?」

「Yes. Also, he seemed to be even more interested in him when he learned that the item he tried to steal was a Bandit Bandana.」

Yes, Bandit Bandana was the item that guy seemed to be the most adamant on getting from all of the items left by the raiding party that attacked Somara village. Supposedly that thing can only be worn by Bandits, and when done so, it increases their physical capabilities, most likely giving them boosts to all their stats. According to both Picker-san from Somara and the Armor shop merchant we initially tried to sell it to, it could be sold on the black market for a small fortune. If he wanted to steal that, then it most likely means that he must have had a buyer willing to buy it off of him.

「His current owner will be here to pick him up... tomorrow, am I right?」

「That's right.」

「Have you noticed anything suspicious about him? Anything at all?」

「There were two guests in total. One of them was asking me all sorts of question related to purchasing slaves, while the other talked with the slave in question. Perhaps he was passing some kind of instructions onto him? I tried to listen in on what they were talking about, but they were doing so in especially hushed whispers, so I am afraid I wasn't able to learn anything of significance.」

Maybe it's just my bias towards Bandits speaking through me, but that seemed suspicious as fuck.

「If you asked me, those guys give me all kinds of bad vibes just from hearing about them from you.」

「Whatever the case may be, once the payment has been made and all the necessary paperwork has been delivered I'm afraid that I cannot interfere in the affairs of my clients and their newly-bought slaves. We wanted to keep that slave in a locked room separated from all the rest, but the buyer requested that we did just the opposite: he specifically requested for his purchase to be kept in an unlocked room until the day he would come to pick him up. For the time being, we are keeping him in a separate room on this floor of the building. He's been on his best behavior for now, but there is no telling if he won't try to leave in the middle of the night, going as far as to meet the Bandits who bought him at the front door.」

Alan-san told us all of that with a calm face. He didn't look worried or scared at all, which was quite bald of him.

「Is... is that really okay with you?!」

Roxanne raised her voice worriedly.

「Of course. We are in the middle of a city after all. Even if they do appear, a large number of uninvited guests will not go unnoticed.」

「B-But if something happens to that nice lady...」

「Do not worry. No matter what happens, we will probably be fine.」

Alan-san said that they will be okay, as if he had absolute confidence in his own words.

Well, whatever. We have warned him about the potential danger to his shop, so I say that our job here is done. Whatever ends up happening next, it will be Alan-san's problem, not ours.

「We're going home, Roxanne.」

I said, standing up from the sofa.

「Ah, uhm...」

Roxanne mumbled as if she was having trouble with finding the right words to say.

「Still worried after all?」

「..... Y-Yes.」

Sigh What to do Michio? What to do?

I mean I have dealt with Bandits already, so it's not like I feel any kind of aversion towards killing them simply because they are human beings just like me. And as long as I have Durandal, I am pretty sure that none of them could

pose an actual threat to me. So, with that in mind...

「How about this, Alan-san? Why don't you hire me as a bodyguard? What do you say to that?」

I presented Alan-san with my proposal.

Part 8

By proposing to be Alan-san's bodyguard, I should be able to quell Roxanne's worries, even if just for a little bit, and avoid having a guilty conscience myself. Because you know, I might not give two shits about the guy I sold here, but if anything happened to innocent people because of him, I have no doubt that it would have left an incredibly bad aftertaste in my mouth.

「Are you sure about that? For an owner of the shop to hire one of his customers as a bodyguard, this is rather unheard of.」

「Yeah. Besides, I don't want anything bad to happen to the slave I sold, so you can say that I have a bit of a personal interest in this matter as well.」

That was only half of the truth, but he doesn't need to know that. Also, if I get the chance, there is a little something that I would like to try.

「Thank you very much, master!」

Roxanne bowed to me in gratitude. She really looks relieved now. So she was that concerned about the wellbeing of the lady who was nice to her, huh?

「Very well then, I accept your humble proposal.」

Nice. Should things get too hairy for us to handle, there is always an option of getting the hell away from this place by using my Warp. I couldn't use Dungeon Walker while fighting against the monsters in the Labyrinth, but I think it should be good as long as our enemies will be just your regular Bandits and the battle won't suddenly move to the Labyrinth itself, since I am able to Warp between the Labyrinth and the Adventurer's Guild without any issues. Also, a mental note for the future: next time we happen upon one of

those monster-filled empty Trap Rooms, I should try fleeing from them using Warp to see what will happen.

「Great. Looking forward to working with you.」

「Likewise. Now, whether I hired you or not I do not think the problem is going to be as big as you are making it out to be, but let me be absolutely clear about one thing: above all else, I don't want for anything to happen to my customers and slaves, therefore I would like you to remain in the backline, and only step forward when it is going to be absolutely necessary.」

「Gotcha.」

「Do exactly that, and your payment will be 1000 Nar. If you manage to defeat the Bandit that threatens the shop, feel free to take any of his dropped items and goods as a bonus to your reward.」

「Understood.」

I thought he was going to be more wary or restrained towards the idea, but Alan-san accepted my proposal much easier than I thought he would. That aside, getting my hands on that extra reward would be pretty sweet, so maybe I should make it my priority to take that one particular Bandit down? Yes, in order to maximize the profits from this job, we absolutely cannot let that guy sneak out and rejoin with his companions. Still, even if we don't have the full picture of what is going on here, this looks kinda strange. Why would my former slave cooperate with those guys, if the possibility of them betraying him at literally any point in time was quite high? No matter how hard I tried thinking about it, all I could see was no merits to it at all, only the ever-increasing odds of getting backstabbed.

Combat wise, I don't think any of the Bandits in the city or in its vicinity were on the level of a guru, since none of the ones I fought with so far displayed any remarkable skills with their weapons, but there has to be something more to it than that. If that was the case, then even the guys who attacked Somara village and were slaughtered by me when I was still a complete noob were guru's, which was not the case. Even Roxanne wasn't a guru, even though her combat prowess and the way she was able to avoid

even the more complex attacks of monsters seemed to be indicating otherwise.

Be that as it may, what I am getting at is that even if the chances of anything happening today are low, Alan-san still would lose nothing if he chose to hire us as an insurance against Bandits.

「The one watching the shop definitely saw me going inside, so for now we will go back to our inn and come back here when the night falls. That way we won't make him unnecessarily vigilant.」

「If that is the case, then I think it would be best for you to come back here around dawn. If my shop really is being targeted by Bandits, I think that will be the most probable time for them to arrive.」

「You think so?」

Generally, I have to agree with him. The dawn seems like the most probable time for the Bandits to attack, since normally people would assume they would have made their strike in the middle of the night.

「Some of my slaves are also capable of fighting. Three of them are here in the shop at all times, while the best five of them always venture out into the Labyrinth around daybreak. If we were being watched for the past few days, then it would be wise to assume that our observer has also taken notice of that fact. I'll also have you know that I am somewhat strong myself, since I did some adventuring together with my reliable Party before I started studying the ways of the merchant in order to become a Slave Merchant.」

「That makes sense.」

When Roxanne was explaining to me how Parties and adventuring worked, she mentioned that oftentimes the aristocracy and the noblemen would send their children to the Labyrinths accompanied by strong Parties so that the children themselves could gain experience and raise levels quickly and effortlessly since the EXP gained from slaying monsters is being shared across all the Party members. And based on what Alan-san just told me, it looks like that if you want to become a Slave Merchant, you have to raise the

level of the ordinary Merchant Job first. Alan-san's Job is Slave Merchant Lv.44. His age is quite advanced, but even taking that into account, his level is still abnormally high. Now I really wonder if he was frequenting the Labyrinths in his youth.

「The peak in the adventuring activities in the Labyrinths is usually early afternoon to an early evening, so my Parties always go there right before dawn to avoid running into an unnecessary traffic. But, as I mentioned before, the Bandits should be well aware of that routine of ours if they were keeping a close eye on us. If we assume that this is indeed the case, then the most probable time for them to make their move would be when the Party of combat-capable slaves leaves the shop for the Labyrinth, meaning from dawn until the afternoon. Of course, I won't be having them going there. They will remain here on standby, and those of them who cannot fight will serve as a deception.」

Was that why Alan-san sounded so confident and seemed like that entire matter wasn't such a big deal? Not that I am complaining, mind you. If anything, I quite like this new development, since instead of waiting cluelessly or getting dragged in the Bandit's trap, now it feels more we are the ones setting the trap for them.

「Hearing that is certainly reassuring.」

「I have to admit that it has been quite some time since I retired from the adventurer's lifestyle and passed the place in my most reliable Party to my son, but I should still have enough steam left in me not to let some petty Bandits get the better of me.」

He said proudly. Maybe he actually is more amazing than I gave him credit for?

Part 9

「Does this place have a back exit?」

「Of course it does. Why do you ask?」

「Because we should probably leave through there to avoid being seen.」

「Very well then. Allow me to show you the way. It's just over here.」

Alan-san showed us the way.

「Here we are. I suggest that you use this entrance to get into the shop when you will come back here at dawn. The alleyway is connected to that street over there, so even if the front door will be constantly monitored, no one should notice you when you arrive. Just be sure to remember which building is ours to avoid any needless complications.」

「Thanks, but I think we will manage somehow.」

All we have to do is to Warp over here, so that takes care of that problem.

He opened the door and let us out. There really was a narrow alley between the buildings. In such a tight space no one would really see us, and getting here would only require a small detour from us, so using this back entrance might really be a good decision. After we confirmed everything we wanted to know, Alan-san walked us all the way back to the front door.

「Well then, thank you for your patronage today.」

「Yeah, you've really been a huge help.」

I said that in an especially loud voice to be sure that the Bandit watching over

the shop could hear us.

「I look forward to your next visit here.」

And like that we have left the Slave shop. We went straight ahead, without any needless wandering around, but when we were passing the alley adjacent to the shop, I couldn't see the Bandit's figure anymore.

「Is he there?」

「I can't really see him, but I can definitely smell him from behind the building.」

「Good.」

I had a quiet conversation with Roxanne once we went past the Explorer's Guild. As expected of Roxanne, even in the crowded city filled with all kinds of smells, she was still able to track down that particular one like it was nothing.

「Uhm... I'm sorry for being so selfish during the meeting.」

「You don't have to be. I was the one who made him the offer, and he accepted it out of his own volition.」

「But I was the one who blurted out that that man was a Bandit because I allowed my emotions to get the better of me.」

So she realizes how risky that was. True, things could have gone very bad if I didn't come up with an excuse, but since I did then I guess it's all fine. I managed to keep my secrets, so there's no use mulling over it now.

「It's all fine with me. Just try to be more careful in the future, okay? And remember: any trouble of yours is a trouble of mine as well.」

「Yes! Thank you so very much!」

With Roxanne thanking me once again, we have returned to the Veil Pavilion. Initially I just wanted to eat dinner and go to bed, but with our

current arrangement I guess that won't be happening. For the time being, Roxanne performed both the usual maintenance of our equipment and the laundry of our underwear by using the hot water delivered to our room after we finished eating. She had to do it, because, to be frank, I sweat a lot. Not because the Labyrinth is a particularly hot place, but because of all the fighting I was doing, which should be an obvious thing, right? Fighting requires you to move your body around a lot, and moving around a lot causes you to sweat, all the more if the equipment and armor you are carrying around with you weights a hefty amount. And since sleeping in sweaty, smelly underwear would be a straight-up unpleasant experience, I was grateful to have someone ready and willing to do my laundry for me.

Unfortunately, there are no normal baths or showers available for everyone in this world, so we have to get by with the closest equivalent available, which is wiping our bodies with towel dowsed in hot water. It cannot hold a candle to a long, refreshing soak in the bathtub, but it was definitely better than not washing ourselves at all. Given the circumstances, it was actually quite comfortable. And since Roxanne was wiping herself without voicing any complaints, then she must be thinking that as well. And now it is my job to carefully wash every part of that work-of art body of hers.

A fresh and clean-looking skin. A bust so magnificently big and well proportioned that it almost seemed like a miracle. Once again I have felt something slowly accumulating inside of me, but it shouldn't be a problem for now, because if it will be close to bursting, I have someone who will readily take care of it for me.

「Mmm... ngh....」

A few hours later, after Roxanne made me spit out all of my accumulated lust, she once again woke me up with a passionate kiss. Since I managed to catch a good amount of z's, I was in a refreshingly good mood even though I have just woken up.

Since we had a job to do very early in the morning, I asked her to wake me up a little bit earlier than usual. I gotta say, having my tongue massaged by Roxanne's own soft tongue is the best way to wake up ever. Never in my wildest dreams could I ever imagine that there will come a time in my life

where I will be able to be woken up in such a wonderful way.

After fighting off my initial drowsiness, I hugged Roxanne strongly, having the bulges of her chest bounce and press against my own torso. Enjoying that unearthly elasticity, I slowly extended my own tongue to give her tongue a friendly greeting, and our wet tongues started playing with one another, slowly returning the pleasurable favors, occasionally stretching deeper into our oral cavities and deeply entwining around each other.

「Good morning, master.」

「Yeah... good morning, Roxanne.」

After tasting Roxanne's sweet tongue for a good while, I finally let go of it so we could exchange our usual morning greetings. As usual, I needed a moment to properly catch my breath after such an intense exercise first thing in the morning.

「It is about time for us to leave.」

Prompted by Roxanne, we proceeded to put on our clothes and armor, finishing our preparations. I just hope that we didn't kiss for long enough to actually be late to the meeting with the Slave Merchant.

「Ready? Then let us be on our way.」

「Yes, let's go.」

「Actually, I was thinking if it wouldn't be better if you sat this one out, Roxa...」

「I. Am. Going. As. Well.」

Roxanne said, putting emphasis on every word.

「Fine. You can come with me, but I want you to stay behind me as much as possible. Putting you in unnecessary danger is the last thing I need.」

If things get too dangerous for her, I can always order her to escape. I

understand that she wants to protect those who helped her during what was probably the most difficult time in her life, but that does not mean that it is okay for her to be putting herself in danger.

「Yes, of course!」

After leaving the room, we left the key at the front desk and walked out of the inn. I took Roxanne's hand and proceeded to go along the inn's outer wall, entering the labyrinth of the back alleys so that we would avoid being detected. Like that, we made our way to the alley behind the Slave shop which we were shown just few hours earlier. As expected, there was no one there and no one bothered us on the way. Shifting myself so that Roxanne was being placed between myself and the building's wall, I confirmed the door's exact location with my hand and knocked on it, doing so very lightly in order not to make too much noise. The door was opened not even a few seconds later. The one to greet us was Alan-san himself.

「I have been expecting you. Please, come inside.」

We nodded at his invitation and went inside the Slave shop, ready for whatever might have been awaiting us.

Part 10

「Wait here until my customers arrive, please. When we detect any form of movement downstairs, my combat-capable slaves and I will immediately go downstairs to meet with the Bandits. When that happens, your job will be to protect the stairs so as to not allow any of them to reach the higher floors, since that is where the shop's staff and the slaves who cannot fight have been told to hide. And do not worry with the possibility of the Bandits coming into the shop from above. The only points of entry to the shop are the main entrance and the back exit, and as you know, they are both located on the ground floor.」

As we followed Alan-san into the shop and then upstairs, he briefly explained the entire operation to us. When we nodded at him, signaling that we knew everything we needed to know, he turned off the light in his lantern, but even with its light gone, the surroundings didn't turn completely dark, because apparently the lights in the other parts of the corridors were still on, so the area under the stairs and its surroundings were still fairly visible. For now, all I could do was to hold my breath and wait for how the situation was going to develop, allowing the time to pass.

In addition to Alan-san, Roxanne and I, there are several other people around. They most likely were the members of Alan-san's Party that would normally go to the Labyrinth before dawn, but this time stayed behind specifically to take care of this Bandit situation. All of the were of mixed Jobs, such as Fighters, Warriors, Monks and Adventurers, and their levels also varied from person to person, but I think it is safe to say that if they fight alongside us, the eventual battle should be a piece of cake.

After some time Roxanne suddenly stood up, and the rest of the people around us followed suit. What's going on, I thought to myself.

「There's movement downstairs.」

Roxanne said to me, noticing my puzzled gaze.

Wait, seriously? I didn't notice anything at all until she told me just now. But seeing how all of the other guys also stood up, there can be no mistake that something was definitely going on down there. One by one, they descended down the stairs without making any noise at all.

「We will leave the defense of this position to you then.」

So Alan-san is going to go with the rest after all. Is he going to fight the Bandits as well? Or is he just going to issue commands from a safe distance?



Beside me and Roxanne, only a few of the low-leveled slaves stayed behind while Alan and the others, probably the most elite of his team, went downstairs, and then everything was silent for a good while, until eventually, we started hearing noises coming from the shop's first floor. They were mostly human voices and screams.

Looks like the party started for good.

With my hands clenched tightly on Durandal's handle, I stepped a few steps down and assumed a defensive stance with Roxanne following closely behind my back. Alan-san said that the Bandits cannot come at us from above, so if they can only approach from the lower floors, Roxanne and I should be able to handle anyone that comes near the stairs to the second floor.

I took another few steps and looked downstairs. It was too dark for me to see if anyone was coming from the other side of the corridor, so I had to rely on Roxanne's hearing and keen sense of smell.

「Somebody's coming.」

Roxanne murmured in a whisper that only I could hear. And just as she said, little by little, a shadow of a man came into my view. A Lv.3 Bandit, the one we saw eyeing the shop! Did he survived Alan-san's group's interception? Or perhaps he's a scum who ran at the first sign of danger? Probably the latter, because with how strong his group was, I had a hard time imagining someone like that low-life slipping past those armed slaves and their boss, especially with how busy the first floor sounded now.

Running past us, the guy took refuge in one of the rooms down the hallway. He didn't even seem to be paying any attention if someone was already there or not. If he really did so blindly, his mind must be in a pretty big disarray, and that is a chance I can definitely take advantage of.

「Wait right here, Roxanne.」

I slowly went down the stairs into the dimly lit part of the hallway while carefully surveying if anyone else was coming. Confirming that I was the only one here, I quickened my pace and went towards the room the Bandit

has holed himself in. I placed my back against the wall and my right foot against the door, and then opened them with a powerful kick. But I didn't immediately jump inside. For you see, normally, after hiding in a room, the villain would hide just behind them so he could pull a sneak attack on whoever tried to follow him inside.

The inside of the room was pretty damn dark. If the hallway was dim enough for me to at least see where I was placing my feet, I don't think I can see anything that is inside there, especially while I still had my back against the wall next to the door. Since I opened the door, the bandit didn't show his face, so in order to find him, I used Identify.

Bingo! He was standing right in the middle of the room, sticking to the shadows where no one could spot him, with his weapon pointed towards the door, weapon ready to strike. It would be another story if I could see him clearly, but if he is camouflaged like that, it means I have no choice but to test the thing that I wanted to try out on him.

Up until now, Bonus Spells have been largely unreliable, if not borderline useless due to the fact that I was unable to use most of them, probably as a result of my extreme shortage of MP, Warp being the only exception to that rule. But the spell I wanted to use right now might be different, and it might just work.

Equivalent Exchange. A spell that I was scared to use because I had no idea how exactly it was going to work. Will it decrease the HP of both myself and the target? Or maybe it will decrease my HP in exchange for sapping the target's MP? Or perhaps it will flat out deal damage based on the difference in our HP pools? As with every spell, I won't know how it works until I try it, but I was scared of using it on monsters because I couldn't see their stats, but this guy here is just a regular human, and a Lv.3 Bandit at that, so with the stark difference in our levels, checking out what exactly does Equivalent Exchange exchanges might not end up in disaster... after all... I have more HP and MP than him... so it should be safe...

Swallowing my saliva, I focused my eyes on the general direction that the Lv.3 Bandit should be, and I prepared to cast the spell. All right, here goes nothing.

Equivalent... EXCHANGE!!!

Part 11

As soon as I start casting the Bonus Spell, I started feeling as if something was being drained from my body, and I was assaulted by an indescribably unpleasant feeling. Taking a pained look at my HP and MP bars, I saw that my MP pool was being rapidly depleted.

I recognized this dreadful state all too well, because I felt like that once before: when I used Warp for the first time, and it drained me of almost all of my MP, making me feel depressed as shit. It is exactly the same as that time, but somehow it feels much worse. But never mind that. The Bandit! What about the Bandit I used Equivalent Exchange on?! I still can't see him well, but I am sure that I heard a strange noise as if something was popping, or exploding, followed by a wet noise of something falling onto the ground. Does it mean I succeeded? If I did, then that's great, but oh God a part of me wished that I didn't.

I wonder what exactly have I done to him? Oh great, the negative effects of MP loss start to kick in. Wonderful, simply fucking wonderful! Did I kill that guy? And if I did, then for what, some additional trinkets or a useless weapon he was probably carrying on him?! If I knew it was going to end like that I would have agreed to do this fucking job for free. Haha, do the job, not that's rich! Without my weapons granted to my buy my cheat-like abilities I am nothing, a literal piece of sentient trash that cannot do anything on its own, has no talent in any field outside of being a living failure. An absolute worst human being to ever walk the surface of this wretched shithole we call world!

Incompetent, perverted, cowardly, lazy, insignificant. Why is someone like me even alive? What purpose does my meager existence have?! Now that I think about it, how stupid of me was it to think that a life in this new, fantasy-like world would be fun and exciting? So far, it has turned out to be just one annoyance after the other, absolutely not worth living in here! And that's

coming from someone who couldn't find a place for himself back on earth so he decided it would be best if he tried to fucking kill himself!

Feeling tired and exhausted with all that shit, I fell on my knees, catching every breath with great difficulty.

「Master!」

I haven't even realized when Roxanne appeared behind me. That's right. If she is here, then it means someone else can come in here at literally any moment as well... like more Bandits... ugh, what the fuck am I doing? I hurriedly collected myself and started paying more attention to my immediate surroundings, scanning everything with Identify.

Meanwhile, Roxanne placed her hand on my back and patted it gently. As she did so, the surroundings gradually began to get brighter, to the point where I could see that someone was approaching the room we were currently in. It was Alan-san. Great, just fucking awesome. The last thing I need is him finding me in such a sorry state, when I don't even have an idea what exactly happened to that Bandit over there! Man, fuck this shit! Not only I feel like I'm dying of depression and dark thoughts, but he's definitely going to ask question when he finds me.

This is bad! If he sees me the way I am now, there's no way he won't get suspicious, and he might just figure out that I am not from this world! That's right, I am not a member of this world. I am a filthy intruder. I wonder will I be branded as a murderer now, or perhaps a blood-hungry beast? Will I be executed, or just stoned and chased out of the city if I'm lucky? Either way, Roxanne seeing me like this was one thing, but when Alan-san sees me, that's going to be it for me. Persecuted, disfellowshipped, and quite possibly killed, those were the only options left for me.

「Roxanne... Th-This is...」

The finally realized that I was neck deep in shit. This is it for me. The literal end of the line. But at least now I see how it is. From the very beginning, everything was a clever trick, a scam orchestrated by that bastard, Alan the Slave Merchant! A conspiracy aiming to get rid of me! I new there was no

chance for someone like Roxanne to be so nice to me just because!

「Michio-sama, are you okay.....」

「?!!!」

「!!!!」

「What in the world happened here?」

When Alan came inside the room with a lit lantern, we could finally see what happened to the Bandit who fell victim to my spell. There was literally nothing left of him. In the place where he was supposed to be, there was nothing but a big pool of blood. Witnessing this sight straight out of a horror movie, I desperately tried to hold up the urge to vomit.

「Can you stand up, master?」

Roxanne asked me worriedly, giving me her hand to help me get up from the floor.

「A Suicide Bomb? I had no idea Bandits had access to such items. I heard stories of how gruesomely effective it is, but this... you're lucky you made it out alive, Michio-sama. Suicide Bombs usually claim the lives of those who are both on the using and receiving end of it.」

「Are you okay?」

「As I said, he's lucky to still be breathing. Since Suicide Bomb is an item, its effects are instantenous, so I imagine he only had a split second to get some distance between them.」

「Something like that always happens when such an item is used?」

「Pretty much. Which is why I am all the more amazed that Michio-sama is not in a much worse shape.」

「That's because master is amazingly strong!」

Roxanne and Alan were having some pretty bizarre conversation, which didn't center on me being a murderous monster for some reason. Does that mean I am in the clear? I sure hope so. Item... Item Box... Fuck, of course! Why didn't I thought about it sooner?! For now, I just need to shut up and take one of those MP Recovery medicines I bought from the Adventurer's Guild. If I do that, my head should be cleared just enough for me to get a proper grasp at my current situation. *Sigh* I really am an idiot.

I silently summoned an Item Box and took the two medicines out of it. I should have bought more of them exactly for those kinds of occasions. Me being a cheapskate has apparently finally come to bite me in the ass.

When I took the medicines, my head felt much better because it was no longer in depressing turmoil. With that problem dealt with, I slowly rose from my knees. My entire body was hurting, most likely because of the fact that when Equivalent Exchange sucked all of my MP, it proceeded to drain my HP next.

「Master, are you really okay? Maybe you shouldn't be standing up so soon?」

「Thank you for your concern, Roxanne, but I am fine, really.」

Now, I have to sort what the fuck happened in my mind. Let's see... looks like initially Equivalent Exchange decreased my MP and the Bandit's HP in equal amounts, and when I ran out of MP, it switched to sucking my HP instead. In other words, if my total HP and MP were lower than that Bandit's, I would have been the one to bite the dust instead of him. It turned out to be quite the dangerous gamble, but thankfully I somehow managed to come out on top this time. But let me be clear on one thing, ok? I absolutely, positively don't want to go through something like that ever again.

「We allowed one of the Bandits to escape, but other than that all of them have been swiftly dealt with, so we should be safe for now. Thank you for your help in settling this matter and sorry for putting your lives in an unnecessary danger. If it wasn't for your warning, someone would no doubt end up injured or worse. No amount of words can describe how grateful I am for everything that you have done for us.」

When I could finally stand up myself without Roxanne's aid, Alan-san bowed to us with words of praise, which probably looked neat, but unfortunately my vision was still kinda blurry from all that magical HP sucking I went through. For a moment it looked like things could have gone so south that I could have hit fantasy Mexico here, but as long as the client is satisfied with the quality of our work I guess we have nothing to complain about.

Part 12

The inside of the room was, from the lack of a more suitable words, a total mess. The blood of the Bandit, and even his bits and pieces, were literally scattered all over the place. The same could be said about his equipment, or at least the one that wasn't damaged by him erupting into a bloody smear on the floor and nearby walls. The only thing that was in good enough condition to be salvaged was the Copper Sword. I already have one of those myself and don't need a copy, but hey, a deal's a deal, so I'm going to take whatever I can. I will probably go sell it later when I will have some free time on my hands.

「As per our agreement, I will be holding onto this.」

Now that everything has been settled, all three of us left the room. Due to the loss of MP from using Equivalent Exchange my body was still in a lot of pain, and now that I have used up the only two MP Recovery Medicines that I bought the only way to fill it back up was to go to the Labyrinth and kill some monsters with Durandal. A hassle for sure, but this time it is a necessary one.

「Before you go, please wait a moment.」

Alan-san said to us before he went and disappeared into one of the rooms.

「Uhm, master...?」

「Yeah?」

「I am deeply sorry. Due to my selfishness, you ended up getting badly hurt

like that.]

「No, that's not a problem at all. Besides, what happened to me was not your fault, Roxanne.]

I don't know why she is the one apologizing when this time I was actually the selfish one here, so what happened to me was 100% my fault.

「Sorry I kept you waiting. Here is the promised reward for your work. That being said, I didn't expect thongs to escalate the way they did, so allow me to express my deepest apologies as well, and thank you very much for everything you did for us.]

I have a lot of mixed feelings about it, but if he's offering us a full reward without any buts, then who am I to complain? Now that the Bandits have been taken care of, we could safely leave the shop through the front door. Alan-san saw us off the entire way, and after saying our goodbyes to him we left the shop and got ack out into the streets.

The outside was still very dark, so apparently sun hadn't rose up enough to start shedding its light onto the surroundings. Navigating the streets without any source of light might be a bit problematic, so much in fact that a part of me wished for Alan-san to share his lantern with us instead if giving us money.

Right now, we need to go to the Labyrinth as soon as possible so that I could replenish all of my lost MP. And since it is dark and no one seems to be around, this looks to be as good of a place as any for a Warp. Warp... just Warp to the damn Dungeon...

I grabbed Roxanne's hand and went through the portal together with her, arriving in Veil's Labyrinth... but that Warp was a bad move. A very, very huge oof. I thought getting to the Labyrinth as soon as possible was a good idea, but it turned out to be a bad one that just made my situation worse. How, you ask? Just think about it really carefully. Warp is a spell, and spells consume MP in order to be used, and right now I only managed to recover a small amount of it and almost immediately used it all up again... so yeah, we are back at the square one with my MP completely depleted because of my

fucking stupidity! Hoe could I be such an idiot as to forget something so crucial... fuck, now my body hurts even more than it did before!! The only saving grace here is that we have Warped into the entrance room where there wasn't any monsters. Yes, such safe places are oh so very much like me. Now I can just curl up into a ball in a corner and shiver with fear like a blasted coward that I am. I will be safe and won't be hurt here anymore. Yes, this place can become my very own sanctuary of peace and safety...

No, I came here for a fucking reason, and I am going to goddamn see it through! I have to find some of those dickless monsters and buttfuck the living shit out of them with Durandal's business end so that I can get all of my MP back with the MP Absorption skill.

「Roxanne... the shortest way to the nearest group of monsters... please...」

But what if we won't happen upon any monsters anytime soon? Ahh, screw it, we will just look for them until we find them. That is why Roxanne is here with me, to give me the push I need to continue going forward even if I don't really want to.

Right now I am sure I am nothing but a burden to her, since there is nothing half as bad as having an incompetent, unmotivated fool like myself for a companion. She is so always so good, you know? Keeping a failure like me company and putting up with my loser shenanigans... okay, my self-deprecating rants are only growing stronger and more fierce, so let's just go out there and slay us some monsters before I really turn into a spineless quitter and run away with my tail up my ass.... Yeah, right, what are you even thinking about, you idiot?! Are you touched to the head or what? A dimwit like you, going outside, killing monsters? There is no way in hell you can do that. The fact that you somehow managed to do it up until now is in and out of itself a one-in-a-million miracle that should not be allowed to happen again! You are such a failure that when the monsters will find you, they will kill you without even trying to do so! You don't want to be killed, right? You just want to continue living like you did before, in the absolute safety of your cramped room, where you didn't have to do anything! So go ahead and stay in this entrance room. Not moving an inch from here is what really suits a spineless chickenheart like you!

「The closest group of monsters should be this way.」

Roxanne pointed with her finger.

「Master? Are you not feeling well?」

「No, it's nothing. I... I will fight those monsters, so you just stay behind me, alright?」

Damn it all to hell! Roxanne is right in assuming that I am not feeling well in the slightest, but the only way out of this sorry state is for me to kick myself back into high gear and kill as many monsters as I can with Durandal, but... is it really going to be safe? I mean, there are monsters roaming the halls out there, so who decided that they won't suddenly charge in here to murder me if they sense me? To be honest, I don't even know what I'm thinking anymore. This is the Labyrinth, dangerous, and filled with enemies at every turn. No place is completely safe in here. There is no escaping them, and there is no escaping death. So that's it, huh? Well, if I'm going to die, then at least I will die standing.

Mustering every last ounce of energy I had, I left the entrance room.

No! Go the fuck back! Do you have a death wish? You want to die that badly?! No. Whether I go back there or not does not matter. The monsters will eventually come to the entrance room, and since I won't be able to beat them, that place will become my graveyard. And suddenly, as if it heard my internal turmoil, a single Needlewood appeared at the back of the passageway. Run away. It's not too late to run, you can still do it! Just go back to the entrance room and stay there, where no one will be able to harm you! No, there's no time! Even if I run right now, I won't make it in time! I am going to be killed by this basic monster and die a horrible, meaningless death! The patrolling Needlewood is approaching, and it is definitely out for my blood!

But then...

I don't even know when it happened, but at some point I must have swung my Durandal at it, killing it in one blow. Was it survival instinct, or perhaps a

motion that my body got so used to that it was performing the moves on its own? Well, it does not matter. What matters is that with a bit of MP I have regained, my head got a little bit clearer, and that was a start of my return to full mental health!

Part 13

Durandal's edge slashed through another monster. The Needlewood fell onto the ground and disappeared in a puff of green smoke. Even though I was still mentally handicapped due to my critical loss of MP, I was still able to swing my sword like normal to defeat monsters. Even in the state of severe depression, it doesn't look like my attack power was affected by it in any negative way.

「Fuaaaaah...」

I dropped my shoulders and exhaled deeply. Recovering my MP this time way harder than it needed to be, but slowly but surely the depression and pessimism which were hanging over me like a dark cloud have finally started to fade away.

The continuous absorption of MP eliminated the feeling of pain and weariness that permeated my entire body, so right now I was feeling pretty okay. But man was that rough! I still have some amount of MP to recover, but other than that I got back to my optimal condition. I have to say though, that feeling of depression which grabbed me in its claws after I used Equivalent Exchange was beyond terrible. I had no idea that this was going to happen to you if you lose all of your MP. Also, I don't know if it is related to it in any way, but my memory of everything that happened after I used that spell is so foggy that I can barely even recall it, even if it happened literally an hour or so ago.

「Sorry about that embarrassing display, Roxanne. Anyway, let's go to the next group of monsters. If you could please lead the way?」

It's okay, it's alright. Now that I have regained my MP I can think clearly again. I kept saying that to myself as we moved forward. Under Roxanne's

keen guidance we hunted a few more monster, and like that, my MP has been fully restored. All the negative thoughts disappeared as if they were never there at all.

「How are you feeling now, master? Are you still sick? Maybe you shouldn't put yourself under so much physical stress just yet?」

「It's okay, Roxanne. Everything will be fine now.」

Now that I reassured Roxanne that everything was fine with me, I opened my Job Settings to check if the new Job Appeared there after I used the Bonus Spell. Glancing over the list, it was there, right at the very bottom: a brand-new shining Mage Job!

Mage Lv.1

Effects: INT Up (Small), MP Up (Small)

Skills: Beginner Fire Magic, Beginner Water Magic, Beginner Wind Magic, Beginner Earth Magic

I did it. I have finally done it! Getting it was more of a pain than usual, but I finally got my hands on the Mage Job! I have to say though, for all the trouble I have to go through in order to obtain it, starting with nothing more but the 「Beginner」 level of spells was somewhat disappointing. And how do I even use it anyway? Whatever I have to do to make them work, there can be no doubt that I can legitimately use them now. Also, isn't the requirement for obtaining the Mage Job kinda buggy? I mean, you have to use Attack Magic to be able to obtain the Mage Job, but in order to cast said Attack Magic you have to know magic in the first place. It's strangely unspecific, but now that I got it there's no need to dwell on the small details too much.

Fiddling with the Job Settings, I set Mage as my First Job.

「Are we going to go to the second floor now?」

「No, not yet. I have a number of things I want to try out, so for now we will be staying here.」

「Understood. This way then.」

As we were walking, I thought about testing the Beginner Fire Magic first. I tried saying the Skill's name in my mind and then to mutter it quietly, but nothing happened, even when taking the Chant Omission into account. Maybe the usable Skills themselves have different names, and 「Beginner Fire Magic」 was just a name for their general assessment? Maybe I'll try asking Roxanne to see if she knows anything at all about it.

「Roxanne, I know you said you don't know much about Mages and Wizards, but do you know anything about magic in general?」

「About magic? Like Skill Magic, for example?」

「More like the one used for the purpose of battle, actually.」

「I'm sorry, but since so few people can actually become mages, not much is known about them in general.」

「I see.」

You said you don't know much, so that means you have to know something, right? But if it's true that only the privileged groups, like the aristocracy and the filthy rich people can become mages, then it's a small wonder that the information about that Job was scarce.

「What I do heard from those who witnessed Mages in a battle is that the magic can generally be divided into three types: Multi0target spells, spells that create a wall in front of the user, and spells that can be shot from your hand in the form of an orb. Oh, and they are activated with some difficult Brahim Chants. What was it again...?」

「A difficult Brahim, huh?」

Well, since I can speak Brahim then I guess all I have to worry about is figuring the chants correctly.

Fire, Flame, Fire Storm, Fire Orb... yeah, let's try those ones out first. Orb, an orb. I will keep that in mind for the time being. Fire. Fire Orb... Fire

Orb.... Ball... Fire... Fireball?

As I kept repeating all those names, when I said fireball, the area above the palm of my hand lit up, and a small ball of fire was floating in there.

Oh, this is it. Fireball was the right keyword here. When I pointed my hand forward, the Fireball also flew forward. A success! A goddamn success! Now I can properly use Attack Magic!

After the ball finally disappeared I looked at my hand in amazement. Knowing that I can now use magic filled me with all sorts of extatic emotions. So magic does exist, and I am one of the lucky few who can wield it however they want! See, moment like that make me think that I have really been transported to a wonderful world. So now I can use Space Magic, Movement Magic, and now I can add Fire Magic to the mix as well. In that sense, I guess getting myself depressed as fuck was well worth it.

The fireball proceeded forward for a bit, illuminating the surroundings with a shade of red, until it eventually disappeared. I can now say it with pride: I have become a Mage before the legendary age of thirty!

「Eh? Ehhh? Ehhhhhhh? Was that magic just now?!」

Roxanne seemed a little confused when she saw my magic.

「It sure was magic.」

「But weren't you an explorer, master? I've never heard of an Explorer using this kind of magic!」

「Well, keep it a secret.」

「A-Another secret, huh?」

Yup, another secret of how much of a cheater I am. Even if I wanted to, there would be no easy way to explain it anyway.

「It's amazing that you can use magic, master! No, that is beyond amazing!」

「I can use it because you taught me. So this time it's thanks to you, Roxanne.」

「Uhm, so you weren't able to use magic before?」

「No, I was just... you know... keeping my hand close to my chest.」

If I could use it before, I would have done so a long time ago.

I tried throwing a fireball at the Needlewood that appeared. When I looked at the monster and thought of a fireball, a ball of fire was formed over my head and flew towards the Needlewood, setting it on fire almost instantaneously. Oh yeah, something is telling me that I am going to have so much fun with this spell that it is going to be unreal.

Part 14

Seeing the enemy that was engulfed in flames right before my very eyes, I wasn't able to contain my happiness. So this is magic! It really is as amazing as I imagined it to be!

Eventually the fire stopped burning, and when it did it became evident that it wasn't as strong as my attacks with Durandal, because even when it was set ablaze, the Needlewood was still standing. With its entire body covered with cinders and clouds of heavy black smoke, it slowly made its way towards us. But I wasn't disappointed with that a result, not in the slightest. Moreover, I guess you could say that such a result was what I was expecting. After all, Durandal is an uber OP weapon obtained from investing my Bonus Points into Bonus Weapons Skill all the way to Lv.6 and most of my stat points have been allocated into STR to make sure that it will always kill enemies with one blow no matter what. On the other hand, I only just got my hands on the Mage Job so it was still at its default, lowest level, Lv.1, and Fireball was a part of Beginner Fire Magic Skill, meaning that its inherent damage likely won't be all that high, and my rather low INT stat probably won't do anything to change that fact either. Anyway, maybe it was because it only had a tiny sliver of its HP left, but the burning Needlewood was exceptionally sluggish, which made disposing of him easier than taking the candy from a little kid. I didn't even have to put any strength in my next slash to turn it into a cloud of green smoke.

Okay, so now that we know how the Orb, or rather Ball type of magic works, let's try taking the Wall-type magic for a spin, shall we?

Hmm, let's go with the most obvious one first: Fire Wall!

When I thought of those words in my mind, a literal wall of flames appeared before me. Both its width and height were about two meters, making them

quite reasonable measurements for that type of spell, but I bet that on higher levels both of those parameters could be sufficiently increased, so I have to keep that in mind as I continue to level the Mage Job and obtain new spells from it. The flames continued to rage for a dozen seconds. And that takes care of the Fire Wall test. I guess in conclusion it could be said that it more of a defensive than an offensive spell that sets everyone who tries to walk through it on fire. My guess is that it would be at its most useful when there would be a lot of enemies in a small, confined space... like the entrance to the trap room, for example! Oh baby, you can be sure I am going to be using that then!

Alright, now that both Ball and Wall-type spells have been tested, all that is left is to see with my own eyes how the Multi-target, or perhaps I should simply call them AoE spells work in comparison to the previous two. But first thing's first, what would the name of such a spell be? Hell Flame? Burn Attack? Volcano Eruption? Nah, none of those option sound like the right pick. If the previous ones to hit the jackpot were Fireball and Fire Wall, then there is a high probability that in order for the AoE to work, the combination containing the word 「Fire」 would also have to be used. Hmm... Fire Slash? Fire Explosion? Fire Storm?

「.....！」

When I used the words Fire Storm, I felt the sensation of my MP decreasing, but nothing noticeable happened around us. So apparently I got the words right, but maybe there was no visible effects because there was no enemies around? Well, given how magic works, I shouldn't be surprised that there exists those kinds of spells that must have a target first. If that's how it's going to be, then I guess off to the second floor we go!

Dungeon Walker!

「Roxanne, we're going to the second floor. As usual, show us the shortest way to a group of monsters. Specifically a group this time.」

「Roger!」

Once we reached the second floor and found a sufficiently large group of

monsters (for the record: they were all Needlewoods) I chanted the Fire Storm again, targeting it towards them. When I did that, the air around them has been filled with a myriad of red sparks which illuminated the cave's walls with a shade of red in much the same fashion like Fireball and Fire Wall did before them. Maybe it's going to sound a little bit too poetic, but it was kinda sorta as if I was watching fireflies gather... only to explode in a fiery all-consuming blaze that swallowed everything in its vicinity, burning everything to ashes. The Needlewoods just burned and burned and burned until there was nothing left of them... or at least that's how I envisioned it, because once more the spell itself was not enough to one-shot the enemies, leaving me to finish them off with Durandal, which I promptly proceeded to do, leaving Roxanne to collect any items that dropped out of them in the process of turning the stragglers into the puffs of green smoke.

My thoughts on Fire Storm? Unlike Fireball and Fire Wall, it is a spell which works best when targeted in the middle of a group of enemies, since you cannot specify the direction where it should be going. The only question that is left unanswered for now is whether or not it can distinguish friend from foe, or is it that kind of spell which works on everything in its range indiscriminately?

I wanted to go an and test the rest of the spells from the other branches of Beginner Magic that I unlocked, but for now I decided to go out of the Labyrinth and have a short rest after everything we have been though today. Just let me say one thing in advance:

Magic is absolutely the best!

Chapter 10: Experiment

Part 1

Kaga Michio

Current levels & equipment:

Explorer Lv.19

Hero Lv.15

Mage Lv.1

Herbalist Lv.3

Equipment:

Durandal

Leather Armor

Leather Jacket

Leather Gloves

Leather Shoes

We returned to the inn where we had breakfast.

It's a very good thing that I managed to become a Mage. Now that I can command the very forces of nature according to my whims and use them at the snap of my fingers, I got overwhelmed by a sense of omnipotence. From now on, I could technically set fire to everything around me simply because I felt like it, and knowing that made me smile involuntarily. I am positive that everybody around me, Roxanne included, must be thinking that my smiling

face looks very creepy, but at the very least Roxanne was tactful enough not to bring this up out in the open. I am glad that she's so good at keeping the mood positive without ruining it. It makes the food taste that much better in my opinion. We finished our meal early and then went back to the Labyrinth. Just like the last time, we started from the first floor.

「Roxanne.」

「Yes, master?」

「For today, I would like to focus on fighting monsters by using magic.」

「An experiment involving magic? Understood!」

When I used magic for the first time, none of the spells I tried were enough to defeat the Needlewoods, a.k.a the weakest of monsters with a single hit. I know that using Durandal finishes each and every battle in a literal flash, but if I wanted to do the same with just magic, it would take considerably more time.

「This way, master.」

However, magic has one advantage over Durandal, and it's a rather significant one. In order to get Durandal, you need to spend 63 Bonus Points. But if I choose to fight mainly with magic, I can spend those points for other things without wasting them for getting Durandal. So whether I spend them on EXP related Skills, Crystal Acceleration or simply for getting multiple Jobs, the benefits are still going to be considerable. So if only I can find a way to fight effectively with magic alone, I should just go for it.

The first of the tests I wanted to perform was to see how effective fighting with magic alone could be. That is why we have started today's foray into the Labyrinth from the first floor which has the weakest enemies. When Roxanne found us the first Needlewood, I tried launching a single Fireball at it to see how it was going to go. The attack was successful, but not enough for a one-hit kill, so I tried launching another fireball at it right after that first one, but for a few solid seconds nothing was happening, even though I was screaming 「Fireball! Fireball! Fireball!」 in my mind like some kinda madman. The

second shot was finally fired, but by the time it happened the Needlewood was close enough to met swing its now flaming branch towards me, but Roxanne got in front of me and blocked the incoming attack with her Scimitar, giving me enough time to prepare the third Fireball, the one that finally took the monster down.

So taking down a Needlewood with Fireball requires at least three of them to hit it, huh? The delay, or maybe I should say the cooldown between each consecutive spell is a little troublesome, but with a little bit of practice I should be able to get used to it in no time. Also, it was probably because I said that I wanted to experiment today, but Roxanne didn't do anything else beside stopping that Needlewood's attack from reaching me, giving me the opportunity to defeat the enemy myself, for which I am grateful. As for myself, I was contemplating if I should switch Durandal for the Copper Sword for the duration of this test, but ultimately I decided it would be best for me to stay with Durandal. If the situation like that one form just now, where I won't be able to beat the enemy with magic happens again and it will come within melee distance from me, I will have no choice but to engage it in melee as well, and for that, I need all the damage I can dish out in order not to make individual battles unnecessarily long.

The next Needlewood we fought with also managed to get close enough to me to try attacking me, so I backstepped to create enough distance between us to have a large enough safety margin, and used another Fireball. It slowly formed over my head and started advancing towards the monster, covering it with fire until it burned down and fell onto the ground.

「Another one that needed three shots to be taken down. I don't know if it's just me, but those Beginner-level spells seem to be unexpectedly powerless.」

「Not at all, master. The fact that you can use magic with such ease is a great achievement in and out of itself, but to be able to defeat monster with just three shots of it is even more amazing. As expected of my master!」

On a side note, we have been driven near the cave's wall without even realizing it. That's dangerous. Almost too dangerous I dare say!

「If anything, master, I am sorry for my lack of knowledge about magic, but

during my short time as an Adventurer I just didn't have much contact with the ones capable of using it.]

「It's fine, it's not like you could do anything about it. While we are on the subject, is there anything more you remember about magic and using it? Every little bit might be helpful.]

「Well, I heard that certain monsters can be either weak or resistant to certain types of magic. I think it was called... Elemental Affinity? I think you were able to defeat those Needlewoods so quickly because they must be weak against fire.]

「So that means that if we keep on hitting the monsters with the element they are weak to, then we should be able to defeat them that much faster, right? In that case, let's try fighting by using magic some more. Any problems with that strategy?]」

「None to speak of! If that is what you decided to do master, then I will follow your every command!]」

Roxanne expressed her agreement with my general plan of action as she was picking up the branches left by the defeated Needlewood.

「Also, feel free to use your Scimitar to assist me more actively. And be sure not to let yourself be pushed against the wall, even by accident.]」

「Don't worry, I will protect you from the front, because mages always fight from the backlines. Not to mention that protecting you is my duty as your slave, master!]」

Now that sounds like a solid strategy. Only a genius tactician like me could have come up with something as elaborate like that.

We continued to walk around the Labyrinth with my magic ready to cast and my hand always close to the handles of both Durandal and the Copper Sword. Another Needlewood we have come across got hit with a Fireball straight to its ugly mug. If defeating monsters with magic takes time, then the remedy for that is quite simple: you just have to spam magic as soon as you see the

enemy appear, and don't give him even a moment to react. That is my master plan.

The Fireball advances through the cave, but then something rather bizarre happened: the Needlewood avoided my Fireball by ramming itself into the wall. Hot damn that was weird to watch. Well, they might not be intelligent, but monsters should still have their instincts which should be telling them when the danger is approaching, so it shouldn't be all that surprising that they are able to avoid attacks like that, so maybe launching the Fireball right from the get go wasn't as good of an idea as I thought it was? Unlike the Fire Storm, the Fireball is not an AoE spell, so it has to be precisely aimed in order to work properly.

I tried using it again, but failed. It seems that you have to get close to some extent firing the next shot, so I did just that and tried conjuring the next Fireball. However, it did not work. Aww shit, another failure? Having no other choice, I finished the Needlewood with Durandal

As I expected, there is a few seconds delay between each consecutively fired spell, even with my Chant Omission Skill, so even with it active the spells are going to be on brief cooldown each time. All in all it's not that big of a problem, but in tough fights that might require fast reactions from me it might make that just a little bit tight.

Part 2

Since the Fireball always forms over my head whenever I cast it, the delay between casting consecutive spells must also include the period needed for each Fireball to form. After shooting another Fireball at that Needlewood it entered my melee range, so Roxanne slashed it with her Scimitar. It shook its branches at her, and she lightly dodged them. Using that opening she created for me, I casted another Fireball, shot it towards the Needlewood, hit it, and subsequently defeated it. It takes more work than I would have liked, but as long as Roxanne and I coordinate our actions and compensate for our weaknesses, it is definitely possible to fight with using just magic.

「Sorry for putting you in the vanguard like that.」

「Not at all. Protecting you is my duty, therefore I will do whatever it takes to keep you safe, both as this Party's magic caster and my master!」

As much as I hate always putting her on the front lines, she is right. Normally Mages and Wizards have little to no melee capabilities, so it is only natural for them to be sticking to the backlines, where they can focus on casting their devastating spells without having to worry about being interrupted. And as far as I can see, Roxanne is more suited for the vanguard position than I am. If she herself is fine with it, then I guess there is no need for me to forcefully remove her from the position she feels the most at home at.

「Okay, now that I have learned a lot about fighting with magic here on the first floor, I think it's high time for us to go hit the second floor, since there is another thing that I want to experiment with.」

「Yes!」

But before we go to the second floor, there's one more thing that I have to

check: something that has to do with Leveling Up Jobs.

When I previously leveled Monk to Lv.2 I was using three Jobs at the same time and defeated about fourteen monsters. Now, since I have gone through the trouble of getting myself the Herbalist Job, I have no choice but to use it, even though it is totally not my style. Now, what would happen if I had only one Job set up? If the EXP is divided equally between all the Jobs you have set up, then with only one Job, it should earn that much more EXP with killing fewer monsters, right? Of course, I have no guarantee whether or not putting it at my First Job will give it a different levelling rate compared to the others, but nevertheless it should be worth a shot. Even if the EXP I'm gaining is divided between my Jobs and Roxanne's Job, they should still Level Up at about half the normal speed. Also, the amount of EXP needed to increase the levels of both Monk and Herbalist to Lv.2 will most likely be different, but that difference shouldn't be all that big.

Let's give it a try.

「.....?」

Hmm? I can't set Herbalist as my First Job. Why? I have more than enough Bonus Points to do so, so why can't I do it? Maybe there are some additional restrictions to the process of Job changing? Bonus Points can be earned when you level up your First Job. That is why you cannot change your First Job to the one with a higher level if you are using all of them. That much I understand. What I cannot understand though, is why can't I switch the First Job even though I have enough Bonus Points to do so?

Think about it, Michio! Think! There must be something you have missed!

Maybe it's an Item Box?

My currently equipped First Job, the Explorer, has an Item Box Skill, and said Item Box contains pretty much all of my items within it. What happens to all the items stored in there if the Explorer is removed from the position of the First Job? That is something that I have honestly never even thought about, and if I don't want to find out about it the painful way, it would be best not to change the First Job at all. I see. Good job for noticing such a crucial

fact before it was too late, me.

While I was lost in thoughts, we happened upon another Needlewood. I slashed him with Durandal, turning him into green smoke in an instant.

「Wait a minute... maybe that's what this is all about?」

I frowned and muttered to myself as I looked at Roxanne as she took the branches left by the Needlewood and packed them into her backpack. So far what I have in mind is just a hypothesis, and I don't know how to explain it well, so maybe I should just straight up try and do it?

「Uhm, is something wrong, master?」

「No, no, everything's fine. We will continue the experiment for now. I still need some more time to get the results I am looking for. By the way, can you hold onto these for a moment?」

I asked, giving her the items from my Item Box.

「Yes, of course.」

I took all of my items out of the Item Box and allowed Roxanne to pack them into her own backpack. Now, how about trying to set Herbalist as the First Job one more time now that the storage space in the Item Box has been freed?

Sure enough, it worked like a charm. So it was about the Item Box after all. It is an item exclusive to the Explorer Job, so as long as I had items stored in there removing it was not possible, but once you emptied it, nothing was preventing you from switching Jobs to whichever one you wanted. I had no idea its contents actually mattered for things like this, but now I know, and will be all the wiser for it in the future.

「Thinking about it that way, that's a really balanced system.」

「???」

Now I can challenge the next monster we encounter while having only the Herbalist Job set up. I wonder how it is going to go?

To my surprise, I wasn't able to defeat the next enemy with just one hit.

「Eh?!」

「Huh?」

It made the both of us very concerned, but thankfully a few more hits later it finally died.

「Uhm...」

「Do not worry, Roxanne. That was a part of my experiment as well. Such a thing happening was well within my scope of expectations.」

「It was? Well, okay then.」

Up until now I always one-shotted everything that came close to the business end of my weapons and Roxanne knows that, so I had no choice but to play it off as a part of the experiment I was conducting so that she wouldn't get hella suss of me. Ever since the first time I entered the Labyrinth, I was always able to defeat the Needlewoods with one attack from Durandal, but I never really knew why exactly was I able to do that? OP stats and effects are one thing, but what about other factors? For example, when I defeated my first ever Needlewood with a single attack, my First Job was nothing more than a Lv.2 Villager if I remember correctly. Maybe the fact that I had more than one Job equipped had something to do with it? Like, you know, the more Jobs and their passive effects you have equipped the stronger your weapons get kinda thing?

「Okay, that should do it for this floor. Now, let us be on our way to the second floor, and we will continue the experiment there.」

I declared to Roxanne, and with that, we moved to the Labyrinth's second floor. The experiment itself can be summarized in the following way: Even though it took more hits than usual, I was able to defeat enough Needlewoods to raise the Herbalist Job to Lv.2. It also seems like whether or not you have one Job or multiple Jobs set up, the amount of EXP you will get will always be the same. What that means for me is that I can have as many Jobs at once

as I want, and I won't be suffering any penalties or negative effects for it.

I increased the number of my active Jobs back to four, and placed all of my items back into the Item Box.

「This way, master.」

「Right behind you.」

Finally back on the second floor, I made preparations for the continuation of my experiments.

Part 3

As for the way we could proceed, we had two options when we reached the intersection: the left one and the right one, so I asked Roxanne if she could try sensing how many enemies were down each route.

「On the right there seems to be a group of two Needlewoods and one Green Caterpillar. On the left there is only a lone Needlewood. What do you want to do, master?」

「The closer the enemy is to us, the better. We're going to the left.」

「Understood.」

And so we proceeded down the corridor to the left.

Now that I have tested pretty much all variants of the Fire-type spells and their general usage, it would be good to try my hand at using different kinds of magic as well.

I tried Beginners Fire Magic already, but the Wizard Job has given me access to three more Skills that I have to test out: Beginners Water Magic, Beginners Wind Magic and Beginners Earth Magic. If Fire Magic used spells that were based on the word fire 「insert the rest here」, then it should be the same with all the others, right? Like, for example, Fire Magic has Fireball spell, so for Water Magic it would be... Waterball? Let's give it a try.

(*Waterball!*)

When I spoke the spell's supposed name in my mind, a ball of water materialized itself in my hand and immediately shot forward from it.

Oooooh! So that is Water Magic, huh?

Since there was an enemy not that far away from us, I concluded that there was no better time than the present to test it out against live, moving targets, and the Needlewood Lv.2 fit that bill perfectly, so when we approached it, I launched the Waterball at it from a safe distance. When the monster's body was hit by the rapidly flying spell it was pushed back a few steps and lost its momentum and was staggered for a few seconds, but it collected itself and continued its advance towards us immediately after that. Okay, aside from that brief stagger, it doesn't look like this Waterball attack did that much damage to it, so I patiently waited for it to come just within slashing distance and disposed of it with one blow from Durandal.

「So, that did way less damage than I anticipated, which is admittedly kind of a bummer.」

「Some monsters may actually be resistant to certain magical attributes or have different set of weaknesses, so Needlewoods might be resistant to Water Magic. I'm sorry I can't tell you more about this matter, but as I said before, Wizards and Mages are rare to begin with, and I didn't have much occasions to meet them and ask about magic.」

「Well, I guess we'll just have to keep trying different spells on them to see which are effective and which are not, but that will come in due time. For now, there's no need for us to worry about it too much.」

That being said, I wonder if what Roxanne said about Needlewoods being resistant to Water Magic was really true? I mean, they technically are nothing more but sentient trees, and trees thrive from water instead of being harmed by it, so I guess that would make sense?

「Well, then, shall we go to the next spot with the enemies?」

「Of course! The next ones should be over that way!」

Our next opponents turned out to be a group of Green Caterpillars, so I tried using Fire Storm on them. The sparks created by the spell gathered around two of them, and in the next moment they were engulfed in the series of fiery

explosions, turning them both bright red before they turned into lumps of charcoal and burned body chunks. Oh yeah, as long as the enemies are weak enough, Fire Storm might actually be the best way of dealing with groups of them, provided that they won't prove to be resistant to fire damage.

When the flames of the Fire Storm finally died out and the monsters slain with it turned into the puffs of green smoke, I decided to test Fire Storm's Water Magic counterpart, Water Storm on the remaining ones. Initially it looked like a single droplet of water, which made me think that it was somewhat unimpressive, but as soon as that droplet hit the ground it grew and erupted into a pillar of highly pressurized water that closed in on the Green Caterpillars' location, and then it swallowed them all, squeezing them in one place where the torrents of spiraling water continuously lashed at them. Water Storm might not be as destructive as Fire Storm, but that property of keeping groups of enemies bundled together in one place might certainly come in handy somewhere down the line.

Then I tried eliminating Green Caterpillars using the Waterball spell. As expected, they didn't die in one shot, but I guess such an outcome was to be expected since I needed three Fireballs to kill a single Lv.1 Needlewood down on the first floor, so obviously it would be unreasonable to expect the Lv.2 enemies on the second floor to die in two or three hits from a Waterball. However, unlike with the Needlewood, it didn't feel like Green Caterpillars were particularly resistant to Water Magic, which was a good piece of intel to obtain.

The next Green Caterpillars must have been a little tougher than the rest, because when I threw another Fire Storm at them, they endured the attack while being colored a mixture of charcoal-black and smoldering-red. I have to admit, there was something especially ghastly in the appearance of a giant, oversized caterpillars that continued crawling towards us even when their meaty bodies were slowly being consumed by the raging flames that wouldn't let go of them until they were burned to cinders. It's not like I'm worried that they might kill us considering their current state, so we just have to stay calm and respond to whatever tricks they might try to pull on us with their dying breaths. And in case of any emergency, I will simply smack them with Durandal to kill them instantly for sure. Or maybe I should use Durandal

right away and be done with it without sweating the small stuff?

When they came into our melee range, they were only two of them remaining, so Roxanne and I each took on one of them. The Green Caterpillar that I faced tried to rush at me, and I avoided its attack, although barely, I have to admit that much. It was a really close call. I knew that things will only get tougher once we go to the higher floors of the Labyrinth, but to be honest, I thought we would still get some kind of leeway on the second floor. I guess the times of taking down enemies quickly and effortlessly couldn't have last forever, did they?

I used Fire Storm once more after throwing two more Fireballs at it, but as soon as its sparks appeared in the air, I sensed a wave of negative thoughts washing over me.

I cannot avoid the monster attacks forever. I want to, but that's simply not possible with my current self. Their attacks will reach me and kill me. I have to escape if I want to leave this place alive! Just do it, you insufferable idiot! Turn your back on everything in this shithole and run as far away as you can! Just when I was about to heed my basic instincts and turn tail and run, the Green Caterpillar finally collapsed right in front of me while burning bright red from the flames of the Fire Storm that did enough damage to it to reduce its remaining HP to zero.

Haha, hahaha, kill them in one shot with magic? What the hell was I thinking?! It took a total of four spell to kill that one enemy. Was that how big the difference between mobs of Lv.1 and Lv.2 was? Or perhaps my own stats are to blame because my Magic ATK is too low? Is that it? So many shots to kill one monster because I am too incompetent?!

I don't care about that now! This is bad! The amount of my MP has decreased too much, affecting my thinking processes in a negative way. I have to kill some more monsters with Durandal now to get myself back to normal before I will do something really stupid! Those spells decreased my total MP to around 1/4th of its total value, so killing a few more monsters should put me back on my feet as usual, and then, assuming I will live through it of course, I will be able to go back to checking the rest of the spells out. I already tested Waterball And Water Storm out, so next will be Water

Wall.

Part 4

After killing a few more monsters with Durandal and absorbing their MP into myself, I was back in the condition where I could cast a few spells without my MP supplies dropping into the mental danger zone, so it was about time to try how different Water Wall would be in comparison to the Fire Wall.

(Water Wall!)

Yes, the activation of the spell was a success, and soon I have watched as a wall made out of water was erected in front of me from, sprawling from the floor to the ceiling, and blocking most of the corridor with itself. Technically it should work in the same way as Fire Wall does, meaning that it should deal damage to whatever tried to pass through it, but will that really be the case?

With Fire Wall it was obvious that the flames would cause harm upon contact, by now that I took a closer look at this Water Wall, it was not made from swirling, torrential water like Water Storm was, but from normal, still water shaped like an elongated square. Will something like that really be able to successfully stop monsters from coming near us? Maybe it was supposed to act like a trap that would drown them to death? Or maybe Water Wall is meant strictly for blocking fire-based attacks?

After a few minutes the spell stopped working, and the water that made up the Water Wall lost its form and fell onto the floor, splashing a generous amount of liquid over my pants as well. Okay, what did we learn from this unfortunate mishap? That apparently, unlike Fire Magic, where the flames go *poof* and disappear when the spell is finished, water used in the Water Magic spells actually stays behind. That's kinda like... like fire and water in real life I guess? You know, with how flames from fires have to be either put out or they have to die on their own but whenever there is a flood then all the water has to be pumped out manually because it won't evaporate on its own?

So that's normal, right? Or not? Well shit, I don't know anymore, because now that I am in a world where magic seems to be a rare but integral part of the world I am not really sure what the criteria for being considered 「normal」 actually are.

「Roxanne, do you think it is safe to drink the water created through Water Magic spells? Because to be frank, using all of those Fire Magic spells made my throat kinda dry.」

「I am pretty sure that water is safe to drink. It's just regular water after all.」

Yeah, since it's normal, plain-ass water, then drinking it should theoretically be okay to drink it. Also, if it's safe to drink, then it could serve more than one purpose. For example: from now on, we won't have to carry heavy water bottles with us whenever we would fancy a drink. But perhaps we should still carry one or two of them with us just in case? Yeah, that sounds like a reasonable thing to do.

The next two Needlewoods Lv.2 we encountered were slain by me with four Fireballs, two for each one of them. Two spells needed just to defeat a Lv.2 monster. That result is far from an ideal one where I would dispose of a single enemy with a single spell, but I guess it cannot be helped for now.

Anyway, now that I tested both Fire Magic and Water Magic, the next one waiting to be tested out was Wind Magic. If the patterns from the two previous tests also apply here, then something should happen once I chant the name of the spell.

(*Windball!*)

I chanted the name of the spell in my mind, but to my surprise, nothing happened. Huh? Strange, that's not how it went the past two times. Maybe I should try some different names?

(*Wind Arrow! Wind Storm! Wind Strike! Wind Cast!*)

I tried all the different names that I could think of, but the result was one and the same each time: nope, nope, nope and... that's right, you guessed it,

nope. And here I thought that since Fireball and Waterball worked, Windball would be the correct one as well. No matter, we just have to keep trying with the combinations of different words.

(Airball! Thrustball! Galeball! Typhoonball! Tornadoball! Breezeball!)

Oh, looks like that last one was it. When I thought about the name Breezeball, a ball made out of compressed air was formed in my hand and then flew forward at great speed. Or at least I assume that's what happened, because whatever I created with that command was invisible to my naked eye, and the sound of the wind cutting through the air around me was the only audible indication that something happened at all.

So that was a breeze, huh? Part of me was hoping for something more epic like a tornado, but since this is the Beginner-level magic then I guess expecting something like that right from the get-go was more than a little unreasonable. Maybe it will come later as I will obtain more advanced levels of magic mastery, but for now this is what I have to make-do with.

The opponent that would act as a test-subject for my Wind Magic testing was a Green Caterpillar. As soon as it appeared in my line of sight, I created a Breezeball and hurled it straight at it, expecting it to be hit one hundred percent since this attack was practically invisible, but just before it hit the Caterpillar bastard, it rolled over to the side and avoided taking any damage whatsoever! How was it able to dodge my Breezeball? Was it somehow able to sense it?! No, don't think about it for now. Once more. Just focus on attacking it with magic once more! And since now would be as good of a time to do so as any, I waited for the Green Caterpillar to get closer and tried Using Breeze Wall to see how it would look.

(Breeze Wall!)

I thought about it, and then a wall made out of invisible air formed before me and the Green Caterpillar. Alright, at the very least the spell seemed to have worked properly. Just as I predicted, it was must have been a wall made from colorless air, transparent and invisible to my eyes just like the Breezeball. Alright, come on, you stupid caterpillar, go ahead and charge head first into it for a real nasty surprise!

I waited for the gory fireworks to pop up, because I assumed that once the Green Caterpillar gets trapped in the Breeze Wall it would rear I up to shreds, but once again, it stopped right in front of it as if it sensed the danger it was about to walk into. And then the son of a bitch actually had the audacity to activate an orange magic circle under itself, meaning it was preparing to use a skill of its own! If this is the same web spitting attack that caught me once before, then I am screwed!

I just don't get it! Breeze Wall should be practically invisible, so then how was this mindless monster able to stop right before he walked into such a perfect trap? And not only this once! It was able to avoid the Breezeball I threw at it earlier, so in hindsight I guess I should have expected it to avoid Breeze Wall as well.

The problem now is that it was getting ready to use its Skill. Form what I remember the webbing the Green Caterpillar spat last time had a pretty wide spread, so there is a possibility that even with the Breeze Wall deployed some of it might still hit me. But hey, such protection is better than no protection at all, so if I can use it to minimize the potential damage done to me, then you can be sure as hell that I am going to use it! And if I'm really lucky, then Breeze Wall might just block the entire Web Spit attack altogether!

A few moments later, the Green Caterpillar unleashed its Skill. From where I was standing, it looked like it was waiting for the exact moment where my Breeze Wall would begin to disappear. Ugh! Another L that is entirely my fault! I should have backed away to a safer distance while there was still a wall dividing us! Roxanne managed to get away in time, but I got hit with the sticky webbing, and while I was struggling to free myself out of it, Green Caterpillar used that opportunity to hit me with a ramming attack. Thankfully this one attack was not enough to seriously damage me, and when it was going at me with a second one I already broke my Durandal-wielding hand at it, killing it instantly.

Part 5

The Green Caterpillar collapsed on the ground and disappeared in a cloud of green smoke, but its webbing still remained entangled around me.

I made another careless mistake, but Durandal has once again saved me from falling into a pretty bad spot. That being said, it turns out that Wall Magic is much more difficult to use than I initially thought, or maybe it's just a matter of me not using it properly? I wonder if the result was the same even if I used Fire Wall instead of Breeze Wall? No, probably not. If such a simple monster was able to wait until my spell ran out of time and disappeared, it would have probably done the same no matter what type of Wall I would have used, be it Fire Wall or Water Wall.

Man, what a total failure.

Based on what I saw now, the exact width of the Breeze Wall was approximately one and a half meters, so as long as I or the enemy would move to the sides of it, it would technically still be possible for us to attack even with the Wall fully deployed, unless I would have used two of them to actually block the corridor entirely. Alright, I guess that is a lesson learned for me then. Now I just have to make sure that such embarrassing failures won't happen to me ever again.

Our next opponents were Needlewoods and Green Caterpillars. I tried using Breeze Storm against them. With the sharp sound of the wind cutting through the air, the monster's bodies have all been shaken, especially the branches of Needlewoods who looked like they were nothing more but tree saplings ravaged by the tropical typhoon. Yup, it looks like Breeze Storm will also be pretty effective as a general-purpose Wind Magic AoE spell.

After the spell died down, it became obvious that, just like with all the others,

another attack will be needed to properly put all of the enemies down. I attacked the Needlewood that was coming towards me with a Breezeball, while Roxanne disposed of the Green Caterpillars by slashing them with her Scimitar. While using magic I couldn't attack with Durandal at the same time, so I had no choice but to stay in front of the approaching Needlewood before I could hit it with another spell. Launching another Breezeball at it to stagger it, I then hurriedly dodged one of its branches which was being swung at me with the momentum it gained before my spell hit it.

「Here it comes!」

Roxanne's voice echoed in my ears. It was not a loud shout by any means, but it was audible enough for me to hear it firmly and prepare for what was approaching.

When I turned towards one of the Green Caterpillars, I saw that it was deploying an orange magic circle beneath its body, meaning that it was preparing to unleash a Web Spit attack again. Okay, you big bug, you're on! This time I won't allow myself to be had like a noob.

This time I waited until the Green Caterpillar began to spit the webbing out of its mouth, and deployed a Fire Wall at the last possible moment. Now that the sticky threads were already flying out of its mouth there was no way it could have changed their trajectory or adjust its position to bypass my Fire Wall, so it crushed into the flames and made a sharp hissing noise.



Now that I successfully stopped the web from hitting me, I tried to see if I'll be able to cast a second Fire Wall While the first one was still active, but unfortunately that was a no-go. As long as the first Fire Wall was burning, I couldn't cast it for a second time next to the already existing one, so in a sense it was the same with how I could not use two ball-type or storm-type spells in rapid succession, meaning that only one spell can be used at a given time, which is a shame because being able to completely block the corridor so that the enemies wouldn't be able to approach me at all would be quite handy of an option to have, but I didn't have the time to properly contemplate it, because other Needlewoods were just about ready to attack me from the other side while I was focused on the web-spitting Green Caterpillar.

I released another Breeze Storm towards them, their bodies were shaken along with one another Green Caterpillar that got caught in the blast. Overall, it took me four castings of Breeze Storm to finish off the current group of enemies. If only I had used Breeze Storm instead of that one Breeze Wall, maybe that number could have been taken down to three. Allowing me to save that much MP for other spell in case I ever needed them. Well, I guess situations like that cannot be avoided when performing experiments. Now I at least know that I can only use one spell at a time, which will save me the potential embarrassment and quite possibly harm if I tried to pull a stunt like that off while fighting against stronger opponents.

Now then, let us move to the final phase of today's experiments. I have already tested Beginner's Fire Magic, Beginner's Water Magic and Beginner's Wind Magic, so the only one left to try out is the Beginner's Earth Magic.

However, this time, instead of shouting things like Earthball, Earth Wall Or Earth Storm, let's try throwing the system a little curve ball, shall we? When we think earth, what do we typically associate it with? Most likely rocks, dirt and sand. With that said, going backwards from the list of those three things...

(Sandball!)

Well well well, would you look at that, I got it the first time around this time! Am I a genius when it comes to those things or what? The small Earthball

was formed in my hand and shot itself forward, crashing into the Labyrinth's wall, cracking it a little. Oh, wait, not Earthball. The command that got the immediate result was Sandball, so that's how I should probably call it. Yeah, Sandball it is then.

Next, I tried casting Sand Wall. Like the name implied, it created a wall of solid sand to erupt from the ground in front of me. After a while, it dissipated just like the Water Wall, but instead leaving a pile of sand behind it. But unlike all the other versions of the Wall spell, I cannot possibly fathom what kind of usage would sand be off to me. Meaning that it was effectively useless if I cannot process it or utilize it in making it into anything else.

The next monsters that appeared before us became my guinea pigs for the Sand Storm spell.

Summing up everything that I have learned about magic today: there are a total of twelve battle oriented spells I can use right now, divided into three types: Ball, Wall and Storm and belonging to the categories of Beginner's Fire Magic, Beginner's Water Magic, Beginner's Wind Magic and Beginner's Earth Magic. Balls are meant for single target attacks, Walls act as defensive barriers and storms are Area of Effect offensive spells. All of the above make what I believe to be the main core of the system of magic in this world. Spells of Fire and Water Magic have 「Fire」 and 「Water」 in the names of their spells, but Wind Magic and Earth Magic deviate from that rule, because spells of the Wind Magic are actually invoked by the word 「Breeze」 while Earth Magic's activate when the word 「Sand」 is used. There might actually be more offensive forms of magic that we simply do not know about yet, but since Roxanne, who is a native inhabitant of this world, says that generally there are only three of them, then I have no reason to distrust her words.

「Okay, I think this should be enough when it comes to our experiments with magic for today.」

「Understood. You worked really hard to figure everything out, didn't you, master?」

「Thank you, but I would have never been able to do any of that without your

help, Roxanne.]

「Thank you very much for your kind words.]

The biggest question that I had to find an answer to now was how do I want to fight the monsters in the Labyrinth from now on. Should I focus on fighting them with magic, or maybe go back to the purely physical fighting style that capitalizes on Durandal's absurd strength?

Currently, I can defeat Lv.2 monsters on the second floor with four spells, which is a bit much, and admittedly the battle times are a little bit too long for my liking, because the longer the battles, the more stupid mistakes I tend to make, and I am painfully aware of that.

Part 6

Ugh, damn it, what should I do?

I can certainly use magic attacks, but using them and using them *properly* are two entirely different things. Not to mention that if I decide to go down the path of magic, I will have to put Durandal away, turning me next to useless in purely physical combat. But on the flipside, if I store Durandal away, I would be able to invest the points that would otherwise be spent on Bonus Weapons 6 into something else, like increasing the amount of EXP gained from slaying monsters.

Bonus Weapons 6, which gives you Durandal costs 63 Bonus Points in total. Usually, I tend to use it with the Skills that decrease the amount of EXP needed for a Level Up by 1/10th and increase the value of the EXP I earn x10, both of them for 16 Bonus Points, so the Points left after Durandal's removal could easily be used to double their effects, giving me x20 EXP earned and 1/20th of the EXP needed to Level Up. And since it is necessary for me to divide the EXP I earn between me and Roxanne, she would also benefit from it.

With the current “Magic Setting” that I am using, I have 1/5th of the EXP needed and x5 EXP gained, so the difference in EXP efficiency would be x8 better, and that is a really big difference, but..

But to be honest, I am scared to put Durandal away. It has the ability to kill monsters in one strike, not to mention the abilities to absorb both HP and MP from the defeated foes, which is why I could always just throw myself at the monsters before me without worrying about getting hurt or dying, which was infinitely more useful and reliable than the ability to shoot spells in rapid succession. So right now, I have to ask myself what is it that I really want:

safety and stability or the increased EXP values?

If I were to stick to my rule that safety always comes first, then I should continue to use Durandal, no questions asked, and it will get me out of probably every emergency imaginable. True, maybe there will be times where the lifeline such as Durandal won't be needed anymore, but that certainly won't be happening anytime soon. What if we were to happen upon some unbelievably strong monster while I could only use magic? Yeah, things definitely wouldn't be pretty if that happened. But the thing is, Labyrinth is a battlefield, and on the battlefield there can be no such thing as absolute safety. It is a chaotic cesspool where literally anything can happen at any given moment. That is why humans invented a very convenient mechanism called risk management in the first place. I know that every time I enter the Labyrinth I should be prepared for the worst, but on the other hand, coming into the Labyrinth does not have to equal throwing myself into certain death situations all the time, even if we take the 「No risk = no gain」 rule into account.

From the efficiency standpoint, increasing the value of gained EXP would be the most reasonable thing to do. Gaining more levels quickly will help reduce a lot of risks in the long run. Also, I am no longer alone. I have Roxanne with me. So not only do I not want to die, but I also want to protect her at all costs.

I looked back at her. She is unspeakably beautiful, has wonderful, big breasts, and most importantly, I finally managed to make her mine after overcoming many hardships to do so. She is a pure, gentle soul who devoted herself completely to someone as unremarkable like me. Right now, I don't even want to imagine what would happen to me if she was not by my side.

If I want to protect her, then I should focus on getting as much EXP as soon as possible to increase our levels. Durandal can protect me, but I cannot say that having it will be enough to also keep Roxanne safe. And now that I confirmed that I can kill monsters with magic alone, Durandal is no longer an absolute necessity for keeping me afloat. Which is why....

After making up my mind and exhaling heavily, I did a Character Reset where I removed Bonus Weapons 6 from the list of my Bonus Skills.

I will put it away for now, but once I get more levels I might go back to it, because its MP Absorption Skill will be useful to me. With Durandal, I won't have to waste too much money on the MP Recovery medicine, which isn't exactly cheap. And of course, if any emergency calls for it, I will go back to it immediately.

With that, after the Character Reset was finished, I now have 1/10th Required EXP Value and x20 EXP Aquired. Next I took Second and Third Job, and set Explorer as my First Job. I could have taken up to Sixth Hob with the amount of Bonus Points I had, but in order to do that I would have to get not x20 EXP Aquired, but x10 at maximum. After all, getting EXP faster will always be more beneficial than having more Jobs, and for that the x20 option is definitely more efficient. As for the rest of the Bonus Skills, I took Chant Omission, Character Reset, Crystal Acceleration x8 and MP Recovery Speed x2. I doubt doubling it will do much, but it will always be helpful to have.

「Roxanne, from now on I will try fighting while focusing on using magic instead of physical weapons.」

「Of course, I understand.」

「Defeating monsters that way will undoubtedly be much slower in comparison to doing it with my sword, so I am sure you're going to have your part of the work more than cut out for you.」

「Please do not worry, master. I am more than fine with that.」

She might be okay with that now, but I really hope she won't come to regret those words further down the line.

「Now that I am going to stick to the magic-oriented combat, could you please continue guiding us to the places where there are no other people?」

That is one of the major risks associated with deciding to only use magic from now on: I absolutely cannot allow any other people to see me using it. Also, my Second Job and Third Job are Bonus Skills, so if someone were to see an Explorer who's capable of using magic they would undoubtedly start asking all sorts of risky questions, like how is it possible for someone to have

the Skills of two or more Jobs at the same time, or why can I use both Warp and Dungeon Walker along with attack magic of the Wizard Job, because Warp, which falls under Space Magic category is not something that Wizards can use. Not to mention that if someone decides to observe me closely, they might notice that I am not using chants for my spells, and that would be the final nail to my coffin.

「Of course. Leave everything to me!」

But Roxanne assured me once more to leave everything in her capable hands. Yes, I think I will do just that. After all, now Roxanne is not just my slave, but also my reliable, amazing-looking, irreplaceable Party member.

⟨To be continued in『A Harem in the Fantasy World Dungeon Volume 3』⟩

蘇我捨恥

Shachi Sogano

illustration 四季童子

迷宮で異世界へ

3

を

ヒロ姫

SLAVE HAREM IN THE LABYRINTH OF THE OTHER WORLD (LN)

– Isekai Meikyuu De Dorei Harem wo –

- VOLUME 3 -

-AUTHOR-

Sogano Shachi

-ILLUSTRATOR-

Shiki Douji

[Light Novels Translations]

Shachi Sogano

蘇我捨恥

illustration 四季童子

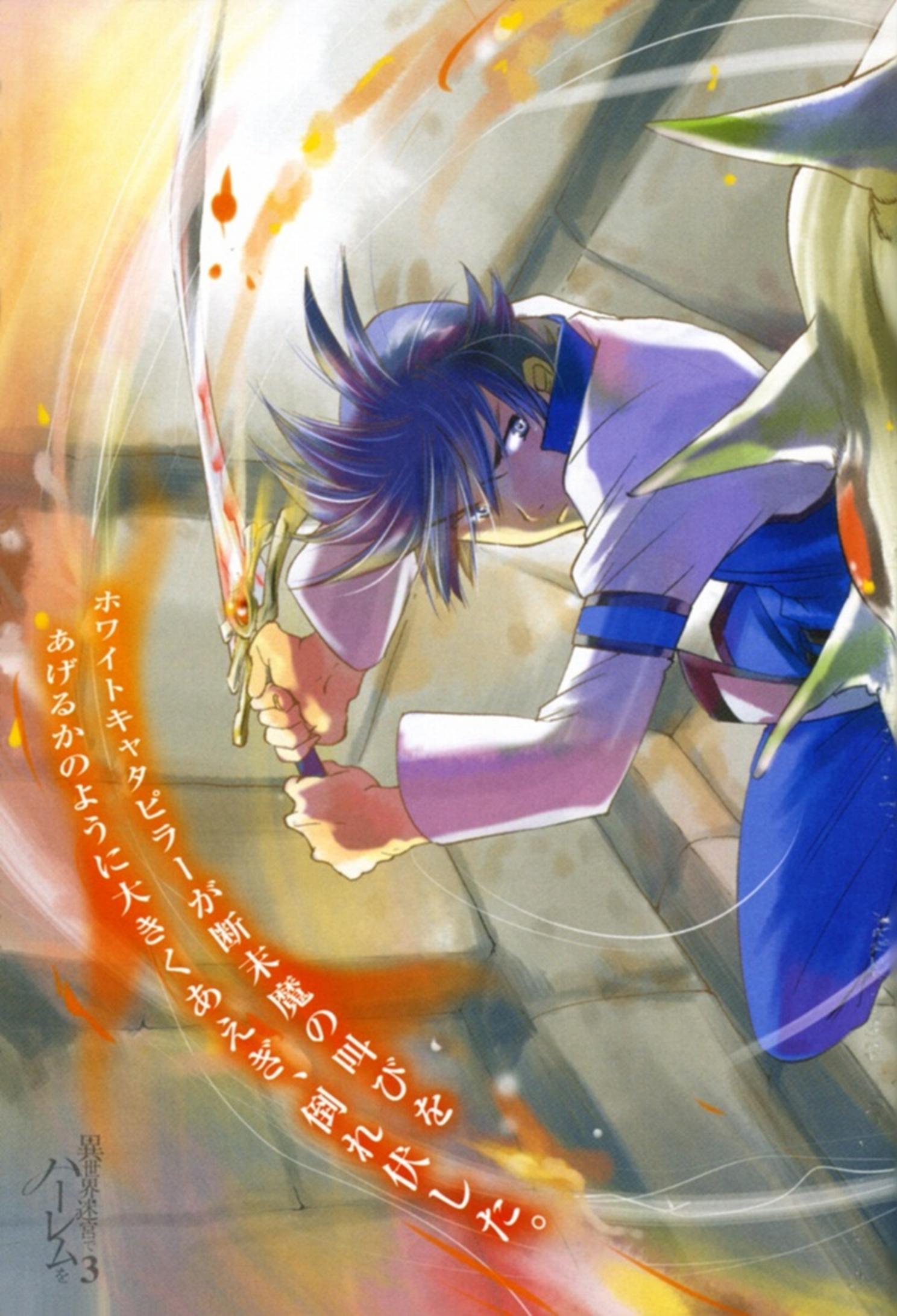
異世界迷宮で ハーレムを

③

薄紅色のキャミソールに
身を包んだロクサース。
服はしつとりと清楚だが、
中身は暴力的だ。

「最高に綺麗だ」





ホワイトキャタピラーが断末魔のやを、叫びも
あげるかのように大きめに大さへ魔を倒れ伏した。



剣が魔物を斬り裂く。
一步踏み込んでデュランダルを浴びせる。



お湯の中、ロクサースの肌はなめらかだ。
しつとりかつさらさらしていて、気持ちがいい。

「はい。とても
いい気分
です」

「うん、
最高だ」

ロクサースと一緒に風呂に入るのは、
思つた以上に素晴らしい。

異世界迷宮でハーレムを 3

▶ INTRODUCTION

▶ めくるめく日々

▶ 道夫とロクサーヌの生活はまるで新婚夫婦そのものだった。

いや、それ以上かもしれない。

ベッドを買っては、その使用感を確かめると言って×××……。

絨毯を買っては、その上で×××……。

お風呂の中でも、当然のように×××……。

羨ましいことこの上ない甘くめくるめく日々。

かつて将来に失望し、自殺サイトを覗いていた少年がなんという変わり様。

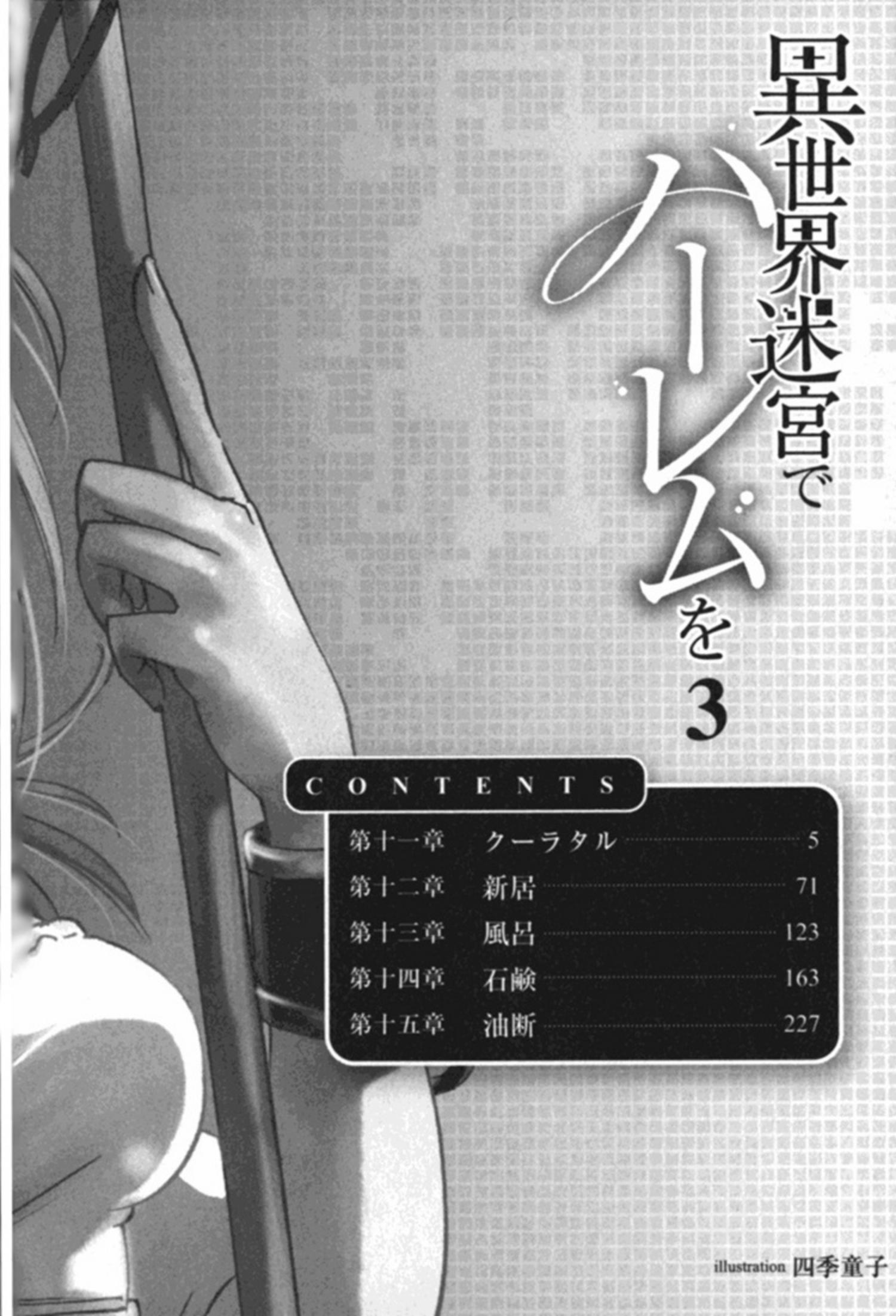
異世界って素晴らしい!

異世界迷宮で

ハーリムを3

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CHAPTER 1

QURATAR

Kaga Michio

Current levels & equipment:

Explorer Lv.20

Hero Lv.16

Mage Lv.12

Monk Lv.13

Equipment:

Copper Sword

Leather Armor

Leather Jacket

Leather Gloves

Leather Shoes

Right now, I am fighting monsters inside of the Labyrinth, but not in my usual, one-hit-kill-with-Durandal way. No, since I have decided to gain as much levels for my and Roxanne's Jobs as soon as possible, I am fighting by only using magic now. That's right, you heard that correctly: just magic, no Durandal. Since I got rid of Bonus Weapons 6 with my last Character Reset, the only purely physical weapon I have equipped right now is the very basic Copper Sword.

Facing the current group of enemies, I shouted (*Firestorm!*) in my mind, and when I did, the activated spell created fiery sparks that appeared all around the enemies and

erupted into fiery explosions as soon as they came into contact with the monsters that happened to be near them. I didn't have to use any matches, oil, gunpowder or any other materials in order to make it happen. The sparks which initiated that series of devastating explosions was executed from start to finish only by what I imagined, thought about and ordered, coating the two Green Caterpillars in front of me entirely in flames.

This is magic. A power to turn what's seemingly impossible into possible and make various supernatural things unavailable to any Jobs aside from that of a Wizard or Mage happen. However, while it is true that you can certainly fight monsters by using magic, it's not all rainbows and sunshine as you might think, because while that method of fighting certainly has its share of advantages, it also has disadvantages. For example: you can use magic to fight monsters from a distance, which makes it much safer in comparison to physical fighting where you have to get up close and personal to them to do any kind of meaningful damage, but killing them that way takes a few attacks in a row, whereas with my earlier Character Setting, the one where I had a bunch of Bonus Points invested into the Bonus Weapons Skill all the way to Lv.6, which granted me my ultimate weapon, Holy Sword Durandal, I was able to defeat all regular mobs with a single strike, and the Boss of the first Floor with a few strikes.

When the fire created by the Fire Storm subsided, one of the Green Caterpillars that must have survived its raging inferno came at me with its ramming attack, which I guarded against with the aid of the Copper Sword, the weapon that was now acting as Durandal's replacement for as long as I am using the Wizard Build that I am using now to accumulate EXP as fast as possible. I have to admit, using a weapon that is weak as shit in comparison to Durandal was tough to get used to, but thankfully the monsters here on the second floor are not as tough and do not hit as hard as to give me a genuinely hard time dealing with them. All I had to do was to switch my mindset and adapt to killing enemies at a slower pace than usual.

Some distance away from me, Roxanne, who was wielding a Scimitar was nimbly avoiding the attacks of another Green Caterpillar that must have targeted her while I was busy with the ones in front of me, which is admittedly kind of strange, because normally she would have just wailed o it with her weapon without needing to avoid it that much. I wonder if something happened to cause it, or perhaps it used its Skill and she had no choice but to avoid it to not get caught in its sticky webbing? Well, no matter. For now we both have to focus on fighting, and the time to eventually ask questions will be after that.

When I finished parrying the Green Caterpillar's charge attack, I went on and launched another Fire Storm that engulfed the one I was squaring off against along with the one that targeted Roxanne. Since they were already beaten up to some extent by our previous attacks, they weren't able to survive the flames that burned them up to crisps. Both of them fell onto the floor and disappeared in a puff of green smoke, leaving only their Drop Items, Green Caterpillar Thread, behind them. Looks like the victory once more belongs to us.

"Phew... we finally defeated them, huh? I have to say, even though we are taking countermeasures against that pesky Web Spitting Skill of theirs, fighting Green Caterpillars sure is much more mentally exhausting than fighting with the Needlewoods."

I struck up a casual conversation with Roxanne as we went on picking up the items all the Green Caterpillars dropped onto the floor after their deaths.

The Green Caterpillar's Skill that I am talking about, Web Spitting, is a Skill that they are using on those who let down their guards around them that allows them to pin their prey in place and prevent it from both moving and defending themselves by with their sticky threads that are pretty similar to spider's web now that I think about it. Also, I have to confess that I have been caught in that freedom-of-movement-robbing Skill more than a few times now, which makes me feel incredibly embarrassed about it, because it is actually very easy to avoid as long as you will remember to pay close attention to the Green Caterpillars to see if any of them does not have an orange magic circle on the ground under their bloated bodies. If they do, then you have to get as far away from them as possible, since the length and the width of that Skill are both deceptively large.

"Maybe so, but still, your magic defeats them so fast that I can't help it but to feel at ease, master. Not to mention that thanks to you we seem to be getting much stronger extremely fast!"

"Y-You really think so?"

"Yes! And that is why I am grateful to you for this. Thank you very much, master!"

Roxanne answered me with a bright smile on her face. Truth to be told, it's not me that you should be thankful to, but rather to the increased EXP gain Skill that I have currently equipped. If not for that, then I really don't think there would be any cause for celebrations.

Normally, Roxanne is able to avoid Green Caterpillar's Skill attack thanks to her superior senses and agility of the Beastman, and I still have to work on my own strategy of avoiding it, but we will definitely get there at some point. As for the rest of the monsters of the second floor, they are only Needlewoods that are slightly stronger and a little bit tougher than their counterparts from the first floor, so we have no problems with dealing with them, since all that it takes to completely avoid their branch swings are some light dodges. But the thing is, we might have a relatively easy time fighting the enemies now, but such a state of affairs won't be able to last forever. Which is why...

"If at all possible, I would very much like us to become just a bit stronger before advancing to the next floor."

"Stronger, huh? Let's see... I heard that typically Mages and Wizards tend to use staffs and wands instead of swords."

"Staffs and Wands, huh?"

Well, that certainly makes sense. After all, normally swords and other weapons like that are supposed to be wielded by the members of the front guard while Mages and Wizards are supposed to hand around the back of the Party and use their ranged spells to provide support to those fighting on the frontlines. That might be another thing I should be looking out for then. If anyone saw a guy using spells fighting along with the rest of the Party on the frontlines, that would probably net me all sorts of uncomfortable questions. In short, if you want to act and fight like a Wizard, be sure to also be equipped like one... but wait a minute...

What was the typical Wizard equipment again? I have to admit that when I was doing my shopping back in Veil when I first arrived there and later when I bought Roxanne, I didn't really paid attention to anything else besides the things I needed at that time, which is to say, a typical Warrior's equipment. And since Roxanne fights with the Scimitar and the Leather Armor I gave her, there was no need to optimize our stuff according to the Jobs we have, but now that I decided to change my playstyles so drastically, a change of both weapon and equipment might be exactly what I need. Kind of a pain in the ass, but hey, it's for the sake of keeping up appearances.

"That is what I had heard regarding magic users and their equipment, so I am sorry if

any of what I just said turns out not to be true.”

“Don’t worry about it. You’re already helping me more than enough, so asking anything more of you would be downright rude of me.”

“Thank you for your kind words, master, I really... wait, the enemy is close by!”

Roxanne pointed that out while we were walking through the Labyrinth, having a nice, casual chatter, and just like she said, a Needlewood has appeared right before us. As expected of Roxanne. Her senses are all so perfectly sensitive that she’s able to sense enemies even when she’s in the middle of talking with me. Can you be more reliable than that?

Normally I would be 100% against idle chatter anywhere outside the entrance to the Labyrinth and the first rooms on every floor, which function as safe zones for Adventurers since the danger might be lurking around every corner, but with mine and Roxanne’s current levels, dealing with a single enemy when there is a pair of us should not be a problem at all. Now that she is a member om my Party, no monster attack will catch us by surprise anymore.

I launched a quick Fireball at the Needlewood. Since the enemy is only one, then instead of using Fire Storm, which is an AoE (Area of Effect) Fire-type spell, it’s more cost-effective to only use single-target spells. Also, that way I could technically attack this guy all the way from the safe zone, where monsters have no access to make sure that Roxanne, who would have to rush in close to it to hit it with her Scimitar, won’t get hurt at all, but right now, there was no need for me to be so overprotective of her, because she fended off each and every attack with swift and agile movements. The are so fast and precise that sometimes I wonder if those are really her natural moves, or is that thanks to some kind of Passive Skill she might be possessing?

Anyway, now that we have defeated that monster without any harm coming to neither of us...

“Going back to our topic of equipment for magic users, I sure wish that Veil had more shops that are opened permanately, and not just on the bazaar days. That way we could go shopping whenever there would be a need for it instead of waiting for the specific shop to be opened on a specific day. Yeah, that would surely be nice.”

We continued the talk that got interrupted due to the sudden appearance of the

enemy. So back to what I was saying, it's a shame that there are no permanently opened stores in Veil, but even if they were opened 24/7 (or five days a week for eight hours like most of the shops back on earth, I don't know which would be considered to be more normal here), then I don't think any of the stores in Veil, which are open every five days when the bazaar opens would be able to offer me equipment and supplies specifically for the magic users since apparently they are a pretty rare breed around these parts. And that is... inconvenient, to say the least.

"Oh, if it's a store selling wands, staffs and supplies for Mages you want, then you should probably go to Quratar. The stores in the Imperial City should also have those kinds of items, but Quratar is much closer, so that would definitely be your best bet."

"Quratar, huh? That's the first time I'm hearing the name of that city, but if you say that it should have all of the things we might need, then I think checking it out would definitely be worth the shot."

"Umu. I've only been there once before, but that one visit was enough to know that there is also a big Labyrinth there, and it's pretty convenient because the shops which sell all manner of supplies for both Explorers and Adventurers alike are situated pretty close to one another."

How admirable, she explained all that without me even having to ask, but that was probably due to my fake backstory that I told to Roxanne, that I am from a remote region of the world far to the east where I was raised without knowing much about the common sense of the world. She really is like my own personal guardian angel. With benefits.

"Well, that settles it then. We should really try going there if we ever get the chance to do so."

If this Quratar place is even bigger than Veil, then the shops would probably be much bigger with better selection of items, which would be pretty convenient for me.

We stopped the conversation once more to deal with two more enemies that appeared before as we continued to go deeper and deeper into the second floor. Since there are two of them, we did our usual thing where we split up so that each one of us would draw the attention of one monster to ourselves. Actually, I think that right now I would be more than enough to take care of both of them with my AoE spells so that Roxanne didn't have to put herself in unnecessary danger, but suggesting that to her now might

be insulting to her, so I think it would be better if I shut up about it for now and just let each of us do our own thing.

Fighting monsters with magic was harder than with normal weapons, but it was not impossible. I can shoot at them with my spells before they even get close to me, but if they get within striking distance without dropping dead I will only have a short moment to react before they will launch their attacks at me, causing me to either evade and reposition myself or use another spell from point blank range while taking the risk of tanking a potential hit, which is why defeating them while they are still relatively far away from me would be a preferable outcome, but as you all probably know, you cannot always get what you want from life. That is just how big of a bitch it is. I wish the battles on all floors of this Labyrinth would be simple ones, but that is little more than my own wishful thinking. Right now the monsters are weak because we're only on the second floor, but once we start climbing onto the higher floors, not only there is going to be significantly more enemies for us to deal with, but they will also grow stronger with each floor, so we should appreciate these short fights whenever we can, because pretty soon they will become nothing more but a distant memory that we're going to look at fondly. Well, I guess that is how a natural order of things works, so it cannot be helped. I still think that what we are doing now is the right thing to do. We are taking things slowly, adapting to tougher battles little by little, which is infinitely better than rushing ahead of ourselves blindly until we encounter monsters that will be too strong for us to defeat, sending us to the early grave because of little else than our own stupidity. Yeah, we will gradually get used to the raising difficulty level, and getting me a wand or a staff may wait until then.

After finishing the exploration for the time being, we left the Labyrinth and went back to Veil to sell the items that we acquired. But before we went to the Explorer's Guild's building to do so, we took a moment to replenish our supply of drinkable water by filling our bottles from the well behind the Veil Pavilion inn, in which we were currently staying. Initially I thought that since I learned how to create water with magic then we won't need to carry bottled ones with us, but that assumption of mine got quickly corrected once I learned that storing magically created water is not as simple as I thought it will be, so I guess it was a good thing that Roxanne mentioned Quratar now of all times, because once we go there, we will be able to buy water storing supplies, like cups, more bottles, or perhaps even bigger containers if we're lucky.

When we sold all of the Green Caterpillar Threads and got our money, we returned to the inn to have a short rest, after which we have set off into the Depths of the Labyrinth

once more.

“This way.”

As usual, I followed after Roxanne’s guidance. Navigating the Labyrinth’s dimly-lit corridors, we soon happened upon a first pair of enemies.

The enemies this time are, once more, a group of Green Caterpillars.

(*Fire Storm!*)

I activated Fire Storm, and the sparks it created began to fall in the vicinity of the enemies. Most of them got burned down on the spot, but two of them actually survived, meaning that we were once again put in a situation where both Roxanne and I had one enemy to defeat. When the one I was closer to approached me, I slashed it with my Copper Sword and got body-slammed in return. It didn’t hurt all that much, but it was all too evident that this shitty Copper Sword was not Durandal. If I had it with me, this bug would have been turned into shishkebab in a jiffy. I managed to avoid the second body slam that was heading my way and then wanted to launch magic at the Green Caterpillar in return, but before I was able to cast Fireball or another Fire Storm at it, it used that brief gap between my actions to get closer to me again.

Damn it! Why did I allow something like that to happen! Now, if I was the previous, close combat oriented me, then I would never allow such a blunder to happen, but now that I have switched my specs from sword-fighting to magic casting, it became all too apparent to me that I simply started paying too much attention to the process of casting spells, which resulted in me not paying as much attention as I should have to the monsters themselves!

A moment later, Fire Storm finally activated, and its sparks managed to catch the Green Caterpillar just as I was in the middle of backstepping to create more of a distance between us. The flames swallowed it, and in the next moment it moaned loudly, keeled over and died, turning into a puff of green smoke.

“Ugh...”

Just like I have previously said, fighting with monsters while being a magic user is much more difficult in comparison to having a purely physical build, and it made me

groan a little in frustration. If this is how it is on the second floor, then a part of me cannot help it but get worried about how tough the things are going to get once we eventually reach the higher floors.

In this world, someone like me who had no other talents besides those I gave myself while I was creating my character (and all those I have obtained through performing countless Character Resets) has no other way of earning money for sustaining himself aside from hunting monsters and exploring the Labyrinth. Maybe I could try mercenary work or some other job requiring physical strength on knowing how to swing a sword, but there is absolutely no guarantee that it would get me more money per day than foraging into the Labyrinth would give me. Fighting monsters in the Labyrinth might be a difficult depending on the floor you are exploring and you have to put up with the constant risk of certain death looming over you the entire time you are inside of the dungeon's halls, but other than that this so-called career path is easy and simple enough for someone like me to understand: go into the Labyrinth, kill everything that moves and acts hostile towards you, pick up any items the monsters might leave behind when they will die, sell those items back at the city, profit, repeat as many times as necessary. And speaking of items dropped by the monsters, I went and picked up all of the Green Caterpillar Threads that have been left behind by the monster we defeated just now.

"Roxanne, give the Green Caterpillar Threads that you picked up. I'm going to store them all in the Item Box."

I called out to Roxanne as she was picking up the Drop Items near her.

"In the Item Box? Not the backpacks?"

"Yeah, into the Item Box. Right now I should have the necessary space to handle putting that many items inside, so no worries."

Just recently I have hit Lv.20 as an Explorer, and since the overall capacity of the Item Box depends on the level of the Explorer Job, then the space of my Item Box has increased considerably in comparison to what I had when I was just starting in this Labyrinth crawling business. To be more specific, since I am a Lv.20 Explorer, I can now have 20 spaces for items, each of which can hold up to 20 pieces of small items. Before I had to be really selective with what I was putting inside there, but now I have more than enough to safely store all of my gold coins, silver coins, some pieces of spare equipment and various medicines, and I will still have some space left in that sucker!

And since the only monsters we have been hunting in the Veil's Labyrinth for a while are Needlewoods of the first floor and the Green Caterpillars of the second floor only drop Needlewood's Branches and Green Caterpillar's Thread respectively, there won't be any problems with fitting them all inside there.

Normally I would keep all of my coins in the string pouch in my backpack so that I could have an easy access to them at any time, but since now I have quite a lot of gold coins, which make the bulk of the entirety of my current monetary possessions, I decided to store them all in the safety of the Item Box where no one would ever rob them from me even if they tried. It's possible that I'm getting a bit too paranoid about all of this, but we can never be too cautious when it comes to the safety of our funds, but even then we cannot be too sure of our money's safety. Who knows, even if Roxanne does not know about it, there is a tiny sliver of a chance that there might exist a spell that allows others to steal items from the Item Boxes without their owner's even knowing that they are getting robbed.

"Uhm, forgive me for being too curious about the matters that have nothing to do with me, but may I ask what is your current level, master?"

Roxanne asks about my level in a timid manner as if she thought that she was doing something that she wasn't supposed to do. She wants to know what my level is, huh? Well, I see no reason for keeping it a secret from her, so...

"My Explorer level, right? Currently I am at Lv.20."

"Lv.20...?! As expected of someone as amazing as you, master. In that case your Item Box should still have a lot of free space for all the items we obtained today!"

She must know about the Lv. = number of spaces in the Item Box, but she didn't know my exact level, and that's why she wanted to ask for confirmation. I have to say, being praised by her for how big my level was felt quite good, almost as if she was saying that something else about me is quite big, if you know what I mean. So come on, Roxanne, praise my level some more!

Then again, I guess me having such a high level can actually be considered to be pretty abnormal, since normally it looks like the process of gaining levels in this world is typically associated with aging, similarly to how back on earth there was this saying that "*with the age comes experience*". This world is like an example of putting that saying into practical use, except for the fact that there is a way of gaining EXP faster

than normal people, but it has one prerequisite: you'd have to be a child of the nobility, and then you'd be taken to the Labyrinth from an early age so that you could have more EXP and the money until you'd reach an age where you could start going there by yourself. But I am not a child of nobility according to the fake backstory I told to Roxanne. To her, I am just another country bumpkin, so it is understandable that she might be amazed at how someone who's supposedly no different from any other regular person is able to gain levels so fast.

Thinking about it that way, I guess the level of my Explorer's Job might be considered a little high for my age, but it should not be that much of a deal. True, right now I am earning x20 more EXP points due to The Bonus Skill I have taken exactly for that purpose, and it was that that allowed me to achieve such a level in such a relatively short amount of time, while normally getting to Lv.20 in any Job would take a few more years, at least according to what Roxanne said at one point.

I also remember her mentioning that some noble children might have been taken to the labyrinths not only since they were little, but also even after their age went into the one with double digits, and they still wouldn't be able to level as fast as I did. I really have no idea if my high level should be a case for concern or not, but just to be on the safe side the wise move here might be keeping it hidden from anyone else unless revealing it would become absolutely necessary. So, to that end...

"Roxanne, I would really appreciate it if you could keep my level a secret and not talk about it to anyone, okay?"

"Of course, master. My lips are sealed."

Ahh, why am I even worrying about her spilling the beans on that information in the first place? Of course Roxanne wouldn't go revealing sensible information about me to anyone else. Her trust in me is absolute, and she would never do anything that would risk me losing that trust in her. Besides, we have our fair share of secrets already so adding one or two more to the mix should be okay and not make that much of a difference, and we have already established that the safety of my personal information should be our number one priority. She and the inhabitants of this world might not realize it, but information might be quite a powerful weapon when wielded in the right hands and used at just the right time.

While we were taking on another group of monsters, I noticed that there has been a slight change in me. Up until this point I needed roughly four spells in order to defeat a single monster from the second floor, but right now, all I needed to take one of them down were three shots! You might think that this is not that big of a deal, but it is exactly the opposite! Now that I managed to lower the number of spells required to take the enemies down by one for some reason, I can actually defeat them before they can get into our melee range, significantly dropping the risk of us sustaining injuries in battle! That is some truly great news. Of course, it's not like I can snipe them away from like a kilometer or so away, because single target spells still have to be aimed manually in order to maintain the highest accuracy of the shot possible, but putting that little technicality aside, that is going to be a tremendous improvement that showed its usefulness even now, since I was able to finish the battle that much faster with the less spells required to do so.

When there was only one enemy left, Roxanne jumped in front of me and finished it herself, which was a nice contribution, if not a little unnecessary, because with my new discovery I would have been more than glad, and most importantly, capable, of dealing with all of those monsters by myself.

Anyway, I think the number of spells required to kill monsters has decreased because my level as a Wizard has increased, making my spells a little bit more powerful. All of my levels were going up at a pretty decent pace, but the increase that the Wizard Job was getting through was especially fast even among the rest of my Jobs, because it started at Lv.1 just like any other Job, and right now it was already at Lv.12 even though it was the newest Job that I have acquired, so I technically had it for the shortest amount of time in comparison to the rest like Explorer or Hero.

“As expected of you, master. You are growing stronger and stronger by the day.”

“Nah, that’s probably beginner’s luck since I started using magic only recently. I bet I still have a long way to go when it comes to improving and mastering my skills at it.”

“That may be so, but with your extraordinary levelling speed, the day when you will be able to master more amazing spells might not be as far away as you might think.”

Again, that is only because I have the Bonus Skills that lowered the EXP required to level up by 1/10th of its original value and increase the amount of EXP I’m receiving for killing monsters by x20. Roxanne already knows how much levels I gained when it comes to the Explorer Job, but maybe I should not be telling her how much levels did

I gain for my other Jobs just to be on the safe side?

We continued the exploration of the second floor and the extermination of the monsters living on it, and after a while we seemed to have reached the waiting room that was placed right before the Floor Boss's room. I looked around to be sure: no other ways and branching paths, just a pair of doors leading forward and a pair of doors leading back to where we came from. Yup, this is the waiting room alright. Who would have thought that we have advanced through the second floor so much? It felt much shorter compared to the time we have spent on the first floor before we reached its Floor Boss.

Seeing how empty the place is, it doesn't look like any Party in particular was awaiting their turn to take a stab at the Boss of this floor, so this seems like a perfect moment to get Durandal back, since I would like nothing more than to have it as my standard weapon for Floor Boss encounters like that, since its HP and MP Absorption Skills might be all the difference between life and death in the battles with stronger opponents, and this is definitely not a place to be worrying about getting more EXP. For this particular fight, DPS and survivability is where its at.

While performing a Character Reset, I also removed the increased EXP gain Bonus Skill and added myself a Fifth Job. Now that I have decided to bust out Durandal, it would also be good to use Warrior's Rush or Swordsman's Slash Skills, and the Fifth Job is exactly for the purpose of adding one of those Jobs to the rest of the ones that I already have. Obviously I cannot remove Explorer from the list of active Jobs, and Hero has to stay on as well because that Job is also very effective with its Stat boosts and Skill, Overwhelming, which might be pretty useful if I will find myself in a pinch. I should also keep Monk on, since that Job is the one I specifically wanted to get because of its focus on healing abilities that might prove to be more reliable than your standard item-based healing in the middle of a battle. For a moment I was considering whether or not to get rid of the Wizard Job, but maybe I should leave myself the ability to use magic just in case the battle goes horribly, horribly wrong for some reason. For now the only Floor Boss battle that I have experienced was against the Udowood back on the first floor, which was actually not that difficult from your standard battles against Needlewoods aside from the facts that Udowood was bigger than them and could attack in every direction thanks to the sheer number and placements of its branches, but as for the Floor Boss of the second floor, I don't even know what I should be expecting. For all I know, the Boss of the second floor might be the one that negates physical attacks, or he might negate magical attacks, or neither of them. Yeah, since there is too much unknown factors that I have no countermeasures against, the

sensible thing to do here would be to prioritize safety over the gains to the EXP points, so I finally chose Warrior as my Fifth Job and ended up the Character Reset.

As we approached the door to the Boos Room, they opened up by themselves, almost as if they were waiting for us, inviting us inside.

“Alright Roxanne, we’re going in. Let’s go!”

“Yes!”

When I was walking through the double door, I felt my entire body instinctively tightening up. If this was nothing more than a game world where there would be no real risk of me actually dying I would have probably be excited as hell to face off against the new, never before seen enemy, but right now, knowing that my life is legitimately on the line here, I just couldn’t force myself into enjoying this situation even if I wanted to.

When we were about to reach the center of the large Boss chamber, our surroundings were filled with clouds of green smoke that gathered in front of us, forming the silhouette of our next enemy.

The Floor Boss this time... turned out to be a caterpillar. But not the same like all the other Green Caterpillars we have encountered so far, because that one was like, way larger. After using Identify on it, I learned that it was actually called a White Caterpillar, which made sense since instead of being green it was pale-whiteish in color. Since it is the Boss monster for the second floor, it was Lv.2.

Hmm, I wonder id this is a general rule that the Floor Boss of each floor is just a beefed-up version of the regular mobs that roam the given floor, because it was the same with the ones on the first floor. Normal monsters there were Needlewoods, and the Boss was an Udowood, which looked like a bigger, thicker version of a regular Needlewood. It would have been nice if we had a moment to stop and thin about it, but it was not to be, because White Caterpillar began the battle by creating an orange magic circle beneath its body.

“It’s going to use its Skill, master! Brace yourself!”

Since this thing is a caterpillar, then it probably means that it has a Web Spit attack as

its Skill, so I probably should prepare Fire Wall to guard against it. Damn, if only I knew beforehand that it might have the same Skill as its weaker counterparts, then I could have prepared to attack it while it has its guard down during the Skill casting timeframe. But that's only assuming that its Skill will really be spitting that sticky thread out of its mouth and not something else entirely. For the time being, I will proceed while assuming that it will be a Web Spit indeed.

While keeping a close watch on the White Caterpillars mouth, I chanted Fire Wall in my mind and deployed it just in the nick of time, because as it turned out, the Skill that the White Caterpillar used was indeed a Web Spitting attack. Kinda disappointing that it didn't have anything else up its sleeve, but whatever, I will take an attack that I know and can guard against it instead of something completely unpredictable any time of the day.



ホワイトキャタピラーが断末魔のやを、叫びも
あげるかのように大きめに大さへ魔を倒れ伏した。



剣が魔物を斬り裂く。
一步踏み込んでデュランダルを浴びせる。

Now that Fire Wall was fully deployed, instead of sticking onto me and restricting my movements so that the White Caterpillar could devour me, its threads crashed against the barrier made out of flames, filling the entire room with the hissing sound and the smell of burned thread. I knew it, this is the best way of using such spells after all. Also, now that I know that it is using Skills and exactly what kind of Skill it is, I might as well modify my strategy to incorporate hitting it with Durandal since it has the ability to interrupt the chants of the spells and Skills used by the enemies, unless it will always try using it while being far away from us, in a place where it would be impossible to hit it with physical attacks. But to be honest, that is actually something that we can use to our advantage.

“Master, I’m going in!”

Roxanne shouted back to me as she ran past the Fire Wall with her Scimitar in hand and slashed the White Caterpillar’s side on her way towards its head, causing it to divert its attention completely to her as it tried to bite her with its many rows of teeth. Thankfully, Roxanne’s innate nimbleness allowed her to sidestep and avoid each and every one of its attacks without breaking too much of a sweat. Capitalizing on the opportunity she created for me, I ran to the White Caterpillar’s backside and started wailing on it with Durandal. It raised the upper half of its body in an attempt to slam Roxanne with it, but she managed to avoid getting squashed underneath its weight by blocking most of the attack’s impact with her shield. While all of this was happening in front of it, I didn’t stop slashing its ass for even a second.

I have to say, fighting such a gigantic Boss in such a way was incredibly effective and relatively easy. Since this is a Floor Boss, both Roxanne and I knew that the battle is going to be a long one, but I was expecting to have a little bit more difficulties with it, if I am to be totally honest with you. But now that we blocked its initial Web Spit Skill with my Fire Wall and divided its attention between Roxanne, who can do less damage but actually has a shield that can block frontal attacks and myself who doesn’t have a shield for protection but my attacks are having one hell of a wallop, it became obvious that right now we were the ones dictating the pace of the battle. Funny thing, huh? Take away the monster’s strongest ability and surround it, ad it won’t be able to touch you at all, since it cannot turn its body so much as to use its Skill against those who are sitting at its ass all the time, and even if it tried to do that it would have to either let Roxanne hit it with her Scimitar, or keep focusing on her and risk having its Skill interrupted by Durandal’s OP Chant Interruption ability. Even so, we still had to maintain caution, because we don’t know if it won’t start pulling some new moves out of nowhere or when its HP starts going into the red zone.

Roxanne delivered another series of fast Scimitar slashes to the monster's head to continue provoking it, and I did the same with my holy sword to its backside while carefully observing its movements, keeping an eye out for anything suspicious that could have revealed what kind of attack was it going to use next, and when I saw that a sufficient enough opening has presented itself to me, I raised Durandal high into the air and used Rush, dealing even bigger damage than with my normal attacks. However, even though that attack fully connected without any issues, the Floor Boss was still standing, stubbornly refusing to keel over and die. Damn, for just a Lv.2 enemy, this thing must have a ton of HP if it was able to take the beating from both me and Roxanne and still be alive and kicking as if nothing had happened to it.

I quickly backstepped as to not get hit when it started thrashing its ass around, and then watched as it once again tried slamming its body into Roxanne, only to have her dodge to the sideways to avoid the incoming assault, leaving the monster in a brief state of confusion when it realized that its charge didn't hit anything. Sensing that this might be an ideal occasion to do some big damage, I performed another rush from up close, driving Durandal deep into the monster's soft flesh, and then yanking it out to the side with all my strength behind that motion, leaving it with a large, open wound. The White Caterpillar make a loud, ear-piercing shriek, thrashed its body upwards and then finally fell onto the ground, dead.

"Phew... we finally managed to defeat the Boss of the second floor, but I have to say, that was more tiring than I thought it was going to be."

"Yes, it was certainly more difficult than the battle with the Boss of the first floor, but thanks to you we were able to once more defeat it rather quickly, master."

Roxanne praised me, but to be frank, I don't know if I can accept that praise this time. It's true that we managed to achieve victory, and a win is a win, no matter how it was obtained... but I couldn't shake off the feeling that this time it all went all too easy for me because all I did was molesting the Floor Boss's ass from behind while Roxanne was playing bait in front of it where it was infinitely more dangerous. Not to mention that I once again ended up relying on Durandal's absurd strength for the duration of pretty much the entire fight, which feels like a personal defeat after all my talking of how I wanted to rely more on my own abilities instead of the Bonus Weapons, but on the other hand, what choice do I had here? I didn't know what we were going to be fighting against and didn't want to risk dying. Nevertheless, some sour taste was still left in my mouth, even as I went to pick up the Drop Item that the White Caterpillar left behind it when it turned into clouds of green smoke and disappeared.

Surprising nobody, it seemed to be some kind of thread. Upon using Identify on it, it was revealed that this item was actually a Silk Thread. Silk, huh?

Since this dropped from the Floor Boss after its defeat, then it probably means that its quality must be higher than those dropped by the regular mobs native to the second floor, just like it was with the Udowood's Leaf back on the first floor. Floor Bosses dropping higher quality materials must be another one of Labyrinth's rules.

Thinking about it, that White Caterpillar was acting pretty much in the same way as Green caterpillars did, aside from the fact that it used its Skill at the very beginning of the battle. But other than that, it followed a pretty clear pattern: It tried to seal our ability to move with its Web Spit, and when it failed to do so, it moved to attack us directly. Maybe since it is a bug, its brain could not process that such a pattern won't work on us? Or maybe it was not its fault, but rather the code that programmed its natural actions was to blame? Either way, my point is that the difficulty spike which should be present when fighting a Boss rank monster was pretty much nonexistent here.

"Roxanne, hold onto this Silk Thread for me, will you?"

This time I had to give the Silk Thread to Roxanne so that she could carry it in her backpack for me, because I was starting to run a little low on the space in my Item Box due to all the Drop Items from the Needlewoods and Green Caterpillars we have hunted down on the way to the Floor Boss's chamber.

Since we were having a little break of sorts, I removed my Leather Helmet and Leather gloves to give myself a breather from wearing them all the time. We were lucky that this Floor Boss also dropped its Drop Item after our first battle with it, because a perspective of fighting it multiple times just to earn something like that was not a prospect that I would like to entertain. The battle itself might have been simple, but the Floor Boss is still a Floor Boss, so it would probably hurt like hell if he managed to actually hit us with one of its attacks.

After picking up the Silk Thread, I checked the Party Settings to see if Roxanne obtained some new Job, but sadly, no such thing happened this time. It was the same for me as well; the number of my available Jobs did not increase at all, which is a shame because a part of me expected one of us to get something along the lines of Weaver

Job or something like that. I know it probably won't be like that every time, but it would be really funny if it did.

Okay, enough jokes and let's move on. But before we move on from here, let's have a quick look-around first. Anything we have missed because the battle started right from the get-go? No, it doesn't seem like it. Any items left by the previous Parties who were unfortunate enough to get killed by the White Caterpillar? No, it doesn't look like it either. Yeah, there is really nothing left for us to pick up, meaning that either whoever was here before us managed to successfully defeat the Boss and proceed to the higher floors, or no one was fighting against it for quite some time. Whichever one of those two options it might be, that is not any of our concerns. With little else to do here, we nodded at each other and proceeded to the Labyrinth's third floor.

The small room that served as the entrance to the third floor looked exactly the same as the ones on the first and second floors. Behind us was a black wall-portal, and before us, the road was forking into three possible directions. The question is: which one should we take. Let's ask our residual expert on the subject.

"Alright Roxanne, can you tell if there are any enemies nearby?"

"If we go straight ahead, then we should encounter a Kobold and a Green Caterpillar, but if we take the path to the left, there will only be a single Needlewood there."

"Then take us to the left, please. Since this is a new floor we are stepping into, then let's take it slow and go down the path that has as little monsters as possible first."

"Understood. Please follow me, master"

Just a quick note about the other roads in the room outside of the Floor Boss room on the second floor that also have black wall-portals on them: the road forward leads to back to the first floor, the road forward is a shortcut back to the second floor, and the road on the left, the one we ultimately took, took us to our current destination, the third floor.

While still holding onto Durandal, I did a Character Reset to change my Third Job, and when I was done, we went down the road to the left. The first monster we encountered soon after was a Needlewood Lv.3. Makes sense. We are on the Labyrinth's third floor, after all, so it should be pretty obvious that the enemies we would encounter here would all be Lv.3, even the ones that were native to the first floor. Not waiting for it to

come to us first, I ran towards it and slashed it diagonally with my sword in a fast blow, causing it to fall down to the ground and disappear in a puff of green smoke. Huh, so even on the third floor, where the enemies are supposed to be stronger than the ones from the second floor, one blow from Durandal was still enough to kill them in one strike? Good to know, but also disappointing. I thought that since the enemies were of higher level, then it would mean that they will also start improving in a fashion similar to me or the Adventurers in video games, but I guess the improvement that the third floor made to them are still not enough to turn them into any real threat towards the current me.

For the next encounter, let's test how magic is going to work on the monsters here. I did another Character Reset, changed Durandal for the Copper Sword and got all of my Bonus Skills buffing the amount of gained EXP and lowering the amount of EXP required to Level Up.

The next thing that appeared before us was a new enemy: a Kobold Lv.3. If I remember correctly, they were supposed to be the monsters native to the third floor, if what the guy from that other Party we have eavesdropped on was telling the truth. If were to describe it, it looked like a blue dwarf, or perhaps a goblin, because it also had a pair of big, creepy-looking eyes and sharp fangs and pointy ears. Also, its face is friggin' huge! Like, I legitimately think that most of its head is occupied by its ugly face! And it's also holding a knife in its hand! I think that is the first monster that I saw using an actual weapon ever since I arrived in this world, and the though that some of the monsters are intelligent enough to be actually using weapons is more than a little scary. I mean, I know that any cuts and wounds my body may suffer will be completely heal with Durandal's HP Absorption Skill, but what about any other types of wounds? Simple cuts should be fine, but what about my limbs being completely severed? Because if I were to lose an arm or fingers of my dominant hand without any way of restoring it, that would mean my life as an adventuring her would be over before it even properly began. And what about my internal organs being gouged out? Or if the would I sustain will cause massive internal or external bleeding? Can HP Absorption heal damage like that, or is it limited only to the simple kind of wounds and the more serious ones would require the help of a proper doctor, or healer, or whatever the hell the medical stuff is called here?

I am worrying about everything like crazy, and the actual battle hasn't even begun yet, but hey, look, this is my first time fighting against not an armed human, but an armed monster, so of course I would be freaking the hell out, you know?! And since this is the thing that I absolutely do not want to test out no matter what, then the answer to how

I should proceed here should be obvious.

The enemy is a Lv.3 monster holding a weapon, so in this case, victory will go to whoever will successfully make the first move, and it just so happens that I have the perfect tool for doing just that!

This is one thing that I would like not to test out no matter what, even though I'm still worried about it.

Alright Michio, stop distracting yourself with needless worries and focus. Your current enemy is holding a weapon, so it means that in this battle the victory is going to belong to the one who will attack the other first, and when it comes to attacking first, I have just the right tool for that very purpose!

(*Fireball!*)

I invoked Fireball, and as soon as it appeared in my hand I sent it flying towards the Kobold. Back in my old world there was a saying “never bring a knife to a gunfight”, but here it’s the exact opposite: never go with a knife against someone who can use magic!

The Kobold’s reaction, even when it saw the ball of fire heading its way was extremely slow. It got hit square in its ugly mug with it, and even then it didn’t even try to put itself out, simply allowing the fire to engulf it entirely. Without making a single noise, the Kobold collapsed onto the ground and disappeared in a puff of green smoke.



I really wish I could say something more about it... but I can't, because that was literally it. All it took to kill that Kobold was one Fireball attack.

Weak! So pathetically weak! Was that really a Lv.3 monster?! Even Green Caterpillars, Lv.2 monsters from the floor bellow this one needed more hits, 2 to be exact, from the same spell to be defeated! No wait, maybe it was so effective because Kobolds are actually weak against fire? Let's ask Roxanne about that.

"Roxanne, wasn't that Kobold just now awfully weak?"

"Well, yes, but that was to be expected. Generally speaking, Kobolds are so weak that they have been mockingly called "Beginner's Monsters" or "Cannon Fodder", so with master's strength killing it with one attack was to be expected."

"Is... is that so?"

It's a weak monster, so it carries a knife to compensate for that weakness, huh? No, actually, it would be more accurate to say it has to use a knife precisely because it is so weak. I wonder if that rule can be applied to all bipedal monsters carrying weapons with them? It would be nice if that was the case, but on the other hand, an attitude like that might be pretty treacherous, because if you assume that all weapons-using monsters are weak, then you're going to have a bad time when one day you're going to encounter a weapon-using monster that won't be weak at all.

When the Kobold disappeared, it left something that looked like a white fang behind it. When I Identified it, it turned out to be something called a Kobold Salt. I wonder if this is something even remotely close to the rock salt that I know from earth. But since this is supposedly salt, then I wonder if it'll be safe to keep it in my Item Box without running the risk of dissolving it by accident?

"Kobolds are supposed to be this floor's native monsters, so if we continue to kill them we are bound to get more of this Kobold Salt item, but I wonder if we won't have any difficulties storing it in our backpacks or my Item Box?"

I summoned my Item Box and placed Kobold Salt inside of it. When I got the chance to touch it a little bit more with my fingers, it really felt like your average lump of crystalized salt.

"It should be all right to store it in you Item Box, but if we decide to carry it in our backpacks, we would have to be careful not to get it wet, because we won't be able to

sell wet salt to any of the Guild shops, but even if that were to happen by accident, that wouldn't be that big of a loss, because Kobold Salt is the cheapest item that can be bought from Guild merchants."

"Oh? How cheap are we talking about, exactly?"

"It costs only 4 Nars for a piece."

Man, that is dirt-cheap! Ehhh, and here I was thinking that since it is an item obtained at the Labyrinth's third floor then we were going to make some serious profit out of it, but I guess that won't be the case after all, which made me feel depressed as hell. Seeing me like that, Roxanne started laughing. Her smile was more precious than any treasure this Labyrinth might have been hiding though.

"We could always try selling the Kobold Salts to the inn, since they might use it for the seasonings in the food they are preparing, but I don't know if that idea is even going to work. Think we have any chances with that?"

"Unless you're very close with the inn's owner then that might be pretty difficult. Even though it is an ingredient that is frequently used in the gastronomical business, not many places beside the Guilds are willing to buy them due to how easy it is to obtain. That is how weak the Kobolds who drop the Salts are considered."

So we have no chances of selling it outside of the Guilds, huh? I guess that makes sense. If Kobolds are so weak that a single Fireball was enough to kill them, then I bet they also die to regular weapons pretty quickly, and that is what got them their reputation as "Beginner's Monsters", and if they are weak, then it will always be cheaper to go and hunt some of them yourself than to rely on buying their Drop Items from other people who might try to get more money for their items than they are probably worth. Okay, so for now let's forgo the plan of selling the Kobold Salts and let's just proceed with the exploration of the third floor.

On the third floor, where we currently are, the maximum size of the enemy's Party is still two monsters, the same as on the second floor. From the fourth floor onwards the maximum amount of monsters in one group we would fight will increase to three, but since Kobolds really are no actual threat, I think the battles on the third and fourth floor might be a little bit easier than the ones on the second floor, where the only enemies possible to encounter were buffed up Needlewoods from the first floor and the Green Caterpillars native to the second floor itself. That assumption of mine

seemed to be truer when I tried to use Fire Storm on a two groups of two Kobolds, and a single spell obliterated them all without a trace. Even when Kobolds were mixed with Green Caterpillars, defeating such a group was still not a problem to me, because it took a single spell to kill a Kobold, and two more to finish the Green Caterpillar off.

They certainly are weak. For a while I thought that they might have some powerful magic as a Skill at their disposal, but that didn't seem to be the case at all. Since they were the first humanoid-shaped enemies I have encountered here in the Labyrinth and because they are so gross-looking, with their big heads, even bigger faces and this bluish skin similar to those of fishes I thought that I won't be able to face them while keeping my cool (Needlewoods were obviously plant-type monsters while Green Caterpillars are just enormous bugs, so I guess I simply got used to their appearances the more we fought with them), especially since they are carrying knives with them, and there is not a human being in this or any world who wouldn't be scared when a monster with a sharp weapon would attack them out of the blue, but those concerns were entirely misplaced. Kobolds are just weak as shit, simple as that, to the point where I was actually beginning to feel sorry for them, thinking that placing them as mobs on the third floor instead of the first might have been some kind of fate's cruel joke. Unfortunate for them, but that is how it sometimes is with life: even though you want to do your best, you still end up picking up the short straw. I am a perfect example of that. But while it might seem not fair for the, that's actually all the better for us. I don't know if there is any reason for such weak creatures to be on the third floor instead of the first along with the Needlewoods. But I am not going to complain about that. That is what this world's reality wanted, so that is apparently how it was supposed to be. And if we're going to have an easier time exploring this new floor thanks to that, then that is the kind of coincidence that I will gladly take any day of the week.

However, now that I have become more accustomed to both exploring the Labyrinth and fighting with the monsters that dwell inside of it and raised the levels of my Jobs through repeating countless battles, I think I have begun to slowly overcome that fear, or at least that is what I would like to believe.

But if instead of Needlewoods Kobolds were the enemies present on the first floor, then I don't know if I would have been able to conquer my fear of their weapons. But thankfully I didn't have to worry myself with things like that then, so I guess there's no need in worrying about them now.

The next opponents we have encountered were a pair of Kobolds and a pair of Green Caterpillars, on which I tried to use Water Storm to how well was it going to perform, but even with Water Magic, which was normally supposed to be weaker than the rest of the elemental-type spells (At least if we consider how is it usually being portrayed in video games), the Kobolds still died after being hit with a single spell. When I saw that Fire Magic was so effective against them I honestly thought that fire must have been their weakness, but it would seem that they are also weak against water. With the next group of enemies, which was a pair of Needlewoods and a pair of Kobolds, I tried attacking them with Breeze Storm to see how effective Wind Magic would be, and as it turned out, Wind Magic was not very effective. But still, instead of just one Breeze Storm, it took one Breeze Storm and one Breezball, so all in all, Kobolds can still be considered weak in my book. But if they are so weak, then won't that mean that I will get a really shitty amount of EXP for killing them, which is going to put a wrench in my EXP gaining strategy which was designed with the highest possible efficiency in mind? I sure hope that this won't be the case, but now that this idea has popped into my head, I can't get it out of it. Great, now I will worry about it constantly and it will ruin the rest of my otherwise pretty pleasant day.

After we killed all of the Kobolds and Needlewoods, I went over to the place where the Kobold disappeared and noticed that this time the item that it left behind was not Kobold Salt, but the knife it was holding onto instead. Further investigation revealed that it was a type of folding knife, aptly named Kobold Knife.

"Huh. And here I was thinking that Kobolds won't drop anything other than Kobold Salt."

"Because it seems that monsters can drop different items when they die, although the appearance of some of them is much rarer than the others."

So in other words, to borrow the video game terminology, Kobold Salt would be Kobold's Common Drop, while Kobold Knife must be the Rare Drop. I wonder if the number of drops is determined by the monster's level or some other factors, because thus far the Needlewoods on the first floor only dropped Needlewood Branches upon defeat and Green Caterpillars of the second floor were leaving behind their Threads. Roxanne picked the knife up and examined it closely.

"That so? Good to know then. Here, let me put it in the Item Box."

"Are you sure you want to do that, master?"

"Well, yeah? Or what, is there something wrong with it? Can it be sold at the stores back in Veil or not?"

Before continuing, Roxanne handed the knife over to me, just like I asked of her. When I saw Kobolds wielding them I was initially scared of them, but now that I look at it from up close it looks just like any other ordinary folding knife, pretty much the same as the ones I knew back in my old world. Something like that would be more useful as a multipurpose tool rather than a weapon. I mean, you could probably cut the skin open with it rather easily, but I doubt something of this caliber and quality would be able to pierce through the hardened leather of our Leather Armors.

"I don't think we will be able to sell those at the Guild shops for much money either, since this is obviously a trash drop."

"So you're telling me that even if the items we pick up here are considered trash, we can still sell them?"

"As long as the Guild will be able to process those trash drop into something that can still be useful, then yes."

So it's like that, huh? Thinking about all the items we have already obtained in the process of killing monsters as I experimented with all kinds of magic and its usage against the monsters on second and third floors I was beginning to think that I might be running out of storage space in the Item Box, but thankfully my level as an Explorer has just risen, meaning that I should have obtained an additional bit of carrying capacity. Normally after clearing the second floor we would have went back to sell all of our items to free the space in Item Box and backpacks, but this time we went straight to the third floor, where the enemies were dropping much more items than I expected them to. If I hadn't Leveled Up just now, then we would have probably leave all of the drop items that would be too much for us to carry. The Item box can hold only one type of item in a single row, but the number of said item can be as much as the overall level of the Explorer's Job. With that additional level of mine just now, we should be able to carry everything we have obtained without the need to leave a single thing back.

We left the Labyrinth and returned back to Veil so that we could have lunch and rest until noon, and then we have made our way to the Adventurer's Guild to sell all of the items in our possession by using Warp.

When we arrived at the Guild, a pair of Adventurers, a male and a female one have just popped out of the black portal that appeared at the Guild building's wall opposite to the one at the entrance.

“A one-way trip to the Imperial City! Anyone wanna tag along for the ride?!”

The female Adventurer shouted, asking if there was anyone willing to go with them.

Adventurers have a Movement Magic called Field Walker, a type of magic that allows them to instantly travel to any place they have visited at least once through the black wall-portal similar to the one I am using with my Dungeon Walker, so I guess you could say that Field Walker functions somewhat like the busses did on earth, except Field Walker must probably be much faster than any bus I ever used when I was still back there. The problem is, we currently want to go to Quratar, not the Imperial City itself, because according to Roxanne there should be a permanently open shop that sells accessories and equipment for magic users there. But you know, even if we don't have any business in the Imperial City eight now, I sure as hell would like to see it someday.

Now that we were on the Labyrinth's third floor, I could no longer kill Needlewoods and Green Caterpillars with just 3 spells, reverting back to needing four of them. That is an obvious sign that if I don't want to have a bad time when fighting mainly with magic, then I should go buy myself a wand or a staff as soon as possible. However, it's not like I am in any hurry to do so just yet. It's just that killing monsters with three spells is more convenient for me, because it allows me to kill them before they can enter my melee range, and besides, if we wait for a few more days, then surely enough the bazaar day would be upon us and the shops would be opened once again, offering us a chance to look for everything we needed here in Veil, so the timing of those two Adventurers and their lift offer couldn't have been worse.

“Imperial City sounds tempting, but we should really go to Quratar first.”

“You know master, Quratar is actually pretty close to the Imperial City.”

Standing next to me, Roxanne whispered that into my ear.

“It is?”

“Yes! When I went to Quratar that one time before, I stopped at the Imperial City first. I don't know if it is possible to go to Quratar from Veil, but a travel there is certainly possible from the Imperial City.”

“I see. Let’s try going there then.”

Now that I have made up my mind, I have to say that I am getting interested in seeing what the Imperial City looks like. Since it is the capital of the entire kingdom, then I’m guessing it has to be quite prosperous?

“Okay, then I wish you a safe trip, master. I will be awaiting your return right here.”

Oh? So Roxanne is not going together with me? Well, I can see where that idea is coming from. Since those two are offering to take people to the Imperial City through the portal that they have made, it would be reasonable to expect that they will want some kind of travel fee, in which case the most cost-efficient option would be to go to the Imperial City with just me alone this once to cut costs, and once I have visited both of those places I will then come back there with Roxanne, especially after I’ll obtain Field Walker for myself at some point... or not, since I don’t have to wait for that with all the Bonus Spells at my disposal, and Warp is that much better than Field Walker because it can take me not only to “normal” places in the world, but also to the Labyrinth itself at a relatively low MP cost.

“Alright then, I guess I’ll be heading off. Hold down the fort for me while I’m gone, okay?”

“Of course. Have a safe trip, master!”

And so I walked towards the pair of Adventurers near the wall on the other side of the room. To be honest, the thought that Roxanne might run off somewhere while my eyes are not on her at all times makes me a little bit anxious, but I probably shouldn’t worry about such things. After all, I am her master and she is my slave, but even more importantly than that, we both trust each other. I think. No no no no, I am absolutely sure of that. If she ever wanted to run away from me, then she could have done so numerous times while I was asleep instead of waiting for a moment where I would be away that might have never come.

It’s fine. It will all be fine. Seriously, stop worrying about it! I want to believe that she’s still going to be here when I get back. I have to believe it!

While having such conflicting thoughts roam the inside of my poor mind, I approached the pair of Adventurers and asked about the price of the fare, after enabling my 30%

Price Discount of course.

“How much for the trip?”

I asked the female elven Adventurer in a friendliest tone I could muster. She was quite beautiful, I'll give her that, but not as beautiful as Roxanne is. I wonder if the Imperial City will have many beautiful girls and women, or are they all going to be inferior to her? The male one looked like he was in his fourties, but since he had pointed ears, which indicated that he must have been an elf, then he might actually be way older than my estimation. The woman was 20 years old, according to my appraisal with Identify.

“We usually charge 2 silver coins for a back and forth trip, but since this is a one way trip we're willing to drop it down to 1 silver coin.”

“Okay.”

My discount didn't seem to work. At this point I cannot even say that I am surprised about that, because from my observations so far it seems that the discounts only work if the one you want to use them on possesses the Calculate Skill associate with the Job of a Merchant. In other words: this female Adventurer does not have that Skill. Well, not that it changes anything here since this price is pretty small in and out of itself so that 30% discount wouldn't even do anything.

In order to pay that one silver coin I summoned my Item Box and got the required amount out of it, but since I was in front of others I had to summon it with normal incantation, since I didn't want them to get suspicious of me for not using proper spells and still getting the desired results.

“Respond to your friend's trust and provide proper service. Party Formation!”

When I handed the money to them, the elf Adventurer began casting the Party Formation spell. Whoa, that's right, I completely forgot about that! If I wanted t travel with those two and the portal they have created with their magic, I had to form a Party with them first, so I quickly looked back at Roxanne, with whom I was still in a Party and hurriedly disbanded it so that no one would get suspicious that a lovely girl like her was standing all alone without the Party Leader around. Once that was done, a system message asking me to confirm my new Party appeared in front of my eyes with the two options available for selection: Yes and No. I pressed Yes without even thinking

about it. I see, so that is how joining someone else's Party actually looks like, huh? This is my first time ever doing something like that, because all those times before I was always the Party Leader adding Roxanne to my own Party. I looked around to see if anyone was gawking at us, but strangely enough, nobody seemed to care about what we were doing, not that there was that many people around in the Guild building to begin with. Was this that common of an occurrence to disband your own Party just so you could travel somewhere with other people? Because it certainly felt strange to me.

Well, whatever the case with it may be, I didn't have any time to actually worry about it, because the elf Adventurer already chanted Field Walker and opened the portal leading to the Imperial City o the wall. The elven guy came through it first, and the lady Adventurer went inside next. Not wanting to be left behind, I swiftly followed after them.

When I went through the portal myself, I found myself in a large room. Its basic structure was pretty much the same as the one of the Veil's Adventurer's Guild, so this must be its branch in the Imperial City. The first thing that was obvious from the get go was how much bigger it was: about four to five times larger, or at least that was my initial estimation, and instead of just a single reception counter in the middle of the room, there are actually ten rows of them at the walls.

“..... Party Formation!”

I heard the male elf Adventurer chanting the Party Formation spell, meaning that our Party made for the purpose of getting here has been officially disbanded.

“Thank you for your patronage. Now, is there anyone here who wants to go to Veil?!”

The two Adventurers big me farewell with small nods and then immediately proceeded to fishing out those who wanted to travel from Imperial City to Veil, and they actually managed to get themselves five of them, an entire Party by the looks of it. Just like they did that with me, when each and every one of them finished giving them the payment for the fare, they chanted the Party Formation Spell to for one Party, and then the male one used Field Walker on the wall again to create a black portal leading all the way back to Veil and went through it with the others while leaving his female companion behind. Hmm, perhaps that guy was the member of that Party who never been to Veil, so he tagged along with that girl who had been there before take him there so that he could travel there with Field Walker himself with the rest of his buddies, similarly to how I wanted to do with the journey to Quratar now? And while

we are on that particular subject

"Excuse me, but if possible, could I ask you to take me to Quratar? One way is fine with me."

I asked the female Adventurer. If she is free right now then maybe she will be able and willing to take me to my destination? Asking does not cost anything and I won't lose anything, so might as well give it a shot.

"Quratar, huh? Sure, that will be two silver coins."

Yes, so they actually can take me straight to Quratar from here! Lucky me! I gladly handed the 2 silver coins to the female elf Adventurer and waited for her to add me to her Party and cast Field Walker again. And then, after another short walk through the portal...

"Here we are: Quratar's Adventurer's Guild."

"Thank you, and sorry for the trouble."

"Don't mention it. Anyone up for a trip to the Imperial City?!"

We have disbanded our Party and went our separate ways when the girl tried to assemble a new group of people who were up to take the trip she was offering. As for the Guild building in Quratar, it was bigger than the one in Veil, but definitely smaller than the one in the Imperial City. Veil had only one reception counter, Imperial City had many more of them, and the one here in Quratar has three in total. Hmm, from what Roxanne was telling me about this place, I thought its Adventurers Guild was going to be a bit bigger.

"A trip to the Imperial City! Anyone?"

The female elf Adventurer repeated her message, but once she saw that pretty much no one was coming along for the ride she simply clicked her tongue and then returned through the portal back to the Imperial City. Well, that's life for you I guess. You cannot always have a cake and eat a cake, or in this case always have people who would be willing to Fast Travel to wherever it is you're going.

But that is none of my concerns. All that I care about for now is that my goal has been achieved. Now that I have personally been to both the Imperial City and Quratar's Adventurer's Guild, I should be able to teleport to both of those locations on my own by using Warp, so I think I will do just that. And when I emerged from the portal back at Veil's Adventurer's Guild building...

"Welcome back, master."

...Roxanne was still there, patiently waiting for me, greeting me with those warm words. My God, she has no idea how happy I am to see her!

"Yeah, I'm ba... whoooa!!!"

When I tried to walk towards her after returning her greeting, I suddenly felt very weak in the legs and tripped, almost falling on top of her, but Roxanne caught me before that could happen.

"Are you okay, master?"

Huh, that's strange. Did I use too much MP for that Warp from Quratar to Veil? But I don't feel the wave of negative emotions washing all over me, so it must have not go down to the critically low values just yet. But from now on I should keep it in mind that apparently the further I travel with Warp, the more MP will be consumed. When I go from Veil to the Labyrinth near it I don't feel anything, but that might be precisely because those two places are so close to one another, but a trip to Veil from Quratar must have taken a good chunk out of my MP bar, which kinda sucks, because I was convinced that no matter how far I would go with Warp all teleportations would require the same amount of MP, but apparently that is not the case, and the farther you want to go, the more of your MP is going to be consumed. And since the side effects of using too much of your MP include depression and being overwhelmed by negativity, such a result should be avoided at all costs, meaning that I should either avoid making too many Warp trips in a row without restoring MP or travel through short distances only. Anyway, the biggest surprise this time around was the fact that I didn't feel depressed at all but that instead my legs got all tangled up.

"It's okay, I'm fine. More importantly, would you like to go to Quratar?"

"Yes, please, let me accompany you this time."

After selling all of the items we have obtained in the Labyrinth, we walked out of the

Adventurer's Guild's building and headed to the empty alley behind it where we have once again formed our Party, and I also checked the time by looking at the position of the sun in the sky, which was quite high. Could it be that it was about noon? Well in that case we should still have enough time to do all the shopping I might need, so after waiting for a bit to allow my MP to be restored we made our first trip to Quratar together. When we arrived at the Quratar Adventurer's Guild, we immediately left it, since we had no business to take care of there specifically.

The streets of Quratar didn't look that much different from what we had in Veil, with one major exception: this town has its stores perpetually opened, and how many of them there were! Just the buildings across the street from the Adventurer's Guild had a dozen of them on their ground and first floors, which caught me off guard since I was expecting it all to have a more rural feeling to it, since this was my first time seeing the normal shops since I first came to this world. Most of them looked pretty similar to the ones you would see in the Japanese shopping districts of any major city, meaning that there was nothing particularly special about them from the outside, but maybe that was the compromise they had to go to if they wanted to have so many of them? Anyway, since these stores are perpetually opened, it probably means that from the business perspective Quratar must be more prosperous than Veil is. Then again, their Adventurer's Guild is smaller than the one in the Imperial City, so how prosperous is it in regards to adventuring business?

"Now I see what you meant, Roxanne. This city really seems to have everything an aspiring Adventurer might need and then some. When you mentioned the size of their Adventurer's Guild, is this what you had in mind?"

"Yes, although to be precise, it's not the Adventurer's Guild that is the most representative here. Since Quratar is a town with a Labyrinth nearby there are a lot of Explorers here, so as a result the Explorers Guild is substantially bigger than the Adventurers Guild."

Roxanne explained. Thinking about it that way, it really makes sense. If the Labyrinth in Quratar is one of the bigger ones, then the services of Explorers, who specialize in, well, exploring Labyrinths and mapping them out would really be in higher demand than those of the Adventurers, who are much more oriented towards slaying monsters, which would also explain why their Guild in here is relatively modest in size.

"Is that so? Have you ever visited the Labyrinth here, or did you hear that from someone who was there?"

"Yes! When I was here before I visited the Labyrinth outside of the city once, and many more people seem to be doing exactly the same thing."

"Really? Then maybe we should do the same? If we do, then I'm counting on you to guide me."

"Leave it to me then! Please, it's this way!"

Roxanne pointed with her finger and began walking without hesitation.

"you know which way the north is, Roxanne?"

"I'm sorry, but I don't quite understand. Could you repeat that, master?"

"Nah, it's fine, don't worry about it, I was just talking to myself. I'm surprised that you remember which way to go after not being here for so long. Ah, could it be that you're following the Labyrinth's smell? Also, aren't we going to go outside of the city to reach the Labyrinth?"

"No, there's no need for that, because this city has been built around the Labyrinth in its entirety. The Labyrinth is in the town's center, and all of the roads extend from there in a radial pattern."

Wow, really? Initially I found it pretty hard to believe, but the further into the city we went, the buildings were gradually getting more and more sparse on the right side of the road, meaning that this was probably the direction of the town's outskirts, whereas on the left side of the road they continued like normally all the way to the heart of the town, where we were apparently heading right now.

We continued to walk down the road towards the town's center. I looked at the sun to confirm its position in the sky and with it the time, and noticed that it was a little lower than it was back in Veil, but since I have no idea how far are those two cities located from one another, it became impossible to determine whether their longitudes and latitudes were exactly the same or different, causing differences in the length of the day or the amount of time one hour was perceived here, if such differences were even present in this world to begin with.

The stores we were passing by consisted mainly of fishmongers, butchers, bakeries and hardware stores. When we went passed them, we arrived at what looked like a rotary.

There were several roads extending from it, and each of them had several shops on each side of the road. And in the center of the rotary, there was something that looked like a mound of earth with a portal right in the middle of it. Could it be...

“Is that... Quratar’s Labyrinth?”

“That’s right. Everything has been built around it, and the Knight’s guardhouse is located right next to it so that they could move swiftly and surely in case that any kind of emergency would happen.”

As if to confirm Roxanne’s words, the full scenery of the area of Labyrinth’s entrance has came into our view. Indeed, the portal that was presumably leading inside was situated right in the middle of that mound-looking structure, and the Knight’s guardhouse was situated in its immediate vicinity.

“Oh, and by the way, that large brick building right across the entrance is the Quratar’s Explorers Guild.”

Roxanne pointed at the large, five or six stories high building made out of brick that was sandwiched between the two roads coming off from the rotary’s center. Yup, that building was most definitely what I would call majestic. Compared to that, the quarters of the Adventurers guild looked tiny and unimpressive, as if they just took whatever vacant building they could find for themselves. Just by looking at that towering building alone it became apparent how influential the Explorers must be for this city. The double door on the ground floor were widely opened, and we could see many people as they were coming in and out of it like a constantly flowing stream of human mass, and the similar thing was happening in front of the guardhouse, but there people were standing in an ever-growing line.

“What’s up with all those people? What are they waiting for?”

“They are queing up to pay for their Labyrinth Entrance Certificates.”

“Entrance... Certificate?”

“Yes, this is one of Quratar’s laws: if you want to enter the Labyrinth and explore it, then you have to pay for it every time you enter. The usual price for one person is 100 Nars.”

So you actually have to pay money to enter this Labyrinth? Whoever came up with that idea, I have to hand it to them, they definitely knew what they were doing, turning such a dangerous place into something akin to a tourist attraction.

"Well, if it's like that, then I think we will be better off just going to the weapons and armor shops today instead of a Labyrinth." If we have to pay for the entrance, then it would be best to come back here when we will have more money on us, and most importantly, more time on our hands. Looking at the sheer size of that queue, I don't think we would wait five or ten minutes for our turn. Also, in order to maximize our gains from such an excursion, we would have to come here first thing in the morning to spend as much time as possible inside before we would have to leave and then come back and pay the entrance fee again.

Then again, spending a whole day in the Labyrinth, from sunrise to sunset without taking any breaks in-between? Ugh, that might be difficult to do in and out of itself. Not to mention that our purpose of coming to Quratar in the first place was to buy equipment and accessories for my Mage Job, not to go delving into this city's own Labyrinth. But there are so many roads extending from the rotary that I have no idea which one we should take to arrive at the weapons shop, which would be our first stop.

"Master."

Suddenly I felt Roxanne pulling lightly at my sleeve.

"Hm?"

"It's just a thought, but... wouldn't we be able to enter that Labyrinth without having to pay every time if we used that Movement Magic of yours?"

"!!!!!"

I looked at the entrance to the Labyrinth, then at Roxanne, and then at the entrance to the Labyrinth again.

"Roxanne, that's... that's a pretty clever idea! Atta girl!"

"Thank you very much, master!"

She said with a satisfied smile on her face.

I see. Her suggestion was a very sly, but ultimately a practical one from the standpoint of our financial condition. If we were to come in and out of the Labyrinth here like any regular Explorers and Adventurers, then we would have to pay 200 Nars of entrance fee every single time we would want to enter there. But if we enter there once, then we could be using my Warp to come and go there as we please without worrying about any stupid payments, similar to how we can go inside Veil's Labyrinth by warping there from the alley behind Veil's Adventurers Guild. Oh Roxanne, you little evil impish devil, you! If you were wearing a kimono right now, I would have grabbed your obi and untie it with one single, swift move so that you would start spinning around until even your eyes went all round, that's how happy I am right now!

Since Roxanne's suggestion helped us solve the problem of the recurring Labyrinth entrance fee, now we can focus entirely on our initial objective of browsing Quratar's stores in search of a wand or a staff for me.

We began our search in a nearby hardware store. It might not be the weapons or magic oriented shop, but maybe it will have swords or shields, and it's as good of a place as any to start our search, especially since we definitely won't find wands or staffs at a fishmonger's or in a bakery.

Unfortunately, the hardware store was a bust (who would have guessed) because the only things we found there were pots, scissors, hoes, shovels and all kinds of other metal products whose intended usage and purpose I could not wrap my head around. Oh, and also padlocks. So if we want weapons, we really have to go to the weapons shop specifically. Everything that is being sold by the hardware shop can only be classified as a gardening tool or a daily necessities. Not a single piece of weapons to be found here.

"Welcome!"

The person who greeted us in a cheerful voice was a middle-aged lady. Identifying her revealed that she was a 37-years-old Lv.44 Merchant. Wow, for someone her age, her level was certainly quite high, but maybe it was like that because she was running a successful, profitable business? She didn't have any distinctive features that would point otherwise, so she must be an ordinary human as well. Maybe women had a natural predisposition to be merchants and the like, hence her high level? She was obviously older than that female elf Adventurer who brought me to Imperial City and then to Quratar, but she was an elf, so maybe there was no sense in comparing those two races in the first place? But you know, even that male elf, who was supposedly in

his fourties looked younger than she looks now, so it really has to be the matter of different races having different points of aging. Humans who approach the age of fourty are classified as middle-aged people, but for the elves those who lived for fourty years might still be considered maybe not children, but most definitely young people, so maybe thanks to that Roxanne won't age as fast as me, staying as beautiful as she is now for longer?

Ah, that reminds me! Back when I formed a Party with that female elf Adventurer, she could probably see my level through the Party Job Settings! And if she saw it, I wonder why she didn't comment on it in any way? Did she not find it suspicious? Or maybe levels are not as big of a deal as I thought they are? Well, whatever the case with that may be, it's not like I can do anything about it now, can I? Yeah, nothing that can be done, so it's best to just drop that subject entirely and not think about it too much.

"Pardon our intrusion, ma'am."

Roxanne and I bowed to her lightly.

"If there is anything you are looking for but don't see on the shelves, I can help you find it. Or perhaps you're here in order to buy a house?"

"Actually, I was wondering if we could find any weapons here."

"Weapons? My oh my, no, you won't find those here. If its weapons you want, then you have to go to the weapons store. Let's see... do you see the Knight's guardhouse outside? You should find a store that sells weapons easily if you go down the street that goes past it."

The woman instructed us on how to get to the weapons shop, and she even left the store to properly show us where we should be going even though we were not even her customers. How polite of her.

So according to her words, the nearest weapons shop should be located just past the Knights guardhouse, so that is where we shall be heading next.

"Thank you for telling us all this. We will be sure to come back here later to buy something."

“Certainly. I will be eagerly awaiting your return.”

After thanking the kind shopkeeper lady, we left the hardware store. One detail I forgot to mention about that lady before: apparently her name was Honesta, and it really showed, because she was a truly sincere person to some random passers-by whom she met for the first time in her life like us.

“She mentioned buying a house earlier. You think she is a landlady or a real-estate agent or something?”

“I think she might have been, actually.”

If it was to be from such an honest and sincere person, then maybe renting a room somewhere in this city might not have been such a bad idea. While we walked towards the weapons shop, I talked about it with Roxanne.

“So far we have been staying at the room in an inn, but would it actually be cheaper to rent a room in a normal house?”

“Let’s see... although I have no idea what the proper market price in Quratar actually is, renting a room usually costs between 10,000 and 30,000 Nar for a contract that lasts for a full year. Also, I have heard that 50,000 Nars should be enough to rent a nice house in the suburbs.”

“Is that how it is?”

I don’t know whether that is expensive or cheap, but that is most definitely cheaper than staying in an inn in the long-term, because the math is pretty clear about this: a year of renting a room would be between 10,000 and 30,000 Nasr, a year of renting a house costs 50,000 Nars, and if we assume that the accommodation in an inn costs 300 Nars per day, than a full year of living in such a way would easily end up costing more than 100,000 Nars, but if I wanted to increase the number of my Party members even further in the future, then the cost of accommodation would also go up accordingly.

“Please, should you decide to rent a house, leave the cleaning and all the different chores up to me, master!”

“Ah, oh, I... I see now. If we decide to go through with this, I guess it will make things especially tough on you, huh, Roxanne?”

“Please don’t mind it, master. It would be my pleasure.”

Living in an inn or a hotel, you don’t have to worry about doing household chores like cleaning, because the cleaning staff does all of that for you. But since Roxanne is my slave, she probably thought that doing all of that would fall on to her, but if she were to do all those chores alone then I feel like that would be too great of a burden even for her. In that case I would be helping her with those of course, but even so, since this world does not have such convenient things like gas, electricity, vacuum cleaners and washing machines and water is not piped directly to the houses, then my guess is that it would still take a considerable amount of time.

“And what about cooking? Can you do it, Roxanne?”

“Yes! As luck would have it, I happen to know a thing or two about cooking.”

“In that case I’m sorry in advance, but I will be troubling you with that.”

So now Roxanne is basically going to be a maid and a cook on top of being my slave, huh?

“Of course! If its master, then I think renting a house might actually be for the better for you.”

“So, are there any additional conditions to be fulfilled if one wants to rent a house?”

It will be pretty bad if it turns out that we need a guarantor for this. Also, can anyone just rent a house anywhere, anytime, without any formalities to be taken care of first?

“I think there won’t be any problems with that since this is quite a large city.”

“Ah, good to hear it then.”

If we were in a village or some other remote region in the boonies, this might have been tough because locals are always wary of strangers suddenly coming into their closed little communities, but since this is a city we should then we should be fine.

“I have heard that many Explorers live both here in Quratar and in the Imperial City, but personally I think that thanks to master’s magic abilities we could live pretty much anywhere we wanted to.”

By “magic” she probably meant Warp, and there was some truth to her words, because as long as I have that Bonus Spell, then it won’t really matter where we will live as long as we could use it to travel wherever we needed to go. However:

“But we also musn’t forget about remaining careful. We have to choose a place where it would be normal for an Explorer to live without raising too much suspicions. The last thing we would want is for everyone around us and their mothers to learn that I can use magic.”

“In that case, buying a house here should be perfectly fine.”

Yes, Roxanne was absolutely right. If this city really is so densely populated by Explorers, then one more of them taking residence here would not probably pick up anyone’s attention due to how common of an occurrence it was around these parts.

Having decided on such a course of action, we navigated the roads between the entrance to the Labyrinth and the Knight’s guardhouse, making our way towards the weapons shop.

When we got to the place described to us by the owner of that hardware shop, we noticed that it had not just one, but a few weapons shops at the both sides of the street, each one of them apparently specializing in different kinds of weapons, as was evident by the articles of war placed at the displays next to the shop’s entrances. I have to admit, at first I was truly taken aback by how wide the selection was, reminding me of the gun shops of America that are supposedly in each and every one of its cities around pretty much every corner.

We entered the nearest weapons store, walking past many customers who were continuously coming in and going out after either browsing through the wares it had to offer and buying them or simply window shopping. The store itself was fairly large, with several people at once filling every one of its many isles, and they all looked deadly serious about making their selections, to no one’s surprise, since choosing a perfect weapon for yourself to use could very well be a potentially life-saving decision.

“Now let’s see... where wound wands and staffs be?”

Looking for wands and staffs we went towards the back of the shop, where we noticed the staff-type weapons being kept, and there were not that many of them. Could it be that they are somewhat unique, even in this world where the existence of magic is

commonly known? Maybe because the number of Mages and Wizards is significantly smaller when compared to all the other Jobs?



We looked at all the wands, staffs and canes the store had to offer one by one. The way they were lined up, it made me think that maybe they were lined up in order from the cheapest to the most expensive, with the former being placed in the front and the latter in the back. When I used Identify on them, I immediately learned why they have been arranged like that: Wands were the cheapest because they had only one empty Skill Slots, Canes had two empty Skill Slots and Rods, the most expensive of the bunch, had up to three empty Skill Slots.

Thinking about it in such categories, it makes sense that the weapon with the most Skill Slots would be the most costly, but at the same time it should be the most efficient in battle, while the cheapest ones will have the least amount of Skill Slots, and therefore you shouldn't be expecting too much from them battle-wise.

Since I am still a beginner when it comes to using magic, I think a simple wand with a single Skill Slot might be the best for me for now, price-wise, so let's buy it.

"This one looks good enough."

I said to Roxanne out loud, indicating that I have made my choice.

"I have no idea what separates a good wand from a bad one, so I will put my trust entirely in your judgement. But, just as I expected, you have a very keen eye when it comes to appraising the value of things, master."

My dear, sweet Roxanne, I have no idea when it comes to discerning those things as well. All I did was to use Identify on those weapons, so all the credit should go to that Skill instead of me, really.

The other side of the isle was dedicated entirely to canes, and there were many different types of them: Wooden Canes, Iron Canes, Steel Canes and so on and so forth, but as to what was the difference between them and why was there so much variety, I do not know. Maybe I could ask the shop clerk about that, but if at all possible then I would like to refrain from doing that, because it would be strange for an Explorer or an Adventurer to be buying a wand meant for Mages, so he would probably give me the suspicious look, and even worse, he might start asking all sorts of uncomfortable questions.

However, when we went to pay for the wand the clerk at the counter didn't give me as

much as a passing glance, perhaps because there were so many customers in the shop on that particular day. Ultimately I have decided to buy one of the cheapest wands with a single empty Skill Slot, and the Wooden Cane with 2 empty Skill Slots as well, but even then the price was lower than what I was expecting, maybe because my usual 30% discount worked because I bought only multiple items instead of just one. Now that our business there was pretty much concluded, we booked it out of there on the double so as to not attract any more unnecessary attention, and even after stepping out the shop's door I decided it would be best if we go a fair distance away from the weapons store in the unlikely case that someone saw what I was buying and decided to follow me. While we were passing the stores, a certain thought occurred to me: there is not that big of a variety when it comes to the types of the shops. We have general stores, weapon stores, armor stores, bakeries, fishmongers, clothing stores, but that's probably my 21st century-living ass who could have bought everything he ever needed without even needing to leave the house due to how many different stores we had back on earth. Putting that little digression aside, we probably moved a fair distance away from the weapons shop now, so this might be a good time to stop and put the items I bought into the Item Box.

Unfortunately for me, the wand and the cane didn't want to fit in the same item slot in the item box, meaning that I would be forced to keep them in the separate ones, taking twice as much of my free holding space. That's a bummer, but not a one I could do anything about, unfortunately. Even if I won't be able to use one of them now then that's fine, because it can act as a spare I will be able to bust out once my Stats will be sufficiently improved. That being said, I know it can't be helped, but that is one of the many little things that start to seriously irritate me. Technically speaking, wands and canes should be more or less the same type of item with only small differences between them, so in my opinion it should be possible to place them in the same slot in the Item Box, and the same should be possible with Leather Gloves and Leather Mittens, but no, for some reason beyond my understanding, they are treated as separate types of items, leading to the unnecessary wasting of the storage space just so that I could store them in the Item Box instead of the backpack.

It might sound like nitpicking, but it's a legitimate concern over a possible flaw in the game's design that should be patched as soon as possible (yeah, like that will ever happen.).

Now that we were done with our shopping business, we walked to the suburbs part of the town to check how the houses which were located there looked like.

"This is a nice neighborhood, even though it's a little walk away from the city's center. The houses look neat and quiet, and the shopping district is just a short distance away. I like it here, if I am to be honest."

"I think so as well. The atmosphere here is quite serene."

Yes, with how this residential area was located away from all the hustle and bustle of the main part of the city, it would definitely be a good place to live a nice, quiet life, and since the other houses are not crammed together next to one another like someone wanted to fit as many of them on the limited amount of land available, we probably wouldn't even have to worry about getting robbed or being jumped at in the middle of the night. And more importantly, all of the stores are perpetually opened here, unlike Veil where we would have to wait with the shopping every five days for the bazaar day to commence.

You know what? I think it's settled. This might very well be our new home.

With my mind firmly settled, I turned back and walked the way we came here, heading to the hardware store ran by that sincere lady Merchant, Honesta, who was so helpful to us even though she didn't have to. Taking a quick look down the nearby roads, it has an armor store, a tailor, and a general store all pretty close to one another, and I think I even saw something that looked like a diary store around one of the corner, so if we're lucky, then maybe we could buy things like milk, cheese or eggs there. I just wonder if there is a ranch or a farm somewhere nearby that supplies them with cows, chickens and the like? But anyway, this is much more than enough for me.

After taking a light turn around the next intersection we have arrived back at the hardware store Honesta ran.

"Oh, you're those two from earlier. Did you manage to find the weapons shop without any difficulties?"

"We were, thanks to you providing us with directions. Once again, thank you for your help with that."

"Don't mention it. I'm glad that I could be of help."

"By the way, do you mind if I asked you something?"

"Yes? What is it?"

"When it comes to renting a house, is anyone allowed to live in this city? Or are there some additional requirements that have to be fulfilled in order to do so?"

I asked Honesta the Merchant after we exchanged greetings and some small talk.

"There are no additional requirements aside from the one where your Intelligence Card needs to be checked by the authorities, so to answer your question: yes, pretty much anyone is allowed to buy or rent property here in Quratar as long as they are a law-abiding citizen."

Yeah, that's understandable. The authorities would want to check your Intelligence Card to make sure that you are not a Bandit or a Thief... which I am, but I should be in the clear because only the First Job gets displayed on the Intelligence Card as your main one. But aside from your name and the main Job, there are not that many information that can be acquired from the Intelligence Cards, so I wonder if there are any other potential pitfall that I would have to look out for?

"So I won't run into any problems?"

"No, because there are many types of people who come live here, and in this city trying to obtain information about somebody's background without their permission is considered to be a strict taboo."

"I see."

Roxanne said that most of the Explorers tends to live either in Quratar or the Imperial City. So if we compare those two places to one another, then obviously Imperial City should be the one with more restrictions, but that would also mean that the folks running the shots there consider themselves to be better than Quratar simply because their city is the kingdom's capital, and that reeks of superiority complex to me.

I want to believe that this is not the case here, but could it be that every place that is not the Imperial City is treated like a slum in comparison to it?

"Incidentally, I happen to be the Property Manager assigned to the 6th District of Quratar. It is a pretty nice and peaceful neighborhood that's located just upstream of the city. If you are seriously looking to buy a place for yourselves, then I really recommend that one."

“6th District?”

“Yes. As you have probably seen already, this city is divided by six roads extending radially from the center. The section with the Explorers Guild is the 1st District, and counting counter-clockwise from there, this is the 6th District.”

Certainly there were six roads indeed. Well, it would be more accurate to say that there were three of them at both halves of the rotary, because due to how the city was structured you couldn’t go to each one directly from the other, and it would seem that the exact definition of a District is anything that is located between the two main roads, kind of like in wheel of the wagon.

“Six districts, huh?”

A city with the Labyrinth in its center, divided into six districts by the rotary. That is the kind of city that Quratar is. So according to this distinction, the part of the town with the Explorers Guild in it is the 1st District, the part that is home to the Knight’s guardhouse is the 4th District. I wonder if this particular order has been established around the importance of each of the major facilities Quratar houses? In that case it would make sense for this hardware store to be at the ebd of the 6th District, because that is just another shop among many others. I don’t know if she should have told me that much, but thanks to Honesta being a real talker, we at least managed to obtain some useful information about this city and the way it operates.

As for whether we can put our trust in her as our property manager, I think we can do that for a number of reasons: since she owns this store, then it’s probably safe to assume that she makes most if not all of the things she is selling here herself, and Metalworking must be a really useful Skill in this world and its civilization, because it allows for the production of various essential home appliances and tools such as pans, rakes and hoes, and having someone like hat as a potential “ally” and getting on her good side should benefit us in the long run.

“Are you an Explorer, by any chance?”

“That’s right, I am.”

“Uh-huh. And what kind of property are you looking for, exactly?”

When she asked me that question, I was honestly at a loss of words, because I have no experience when it comes to real-estate business and buying property for myself,

because so far in my life I never even had to worry about such things. As shitty as my life was in the past, that was one of the things that remained consistently unchanged, for which I was grateful, at least to some extent. But going back to the topic at hand...

“Rather than me telling you what we are looking for, I would like you to tell me what options are available at the current moment. All I can tell you with absolute certainty is that we have no other requirements other than the rent being up to 40,000 Nar a year, and if at all possible, we would like it to be a place with a relatively low crime rate.”

“Is it for the two of you so that you could live together?”

“For the time being, yes, something that would be enough for the two of us, but in the future, well...”

“I see. You certainly are an Explorer all right.”

The Merchant Lady Honesta grinned in a smug way that made me feel somewhat uncomfortable. Could it be that she figured out that Roxanne is my slave just by looking at her? Or maybe from my way of speaking she managed to put two and two together and realized that my ultimate goal is the creation of my very own harem? Or maybe she's simply saying what's on her mind just because she likes to talk?

Anyway, as a general rule, a single Party can be formed from up to six Party members, and from what I have heard from Roxanne before, it is not strange at all for the members of the Party to live together as long as they trust one another. My guess is that it's also a nice way of cutting the costs and living expenses.

Honesta gave Roxanne another glance, and smirked again. Yup, she really seemed to have both of us figured out pretty quickly. Maybe that's what's actually required to be working in that line of business, having a good eye for people and their characters, I mean? However, knowing is one thing, but I would really appreciate it if she stopped making that smug faces, because it's more than a little unnerving, having someone look at me as if they figured out my entire existence after as little as a single glance. Man, property managers are terrifying! And on a side note, I hope she won't think of me as someone who takes his slave to the Labyrinth with him.

Then she moved in on Roxanne and started eyeing her from every angle possible with her hand on her chin. Just what is going on here?

"Uhm, ma'am...?"

"Hmm, you seem to have a good girl as your companion. If you two intend to explore the city's Labyrinth, then would you like a property that's located as close to it as possible?"

She left Roxanne, who was just about to open her mouth and say something and turned back to me.

"We'll be fine even if it would be somewhere that would require a little walk to get there. Distance is not a problem for us."

In Quratar's case, being close to the Labyrinth also means being close to the center of the city, so that might be the reasoning behind the logic that farther from the Labyrinth = smaller rent, closer to the Labyrinth = higher rent. But in our case, since I am able to use Warp, then even if we were to live relatively far from the city's center but had some business to take care of there, all we had to do was to Warp to the Quratar's Adventurers Guild, and voila! Suddenly everything is within a short walk's distance, so no matter what kind of location we end up choosing for ourselves, it will still be enough for us to swiftly move around if the need for that ever arises.

"If you want something for 40,000 Nar a year that's close to the Labyrinth, then I would recommend an apartment. But if you really are fine with a little distance, then I think I might just have a free house located in the suburbs available."

"Yes, a house would be a preferable option for us."

We have my Warp after all, so we can get pretty much anywhere as long as we have visited that place at least once. Not to mention that the rent seems to be higher when the place you're renting is located close to the Labyrinth.

There is no reason for us to live near the Labyrinth. If it gets cheaper the farther the housing is located from it, then that's all the better for us.

"If you're not an Adventurer, then perhaps I could interest you in a house that is reinforced with shield Cement?"

"Shield Cement?"

Not understanding what she was talking about, I shot Roxanne a discreet glance, and

she immediately followed up with an explanation.

"Shield Cement is a material that is being used in reinforcing buildings so that could withstand harsh weather conditions, but Adventurers dislike it because for some reason it is preventing their Field Walker Skill from working."

Thank you for the save Roxanne. It's good to know that you can always be my go-to when it come to needing information about the matters that I am completely oblivious to. That aside, I do intend to use Warp quite a lot to move around, so not being able to do it sounds quite concerning. So Shield Cement prevents Movement Magic from working properly. I see. That would mean that if I wanted to use my Warp I would have to either pick a place that doesn't use it or live near the Labyrinth because a place reinforced with Shield Cement that's going to interfere with my Movement Magic is essentially useless to me, but on the other hand I don't want to pay a high rent when I can avoid it. What to do, what to do?

"I realize that this might sound like quite the detriment, but as long as you set up a partitioning screen, you will be able to use Movement Magic indoors without any problems, even if you decide to become an Adventurer in the future."

Oh, a chance!

"Before we make our decision, could you please show us around the property first?"

This lady thinks that I am only an Explorer and that's why she was giving me all those information, but she had no way of knowing that I am actually what you might call a true cheat character who can have any combination of skills he wishes, as long as they can be obtained from the list of Bonus Skills, so even though I shouldn't be able to use Movement Magic, all I need to do is to get myself a Warp and there you have it; a non Job-limited spell allowing us to go wherever we want, whenever we want. However, it's still to early to be overly enthusiastic. I first need to see the place for myself and determine if I really cannot use Warp there, and we will see what we're going to do from there.

"Most certainly. I can take you there at any moment, even now if you want. Just give me a moment."

Saying that, Honesta retreated to the back of the store and returned after a while with

someone else whom we were seeing for the first time.

"I'm sorry for the delay. If you're ready then we can go anytime now. Watch the store while I'm gone, okay?"

"Certainly. Have a safe trip, ma'am."

The person who came back with Honesta from the back of the shop saw her off like that. Since Honesta is the shop's owner it would be unwise and unprofessional of her to be leaving the store during business hours just so she could show the houses for rent to two potential clients, so my guess is that this person must be the substitute shopkeeper who minds the store every time the owner is away.

"This way. Follow me."

She walked out of the hardware store with us and guided us on our way. Following in her footsteps, we went back towards the Adventurers Guild and then passed it, going further and further away from the city center until we reached the suburbs area, which didn't have as many buildings standing so close to each other. Well, I expected that much. After all, we said that we don't mind if the house would be situated far from the Labyrinth, so of course she would show us the property located the furthest away from it first.

"What is the climate around here?"

Roxanne started a small talk with the Lady Shopkeeper.

"It's a nice, peaceful neighborhood. It's cool in the summer and it doesn't snow much during the winter."

"And how long is the rainy season?"

I don't know about Roxanne, but personally I began to wonder is it not too early for us to be renting a house. Oh, don't get me wrong, it's not that I am against it, it's just that I think that maybe we should wait a bit longer before making any legally binding decisions, do some more research and think about this really seriously, and think about the future some more. First of all, I feel like we should get to know more about the occurrences of natural disasters like fires, earthquakes, cyclones floods and so on in this area.

Sigh Then again, I guess it's not like we have much of a choice here, do we?

Currently the two choices we have considered are Quratar and the Imperial City. There may be other places where we could probably live without any major issues, but for the time being I do not think we will be able to find any town or city better than this one, since there is always a threat that if we decided to look for other places first, it might very well take us week, or perhaps even months to find something suitable, therefore renting a house now is definitely a cheaper, more preferable option. If this place was downright terrible and unfit to live then maybe I'd be willing to consider that, but based on what we have seen so far we have no reason not to pick Quratar over other cities.

While we continued onward, Roxanne kept talking with Honesta about various things, and thanks to listening in on their conversation from while staying a step behind them I managed to hear and confirm a few of the things I was so worried about.

About the natural disasters I just mentioned, it doesn't look like we would have to worry about them, because the buildings in Quratar were build so close to one another inly in the six districts in the city's center where the Labyrinth was, but the residential areas further away from the Labyrinth and the main part of the city were no higher than two stories, and there was always an ample amount of space between them. It was a good countermeasure against natural disasters such as fires and earthquakes, because even if they did happen, the potential damages would be contained to the houses and their immediate surroundings instead od spreading uncontrollably like wildfire, but on the other hand it made said residential areas look kinda like the countryside instead of the suburbs of a big city.

Further up ahead on the road there was a man who carried a lot of wood under his arms. He stopped when he saw Honesta, and the two of them briefly talked about something. A Quick Identify revealed that he was a 40-years-old male, and a Lv.53 Villager. Wait, 53?! Wow, talk about it being high as hell! So you're telling me this lady is aquainted with someone like that?! Because either he has to be super strong and totally amazing, or I am just getting confused by his level.

"In case you're wondering, that was my husband just now."

She explained to us after they finished talking and the man went his own way.

"He certainly looked like he is very strong."

"I don't want to brag, but he is. He has to be, because due to how the city is structured around the Labyrinth, we have nothing in the way of defending ourselves from the monster attacks, and even if we had, mere walls would not be enough to keep monsters from the Labyrinth at bay. I know that those from the lower levels are relatively weak, but they have strength in numbers, and would likely overrun the entire city in no time. That is why those who are afraid of monsters are generally advised to stay clear of this city, and that is also why my husband and I made it our personal habit to go to the Labyrinth every three days so that we could both get stronger little by little."

According to Roxanne, the monsters are present not only in the Labyrinth itself, but they can also roam its surroundings.

I remembered back to my first day at the Village of Somara, when I was fighting Slow Rabbits (and that zombie one that refused to die no matter how many times I whacked it with the Copper Sword, fucking Caerbannog Rabbit) and the Gummi Slime I encountered when Picker-san took me with him to Vale on his carriage. It seems that the cities are surrounded by walls so as to not allow monsters to attack them from the outside, but in Quratar the Labyrinth is in the center of the town, so it would be meaningless to build walls since they could only stop monsters from outside, while doing jack shit to eliminate the threat of the ones that can escape from the Labyrinth into the city proper.

In that sense I guess you can tell that this city is pretty scary, because having an entire settlement build around the Labyrinth which is like a nest of monsters that might or might not escape from it and saw chaos along the ones that might invade from outside of the town was a pretty crazy idea. This couple lived in such a city for so long that they ultimately decided to start going to the Labyrinth themselves to train and get stronger, and that's why both of them have such abnormally high levels, especially that Villager Lv.53.

I have Durandal to defend myself if need arises so I don't care about it, but I wonder what Roxanne has to say about this?

"Roxanne, do you have any problems with living in the city where monsters might randomly pop up at any moment?"

"No problems at all!"

It was stupid of me to even ask that question in the first place.

So far I never once saw a group of monsters outside of the Labyrinth. Be it the zombie Slow Rabbit or Gummi Slime, there was always only one opponent, no more, so it probably is the same here.

“About your husband, Miss Honesta... is he an Adventurer?”

“No, he is actually a Blacksmith. See that cabin over there in the distance? That is the one that we own and it is also where we create the ironware that I’m selling in my shop. Well, part of it, because the other half is being sold to the other cities, including the Imperial City.”

“A Blacksmith?”

“Yes.”

“He certainly looks the type. And based on what we saw in your store, I can tell that all the tools you create are of exceptionally high quality.”

“Well thank you, I will be sure to pass that on to him.”

Thanks to Roxanne chatting Honesta up, I have learned another piece of information that could come pretty handy further down the road. If he is a Blacksmith, then it might be a good idea to ask her how did he managed to obtain that particular Job.

“You said that your husband is a Blacksmith, but how did he got that Job?”

“Interested in Blacksmithing as well as being an Explorer? My oh my, what a curious customer I managed to obtain. However, I’m afraid I have to disappoint you on that matter, because only Dwarves can become Blacksmiths.”

“Really? I thought that smithing is something that anyone can do as long as they have the necessary skills for it.”

“What you’re talking about is not blacksmithing, but regular smithing, and those are two entirely different procedures.”

“How so?”

"Smithing is when you have a small workstation and a kiln or a fireplace where you can then solidify and finish the goods you created. That is what you had in mind, the job that pretty much anyone can do, regardless of their race. However, blacksmithing is the art of creating weapons and armor specifically using the Skills that are unique to the Dwarves, that's why I said that only they can become proper Blacksmiths."

"Ohh, I see now. That does sound different than what I had in mind."

I wasn't expecting this, but apparently smithing is an entirely different beast from blacksmithing, but when I thought about it carefully, it made a surprising amount of sense. After all, the Job of Honesta's husband was a Villager, not a Blacksmith. But I have to say, that bit about Blacksmiths creating weapons and armor by using the Skills that are unique to their Job got me all the more interested in them, which is why it is a damn shame that I won't be able to become a Blacksmith myself, but this is one of the things that my Bonus Skills cannot circumvent because there is no Bonus Skill that would allow me to change my race at will.

"And here it is. We have arrived."

Going a little further, when we walked along a narrow path, Miss Caretaker pointed to one of the white houses. It was a two-story white house painted with mortar. It is a house identical to those that you could often see in this area and in the town of Veil, so it was probably your typical style of making ordinary houses. It looked pretty plain, but at least the area around it was pretty spacious, which was a welcomed thing in my book. There was a small forest in its immediate surroundings, and it was around ten minutes of walking from the city's center. If I were to compare it to the cramped, suffocating style of building that was typical to modern-day Japan, then I guess you could say that the usage of space was another thing in which this world had my old one beaten, the other being a fact that there are animal-eared cuties like Roxanne in it. There is absolutely no way for me to stop praising the cuteness of her droopy dog ears and petting them whenever I get the chance to do so!

"Is this part of the property the garden?"

"That's right. And since this is a part of it, then you can use it however you like."

So in addition to the house itself, we will also have an entire garden at our disposal, huh? It was at the other side of the road across from the building itself and was pretty wide, having some bushes and low growing trees. However, that was about it, because

the rest of the garden's contents could be summarized with only one word: weeds. A whole lot of weeds, and all of them so overgrown as if nobody took care of them for a pretty long time.

"Looks kinda rough if you asked me."

"There is a lot of wild Rosemary here, but it truly looks like it's not doing all that well."



Roxanne informed me as he kneeled down and had a closer look at one of the bushes and plants that still didn't completely turn into weeds. So apparently this herb-like looking thing is Rosemary? I have heard about it back when I was still on earth, but I also have to admit that I have mainly dealt with the store-bought kind and rarely saw how it looked in its regular plant form, so I had no way of confirming whether or not it was the same as Earth's rosemary or was it different in some way.

"I guess you can say that's what happens when there is no one who would want to rent the property and take proper care of it."

Honest explained with a dejected smile on her face when we inquired about the poor state of the garden. I see. Since the garden is part of the entire property, then it being poorly kept would lead to the lowering of the property's value as a whole, and that's why Roxanne purposefully mentioned that the Rosemary looks like it's in an especially bad state. Nice thinking, Roxanne. Maybe we will be able to actually eat a cake and have ourselves a cake if we play our cards right here.

"You know, I'm not an expert on the subject, but if the garden is in such a state, then doesn't that mean that it will be especially hard for it to make a complete recovery, even if we were to start taking care of it right away?"

"That's true. Even more so since we lack the specialistic knowledge required for the proper care of the plants and trees.]

Roxanne and I continued our verbal assault. With every word that was hitting the jackpot of the issue here, I could almost see our words stabbing themselves into Honest like in some comedy manga. Who knows, maybe she will really give in to the pressure if we maintain the offensive for a bit more?

"Y-You know, I know it might look like things are pretty bad, but trust me, right now this garden is still at the point where everything can still be recovered back to the state of being perfectly usable, and you should be able to plant and grow other herbs if you want to."

Growing and cultivating herbs ourselves, huh? Well, when I took a quick look at all the surrounding houses, pretty much all of them had something planted around the areas that were probably their gardens. There were no fences around any of the house premises, so my guess was the borders between their vicinities were all agreed on between the residents themselves, or perhaps they were strictly visual according to

the rule that “*everything from here to here is mine, and from there to there it’s not mine, but yours*”. In such conditions it would be problematic if we wanted to start growing not only plants, but vegetables as well (assuming that the soil in here would be sufficient enough to even accommodate them), and there was also the issue of monsters and stray animals ruining the crops we would cultivate if they ran through the garden even by accident, so maybe having a fence around our house would not be such a bad idea after all?

“Would it be possible for us to get new seeds to plant them around if we decided to restore the garden after all?”

“If you really decided to do that, then I would be extremely grateful to you. In that case I could give you new seeds and saplings of various plants as a way of thanking you for deciding to rent the property. Oh, we could also sell you hoes, rakes and other gardening tools you would require to maintain the proper care of it.”

“If so, how much would it be?”

“Since this is a kind of a blunder on my part, then I’m sure we could offer you some favorable prices as a way of apologizing for all the trouble that you’ll have to go through with it.”

“Oh, in that case I guess we could definitely manage...”

Roxanne seems to be really fired up about the idea of cultivating her own herb garden, huh? And that Honesta, she’s willing to go as far as gifting us tools and seeds just to make sure that we will rent this house without backing down once we knew that its upkeep would require more time and effort than we have initially anticipated? As expected of someone with the Job of a Merchant, she will never miss an opportunity to make the deal go through, huh? Well, if that’s how it’s going to be, then I guess all that we need is just one more small push.

“Oh well, I guess it cannot be helped, right? Worst case scenario, we will simply have to replant all of the herbs and start the garden up from scratch.”

“Are you sure about this? This is definitely going to take quite a lot of time, work and effort...”

"Yes, I am sure. After all, it's not like don't have a lot of time on our hands, so might as well put it to good use, right?"

How about that merciless counterattack, Miss Caretaker? Ready to give in now?

"Ekhem! Regarding the house itself, in order to prepare it for the arrival of potential buyers I restored all of the wooden windows to the best of my ability and cleaned the inside of it thoroughly, so you can move in right away when you bring in your own furnishings."

Realizing that we had her beaten in the matter of the garden, Honesta headed inside of the house while she explained that restorative work has been already done and what was still left to do. To tell you the truth, I was counting that we might squeeze some more concessions out of her, because even if she provides us with the seeds and the right tools to cultivate them, it will take some serious time before we will be able to actually harvest the fruits of our labor, but apparently that was as far as she was willing to budge in that regard. A shame, but I am still willing to call it our complete victory nonetheless.

Honest unlocked the front door and entered the house, and Roxanne and I followed her inside. Once we were there, no one bothered to actually take off their shoes, so I guess that custom is something that might be exclusive to Japan only, and it made me feel like an oddball when I was just about to reach to the laces of my boots so that I could leave them at the doorstep. Roxanne, who was normally going barefoot, but started wearing sandals ever since I told her to do so didn't even stop to consider doing that, so that must mean that in this world going into somebody's house while still wearing your outdoor shoes is not considered to be a grave offense.

The inside the house was made entirely from wood on the floor and concrete on the walls and ceilings.

"Ohhh, inside it is a lot more spacious than it looks from the outside."

If I were to draw any comparisons, this place wa giving me that distinct developer's standard feel that some of the residences in Japan had. Not those cramped crappy apartments that are associated with perpetually tired salarymen from the middle class, but the mansions and those big suites at the top floors of the hotels where all of the rich and important people used to live, or like those really big rooms lined up with tatami mats from the TV dramas set in the Edo period

"The former resident has made a lot of modifications to the structure already, so you're free to make even more alterations if you ever feel like it. The improvement that you may find the most interesting is the water-flush toilet that he ordered to be custom made for him."

Honest the Caretaker walked through the house and opened one of the doors at the back of the ground floor. To my surprise, it really was a small room with a toilet inside of it. Wait a minute... did she just say...

"Water-flush toilet?"

"I know it might sound unbelievable, but that's actually what it is, and the way it works is actually quite simple: when you add water to the upper container, it will drain the contents of the toilet straight to the ditch located outside of the house. And because the water is being drawn from the river that's located not far away from here, you don't have to be worried about the ditch being particularly dirty."

Having a toilet that resembles the ones I had in Japan by having a flushing system and being directly connected to the drain was a nice surprise that I wasn't expecting to have at all. Upon Honest's approval, I flushed it once to see how exactly was it working, and it did in the exact way I was expecting it to: when you pulled the string located next to the water tank, it released the water collected in the tank, flushing the contents of the bowl down with its momentum. It made me feel at ease, because originally I thought we would have to collect our you-know-what into a jar or some other container in order to dispose of it manually. Knowing that we won't have to resort to such barbarism makes me happy beyond belief.

"That will certainly be a useful thing to have."

"It might be a little inconvenient to collect water from the river anytime you want to flush it, but apparently that was the previous resident's hobby. He also started another project, but I evicted them in the middle of making it so they were never able to finish it."

"What, like, another toilet or something along those lines?"

"As I said, I ended up evicting him when that second project was about halfway done, so I do not really know what was it supposed to be. All that I know is that it only has the drainage pipes connected to it. It's here in the back."

When Honesta opened the door she previously pointed to, I saw that it was an empty room similar to the main one, but bigger than the one where the toilet was located... but what was its purpose? Another toilet room? No, they already had one practically next door, so that's probably not it. Could it be that this guy was just a nutjob with some strange hobbies? But even if that would be the case... man, toilet making and tinkering with them was too weird of a fetish, even by my standards. Part of me wondered if this guy also made a washing room somewhere in the house as well. Heh, that would be pretty swell.

"Uhm, excuse me, Miss Caretaker?"

Roxanne called Honesta back to the main room in order to ask her some questions about the kitchen area. She said she's able to cook, so she probably wants to know as much as she can about the kitchen's user-friendliness.

"I'm going to go take a look upstairs, so make yourself comfortable here, ok?"

Now that Roxanne was occupying Honesta's full attention, I can go upstairs where no one will see me and experiment with Warping while I have the chance.

When I arrived upstairs and looked down, I noticed that I could actually see Roxanne's silhouette outlined through the floor. Could it be one of the effects of Party Formation? Then maybe I should briefly disband it as a precaution, since Movement Magic transports the entire Party? Yeah, let's do that.

First, I opened the door to the room that I would be Warping to in order to check what was inside, but its shutters were all closed tight so it was pretty dark in there. Next, I went to the room that was adjacent to the one I just left, which was the largest room on this floor, ideal to make it our bedroom, since it also came equipped with its own fireplace. I walked to the wall and created a portal that should take me straight to the room right next to it when I will walk through it, assuming that it will work correctly and not get blocked by the shield cement.

With pounding heart, I gulped my saliva down and took a step towards the portal on the wall while closing my eyes.

Please, let it work. Let me go through! I just want to go through, nothing more!

...

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.....

When I opened my eyes again, I was standing in the next room, the one that had its shutters down. I did it. That Warp was a success! This means that Warp not only ignore all of the restrictions placed on Field Walker and Dungeon Walker, but it also bypasses everything that would normally prevent Movement Magic from working, like this Shield Cement!

This is great! I thought that this Bonus Spell was nothing more than an alternative to Dungeon Walker and Field Walker, but it turns out that this is spell is superior to them both in every way!

With this we can move in and out of the Labyrinth without any issues, but it doesn't mean that the problems end here. Quite the opposite, actually. The number of things I have to look out for only increased.

First of all, I should avoid moving just about anywhere with Warp, because it would be pretty bad if I ended up Warping somewhere I normally wasn't supposed to Warp to and got noticed by someone, which means I have to select destination that can be easily accessed by either Field Walker or Dungeon Walker. The safest bet would be the walls of the Adventurers Guild because pretty much everyone is using them as their target for transportation. Trees in the woods should also be okay, should be the Labyrinth itself, but that much should have been a given. So unless I am certain that the place I want to Warp to is out of the people's gaze, I should only travel to the places which I have 100% certainty that they are normal.

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Okay, for the time being, here's how we're going to handle this issue: from now on, I will only use Warp to move to the Adventurer's Guild buildings and into the Labyrinth's, just to play my cards safe. Before I went back downstairs to rejoin Roxanne and Honesta I stayed on the first floor for a bit pretending that I was looking around so that it would not look unnatural that I went upstairs and then immediately came down.

"How about it?The obvious downside of this house is that the river and the well are somewhat far away from here so drawing water from them will always require a little

walk and that it is also far from the Labyrinth's entrance, but since that shouldn't be a problem for you then I think you will agree that this place is not half bad, right?"

The Landlady welcomed me when I came back down, and then remarked after glancing at both me and Roxanne. Well guess what, Mrs. Honesta? Even if a well and a river are far away and drawing water from them would take time, those downsides do not affect us in any way because of my Warp distance will not be a problem anymore.

"Most certainly. I think this is a good property."

I don't know what Roxanne's thoughts on the matter are, but from the looks of it she does not look like she's dissatisfied with what she saw so far. In that case she should be overjoyed when I will tell her later that since I have access to Water Magic we probably won't have to bother ourselves with drawing it by hand as well if I could fill the water container by shooting at it with Waterball. Honesta said that doing it shouldn't be a problem for me, but from her perspective she probably assumed that Roxanne, my slave, would have been tasked with doing it while I stayed home. And you know what, let her think that. Whatever's inside her head is her business, not ours.

"Really? Well I'm glad to hear it."

Yes, really. The shortcomings of this house do not apply to us because of my Warp, so I can definitely say that this is a good property.

The problem is whether we should decide on this house or wait and see the other options Honesta has to offer right now. However, looking over the other properties and checking if it would be possible to use Warp from them would definitely take a fair amount of time. Renting such a house will definitely be cheaper than living in an inn for an entire year, is far away from the center of the city and has relatively few neighbors in the area, so for now I guess we can take this one and switch over to the new one if it does not end up being to our liking in the end. Besides, if Roxanne does not have any objections and agrees with my assessment that this is a pretty good house, then I think that pretty much seals the deal here.

"So, what should we do now? Set the price of the rent?"

"Precisely. You look like your mind's made up, so we can move on to that. Let's see..."

For a moment Honesta simply stood there with her hand on her chin.

"Since the garden has been left unattended and neglected for so long I can subtract that from the overall cost of the rent, meaning that instead of the usual 50,000 Nar the cost of the yearly contract would go down to 45,000 Nar per year. Since the day is slowly drawing to a close, then let's say that the contract will start tomorrow and will be in full legal force until tomorrow of the next year, that is to say the 14th day of Spring."

So it seems that today is the 13th day of spring. Regarding the cost of the yearly rent, it is great that it is not that far away from the usual market price. Not bad, not bad at all, if I do say so myself, but I guess that is the bare minimum required of someone who makes a living as a property manager. If all she did was tricking the customers into signing shady contracts like some kinda villain to extort them of their money, I highly doubt she'd be able to last long in the industry. She has the ability to discern that Roxanne was my slave simply by looking at her (or at least that is my assumption), and she was kind enough to give us a tour of the house before we even decided to if we want to buy it or not. If that is her strategy for running her business, then my guess is that she must be one of the better ones from all of Quratar's landlords, of which there are bound to be multiple ones if the entire city is divided into so many districts. If she wanted to deceive others, she would have been better off not working as a property caretaker at all.

I looked at Roxanne over my shoulder, and she nodded back at me.

"Okay, we will be taking this house. What do we do now, sign the contract, or are there any other things we need to take care of before that?"

I also nodded at the caretaker, and conveyed our intentions of signing a contract to her.

"There is one matter, actually."

After we finished the inspection of what would become our new home, we were taken to the Knight's guardhouse so that we could have our Intelligence Cards checked. Even though she is working as a Merchant, Honesta does not seem to have the Skill that would allow her to check our Intelligence Cards herself. From all the people I have met so far, the only ones capable of doing it were the Knights in the guardhouses and the owner of the Veil Pavilion.

"Now that that's done, all that is left to do is signing the rent contract. Can you write?"

Honesta asked me that question when we went back to her hardware store. I guess asking such a question makes sense, since apparently there are not that many people in this world who can actually do it, although I have to regrettably admit that I am a member of that vast majority myself.

“Is it okay for someone else to be my ghostwriter and sign the document on my behalf?”

“Of course, as long as it will be someone whom you absolutely know you can trust.”

“Then, can I ask you to do it for me, Roxanne?”

“Understood!”

Honesta and Roxanne started taking care of all the necessary documents. Since there was nothing for me to do to help them with that, I decided to have a quick look around the store in order to kill time. As expected of a hardware store, it was lined up with all kinds of products and utensils made of metal, and all of them must have been created by the couple of owners themselves, just like the landlady said before when we met her husband on the way to the house. I can’t help but to wonder as to exactly how helpful tools like that can be in your daily life in a world such as this... oh, looks like they even have a wok here. Huh, who would have guessed? Well, just to be sure...

“Excuse me, but what is this?”

“That thing over there? It is a pot used by professional chefs. It is used primarily when the dish you’re cooking requires a large amount of heat to properly prepare.”

“You don’t say.”

Not gonna lie, looking at this thing made me feel kinda nostalgic, even though it’s not totally the same, but extremely similar. But that should be expected, I guess, since I suddenly saw one of the things that I thought I was never going to see again. If both this wok and the one I know from back home are used for the same purpose, then it should be perfectly fine for them to have a nearly identical shape.

“My shop is the only one around these parts that produces a tool of this type, so it’s not strange that this might be your first time seeing such a thing. If you’re interested in it, then why not buy it? If your girl-companion over there is a good cook, then she will definitely appreciate it. So? How about it?”

"Has anyone ever told you that you're quite good at your job? *Sigh* Then I will be getting this together with the rent. How much would that be in total?"

"My oh my, you're quite the flatterer, you know? Well, since you seem to be liking our special high-flame saucepan so much, then I will gladly offer you a discount, and offer you a special service deal: yearly rent and the saucepan for only 31,850 Nar for both of them! How about it? I assure you that you won't find a better price anywhere else in the city!"

Under any normal circumstances she would probably never offered me such a sweet deal, but in this case I tried using my 30% Discount Skill on her, and since I am buying more than one thing, or to be exact, paying for more than one thing (a yearly rent for our new house plus the wok she was trying to so adamantly to make me buy just now), then I am more tha happy to report that this time its usage has been successful, resulting in quite a drop in price. Who knows, maybe I will be able to get an even better deal if I try pushing her business-savvy buttons some more, but then...

"Excuse me."

After looking at us over her shoulder throughout the entirety of our wok-related conversation, Roxanne approached Honesta with the contract documents in hand, however...

"Brahim is a very difficult language to write in, so can I ask you to check my writing *very thoroughly* and correct any possible mistakes that might have found their way in there? Please?"

Uhm, R-Roxanne? What is with that... malicious aura you seem to be emanating? Because you're scaring me for real here!

"E-Eh? Y-Yes, of course, no problem."

Even if Honesta senses the same thing I did from her, she didn't allow it to show on her face and simply complied with Roxanne's request. I'm glad she can behave like a true professional even in such unexpected situations, but still... I'm glad the situation didn't escalate into something more.

After getting the payment consisting of three gold coins and a bunch of silver and

copper coins out of my Item Box and carefully counting them, I handed them to the landlady, thus finalizing the payment. She gave me the keys to the house, and with that, the signing of our renting contract was over.

"Thank you for your patronage. I hope you will make great use of your new home."

"We should be thanking you for all that you did for us even though you didn't have to..."

"No, I should be doing that for your decision to put your trust in me even though you've just arrived in the city. I will be lookin forward to your next visit."

We exchanged some minor pleasantries with each other and then left the hardware store.

"That should be everything we need for now, right? Is it okay if we buy anything else we might need for our new home tomorrow?"

"That should be okay for as long as the sundries and other necessities are concerned. However, since we don't know if the things that we are going to buy tomorrow are going to be delivered to our home on the same day, so I think it would be best for us if we looked for some basic furniture today so we could get our hands on as many things as we can. That way, we will be able to minimize the amount of time required for shopping tomorrow, and we will be able to spend that much more time in the Labyrinth if we decide to go there."

"That's true. Thankfully the store that sells furniture should be just down the street if I remember correctly."

After consulting with Roxanne on what our next move should be, we both agreed to pay a visit to the furniture-selling store that we briefly saw somewhere near the center of the town when we first arrived in Quratar. Oh, and for those of you who might be wondering about that, I didn't have a free space for it in my Item Box and it was way to big to fit inside of any of our backpacks, so I had no choice but to take the wok with us as it was, only instead of carrying it in both my hands, I asked Roxanne to fix it on my arm with a piece of rope, causing it to look like some kinda shield. If any Adventurer was passing by us right now, I'm sure they would have more than one reason for letting out a good chuckle or two.

When we arrived at the furniture store, the first thing we noticed and then asked about

was the condition of everything they had available for purchase, and it turned out that everything in this store was actually used goods bought from the second hand. A part of me didn't like the idea of having used goods as the furnishings of our new home, but apparently that's just how things work in here, so I guess there's no point arguing or complaining about that now. Besides, as long as I will be able to replace the mattress with a brand new one, then I don't mind having a used bedframe as long as it will be sturdy enough and won't fall apart under our weight (or the weight of our nightly activities). Other than beds, the store also had quite a large variety of tables, chairs, cupboards, closets and other items we might or might not need in the future.

The Job of a furniture store clerk was a merchant, so my 30% discount should work on him just fine as long as we will buy multiple items. At this point I have become so accostomed to using that Skill to make bulk purchases possible, but I have to look out not to waste too much money buying things we don't really need because of it, especially since I bought two wands and a wok already. That is why we have to buy the minimum amount of furniture, and buy the rest one by one when they will be needed, and why this discount is like a double-edged sword for me. That is why this time we only bought a bedframe and a new mattress, as well as some basic furniture necessary for storing our clothes and items. The bed we have chosen was king sized of course.

For the time being we have decided to return home to drop off the things we bought. The clerk at the furniture store told me that the items we purchased shall be delivered to us by cart tomorrow at noon, so we have quite a lot of time on our hands before that happens. We walked to the Adventurer's Guild, and I used Warp to transport us right to our new house. The contract might be starting tomorrow, but I don't think Honesta will mind if we move in today.

"Uhm, master?"

Roxanne called out to me when we walked through the portal and I proceeded to unpack the things from my backpack and undoing the rope that held the wok on my arm.

"Didn't the caretaker lady said that this house uses Shield Cement? So why were we..."

"That she did, but when we were here last time I went and checked if my Movement Magic will work nonetheless. Thankfully it did, and I decided on buying this house after confirming that. Field walker and Dungeon Walker might be useless here, by my Warp works just fine."

"What? That's truly amazing, master!"

"I know, right? But keep it a secret from everyone else."

With a movement restrictions-ignoring spell like Warp you could do pretty much anything ranging from creating a locked room murder mystery to committing a perfect crime. But I'm not interested in using it for such scummy purposes. I am more than fine with just teleporting wherever I want with it.

Also, a side note: if Shield Cement prevents Field and Dungeon Walker from working, was Roxanne planning on walking to the Labyrinth or the Guild like normal every single time? Now that would be both tiring and incredibly annoying.

Maybe I simply grew lazy after getting a taste of how convenient Movement Magic is, I don't want to travel anywhere on foot unless it will be strictly necessary. I mean, we rented this house precisely because of that: so that we wouldn't have to walk to the Adventurer's Guild and the Labyrinth on foot every single time. If we can warp from our house, it would be foolishes of the highest caliber not to use that ability whenever we'd have the chance.

From our home, we went to the Adventurer's Guild of Veil, and when we will be coming back, we will go straight back here from the guild building. That method of travelling is so convenient for us that I honestly feel bad about not figuring it out earlier.

CHAPTER 2

NEW HOME

Kaga Michio

Current levels & equipment:

Explorer Lv.24

Hero Lv.20

Mage Lv.21

Monk Lv.21

Equipment:

Copper Sword

Leather Armor

Leather Jacket

Leather Gloves

Leather Shoes

When we were done with unpacking our things back at our new home, we decided to Warp back to Veil for a bit. Unlike in Quratar, when we arrived in Veil's Adventurers Guild and left it, it was already sunset, meaning that Veil is apparently further to the east, causing the slight differences with the time. We checked the time and then set our sights on Veil's Labyrinth. Normally I would never do something as crazy as going to the Labyrinth during the night hours, but this time was a little different. Since I acquired a new weapon for myself, then I had to take it for a test drive to see how it was going to perform. I am talking about my newly-bought wand of course.

"We're here, master. How would you like to proceed from now on?"

Now that we have returned to the Veil Labyrinth's third floor, I can leave the navigation through it to Roxanne. With her and her keen sense of smell that allows her to detect monsters and their location we can pick our targets depending on what we need at the current moment, and we can perform the experiment with the wand relatively quickly. But before that, I performed a Character Reset and swapped Warp for Durandal.

Warp is a convenient Bonus Spell, but it is not very cost-effective. A trip from Quratar to Veil's Adventurers Guild and then to Veil's Labyrinth took quite a large chunk of my MP out, so I had no choice but to use Durandal to absorb it back before it drops to the red zone and fills my head with debilitatingly dark thoughts.

"Then, first thing's first, take us to some monster that is not a Kobold. It doesn't matter which."

"As you wish, master."

For a next few encounters, Roxanne was guiding me towards the groups of Needlewoods and Green Caterpillars and I killed all of them until I have regained all of the MP I have expended to get us here. With that out of the way, it was finally time to test my wand and cane!

The next enemy that appeared before us was a Lv.3 Green Caterpillar. Great! Just the enemy I was looking for! Back on the second floor taking out those guys took me four shots of Fireball (later reduced to 3 shots after a Level Up). In other words, the ones that appear here, their stronger variants, should be able to endure more than that. Here it goes: the first shot!

I held the wand towards the Green Caterpillar in front of me...

(*Fireball!*)

And launched my first spell. It didn't kill it, so I launched another one, and then another one, which caused the Green Caterpillar to hunch its back as if it wanted to do a Rush attack, which got me on high alert and all ready to dodge, but before there was any need for me to do that, the flames did all the work for me, killing it. So when using a wand, the number of spells required to kill an enemy dwelling on the third floor is three. Yes, right now fighting enemies with magic is definitely more viable option than

using the Copper Sword, since spells are both stronger and faster than that piece of crap.

Next, I tried to use the Wooden Cane by firing a Fireball at the Lv.3 Needlewood that we happened across next. Much to my surprise, killing one Needlewood with it took more shots than when I killed the same kind of monster with a Wooden Wand, which lead me to the inevitable conclusion that out of the two of them, wands are giving a much stronger boost to the user's magic power than canes, but then, what purpose do the canes serve in this world? Is there something that I still don't know about them? Ugh, I should have asked the clerk back at the weapons shop about it. That way I wouldn't have to spend money on something that I am probably not going to use, even if it meant losing the 30% Discount due to not buying multiple items at once. Now that I think about it, I should have gone and bought a rod instead of a cane, since rods are probably the strongest out of all three types of weapons used to cast magic, but on the other hand, they were much more expensive than wands and canes...

Now that I have a wand and know that it is stronger than a cane, should I just keep it and use it to fight mobsters from now on? With a wand as my main weapon, I can defeat the enemies from the third floor with three spells without letting them get close to me, meaning that there will be no risk of me or Roxanne getting hurt, which is why I became interested in fighting with magic in the first place. Of course, it would be nice to have a stronger weapon that could make it possible for me to defeat enemies even faster, but do I really need something like that at the current moment, all the more so when I concluded that I have to save as much money as possible by not spending them on needless things? Nah, for the time being, three-shooting enemies is more than enough for me.

As long as I continue to level up the Mage Job, then MP and magic power should not be a problem either, since both those stats increase with the Level Ups. After realizing how big the difference in attack power between the Copper Sword, Wooden Cane and Wooden Wand is, I concluded that since the numbers of the Copper Sword pale in comparison to the other two, there's no reason for me to use it as a primary weapon at all.

"It's exactly as you said, Roxanne. Wands and canes do increase the strength of my spells. Without them, defeating that monster would have taken four shots instead of three. Thank you."

"I just shared what I knew, and you were the one to utilize that knowledge in practice

in an amazing way! As expected of you, master!"

"Each and every one of your advice has proven to be incredibly helpful so far, so I hope you will continue to guide me from here onward."

"Yes, of course! Thank you very much!"

And with that compliment for Roxanne, I hearby declare the test run of wands and canes to be successfully concluded! Now that our business here was done for the day, we Warped back to the Adventurer's Guild and walked back to the inn on foot from there. That way, the reserves of my MP won't go down as fast so soon after I recovered all of it.

"One night in the two-people room, with dinner. After the meal, I would like you to deliver two basins with hot water and a lantern to our room."

"Right away."

We went back to the Veil Pavilion and rented a room for the night. If everything goes well, this should be the last night we will be spending in this place. For a moment I considered telling that to the owner behind the reception counter, but ultimately decided to stay silent for the time being. It's not like him knowing that we won't be staying here any longer would change anything in the log run, since I'm sure he has other clients besides us who stay here at the regular basis. Also, if he knew that this was supposed to be our last night here, there is always a possibility that he might have tried to add something shady to our food, or maybe try and steal from us at the last possible moment. The thing is, since I do not have Durandal with me right now and all of my money and other belongings are either safely stored in my Item Box or back at our new house in Quratar, that means that I don't have anything of value on me right now, so even if he tried that, he would find nothing of value to take away from me. Nothing except... except... Roxanne... He might try to steal Roxanne from me, since he saw how much of a hottie she is!

No! I am not having that! Over my dead body! I should be silent and not say anything about this being our last night here after all. Safety first. Yup. It is in my and Roxanne's best interest that I keep silent and speak not even a single word about it to the owner.

"Here you go."

I received the key to our room given to me by the owner without saying anything back to him. I want to trust this guy since he hasn't done anything to screw me over for as long as I have been staying at his inn, but now my concerns started getting the better of me. And that's why I will inform him about not going back here tomorrow when we will be after the meal and ready to leave.

We entered the room that has been assigned to us, and I sat down on the bed, staring at the ceiling, contemplating our current situation, which is rather moving now that I actually thought about it some more. After all, this is going to be our last night we are going to be spending in this inn.

This was the place where I was staying after Picker-san, the merchant from the Somara village recommended it to me as a relatively cheap and reliable lodging. This place then became my base of operations when I was desperately running around like a headless chicken trying to scabble enough money to buy Roxanne and make her my own personal slave. This was also the place where I brought her to when I finally succeeded at gaining enough funds, and we even had our first night here.

As I sat there, reflecting on all the events of a not-so-distant past, Roxanne sat next to me on the bed without saying a single word, staring at the walls and the ceiling in silence just like me.

When she came here with me for the first time, she was all tense and nervous, most likely because she did not know what she should be expecting from me. But that was back then. Now, she is much more relaxed around me and her movements are much more natural, and not because I ordered her to do so. Well, initially I did order her to ease up a little and be more trusting of me, but that was only at the beginning. Now that she gradually warmed up to me after seeing for herself that I am not a bad guy, there is no more caution in her movements and mannerisms, which means that she must have decided to completely put her trust in me. I am both glad and relieved that this is what she decided to do, because I would feel sorry for her if she kept forcing herself to act politely around me.

Right now, the trust between us is on such level that I could even push her down and she wouldn't even speak a word of protest. I'm glad she is so proactive, but at the same time, a part of me is feeling a little guilty. God, I want to have my way with her right now! I want to do it with her so badly, but we still have not eaten dinner or performed the daily maintenance of our equipment, so we have no choice but to wait until after that. That's right, we just have to do some preserving and cleaning, eat dinner, and the

we can jump right to the good stuff.

Maybe it was because I was anticipating it more than usual today, but the conservation of our weapons and armor went by in a flash, just like dinner. Before I even realized it, we were already on the way back to our room, waiting for the lantern and the basins with hot water to be delivered to us.

“The water is ready, master.”

Yes, this the moment I have been waiting for!

“Then...”

[Well, then...]

“Won’t you allow me to wash your body for you?”

“I will wash your body for now, master!”

I wanted to tell Roxanne to take off her clothes as soon as possible so I could start feasting my eyes of her wonderful breasts, but I was swiftly cut off from my plans by her innocent request. I was looking forward to being the one to initiate the things today and that’s why I have put up with my urges for so long, only to be denied ushering in them at the very last moment. Ah well, it’s not like I’ve been blue-balled, so waiting for a few more moments is not a problem for me. Without letting Roxanne know about the inner turmoil of my mind, I did like she asked and took off all my clothes. She wiped my body with gentle movements, and when she was done, I returned the favor to her by doing exactly the same.

I wetted the towel in hot water and proceeded to wash every nook and cranny of her amazing body, moving my hands skillfully through all of the strategic areas of her backside. Then, I turned the attention of my hands from her back to the front, wiping and cleaning her noble and beautiful sacred peaks in their entirety. Carefully, politely, delicately. I touched them and kneaded them in my hands as if they were the world’s most valuable treasures, not leaving a speck of them unattended. Once, twice, three times, many times, over and over again. I played with them to my heart’s content without getting bored of it, until I was thoroughly satisfied, and then I made sure that Roxanne would be satisfied as well. After all, this was a celebration of our last night in the Veil Pavilion, so we might as well go a little wild. Though to be honest, I don’t know if calling this a celebration is even right. After all, it doesn’t feel like we have been here

for that long, but that may be because life with Roxanne by my side has been so fulfilling.

The next morning, we have decided to go to the Veil's Labyrinth while it was still dark outside. We had some quick breakfast first, and after finishing the preparations, we were ready to be on our way. Next, I connected this room in the in with our new home in Quratar with Warp, with myself acting like a bucket bridge that was half-in and half-out into the wall in order not to use too much MP travelling back and forth between those two locations. A magnificent display of smart and ingenious thinking, if I do say so myself. That way, I can move our luggage through the Warp Portal simply by sweeping it behind me with my upper half that was in the room of the inn in Veil to my lower half that was in Quratar. The only downside to that method was that apparently I cannot move objects that are too large, like furniture, by using it, so I will have to think about a way to circumvent that next time when I will get the chance. For the time being, I tested if moving a backpack filled to the brim with items would be okay, and it seems that we could move through the Warp portals while carrying that much with us on our backs without any problems. That way even someone like me, who does not have all that much strength in the arms department, can easily do it. I was a little worried about the case that contained Roxanne's clothing, including her maid uniform, but apparently that much was still considered OK by whatever system was governing the warping mechanics, because I managed to drag it through the portal to the other side without any difficulties.

However, one problem was still remaining in regards to our moving process. Carrying our luggage while the portal was continuously connecting two separate places seemed to consume more of my MP than moving in the regular way was doing it, so if I keep the connection up, I'm going to run out of MP sooner rather than later. Thankfully we didn't have that much luggage that required transportation, so I managed to get it done before my reserves dropped to the dangerously low levels. When the amount of my MP is reduced below certain level, its deficiency ends up affecting my mentality in a negative way, flooding my head with an unstoppable torrent of negative thoughts that are getting more dangerous the less MP I have, and that is something that's definitely bad. I have experienced that dreadful sensation enough times already to clearly know that I never want to go through something like that ever again. And that is why I have to make even bigger effort than before to properly manage my MP pool.

When I finally moved all of our things, I stood in the middle of our room in the Veil Pavilion, knowing that this might be the last time I'm gazing at those familiar walls and simple furnishings.

“I know we should be going, but will it be strange of me to say that I almost feel reluctant to leave this place?”

“I feel exactly the same as you, master. This is the room where you first made love to me, but I hope that in the future I can continue to give you my affection and receive yours in return, this time in our new home. Lots and lots more of it.”

Roxanne, that cheesy line just now was just too cute!

Finally, we looked over the room to see if there was anything we might have left behind, and then we just stood there, side by side. If Roxanne was willing to go that far saying such things, I had to muster all of my strength and willpower not to push her down then and there, resulting only to petting her doggy ears. She doesn't know this because she never refused any of the moves I was making on her, but since she was the one who took my V-Card away from me, I literally am crazy for her. Thanks to her, I am no longer a sad, loser virgin I once was, but that is exactly why I have to control myself and don't forget that I never would have met a girl as wonderful as her if it was not for Alan the Slave Merchant and his willingness to wait up until I will gather enough money. Now that I think about it, I feel like a dumb idiot for thinking that he and Roxanne were conspiring to get rid of me.

Carrying the empty backpacks on our backs, we left the room and closed the door behind us.

“We ended up staying a few more nights than we originally intended, but now all of our luggage has been moved out.”

I gave the room key back to the man behind the counter in the lobby.

“I see. Thank you.”

“I should be thanking you for taking care of us for so long. You even supplied us with a lantern since it was growing so dark...”

“A lantern, huh? Well, you did pay for it along with the meal and water, so that's not that big of a deal now, is it?”

His expression didn't even change that much even after I explicitly mentioned

yesterday. I guess that makes those 10 Nars I paid for that lantern the money well spent. If I knew it will bring me the peace of mind, I would gladly pay even more... But I do have to say that him not caring about us all that much makes me feel kinda lonely.

No Michio, don't. Stop with those sappy negative thoughts. This matter is too insignificant to be giving it any serious thought whatsoever. This guy is an Innkeeper, so he has probably seen people like us all the time, and that is why he thinks nothing of such goodbyes now. So, as I already said, don't think about it. Besides, I am pretty sure that me getting emotional over such a trifling matter must be the result of me losing MP in the process of transporting our luggage from Veil to Quratar through the Warp Gate over and over again. Yeah, that has to be it, so let's just leave it at that and not dwell on it more than we need to.

After saying goodbye to the Innkeeper and the Veil Pavilion, we made our way to the Veil Labyrinth so that I could use the monsters in there to regain as much MP as possible. And after we were finished with that...

"Well then, I think that should be enough MP Recovery for the time being, so let's go back to Quratar. The question is, what do we want to do there? Should we go straight back home, or maybe we should swing by the Quratar's Adventurer's Guild?"

"Hmm... well, I think it would be best if we went to the Adventurer's Guild. Out of all the daily necessities we have to buy, we have yet to procure cleaning tools and supplies, so we might as well get some right away."

When I asked her, Roxanne gave me a swift and concrete answer.

"I see. That definitely makes sense. Okay, let's do that. Any other things you would like to do?"

"Let's see... if we are not going to the Labyrinth anymore, then it would be good if I could spend the rest of the day searching for various tools and then doing some light cleaning around the house. If we manage to get a hold of everything I have in mind today, then I could spend the next few days cleaning and beautifying the rest of the house, but if we don't then that's okay as well, since we are not in a hurry. Whatever the case with it will be, just relax and leave it all to me, master."

"Oh come, on, you know I can't just dump all of that work on you. Let me help with it too."

"Nope. No can do. You are my master, master, so obviously you should not trouble yourself with that kind of work, so you can leave it all to me, since this is my job as your servant!"

Is it just me, or does Roxanne seems to be deriving a strange sense of pride from the fact that she is the one responsible for all of the cleaning duties in our relationship? Well, if she is so insistent on doing the cleaning herself, then I guess that is what I should allow her to do, and while she keeps herself busy with cleaning, I can take care of other things that would need doing around the house. Dividing all of the chores in such a way will be greatly beneficial to us, because no matter how much work we will have, we will be able to finish it much sooner that way, meaning that we will have more time for ourselves in turn.

We went to Quratar's Adventurer's Guild, sold our excess items there and then promptly left. As we were making our way through the city, I noticed that most of the shops here were already opened, meaning that their business hours must be starting quite early, but in turn they are probably not opened for as long as I would have liked. Yeah, that's probably it. It might not be the best thing to draw comparisons with, but even the brothel in the slums of Veil was not opened well into the night, chasing all of their customers out well before midnight (according to my rough estimation).

When we arrived at the general store, we spend quite some time there as Roxanne was insistent on choosing only the best tools – such as brooms, towels, etc. – possible, so I was once again relegated to only giving my opinion on the products she ended up choosing. As I was browsing through the store's wares, I noticed that apparently this world does not have its own equivalent of cleaning agents of any kind, so I guess the best things we can do to "clean" our house up would be to dust the floors and then wash everything up with a wet towel without using any kind of soap. When we bought everything we needed there, we went back to the Adventurer's Guild and used its wall to Warp back to our new home.

Also, just a quick side note, but now that I think about it, if I was still back in my old world and saw somebody holding a bunch of brooms and cleaning supplies while they were going through some dark portal that appeared on the nearby wall seemingly out of nowhere, I would have either thought that such a person is a complete wackjob, or started questioning my own sanity and the well-being of my eyes, that's how unusual that would be to me. But now, seeing as I am the one doing that very thing I just described, I don't see anything strange about it, since to the current me, such extravagant behavior is right there on the list of things that Adventurers do. Yes, my

current demeanor and appearance are not at all different from the other Adventurers around me. Since I will be using Warp (masked as a Field Walker or Dungeon Walker so that nobody would catch on that I have such an OP Movement Magic Skill) practically every day to move around between our home and the Labyrinth, having other people see me as just another Adventurer is not only not a problem, but a rather preferable result, if I were to be completely honest.

I mean, there is just one concern that I might have, but it is a very minor, insignificant one: our landlady that we are renting the house from: Honesta. A very small part of me cannot stop thinking about what would happen if she saw me using Warp? She saw my Intelligence Card, and it states that I am an Explorer, and Explorers should not have the access to such Movement Magic. So if she ever saw me using it, would she be upset? Would she look down on me, thinking (and rightfully so) that I have deceived her in order to keep my real Job and abilities hidden? Well, since I plan on using Warp mainly inside of the Quratar's Adventurers Guild or in the back alleyways, I should be in the clear as long as anyone won't see me by sheer coincidence.

Also, even if Honesta happened to see me using it one day, as long as it will be far in the future, at the point where I managed to become a legitimate Adventurer, then me having those Movement Magic Skills would not be cheating, even if I cheated my way into obtaining them.

Anyway, with our current batch of shopping done, we went through the Warp portal and drop it off at home again, only to come back the way we came a minute later so that we could shop for other things and then bring them home without delay. We went back and forth between the Adventurers Guild and our new home at the edge of Quratar for a number of times, each time bringing something different back with us: kitchenware, cleaning tools, various daily necessities, buckets for collecting water and jugs meant exclusively for drinking water... you name it, we got it.

"Phew, we actually bought quite a lot of stuff, but is that everything? We didn't forget about anything, did we?"

"No, I think we should have everything we needed for the time being. With that said, now I will be off to bring water from the river."

The water meant for cleaning the dirty clothes, general cleaning purposes and

toileting is supposed to be kept in a tub, the one meant for drinking is to be stored in a water tank, and there is also the toilet contraption and its separate water container, so if Roxanne wanted to bring enough water to last us for all of those purposes, then she would have to make a number of trips back and forth, which is going to be hellishly inconvenient for her. Thankfully, with me and my amazing magic, there won't be a need for us to waste so much time on this mundane task.

"Wait, Roxanne, wait. Easy on the throttle there. You don't have to go for the water."

"I don't have to? How so?"

Hoo boi, it is exactly as I have expected. Roxanne totally misunderstood my intention when it comes to the water and the ways of procuring it.

"Roxanne, there is no need for you to bother yourself with getting water on your own. I can create it using my Water Magic, remember? And since I can do it, there is no need for us to go to the well at all."

"Really? That's good to hear, but... are you really sure about that, master? I heard that generating enough water for usage in the household chore is quite a... chore in and out of itself?"

"Oh, I am sure that normally it would be a ginormous pain in the ass, but with you by my side, even that should be no problem at all."

"Uhm... as long as you're fine with me, master, then I guess I don't have to worry about it. Above anything else, I want to be of as much use to you as I possibly can."

"That's great to hear. And also, likewise."

"So, what would you like to do now, master?"

"I was thinking of going to the Veil's Labyrinth for a bit again since I have used so much MP today."

I said while brandishing Durandal.

"Is that okay with you?"

"Yes, of course."

Now that I have established so many connections for teleportation with Warp, we can jump straight to the Labyrinth without the need to go to its entrance on foot every single time, which is very convenient for us. Less walking means more time we can spent hunting monsters and exploring, and that will always be good.

"Okay, now that we're here, let's look for some monsters that would make an easy prey so that I can get back all of that MP I expended."

Admittedly, that Warp we did just now made me feel a little sick, so slaying some monsters would definitely be welcomed right now. Anything to prevent myself from being flooded by negative emotions again.

"Right, I am all right with that, of course, but... but could you give me my equipment, master?"

"Ah, that? Do not worry about it. We are only going to hunt a few monsters this time, just enough for me to replenish my MP reserves, so there won't be any need for you to step onto the fray..."

"That is absolutely out of the question! Even though you are saying that we are only going to kill a few monsters, we are still in the Labyrinth, a place where anything can happen at any given time, so you always have to be ready for anything! On that account, my equipment, please!"

Oh wow, look at her getting all angry with me all of a sudden.

"O-Okay, got it. Here you go."

Somewhat bewildered by Roxanne's outburst, I handed the Scimitar, as well as the Leather Breastplate, Helmet and Gloves to her. I really don't understand what's gotten into her now. I thought it was already firmly established that we are stronger than the monsters on the Labyrinth's 3rd floor, so in my honest opinion there would be absolutely no harm in Roxanne sitting this round of monster slaying out, but if she is so insistent on doing it anyway, it will be better for me to just go along with her request, even though I find it to be annoying.

That being said, I cannot deny that Roxanne and her keen sense of smell are pretty convenient to have around, because with her, we found the necessary amount of monsters needed to restore my MP rather quickly, making his particular excursion to the Labyrinth an extremely short one. Although, I cannot stop myself from thinking

that going all the way to Veil's Labyrinth just so that I could replenish my lost MP feels more than a little inefficient.

After returning back home, we took all of the jugs we bought earlier into the room with the drain so that I could fill them all up with water. I then used Water Wall and waited until the water I created in this way would naturally fall into the jugs so that it could be safely stored.

"Roxanne, move them closer to one another, please. While we are at it, maybe we should add a few buckets as well?"

I said when the first Water Wall run out of its time and the water fell down, splashing a lot of itself around without going into the jugs. So yeah, now we know that using this method we can store water in containers and that they are sturdy enough to withstand the weight of the falling water when the Water Wall dissipates, but now it would be good if we could do something about all the water that splashes around them without landing in the buckets and jugs, therefore ending up being wasted as a result.

Since I am able to use my MP freely, at the very least I don't have to worry about the delays between the consecutive usage of Water Magic, so maybe I should try casting Water Wall, or perhaps Water Ball directly into the desired containers, but I don't know if that would be such a great idea. We know for a fact that the jugs, and probably buckets as well will withstand the magic when its applied to them from the outside, but using the magic directly inside of them would probably cause them to break due to all of the excessive force. Not to mention that I have to look out for my MP consumption, because if I end up using too many spells then we will have to make another trip to the Labyrinth so that I could get my MP back, and that would be straight up counterproductive, what with all of the preparations of the equipment if Roxanne kept on insisting on assisting me and all.

"Is that enough water for the time being?"

"Yes, it is more than enough. I will use this water to clean then."

After using Water Wall several more times to give Roxanne enough water to fill all of the jugs and buckets, Roxanne stood up and carried the bucket, which was only about 75% filled away with her.

"Alright, so while you're busy cleaning, then maybe I will go to the Labyrinth here in

Quratar to get the admission fee business over with. Sounds like a plan?"

"Yes, of course. Have a safe trip, master."

With Roxanne on the cleaning duty, I made all of the preparations and then set up another Warp portal on the house's wall. Contrary to the Labyrinth of Veil, I won't have to use up as much my MP to Warp to Quratar's Labyrinth. Since it is right in the city's center I guess I could technically go there by foot, but now that I have awakened to the wonders of Warping, I don't think getting back into the habit of going somewhere by using my own two feet is going to be that easy.

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Emerging back in the main hall of the Adventurers Guild building, I promptly left it and made my way towards the rotary in the city's center. The Labyrinth and its surroundings seemed like they were as busy as they were yesterday. I wonder if it is always like this or maybe it's only like that now because something happened? I think the time is around noon right now, but the queue in front of the Knight's guardhouse did not seem to be getting any smaller, so it would seem that this place is always crowded, no matter the time of day. The air was filled with the sound of the exchanges they were having with the Knights responsible for handling the admission fees, and they were all going more or less like that:

"Admission for six people please!"

"That will be six silver coins."

"Admission for five people please!"

"That will be five silver coins."

Aside from them, there were also Knights who were selling maps of the Quratar's Labyrinth while marketing their products in a rather aggressive fashion:

"Over here! How about a copy of the map of Quratar's Labyrinth?!"

So not only do they handle the Labyrinth admission fees, but they also sell the maps of the Labyrinth's floors? Who would have thought that the Knightly orders can run so many businesses aside from keeping the peace in the cities? Out of sheer curiosity I decided to give one of those maps a look, so I leaned closer to where the Knight who

was advertising them was standing, and all in all I have to say that they were rather nicely done.

The table in front of the Knight who was advertising the maps of the Labyrinth was lined up with a multitude of brown pieces of paper that had a drawing of a simple map of the floors and the arrows showing the way drawn on them. It... it really was a simple map. Like, really simple.

“Quratar’s Labyrinth’s map sold over here! Come an get yourself a copy while you can! The price is 20 Nars for the map of each floor, with a 1000 Nars discount if you decide to buy them all in a single booklet! 20 000 Nars for the bound book version drawn on a high-quality parchment!”

Wow, talk about having a lot of different options to choose from. If I wanted to buy something like that for myself then the obvious choice would be the bound book version on a high-quality parchment, but for the time being 20 000 Nars for something like that is just way too expensive, especially now that I have told myself that I need to limit the amount of needless spending as much as possible if I want to stabilize my financial situation. The obvious cheaper option would be to be buying them floor by floor, but that way I won’t know how many I would need, so the booklet seems like the best cost-efficient option, but it naturally comes with a drawback: since the booklet is nothing more than the cheap parchment maps combined, the question is if they are going to get more tattered and used up with time, because if there is something I definitely won’t be needing, it would be a map booklet made from cheap paper that would get destroyed one day simply because it has been used one too many times. So looking at it from that particular angle, even the booklet might be useless in the long haul. Then again, judging how fast I tend to grow up and get levels with my 20x EXP Earned and 1/20th EXP Required to Level Up, buying a booklet might not be too much of a waste, or at least not as much as it would be if I settled for the maps of each individual floor.

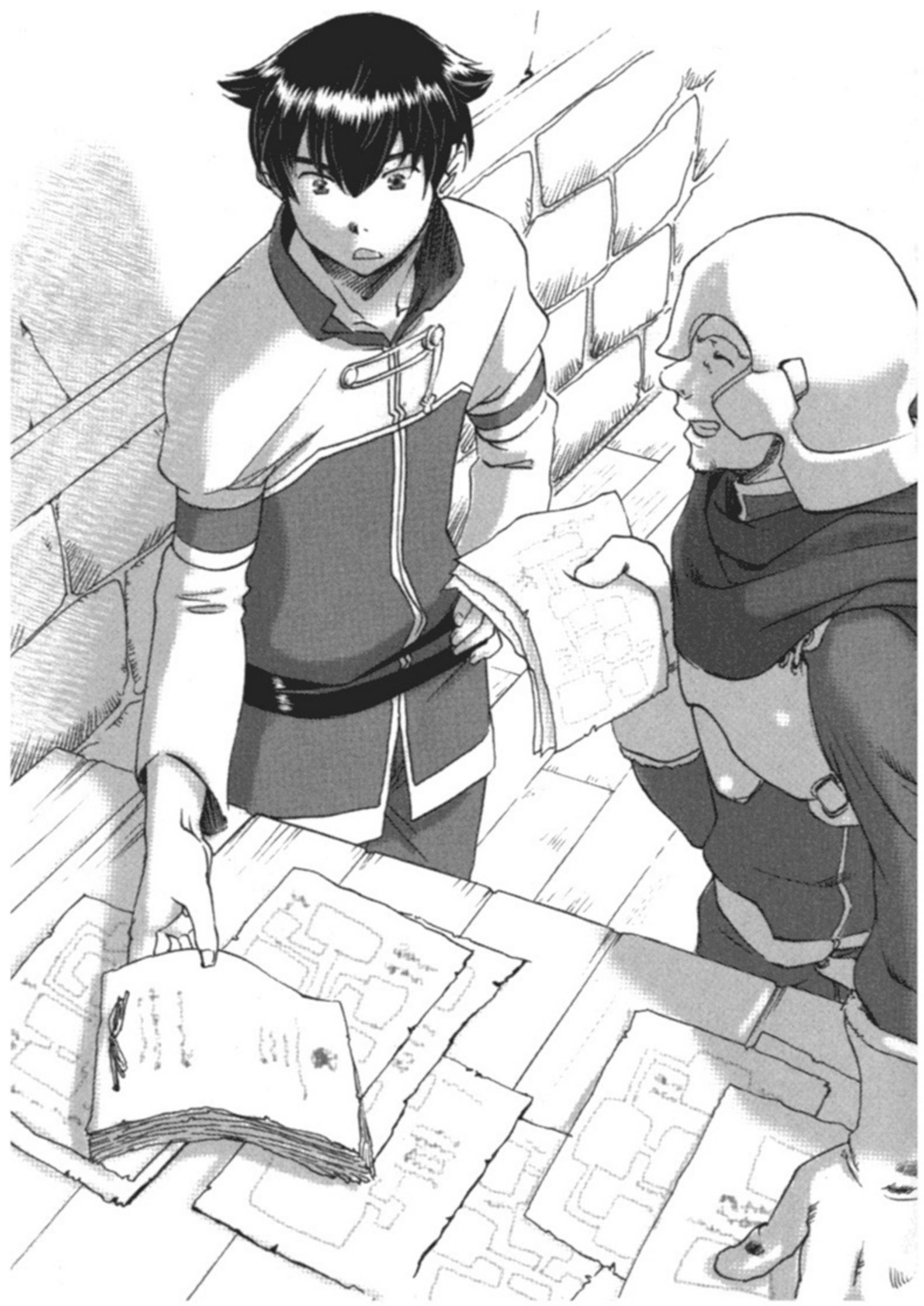
Okay, so buying a booklet it is then.

“Admission for one person and this booklet here, please.”

“Let’s see... that will be eleven silver coins.”

“Here you go.”

I got the necessary amount of money and handed it to the Knight at one of the stands. Obviously, since he was not a merchant, then my 30% discount didn't work, meaning that I had little choice but to pay that price in full.



Now that I have gotten my hands on the booklet with the maps of the floors of this Labyrinth, I might as well do some exploring while I'm still here, since it would probably look very suspicious if I ended up buying both the maps and paying the admission fee without even setting a foot inside of the Labyrinth proper. Thankfully, since I have my Warp that I can use to teleport myself to the Labyrinth from our house, I won't have to pay the admission fee each and every time Roxanne and I would like to come here. For me, it's pay once and then don't pay at all. Talk about a cheat that works to my advantage! The only thing I have to worry about right now is to make sure that I use the map booklet in such a way that will guarantee that it won't get immediately destroyed or ruined any more than it actually has to.

When the Knight received the coins from me, he began to count it one by one with shaky hands and worried expression. He looked pretty old for a Knight, and yet he had to handle the purchases and the counting of the money, which must be pretty difficult for someone who does not possess the Calculate Skill. The entire procedure took a few minutes, but when the guy was finally done I was handed my map booklet, along with another piece of worn-out paper with something written on it. I'm guessing that this is supposed to be an admission ticket? I simply placed them both in my backpack and then I made way towards the entrance to the Labyrinth.

At the entrance some distance ahead of me, there were two Knights and an Explorer. My guess was that he must be the guide hired by the other two to show them around. Not gonna lie, this looks pretty strange to me that the Explorers would be offering their guiding services here, especially since the Guild's building is literally around the corner. After a few more steps, they stopped in front of another pair of Knights, who then asked them something that I couldn't hear very clearly, but since they showed them the brown pieces of parchment, then I guess this must be the checkpoint where you have to show your admission ticket so that you could be allowed into the Labyrinth proper. Armed with that new piece of knowledge, I did the same thing that they did when I approached the Knights, and after they allowed me to go through without any major issues, I proceeded to go inside the Labyrinth through a short corridor filled with complete darkness.

When I finally emerged on the other side in the entrance room, the Party that was ahead of me was nowhere to be seen. Could they have gone on ahead so fast? No, they probably went straight to a different floor. As for the entrance room itself, and the Labyrinth as a whole in general, then it would seem that the general layout is more or less the same as the one in Veil's Labyrinth, but there were some differences that could be seen from the get go, like the design of the decorations painted on the walls. Other

than that, the entrance hall looked pretty much the same.

Perhaps the most important difference between Quratar's Labyrinth and Veil's Labyrinth is that Quratar's Labyrinth has much more people inside of it, whereas the one in Veil looked like it was practically deserted most of the time, because we have never stumbled on other Parties while we were exploring inside of it. And here? Everywhere I went, I saw groups of people. There is so much of the that I began to wonder if it is really possible to hunt monsters effectively under such circumstances? I tried going a little bit deeper to see if the traffic situation was going to be any better, but unfortunately, it was just the same as near the entrance: a fuckton of people around literally every corner, in every last corridor.

Okay, for now I should not worry about this too much, since I didn't come here today for that. Right now, I should focus on finding myself a nice, secluded location that is going to be outside of the view of as many people as possible so I could set up a Warp portal. Going around a number of corridors, I think I found myself a one that was far enough from the main route of the first floor to not be worried about any Parties coming here, but the one that was close enough to it that Roxanne and I should not get lost when we start coming here regularly. Okay, it's now or never.

(*Warp!*)

Remember Michio, you're not doing anything that is against the rules. Your Intelligence Card says that you are an Explorer, and there is nothing wrong with an Explorer using Dungeon Walker (because that's how it should look to anyone who would happen to catch a glimpse of me) to move around the Labyrinth. So whatever you're doing, make sure to stay calm and act as naturally as possible.

With such thoughts filling my head, I went through the Warp portal and emerged in our house on the other side.

“Roxanne, I'm back.”

“Ah! Welcome back, master!”

When Roxanne noticed my arrival, she immediately stopped wiping the floor, stood up and bowed to me respectfully. Her posture as she was doing so was flawless as always. The only thing that could possibly make that greeting even better would be her

wearing her maid uniform. But I guess that would be asking too much of her, since these clothes looked like they were pretty expensive, and there's just no way she would use them during common household chores. But now that I think about it... the way she did it and how she didn't even make a single needless move... there's no way she learned to do that without someone teaching her how to do it.

"Roxanne, the way you greeted me just now... was that something that you have been taught back when you were still in the custody of Alan-san's Slave Shop?"

Initially I thought that maybe the time she spent in the Slave Merchant's shop might not be a pleasant memory to her, but if our one-time gig as Alan-san's bodyguards is to serve as an indication, then it does not seem like she found it all that bad, at least when the people there and the clothes that she had to wear were concerned. These information might prove crucial if I ever wanted to go back there to buy myself a new slave.

"Yes, that's right. Uhm... was it... weird of me to do it?"

"Not at all. It was great."

So my guess that she learned that kind of greeting at the Slave Merchant's shop was a correct one after all. Instead of getting into that matter further, I moved closer to her and gently stroked her dog ears.

"Thank you very much. Uhm, master? Isn't it about time for the furniture we ordered to arrive?"

Even though she had to realize what I was trying to do by stroking her ears, Roxanne quickly changed the topic before the things got the chance to get more heated up. I can't say that I liked that, but I'm not going to be pushy or forceful on her.

"Hmm, I think it is. Back at the shop they said that the delivery was going to be made around noon, right? In that case it really should be about time."

And, as if they were just waiting for my cue, we heard the sound of knocking on our door.

"Delivery service here! Please come and collect your purchased items!"

Well wouldn't you know, it's the deliverymen with our furniture. When I walked out

to the front of the house to check the order, I saw that everything we ordered was delivered by two carriages drawn by horses. Wow, did we really order that much? It surely didn't look like it when we were doing the shopping yesterday, but maybe that's not the issue of the quantity of items, but rather how big they are? Anyway...

"Are there any documents I have to sign?"

"No, now that we have delivered your purchased items, there is no need for that. So, where do you want us to place them?"

"If it's alright, then just go and place them all inside the house in the main hall."

"Are you really sure about that? We can carry them all to specific rooms if you want."

"Thank you for your consideration, but we will manage."

It's great that they also offer to carry the purchased items wherever the client wants them to, but I think it would be better to only have them carry it all to the main hall, just to be on the safe side. It's not like I have something against those guys, but I would rather not have strangers walk around my newly rented house. That was a common sense back on earth, and I think that applying it in this world as well won't hurt me in the slightest, even though having so many pieces of furniture in a single room might make it somewhat difficult to move around it. If I didn't have Warp or using it inside of the house would not be possible, then this could have been a serious problem, but as things stand, I think Roxanne and I will manage just fine if all we have to do is to simply carry of all of the bought furniture to its respective rooms. From the looks of it we will have to carry the cupboards and the closet together, but the mattresses for the bed can be taken separately. The biggest thing from among all of them is definitely going to be the table, but since the kitchen is located here on the ground floor then I think it will be more than enough if we carry it to the room next to it.

"Well then, before we do anything else, I think it would be good to lightly wash all of these."

"Right. We will do it with every piece of furniture, but for the time being let's start with the chairs and the table so that we can assemble everything needed for the dining room. After that, let's move them to the room next to the kitchen."

"All right."



Now that the delivery guys left and we stayed alone once again, we proceeded to move with the work: Roxanne was in charge of cleaning the newly-delivered furniture and I was setting them up all around the house. When it was the table's turn to be moved, Roxanne helped me move it to the dining room. Now that the table and the chairs have been taken care of, plenty of room has been freed in the otherwise cramped room. When that part of the chores was done, Roxanne wiped the closet and the cupboards with a wet cloth to remove the dust that has stuck to it. My plan for them was that I wanted to have either the cupboards or the closet to go upstairs to the second floor. I think that the closet would be the better choice of the two, because we could place it in our bedroom or the room right next to it, meaning that we would have a convenient place where we could keep all of our clothes. At least that was my initial plan, but...

“Man, that thing sure is heavy.”

When we tried to carry the closet upstairs, it immediately became apparent that it was too heavy for just the two of us to carry. Now I’m really starting to regret not letting those guys from the delivery service carry it there for us.

“In that case, maybe it would be best if the cupboards were to be in the kitchen and the closet in the room next to it, tucked in the corner where it won’t take as much space?”

“Yeah, I think that will be the best possible thing to do.”

Now that we actually proceeded with the work, the first floor has finally started to look like an actual home where people can live. When it comes to the second floor, then we are going to do just like we agreed and make the biggest room there, the one with the fireplace, into our personal bedroom. In two trips up and down the stairs, we carried the bed’s frame and the mattresses up to the second floor. We got lucky that instead of being one giant one they were actually two separate ones, because otherwise we might have had a distinctly difficult time with moving them as well. We placed the frame in our bedrooms and then smacked the mattresses on top of it. For the time being, this was the only piece of furniture in the bedroom which was otherwise left exactly how we saw it when we first came here: no carpets, no other pieces of furniture, no wallpapers, nothing. Admittedly, it looks pretty terrible, but given the time I believe we will do something about it. However, now that the arrangement of furniture is done, I think it is high time for something else entirely.

“How about we... check if the bed is working exactly as it should? What do you say to

that, Roxanne?"

Making my proposition, I lightly hugged Roxanne from behind after I briefly played with her tail.

"U-Uhm, y-yes... I... I think it would be best if we did that... mhnn!"

As soon as Roxanne agreed to my suggestion, I closed her mouth with my own. I then gently slid my tongue into her mouth to meet hers, and since she did not resist any of my actions, this has to mean that she was perfectly okay with whatever I wanted to do to her because she knew that I would not hurt her.

Like that, we laid on the bed in order to check its functionality. As expected, the feeling of sinking into a really soft mattress was truly, absolutely the best. After a period of only sleeping in a hard mattress, it felt amazing to be embraced by the one so soft that I legitimately thought I was going to sink into it. That is one of those feelings that you won't realize how much you missed them until you actually get it taken away from you. And of course, sharing that sensation with Roxanne was absolutely the best. I hope that this bed will see lots of action and her sweet moaning voice in the near future.

After we finished checking the beds usability (and we were very thorough in our investigation, you can take my word on that) we went out into the city in order to buy the ingredients for dinner.

"It might be a little late to ask that, but what kind of food are you good at making, Roxanne?"

"I don't want to sound like I am bragging, but I am quite good at making pot-au-feu (*TL Note: Literally "Pot on the Fire" in French, is a French stew of boiled beef and vegetables, widely regarded as the quintessence of French family cuisine*), so if you would be kind enough to trust me on this, I would be more than happy to make it tonight."

Pot-au-feu, huh? I don't know what language is that from, but it sounds like something that will leave you feeling stuffed, and judging by the ingredients we have bought: beef and various vegetables, I am guessing that it will have something to do with combining all of those into a single dish.

"If you are so confident then I will leave it all to you."

"Thank you very much. It would be even better if we had a bouquet garni (*TL Note: "garnished bouquet" in French, a bundle of herbs usually tied together with string and mainly used to prepare soup, stock, casseroles and various stews*) but I guess we can do without it for now."

"Bouquet garni?"

Another term that I am not familiar with, but if she needs it for pot-au-feu, then it probably is something that goes well with it? Maybe she's talking about herbs to spice it up?

"Yes. It is great for spicing up any kind of stew, so when we finally start cultivating our own herbs in the garden, obtaining them will not be a problem anymore!"

Man, she really is fired up about making today's dinner, isn't she?

"So we need to buy meat and vegetables, but is that all we need to make dinner today?"

"Yes, that should be all... but if I may speak honestly, then I have to ask: are you really fine with having meat for dinner, master? Wouldn't something lighter be more to your liking?"

"Yeah. As long as it's something prepared by you, then I am fine with whatever."

"Understood. In that case, since we don't have any herbs that we can use, then I think it would be best if we bought salted or smoked beef rather than simply getting the raw one. That way we could eat it right away after boiling or grilling it."

It's great that there are so many ways to prepare and preserve meat. Back in Japan things like beef or lamb were treated like a delicacy that could not be eaten on a daily basis unless you had a wallet that was literally bulging with money, but in this new world meat is one of the essential ingredients of pretty much every meal, so I couldn't imagine not being able to eat it now that I have gotten so used to it.

With all of that in mind, we bought the necessary ingredients in accordance with Roxanne's advice and then we went back home. And when we were preparing dinner, the what ensued between us was a following conversation:

"You know Roxanne, when I went inside Quratar's Labyrinth I noticed that there were many more people there than in Veil's Labyrinth, but I could not figure out why would that be at the time. Do you have any idea about that? What are they all searching for?"

Roxanne stopped cutting the vegetables for a moment to think before she answered me.

"Well, Quratar's Labyrinth is more crowded than the others because it is a pretty popular place, and obtaining the map that will show you how to move around every floor is relatively easy, since anyone can buy themselves a copy al long as they have enough money, the same way as you did with that booklet you brought back, master. Since there are so many people as a result, the risk of happening upon a Trap Room where you can be ambushed by monsters is significantly smaller. Now, if there are many people wandering the halls of the Labyrinth on a daily basis, the natural consequence of that would be that the monsters are defeated at an accelerated rate, and the more of them are defeated, the more Magic Crystals and Skill Crystals will drop from them. Treasure chests also seem to be popping up there more often than not, so even though you normally have to pay each time you want to go there, then with just a bit of luck the potential benefits of a single expedition far outweigh the demerits, making it a worthy investment."

I understand that Magic Crystals are crystals made from the crystalized magical energy that makes up the bodies of monsters, so when many people defeat many monsters, it would stand to reason that there would be many Magic Crystals just lying around, but what about those Skill Crystals? That is a completely new term for me, so I wonder if the same logic that's behind /Magic Crystals and their origin can be applied to Skill Crystals as well?

Also, that does not explain why there would be more treasure chests in Quratar's Labyrinth than they are in Veil's Labyrinth. Actually, I have yet to see any treasure chest spawn there, even though we have spent so much time hunting monsters in there.

"Okay, now I get why there would be so many Crystals in Labyrinths, but what about treasure chests? Why do they pop up so often?"

"Because it is said that the contents of the treasure chests are actually the equipment and weapons worn by the Adventurers who were unfortunate enough to be defeated by the monsters roaming the Labyrinths."

Ugh, why did she had to be so blunt about this matter in particular?

Anyway, that sound all kinds of terrible in my opinion, but it also makes a lot of sense. After all, I never saw any actual corpse while going through the first three floors of the Veil's Labyrinth. Now I know that it was because the Labyrinths themselves are taking care of the bodies that litter them by turning them into treasure chests because even though they are said to be living organisms, they apparently cannot digest human bodies in any other way.

That would also explain why there is always something inside of them, and why the contents might differ in both the quantity and the quality of the goods inside of them. But then... in games I never thought about it, because the equipment from the treasure chests is always treated as something brand new that is randomly generated by the game's code, but to think hat the reality is that by claiming the contents of the treasure chests you are actually reusing somebody else's stuff... that's pretty grim in its own right. So the more people enter the Labyrinth, the bigger the chances that a lot of them are going to be defeated by monsters, and when they die, they get processed into a treasure chests so that their weapons and armor could be used by other people, who are drawn to the Labyrinths by the promise of finding valuable loot inside them. Talk about a twisted microcosm of life.

Labyrinths are clever little bastards, aren't they.

"Okay, that takes care of that one matter, but if there will always be so many people there, then how are we supposed to hunt monsters effectively? I only been there once, but from what I saw the number of Adventurers was so high that if I threw a stone in any random direction it would probably end up hitting someone anyway."

"It's true that the Labyrinth of Quratar is a pretty popular place with a lot of traffic, but as we will advance to the higher floors, the number of Adventurers per floor should be gradually decreasing, because the first floors are usually filled with beginners who want get a feel of the Labyrinth and amass experience before they move on to higher floors. Also, the number of people should decrease even more if we decided to go there late at night, because the common sense dictates that Labyrinths should generally be avoided after dark if you value your life."

"I-Is that so? Got it then. Thank you for the information."

"N-Not at all, master! It was my pleasure!"

You only have one life, after all, so it's obvious that people will do anything they can in order to preserve it. But... going to the Labyrinth in the middle of the night, huh? I admit that it is a tempting prospect, but if it really is as dangerous as Roxanne says it is, then maybe it will be better not to push my luck with it? Or maybe... maybe I could try using my Warp to find myself a Labyrinth at ten other side of this world so that I could Warp between them anytime it would be getting dark in order to go back to the Labyrinth where there is still daytime? That would be great if I could pull something absurd like that off, but on the other hand it might be impossible for the current me to do, since I only have so much MP on me, and the further the warping distance, the more MP is consumed to travel. And if Warp would be no good for such an excursion, then I highly doubt that Field Walker, Warp's inferior version, would do any better.

Later Roxanne also told me that the Labyrinth in Quratar is the one that has supposedly existed in this country for the longest time, and that presently it is still unknown exactly how many floors it has because no one was able to reach the top floor and defeat its Floor Boss as of yet. This makes me wonder: how big it is, and how powerful the Floor Boss of the last floor is going to be if the rule is that monsters and Floor Bosses are supposed to be getting progressively stronger with each consecutive floor?

Generally it is said that once a Labyrinth has grown to reach fifty floors, it opens its gates and invites people in to explore it, only to consume those who will die by the monster's hands during the exploration process, making the Labyrinth grow even bigger as it digests them and turns them into treasure chests. According to the official records, the highest floor reached in the Quratar's Labyrinth is the 91st one, and that feat worthy of legend was achieved by none other than the Party of this country's first emperor. However, since no one was able to repeat this achievement in any other Labyrinths, it has been established that a Party can be considered a top-class one if it is able to reach the Labyrinth's 80th floor and come back to tell the tale.

Although there are some rules pertaining to what monsters can appear at which floors, the exact species differ between each Labyrinth. In the case of Quratar's Labyrinth it is as follows: the first floor is occupied by Kobolds, the second floor is the domain of Naïve Olives, and on the third one the Spy Spiders reside. I already know from Veil Labyrinth's third floor that Kobolds are noob-friendly monsters suitable for those who have only just began their adventure with going to the Labyrinths, so the same must be true for those two other species of monsters. Because of how easy it is to access the first few floors without spending hours or even days to prepare for it,

Quratar's Labyrinth has grown to be a popular tour destination for those who want to gain levels relatively easily.

Roxanne has educated me about all those things while we were preparing dinner. It was an awful lot of information, especially for someone like me who does not have the biggest attention span and the capability for learning, but she managed to boil it all down into a digestable form that even I could understand. She would definitely made a good teacher if she ever decided to look for a normal, non-adventuring job.

The end result of our joint cooking effort was pot-au-feu prepared by Roxanne and fried meat fried by yours truly. For the first meal that I prepared (partially) with my own hands in this world, I have to say that the taste... well, it was not mind-blowingly great, but it also wasn't totally inedible either.

"Hmm... perhaps we should have added some spices and seasonings after all?"

"You think so as well?"

Ideally it would be best if we could boil the pot-au-feu some more, but since this world only has fire and it will probably be centuries before the gas and electric stoves will be introduced here, then such thought will have to remain nothing more but distant dreams and pleasant memories of how convenient my previous life was in certain aspects. Unfortunately, with the level of technology where it is necessary to stand next to the cooked dish for the entire process in order not to burn it we pretty much have to stay in home and cannot do any other things, like go shopping or to the Labyrinth for a quick monster hunting session. Damn, at times like these I realize how good it would be to also have a microwave in here.

Perhaps in this world eating delicious food is a privilege reserved only for the wealthiest of nobles who can afford to have an army of dedicated cooks and chefs at their every beck and call? And I am sure that this world does not have anything like a solid dashi stock or powdered miso soup, so cooking a strictly Japanese meal is also probably out of the question.

Sigh It cannot be helped since it was my first attempt at cooking something for myself in a new world, but now I know that I have to work on my ability to prepare not only fried meat, but also all kinds of different foods as well without using modern methods. Next time we will be out to do some shopping we also definitely have to make it a priority to look for some legitimate spices and seasonings, because if I had

to choose between eating food that was not season at all and the one that is seasoned, then of course I will choose the seasoned one.

After we ate dinner, we had to wait until it was sunset before the water that we were going to use to wash ourselves was boiled properly. In the dim light where it was hard to see anything farther than my outstretched hand's reach, I offered to wipe Roxanne's body for her, and as usual, she accepted my proposal without any resistance.

"Don't we have any candles in here somewhere? They sure would be handy right about now, it's so dark that I can barely see anything."

"We don't have any candles, and even if we did, we don't have a candlestick where we could put them."

Note to self: for situations such as these, candles, candlesticks and candle holders are an absolute necessity. Right now, when Roxanne's naked body is in front of me I would like nothing more than to feast my eyes on it, but without a proper source of light I can't see her beautiful skin and seductive curves all that well

"Damn, we really should have bought that candle stick today when we had the chance."

"Y-Yes, Master, I... I agree. I'm sorry. Candles... haaah... candles aren't cheap, so I thought... huaahhh... that there was no need to buy them just yet because... because we might not need the just yet... kyaah..."

Well, at the very least I can enjoy the sweet elasticity of Roxanne's chest without relying on my vision all that much. Ahh, that wonderful feeling of solid weight in the palms of my hands is really out of this world. It's like her breasts are literally spilling out from between my fingers because they are unable to fully contain them. Whenever I try to wipe them with the wet towel, their softness and smoothness pushed back against the fabric, as if it was telling not to use anything other than my bare hands in order to take care of them. You know what, I take back what I said. Maybe this darkness that surrounds us now is not a curse, but actually a blessing in disguise.

With my vision pretty much blocked, the sensations registered by my other senses, including the sense of touch, were greatly amplified. And because there is no light and we cannot see what we are doing, there is no need for me to get embarrassed and I can devote myself fully to wiping every last part of her breasts before I will proceed to

doing the same to her entire body. And who knows, maybe it will just so happen that my hand will slip in this darkness, leading me to something far better than simply wiping each other?

“Hyaah! M-Mas... ter...”

“Yes, Roxanne?”

I know exactly what I did, but I have chosen to play dumb.

“That... that place you’re touching now... tha, that’s... that’s the wrong... h-hole...”

“.....”

I know that we have already had our fair share of fun earlier when we were “testing the bed’s functionality”, but that does not matter to me. When it comes to pleasure, it is just like with eating sweets right after dinner: it can always be done, because there is a separate stomach for it. I hunger for Roxanne’s body right here, right now during the night, so no one can hold it against me for trying to quench my thirst.

* * *

When I woke up, it was probably already morning. As usual, Roxanne was still asleep right next to me. Waking up next to her hugging into me day after day after a night of fun was the best possible way to start the day I could ever imagine. And not only can I sleep with her in the same bed, but she also wakes me up with a kiss every single day, just like she was doing in this very moment.

“Mmm.....”

I just stayed still, allowing her soft and sweet kiss’s taste and gentle sensation slowly spread all over my body. Then she gradually started getting more intense, moving her head around to adjust herself to my position and putting her warm, slimy tongue to good use. From now on, the two of us are truly going to be living alone under one roof, meaning that we can take as much time as we want for our little “good morning greeting”. After allowing her to do whatever she wanted for a time, I finally decided to greet her tongue with my own. We massaged our tongues and sucked on each other’s lips until we were both almost out of breath, only then separating ourselves from one another.

“Good morning, master.”

“Good morning, Roxanne.”

Even though my eyes were opened now, they still could see little more but pitch-black darkness. Thankfully, having learned our lesson from back when we were still living in Veil Pavilion, we placed all of our clothes, including equipment on the mats next to the bed so that we could access them easily in the morning without having to trip over our own legs while we looked for them. In the darkness, with the windows only slightly opened we got ourselves dressed by relying on our other senses to guide us. Staying at home and just lazing about seemed like an enticing prospect, but we cannot neglect going into the Labyrinth. We have nothing else to do anyway. No, such a mindset might prove to be pretty dangerous, so I have to correct it in my mind right this instant. If I start treating it like a chore, then it will be a straight way into looking for excuses not to go there. I know that if I wanted, I could spend my every day, from morning till nightfall, here in this very bed with Roxanne. Knowing her, she probably would not refuse such a suggestion. Living such a degenerate life filled with nothing but self-indulgence sounds like a dream come true, but I have to pull my inner brakes here. In order to preserve this new, hedonist lifestyle of mine, it is necessary for me to continue working and putting a conscious, honest effort into the process of making money.

It's just that a part of me wanted to keep kissing her without caring for anything else in the world. I hugged her once more, and tangled our tongues again as we exchanged frantic breaths.

“Hnnn...”

“Haa... aaaah...”

Roxanne moaned lightly, but nothing indicated that she was going to refuse my affections. She simply continued to move her sweet tongue to match the movements of our own in order to ensure that both of us will feel equally good with our mouths. It feels so good that I just want to push her down where she is, but...

“I really want to stay here and continue like this forever, but unfortunately we cannot do that. As much as I don't want to, we should head to the Quratar's Labyrinth today.”

“Y-Yes, of course.”

And just like that, we Warped from our house straight to the small room some distance away from the proper entrance room at the beginning on the first floor of Quratar's Labyrinth. It was my second time visiting this place after a brief excursion that I made yesterday. Hopefully today's forage into its halls is going to be longer and more fruitful one. Since it was so early in the morning I was expecting the place to be completely vacant, but much to my surprise a lot of people were already there, roaming the halls. Did more people had the same idea that I did: to go to the Labyrinth as early as possible in order to avoid running into too much traffic?

"I wonder if we are going to be okay with so many people around?"

"I am sure we will, master. Besides, since this is the first floor, it isn't so bad, even though it is true that some of the people who come here tend to stay for absurdly long hours because they want to maximize their gains and get as much treasure for the entrance fee they have to pay every time they want to visit the Labyrinth."

I wish I could share Roxanne's positive outlook on that matter, but unfortunately my inner sceptic prevented me from doing so. Well, I guess we just have to wait and see how things are going to turn out in the end.

"Look master, it looks like the Boss Chamber is straight ahead."

Huh? Say what now?

I couldn't believe what Roxanne was saying at first so I checked it with the map of the first floor just so that I could be doubly sure... and sure enough, according to it we were almost at the Floor Boss's Chamber for the first floor, which was further confirmed by the Party that was a bit ahead of us and their chatter about the strategy they were going to use to beat the boss. As a side note: the booklet that I bought yesterday, the one that was supposed to be showing the map of every floor, is not showing it. It literally shows only the easiest, most straightforward way how to reach the Boss Chamber, and my dumbass has only realized it just now. It contained no other information whatsoever. To be frank with you, I... I feel scammed, actually. Not only about the fact that I paid more money for this booklet than it was actually worth it, but the feeling of being a little baby duckling following its mother duck while having my hand held the entire time left a somewhat bitter taste in my mouth as well.

The "booklet" might even be too big of a word for it, because those are nothing more but 90 pieces of paper tied together with a string, where one piece of paper represented

one floor of the Labyrinth. The map of the 91st one was not included in the set, meaning that this particular floor must have not been captured as of yet. Just to remind you, I bought the booklet version because it was the cheaper alternative to buying the map of each floor individually. The booklet costs 1000 Nars, and the map of a single floor costs 20 Nars, meaning that if I wanted to buy them that way I would have to cough up 1800 Nars, so the booklet version is much better cost-wise. If you can store it properly that is.

The overall quality of the paper that was used to make this booklet is quite poor, perhaps even poorer than the quality of Japan's newspapers and manga magazines, which are known to be even worse quality than toilet paper, so that alone should tell you how shitty it is. If I were to hazard a guess, they I say that this booklet won't last for even half a year.

"I wonder if this paper is going to be okay here in the Labyrinth?"

"It's not paper, but a papyrus, master."

"Papyrus?"

"Yes, a papyrus."

So the thing this booklet is made out of is not ordinary paper, but a papyrus? I think I remember learning about it in one of the history classes in school, back when I used to still attend it. It was a thin, brown stiff paper used in ancient Egypt. No, actually... I think calling it a paper-like material would be much more fitting, because it looks like it could be torn much easier than regular paper. This is my first time seeing it, but now I think I understand why the maps are written only on one side of it. It's because the entire page would probably end up torn to pieces if they tried to write the maps on both sides of it. *Sigh* I knew there would be a catch to producing a 90 pages booklet in mass quantities, but to think that it would actually be something like that...

I looked at the "map" of the first floor. Since it was the very first one in the entire booklet I didn't have to do anything to pull it out of there, because if I had to do it then I'm afraid that it would have ended pretty badly. I briefly looked over it back home, but now I noticed something that I did not see before. In addition to being arranged in order, the papyrus with the map of each floor also had a number written in the corner.

That's probably a countermeasure in case the booklet would fall apart for any reasons. With the map in hand, we went forward towards the path it indicated, all the while being careful not to bump into the other Adventurer's by accident.

"So many people here even though it's so early in the morning... you think the waiting room in front of the Boss Room is going to be just as crowded?"

"Quite possibly, but if we're lucky, then we should not have to wait for a long time before we can have our own turn to try challenging it."

"Oh really?"

"Yes. And while we are on the subject of this place being crowded, it's mostly because many people are forced to stay for a long time because they pay for it."

Even though it is early in the morning, there are quite a lot of people around us, however, just by looking at them, I can clearly tell that the exact number is lesser than the number of people who were here at noon yesterday. It would seem that even those Parties that looked stronger than us and had more people in them were also making use of the maps as they were proceeding forward a few meters in front of us. And when we pushed ahead even further... yeah, sure enough, there were already a few Parties ahead of us, all of them waiting in line in front of the door to the Boss Room. And on top of that, there were also some of them behind us. What is this, a queue for a friggin' tourist attraction?!

This really makes me feel like we didn't need a map at all to get here. All that we needed to do was to follow whatever Party that was in front of us, and eventually they would lead us right to our target's very doorstep.

Realizing that using magic to fight monsters in a Labyrinth as crowded with people as this one, I reset my character and equipped Durandal. I was still worried about other people realizing what kind of weapon it was, but since we are about to enter a battle with the Floor Boss, I cannot allow myself to skip out on my most powerful weapon because of something as trivial as fear. The saving grace here was that we didn't have to fight any monsters on the way to the Floor Boss, most likely because other Parties that went the same way before us already did most of the cleaning. After a few minutes the door to the Boss Chamber opened, and one of the Parties ahead of us went inside. Now we have no choice but to wait until they are finished so we could also have a stab at it.

A short while later, the door to the Boss Room slowly opened. Great, now we can go inside, so we made our way there without any needless dilly-dallying.

"That was rather fast. You think that Party that went before us managed to succeed?"

"I think so. This is the first floor and it has a Kobold for a Floor Boss, so I imagine you would have to put a pretty large effort to die in here."

Roxanne answered my question like that. Putting an effort to actually die, huh? As someone who seriously contemplated ending my own life, that is a phrase that I would rather not hear again. But since I know from experience that Kobolds are actually laughably easy to fight because they are not that strong even though they possess weapons, then I guess it would make sense for other Parties to breeze through them. And if everyone breezes through them, then even if we had to wait in front of the Boss Chamber to have our shot at the Floor Boss, then the actual wait should not be all that long. Or at least I hope so. I would suck some major balls if it turned out that the Kobold Floor Boss is stronger than its cannon fodder counterparts.

Whatever the case may be, we didn't have to wait long to find out about it.

The green smoke gathered in the center of the room, revealing the appearance of the monster that came out of it. It was a small blue monster with sharp fangs and a comically large head. It is the same size as a regular Kobold, but instead of a small knife it is equipped with something that looks like a small machette, and the overall feeling it exudes is that it should be stronger than the regular weak-ass ones. According to my identification, this guy is actually called a Kobold Kampfer. Kampfer? Does that mean warrior or something? Yeah, that probably means it's going to be tougher to beat than the regular Kobolds, with that larger weapon and its more intimidating posture it cannot be any other way than that.

"Master, I'm going in!"

Almost immediately after the Floor Boss materialized, Roxanne rushed towards him with her Scimitar drawn and ready to attack. Noticing her charge, the Kobold Kampfer readied his own weapon and swung it towards her, but she avoided it by bending her body sideways.

I have to admit, even though we have already established that even though Kobold Kampfer is stronger than its normal kin, it should still be weak, it is still scary to go

and face off against an enemy who uses a weapon in the same way that you do, because it implies that it possesses enough intelligence to wield it properly. If I was forced to fight it alone, I would have most likely lost my shit from the fear of what would happen if he ever managed to cut me or sever one of my limbs with that sword of his. But Roxanne... she was evading his attacks like they were nothing. The Kobold Kampfer's attacks were also painfully slow, so I bet that even I could have dodged its attacks like a real pro if I had to fight with it in a one-on-one duel. So this has to be one of those cases where you can defeat even an opponent with the rank of a Boss as long as you keep your distance and continue to study its movements carefully. Also... now that it is completely occupied with Roxanne who's keeping it busy from the front, nothing is stopping me from using that opening to slash it in the back when it is least expecting it! Roxanne exchanged a few attacks with it, and my single strike reduced its HP to zero. Kobold Kampfer collapsed onto the ground and turned into a puff of green smoke. The only thing that was left after it disappeared was a small fang-like object.

“..... Weak.”

Even for a Floor Boss, it was still so weak that I almost feel bad for killing it.

“Well, it is still a Kobold after all.”

Now that the Kobold Kampfer was gone, the only thing left to do was to collect the object that it dropped. Upon closer inspection, it was something that was called Kobold Flour.

“Kobold... Flour? What is that? It has a shape of a Salt Stone, but the name is obviously different.”

“It is a type of wheat flour produced exclusively by Kobolds. If rumors are to be believed, it is supposed to be more tasty than the regular wheat flour.”

“Really? Well in that case, we should definitely take it with us and bring it to the kitchen back home. Think you will be able to do something tasty with it, Roxanne?”

“I will most certainly try.”

“Great. And while we are still on somewhat on the subject of Kobolds... It might have been just a slightly stronger version of a normal Kobold, but it doesn't change the fact

that this sword of his could have been pretty dangerous if it ended up hitting you. Knowing that, weren't you afraid of exchanging blows with it?"

"There wasn't anything for me to be afraid of there. He was only using slow, straightforward, telegraphed, easy to predict attacks without attempting to use any tricks or feints. When faced with something like that, you don't have to worry about exchanging blows. I daresay that against Kobolds, anyone could have done it with their eyes closed."

So she says, and if she says that so confidently then it has to be true.

For now, I materialized my Item Box and placed the Kobold Flour inside. After a brief inspection, I think we can safely put some more items in there before we run out of space and be forced to start putting the drop items directly into our backpacks. With everything done here in the Boss Room and the items securely in our possession, it was about time for us to go through the door at the other side of the room and proceed into the second floor of Quratar's Labyrinth.

"*Sniff Sniff* Looks like there are no people here on the second floor, or at least not in our nearest vicinity. If you want, I think it will be safe for you to switch back into using magic to fight, master."

Roxanne informed me after she sniffed around when we emerged at the entrance room on the second floor. Certainly, she was right. As far as I could see, there was nobody else around but us.

"It's nice that there won't be anybody around to interrupt us, but isn't it strange? There were so many people on the first floor, and now there is literally no one here. Why is that?"

"I think it's only natural. Half of the enemies that can be encountered on this floor are Kobolds, after all."

Ahh, I see. Since Kobolds are such pathetic weaklings, no one probably wants to waste any more time on them than it is absolutely necessary, and I cannot say that I do not understand where they are coming from.

"So essentially people gather on the first floor when they are novices who want to fight some easy battles to get used to the Labyrinth and how it operates, but starting from the second floor and upwards, they will essentially avoid the encounters that won't

give them good items or experience in favor of the one on the higher floors that will do just that?"

"That might be oversimplifying things a little, but overall I think its safe to say that its mostly right."

Kobolds are suitable enemies for beginners, so the first floor of the Labyrinth, the one which they are occupying, is popular among them. However, once you gain a few levels, the Kobolds stop being an appealing enemy, because fighting them no longer yields the same great results like those from a few levels ago. As a result, people will want to advance to the higher floors, the ones where there won't be any Kobolds that could hinder the process of their leveling

"I think we should call it a day when it comes to Quratar's Labyrinth for today, don't you think? Conquering it all in one sitting would not be fun at all."

"All right, I understand."

Yeah, now that we reached the second floor, let's just go back to our house for a moment to drop all the things we have in my Item Box so that we won't run into the risk of running out of space when we continue to explore today. I mean, we could go some more without freeing the space in the Item Box, but if we want to go to Veil's Labyrinth (and we do), then it would be best to assume that our haul from there is going to be bigger than the one from Quratar's Labyrinth by the virtue of Veil's Labyrinth being mostly empty most of the time. That's why it will be important to have as much free space both in the Item Box and in our backpacks as possible. So we went back to our Quratar home, dropped the map booklet and Kobold Flour there, after which we proceeded to go to our next destination: Veil Labyrinth's third floor.

"Here we are, the third floor. I wish I could be more excited about returning here, but let's be honest, it only means that we are going to be fighting more Kobolds."

"It would seem so. In that case, should we ask the Explorer at the Labyrinth's entrance to take us to one of the higher floors?"

Now that she mentions it I remember that one Party we saw that decided to go to the fourth floor because they could easily handle the Kobolds of the third floor. Maybe we should do the same and skip the third one entirely?

"No. We should continue to climb one floor at a time the way we were going up until

this point. A slow and steady approach like that is much safer than jumping into the deep water without even preparing for what might be awaiting us there, don't you think?"

Bold behavior goes hand in hand with higher risk, and higher risk means the bigger probability of getting needlessly hurt or even dying, and since I hate the idea of getting hurt or dying equally, I will of course choose the best possible option for us: choosing the safest approach with the least amount of danger involved. If proceeding carefully throughout each and every level of this Labyrinth means that it will take us longer to conquer it, but neither of us is going to get hurt because of that, then I will always choose that approach over charging ahead blindly thinking that things will somehow work themselves out as long as we continue running ahead. That is why I suggested finishing this floor and going to the fourth one normally, but it is not the only reason. The other one, but just as important as the first is the total capacity of my Item box.

When we go to the Labyrinth's fourth floor, we will be bound to run into battles with numerous monsters, and since part of the enemies will once again be Kobolds, the weaklings who always drop items behind them when they die, then my Item Box and our backpacks will run out of their carrying capacity before we realize it. That is why it is imperative for me to raise my levels as much as I can while we are still here on the third floor so that it won't grow up into a huge problem once we move on to the higher floors. If I remember correctly from what I eavesdropped from the conversation of that one Party, the main enemies on the fourth floor are Minotaurs, and there will probably also be Kobolds from the third floor. I don't know about Green Caterpillars from the second floor and Needlewoods from the first floor, but if we assume that they won't appear anymore or appear in very limited amounts, then Kobolds, who should give more EXP here since they are native to the first floor instead of the third should give me enough EXP points to level my explorer Job, the one responsible for the capacity of the Item Box, enough to have ample space in it once we hit the fourth floor. In the meantime, it would be great if we could sell all of the drop items that can be sold and use the money from them to buy all of the things we want, but if we start leaving the Labyrinth in order to do it frequently its going to hinder the speed of our progress, so more space in the Item Box is absolutely crucial in if we want to achieve the perfect balance.

For the next few hours we went around the third floor, exploring it until it was time to also call it quits and return home. I approached the Labyrinth's wall and created a Warp portal, connecting it to the wall of the Quratar's Adventurer's Guild. Even though the main door was open and the lights were on, there was no one inside, even behind

the counters. Maybe the guild building was opened twenty four hours a day because of the people who were going to the Labyrinth in the middle of the night?

Unfortunately for us, since there was no one behind the counter, it meant that we cannot sell our items even if we wanted to at the moment.

"Think the shops are going to be open already or do we have to wait a few hours before we could do some shopping?"

"I think we won't have any problems with that. The shops in Quratar are opened for business from early hours in order to accommodate for the needs of the Adventurers who tend to go to the Labyrinth during the night or early in the morning, after all."

We left Quratar's Adventurers Guild and made our way towards the shops located on the street that our landlady, Honesta pointed us towards when we first came into her shop. Most of them were indeed open for business already, but not all of them. Even though it was still relatively early in the morning, there were a lot of people going back and forth between them looking for various tools and ingredients. Looks like Roxanne was telling the truth indeed. This particular part of the city was really well accommodated towards the Adventurer's and Explorer's needs.

Unfortunately, Honesta's hardware shop was among the ones that were still closed at this hour, so we had to go to visit the other ones in order to buy all the ingredients we needed in order to make breakfast for ourselves. Not that much of a detour to be called inconvenient, but if we could buy all of the things we needed in one place instead of going from one shop to another, that will always be a preferable option for me. Well, it's not like we are strapped for time or have anything planned for the day, so we might as well have ourselves a little walk. After all, there is a saying that goes something along the lines of "exercising makes the meal that much more pleasurable", right?

It is a shame that this world is not technologically advanced enough to have fridges and refrigerators in it. That way we could buy a bunch of things in bulk and not worry about keeping them in the house for longer periods of time, because with how things are now, we have no choice but to always buy things like eggs or milk fresh and eat them right away while they are still non-spoilt. I wonder how the shopkeepers handle things like that in here? At the very least I do not think that they bring them to their stores straight from the farms early in the mornings, so the more likely option seems

to be procuring them in the evening and probably store them in the cool storage room so that they wouldn't go bad until the morning on particularly hot days. That way they would always have fresh produce for sale while switching it with the one from the day before that might be going bad, moldy, or stale. Nowadays we do not think about it all that much, but without the method to properly preserve food, it wouldn't be strange for it to start going bad across the span of a single day, especially in the summer where the temperatures tend to be especially high (judging by the Tokyo standard).

From what I have seen so far, Quratar is located in a rather peaceful countryside, with the farms and the fields located not that far away from the city's center. Back in Vale, there were also fields right outside of the city, but there the distinction was much more clear-cut than in Quratar, because Veil had an actual wall separating the inside of the city from the outside, whereas here there is no wall and the cityscape gradually transitions to that of a countryside, making the boundary between the residential and agricultural areas somewhat ambiguous and unclear. Hell, there is a large field that someone was tending to just beyond the house we have rented, so if I were to look carefully, I would probably see cows and chickens running wild somewhere in the distance. Mind you, while I was still living in Japan I have never saw any kind of livestock in the flesh, so maybe I will have the opportunity for that to change sometime soon here?

We bought the things necessary for breakfast and were on our way back to the Adventurers Guild when we passed by the bakery, where the lady who looked like the bakery's owner called out to us.

"My my, good day to the lovely young couple. Why don't you take a look at the bread I've made? Fresh batch made just this morning shortly after sunrise."

"So bread is being sold from the early morning, huh?"

"Of course it is, young man. Buying it for breakfast is one of the more popular traditions of this city, and the fresher it is, the better! It gets harder the more time passes since it came out of the oven, so if you want it at its absolute softest, there's no time like the present!"

"Ah, yes, that's true. Fresh bread is infinitely tastier than the hardened one. Can't argue with that."

Roxanne agreed with what the baker lady was saying. Seems like she has a good

amount of experience with bread and its hardening. In modern day Japan there were a lot of ways to make not only bread, but also all kinds of confections and baked goods last for a fairly long time, but since there is no modern technology in this world, I am afraid that a loaf of bread might not last even a few hours without going stale.

“So, what’s it going to be? Will you two lovebirds buy yourselves a nice, fresh, hot loaf of bread freshly out of the baking furnace?”

I could have sworn that not a minute ago she was saying that she was baking those since sunrise, and I am pretty sure that some time has already passed since then so there’s no way that they are “freshly” out of the oven but ah well, no use arguing about the semantics I guess.

“In that case, can I ask for that one loaf from the back? The one over there?”

I said while pointing my finger at what looked like a medium-sized loaf of French bread.

“Ohh, you have a really discerning eye, young man! The ones in the back are some of my most high quality breads, all for the lowly price of 8 Nars per loaf!”

So it seems like the loaves from the back rows are actually considered to be some kind of luxury items. I wonder if it will be any different from what we had bought for dinner yesterday, because that bread was not particularly tasty if I were to completely honest with you. I know that I am probably biased as hell when it comes to the culinary matters of this world because my tongue is still used to the superb quality of food from Japan, but if I want to get truly used to living here, I cannot allow myself to be picky about the quality of the food I am going to eat all the time. Normally I would say that this is something that simply cannot be helped, but if I work on tempering my expectations, then I am sure my taste buds will slowly accommodate. That, or we simply have to procure more spices and seasonings for ourselves to make the food less bland.

My 30% discount did not work this time, but it was understandable since I only bought one item. Besides, last night when I bought two breads of almost the same size as the one I bought today, but taken from one of the front rows, the difference in the price was pretty minuscule, so I don’t think using the discount matters all that much when you buy the things that cost less than 10 Nars. Also, maybe it is because the baker lady looks like she’s quite a gluttonous eater, but the size of this thing is definitely more on

a larger side than anything else. Is this considered normal here? Because I think that if we go about it reasonably, this one loaf of bread could be enough for the two of us for two, maybe three days at best. Hmm, could it be that this is the bread that is made with the Kobold Flour as an ingredient? Because if so, then damn, maybe I should have bought another one with the discount after all? But then again, if I ended up buying more than we could eat, then some of it would undeniably go to waste and we would have to throw it out, and that won't do!

One of the most basic rules of financial stability is to ensure that you will only buy as much food as you will need, no more, no less, and that is the rule that I want to stick to no matter what!

After we finished buying the high-quality bread from the baking lady, we went back home through the portal in the Adventurers Guild.

“Since this bread is so large, let’s split it between the two of us.”

“Are you sure that’s all right, master? You won’t be hungry with just half of it?”

Oh? There it is. The issue of the size of the bread I brought up just now.

“Why would I be? This much bread is way too much for one person to handle by themselves.”

“Really? Because I was always under the impression that the bread should always be baked to such a size that will ensure that one loaf is going to be enough to feed exactly one person.”

“One loaf of such size is meant for just one person? Are people really such a heavy eaters around these parts?”

“I don’t know about the people being heavy eaters, but Quratar’s bread is one of the best in the empire, to the point where it became Quratar’s staple food. Also it is rare to have meals with so much meat and vegetables like we had yesterday, so bread naturally became of such a considerable size in order to cover the lack of other ingredients while still ensuring that the meals people eat will leave them filled up and not hungry from morning to the evening.”

Oh yeah, that's right. I totally forgot that the standard of this world is not three meals a day but just two: breakfast in the morning and dinner late in the evening. I am used to having three meals a day and so I usually ate each of them in a lighter version in order not to overstuff myself, but it looks like I will have to switch my line of thinking in that regard to fit in with the rest of the people living in this world as well.

"Now that I think about it, we did eat quite a lot for that dinner yesterday, huh?"

"Umu. Normally a big loaf of bread would be enough for dinner, and as much meat and vegetable-based side dishes as we had yesterday would only be reserved for feasts made on special occasions."

Bigger bread as a substitute for normal side dishes in a meal? That is actually a huge difference in comparison to the modern-day Japan.

"Is that so? Well, that is one of the things that we approached differently back where I come from, but I will try to remember that things are different here and take those differences into account as much as I can."

"Yes, thank you and sorry for troubling you with such an insignificant matter, master."

"Since you brought it up, then it means it was not insignificant."

That being said, yesterday's dinner was pretty great (putting the somewhat bland taste of the food without the spices and seasonings aside) while remaining relatively simple in my opinion. Not to mention that it was my first time helping to prepare the meal since I came here. Now that we are not living in an inn anymore, we have to cook every meal ourselves. Leaving their preparations entirely to Roxanne is always a possibility, but if I decide to take that option, there will be no guarantee that every meal she will be preparing for me will be at least on the level of that pot-au-feu or even better (which would be preferable, if I am to be honest), so in order to be absolutely sure about the taste of the dishes we are going to prepare, I will have to participate in the process of making them every single time, because that dinner yesterday made me realize something: even though she said that she is quite good at making pot-a-feu, her actual cooking skills are probably not all that different from my own, and that boils down to simply boiling and baking stuff until its edible.

Well, if I will make some of the dishes myself then it should not be too much of a problem. Ever since my mom died when I was a young kid I had to learn cooking from

the very basics in order to get by all by myself, so while I cannot say that my skills are enough to make something that could be described as genuinely tasty, I can at least vouch for my dishes not turning into culinary crimes as soon as I touch the kitchen utensils. Another problem that I will have to tackle will be the difficulty to replicate the taste of the recipes I know without access to modern-day Japan ingredients, spices and seasonings, but once I get used to cooking without them, I am sure I will be able to whip up something that will be able to get a passing grade when it comes to the taste.

Today, in order to test the waters with my culinary abilities I decided to prepare something relatively simple: ham and eggs. It is the pinnacle of the easy-to-prepare meals that only requires you to fry the ham and then slap some sunny side up eggs on top of it, but in this world it should pass for a true delicacy.

“.....”

Hmm... overall, I have to say that this turned out pretty well. I wonder what is Roxanne's opinion about it?

“Well, what do you think, Roxanne? Are ham and eggs to your liking?”

“Of course, master. Even if the dish you prepared looks simple, it is actually tastier than I anticipated.”

“Thank you. The one you prepared is also pretty delicious.”

The side dish that Roxanne prepared to go with my ham and eggs was ohitashi (*TL Note: Japanese blanched greens with savory broth; a side dish of blanched greens in a soy-based marinade*) made from leafy vegetables that were boiled in the broth with the addition of the Rock Salt we obtained from our earlier bout in the Veil Labyrinth. Combined with the ham and eggs, they made a surprisingly harmonious combination. Having the bread to go along with them was also a good choice on my part. It is nowhere near the level of fanciness you would get at a restaurant or a diner, but what's the most important is that the taste turned out alright, because let's face it: with this world's lack of technology, even the simple task like baking ham and eggs could have gone south really quickly if even the smallest mistake was made, leaving us with either burned scraps or something that tasted like shit. Roxanne also deserves the words of praise. As far as I know, stewing the bouillon was not an easy task even in the modern-day culinary world, but she managed to get it just right.

"It's been some time since I last had the chance to prepare ham and eggs, so I'm glad that I didn't lose my culinary touch."

"Ham and eggs, is it? It's my first time eating such a wonderful dish! What a great treat!"

"That bread is a nice addition as well. I am honestly surprised how good it tastes."

Today's bread is unspeakably soft and delicious. So that is the difference between a common item and a luxury item? Because if so, then spending a little bit more money would be a small price to pay if it would mean that we could eat meals as good as this one every day. I know that I said that we have to be careful with our spending, but eating is this one area of life where being stingy on purpose will actually do you more harm than good.

"Oh, but, uhm... I know it might be a little late to bring it up, but is it really all right for me to be eatin the same thing that you do, master? I also didn't help all that much with the preparation of today's meal, so I feel like I only troubled you today."

"Do not worry yourself with things like that. When we delve into the Labyrinths, our bodies are our most important assets, so it is absolutely crucial for us to keep them well maintained and in optimal condition, so you can simply think about it like that."

"Thank you. I will definitely do my best not to disappoint you, master."

The entire loaf of that high-quality bread cost me 8 Nars, and we ate it all during this one meal after splitting it with Roxanne so that each of us would get half of it, which would mean that each of us paid 4 Nars for his half.

Now let's add the vegetables needed to make both today's ohitashi and yesterday's vegetable stew that each of us had to pay 6 Nars (12 Nars for both of us), eggs which were 10 Nars (5 Nars for a single person serving) and the ham cut from a 100 Nars worth piece of smoked meat worth 30 Nars (15 Nars per person), the total cost of our two meals, today's and the one from yesterday caps at about 30 Nars per person. If I had to guess, then I would say that it is not that big of a price for a meal that most would probably consider to be a very high-class one. I mean, just the ham itself was already super-duper tasty when it was only cut and fried a little along with eggs, so just imagine how mouth-watering it would be if we added some salt and spices to it

as well. Not to mention that the actual amount of the food that's on the plate is much bigger than what I am normally used to eating.

Even though it seemed strange to me at first, I think that will not have any major problems with getting used to this life where two meals a day are a norm instead of three. It is only a matter of switching your mentality to the following: eat breakfast after the sun rises and then eat dinner just before the sun sets. As long as you will have work to do in between those two mealtimes, then you should not feel hungry even if you won't eat anything in between them.

"Ahh, thank you for the food, it was pretty great. I don't think our breakfast could have turned any better even if we tried to make it so."

"Once again, I am sorry that you had to bother yourself with making most of the food for us today, master. I should have been the one who should have prepared the entire meal while you should have been focused on resting."

"And I am once again telling you not to worry about small stuff like that."

I remember hearing that during the Edo period the average height of Japanese people was around 1 meter and 50 centimeters, which is much shorter than the average height of the Japanese people of modern day, but they were not as fat as the members of today's society tend to be. Back then I sometimes wondered what might have caused such a difference, but now I realized that it was probably mostly the matter of nutrition, and the same rule probably applies to the inhabitants of this world as well. They eat two meals per day and do not have much in the way of sweets, so if we factor those things together with the existence of the Labyrinths that require those who explore them to fight monsters and constantly be on the move if they want to keep themselves alive, then it should not be surprising that the percentage of those suffering from being either overweight or obese would be pretty marginal.

Putting all of those thoughts aside, having someone to share such a delicious meal with is truly a blessing. That is a new sensation for me, since up until now I didn't have that many chances to have a proper "family meal" in my shitty life.

The next day, we went to the second floor of Quratar's Labyrinth in order to see how big of a challenge it would present to us. We hoped that there won't be that many people around so that I could use my magic to freely fight the monsters, but unfortunately today the second floor was a little crowded, so the circumstances forced to forgo my

idea of fighting with magic, forcing me to use Durandal instead. *Sigh* so much for our great strategy to go to the Labyrinth as early as possible to avoid bumping into anyone who might find my ability to use magic suspicious if only they caught a glimpse of it. To the rest of the world, I am nothing more but another Explorer, because that is the first Job listed on my Intelligence Card. If any one witnessed my spells there would be no end to the barrage of questions and interrogations for me, since only a handful of people with very specific noble backgrounds are able to become Mages and Wizards, and no matter how you look at me, there is nothing about me that would help me deceive others that I am related to nobility. If anything, I am a picture-perfect example of the word “mediocre”.

Not being able to use magic will suck, but at the very least that is not my fault, but something that the circumstances imposed on me. Using Durandal also comes with the risk of someone recognizing that the weapon I am using is too OP for some novice-looking Explorer on the second floor, but with it I will be able to kill any enemy that will appear before us with a single blow, meaning that we will be able to advance quickly, avoiding any encounters with other Parties. I could always switch Durandal out for an ordinary Copper Sword, but that weapon is so weak and useless that I don't even want to imagine how much time it would take to kill even a single monster with it, so we just have to proceed carefully while staying ever vigilant and we should pull through just fine.

“Roxanne, a route to the nearest monster, please.”

“Understood!”

I followed Roxanne while consulting the map of the second floor to ensure that we will be staying on the path leading to the second floor's Boss Room, and soon after we happened upon our very first enemy here.

“Identify!”

Identification revealed that it was a Naïve Olive Lv.2. It looked kinda like a Needlewood from Veil Labyrinth's first floor, except its main body was not as thick and somewhat smaller, than the Needlewood, but it exchange it had more foliage on its head and arms. It stood with its back turned back to us so it did not see us approaching, and it was a golden opportunity that I simply could not miss. Going as quiet as I could, I sneaked up behind it and then delivered a blow across its entire back. It fell to the ground and disappeared in a cloud of green smoke. Well, I guess you can say that it

was a pretty... naïve enemy, huh? When the smoke from its death cleared, we saw that what it left behind was an oval ball that looked like it was form from some kind of liquid that was a little sticky to the touch. When I Identified it, it turned out to be Olive Oil.

“Oh, It’s an Olive Oil.”

Roxanne commented when she picked up the item and handed it over to me. Yes, Identication showed that this thing was indeed Olive Oil. Contrary to my initial impression of it, it was actuall smooth and kinda rubbery to the touch, making it similar to a rubber ball.

“Olive Oil, huh? The same kind that can be used for cooking and the conservation of our equipment?”

“Yes. When cooking, it can be used for frying the ingredients. Just be careful when you apply it to the pan, because the thin rubber membrane that holds it in its oval shape breaks rather easily when exposed to high temperatures.”

“A membrane? Ohh, I see, so that’s how it retains its shape even though it’s a liquid! That’s actually pretty clever!”

Now that Roxanne told me what it was, I examined the Olive Oil once more. When I pressed down on the membrane with my fingers, it bended its shape slightly and then retuned to its original one, but I can see it popping easily while placed on the hot frying pan. For now though, it should be kay for me to put it in the Item Box as long as I will remain careful about it.

“Master, I don’t smell any people on the path ahead, so I think that you should be able to use magic now if you so desire.”

“That’s great to hear, but I was actually thinking about calling it quits here for today.”

I never told Roxanne about this and it would be a hassle to mention it now, so I have to keep her in the dark about Durandal, my earned EXP increasing Skills and that it is more than a little troublesome to continue switching them on and off every time I am doing a Character Reset before we are going into Boss Room to challenge the Floor Boss or when I am using magic but there are people around so I have to switch with melee Skills in a hurry.

Since I want to keep as much information about me a secret from the inhabitants of this world in order to avoid being targeted by them I have to keep the highest level of caution and secrecy at all times, even if it means switching weapons and Skills on the fly. So for the time being, I proceeded while still wielding Durandal.

Thankfully there really were fewer people here on the second floor in comparison to the first, so we had more occasions to fight against the monsters here with Durandal without anyone bothering us. After a while of exploration we have reached the Boss Room and defeated the Floor Boss of the second floor, who was just a bigger version of the regular Naïve Olive by utilizing the same strategy we used to bring down the Kobold Kampfer: Roxanne kept the boss busy from the front, while I delivered a smackdown to its back, finishing the encounter before it had the chance to truly begin. As long as I have Durandal with me, every battle is like a walk in the park with its OP stats and effects.

When we went back home, it was already the time for breakfast, so we decided to put all of the Olive Oil we found today to good use and made stir-fry vegetables. I felt like something was still missing from it when we ate it, but for now there is little we can do about it, so there is no use complaining about it. The most important thing is that now that we can cook stuff like that pretty effortlessly, it feels like all of our basic necessities and the foundations of a satisfying day-to-day life have been covered up.

“You know, sooner or later I would like to do something about this room. Right now it feels too empty to my tastes.”

While we were eating breakfast I started a conversation with Roxanne.

“Do something about the room?”

“Yeah. You have to admit that aside from the furniture we have already bought the rest of the room looks pretty darn barren in comparison.”

I said while looking around. Aside from the things we have bought, the walls and the floor didn't have any kind of decorations on them, making the entire room look gloomy. I know that it hasn't been all that long since we moved in here, but that does not change the fact that the entire place lacks individuality, to the point where I can say that just staring at them makes me uncomfortable instead of invoking the feelings

of relaxation.

"In that case, why don't we decorate it with something? How about a carpet, for example?"

"A carpet, huh?"

"Yes, a carpet."

If we were to lay a carpet on the floor, then our feet would not get cold while walking around without any shoes or socks.

"I see. A carpet sounds like a good idea, but this room is fairly large, so wouldn't it be hard for us to find a one that would fit the floor here?"

And while we are at it, will we even be able to find a carpet that's both relatively cheap and nice-looking at the same time? Even back at the Slave Merchant's shop, the only place with a carpet was the room where Alan-san was meeting his clients, so isn't that a testament to how much of a luxury product carpets are?

"Uhm... Rather than putting it on the floor, I was thinking we could hang it on the wall as decoration."

"Decorate?"

"That's right."

"So we wouldn't be... putting it on the floor like you're supposed to do?"

"We could, but then we would probably have to buy more than one, and finding matching ones might prove to be potentially difficult."

Roxanne nodded. I had no idea that carpets could also be used as a wall decoration as well. I thought that we would have to get some wallpapers for the walls if we wanted them not to be so rough and empty, but now I think that carpets could make quite a nice alternative for it. Heh, who would have thought that carpets could be so useful?

"Is that so? Well colored me surprised."

"I have heard that rich people sometimes place carpets on the floors in their homes,

but if they are not rich enough they can only do so in a few rooms.”

“Uhhh... Y-yeah, I guess that would look pretty bad, wouldn’t it?”

I can see we are totally not on the same page here. What I had in mind were the kind of carpets that are being sold in pieces or by the meter, but the kind that Roxanne is talking about are definitely the hand-crafted ones that are bound to cost a small fortune for a single one. But now I see. That must be why Alan-san only had one carpet in his establishment. Even though he runs a slave-selling business and he supposedly has a lot of clients, the profits from selling slaves must not be as high as I originally thought them to be. In times like these, I really wish there were tatami mats in here. Maybe they were not as soft and comfy as regular carpets, but in every other aspect they are just as reliable as them.

“Of course. In worst case scenario, such a blunder might even cause a noble to lose their social standing and position.”

“I-I see. W-Well, since we are at this subject already, what kind of store do you think sells carpets and other things like that?”

“Because it is a luxury item, normal stores found here in Quratar might not be selling them, but we might be able to find one if we go to the Imperial City.”

“Imperial City? Should we go there today and get this carpet matter done?”

The Imperial Capital was the stop I made on the way to Quratar, but now that I can use Warp here in the house, nothing should be standing in our way of getting there literally whenever we would feel like it. Now that our new life in Quratar has settled down a little, spending a day sightseeing in the Imperial City might be a good change of pace, especially since I have only been to the Imperial City once, and I didn’t even leave the Adventurers Guild there.

“Yes, I think today would be a good day for you to go there, master. While you will be there, I will collect the seeds we might need for the garden.”

“Seeds?”

“The ones that the landlady promised to give is since we decided to take care of the garden despite the state it is in.”

"Ahh, those herb seeds! Now that you mention it there really was something like that, huh?"

Mrs. Honesta did tell us that we could drop by her hardware store to get some new herb seeds to plant them in the garden, and since she already agreed to do it for us, there is no reason for us to decline her offer. When we get our hands on them, then we can have a swing on some serious gardening, since it would be an extreme waste not to make use of our own gardening space and just leave it all there to ruin.

"I'm really looking forward to what kind of seeds I will get from her."

Hmm...

"In that case let me go with you, and once we grab them we can do some work around the garden itself in the afternoon since it should be warmer then, right?"

"Thank you for your consideration, master. Is that really okay with you?"

"Yes, it's fine. It's not like we have to go to the Imperial City today. We can go therew whenever we will feel like it."

It's decided then. We will spend today gardening.

After breakfast, we entered the Labyrinth and returned back to the Quratar's Adventurer's Guild in the afternoon. We sold the Drop Items at the counter and went outsideand had a short walk from the guild building to the hardware store.

"Welcome. Oh, it's you two! Come on in, I've been expecting you."

When we entered the hardware store, the owner lady welcomed us. She told us to wait for a moment so she could go and fetch the seeds she prepared for us before she disappeared into the back of the store.

While we were waiting, we looked at the tools she had on display. A hoe caught my attention. I have never used such a tool, but I know how it should be used.

It is used to cultivate the soil by swinging it down from above your head and then pulling towards yourself, so technically even a gardening noob such as myself should

be able to use it without any major difficulties. Also, even though it was a simple tool, a part of me was able to appreciate its functional, simplistic beauty. When I held it in my hand to try how it would feel, I could sense a strange sense of familiarity emanating from it. Could it be that the sensation of holding a hoe in my hands has awakened the memories from one of my past lives? I am sure that I have never used such a tool or anything similar to it before, so it has to be that. Maybe I was actually a farmer who spent his entire life working the fields from sunrise to sunset while shedding blood, sweat and tears and enjoying the fruits of his labor while maintaining a harmonious relationship with Mother Earth? Yeah, right.

“If we’re going to be tending to the garden, is one hoe going to be enough?”

“Yes, it should be. I know it sounds like a lot of hard work, but once you get to it you’ll realize that gardening is actually rather simple.”

Rather simple, eh? Was I overthinking things again?

“Oh really?”

“Usually, it is enough to use a simple wooden plank to till the earth.”

“Really? So how about this tool over here? You think it might be useful?”

I gave Roxanne something that looked like a medium-sized shovel that was next to the hoe.

“It’s a spade. It looks like a pretty good product, but I feel like buying it right now would be a kind of a waste.”

“Sorry for the wait.”

Honesta came back to the shop while we were busy looking over the gardening tools.

“I’d like to explain a few things about those seeds. Is that okay with you?”

“Oh, yes. I’m all ears.”

Roxanne then listened to Honestas explanations, which were mostly concerning the species of the seeds and the proper ways of cultivating them. When she was done, she handed her a bag that looked like it was made from the same type of papyrus like the

one used to make the maps of the Labyrinth's floors. As for me, I simply stood on the side since I probably wouldn't understand a word of what she was saying even if I tried to listen as carefully as I could. Instead, I focused on deciding which tools to buy, since tending to the garden with just our hands would not be nearly as effective as it would be with the proper equipment.

"Can we also get this plow and that hoe? And maybe some lumber, while we're at it?"

* * *

"Thank you very much for buying all those tools, master."

"No problem. They weren't that expensive anyway."

If I were to buy all those tools separately, their price could have been a problem, but thanks to my 30% discount the price for everything we have brought back home with us was actually not all that pricey at all, so I really have no basis for seeing that purchase as a problem. Besides, we only bought two of them.

We grabbed the seeds from the landlady and left the hardware store once Roxanne placed them safely in her backpack. With a spade in Roxanne's hand and a hoe in mine, we went back to the Adventurer's Guild and travelled back home through the Warp portal.

"Thank you for the purchase of the farming tools, master."

"No problem. So, what do we do now? We plow the earth before sowing the seeds?"

"Yes. I think we should also remove all the weeds."

I grabbed a hoe, raised it above my head and then swung it down. For a moment I was worried that I might end up hitting my own leg, but thankfully nothing of the sort happened, and the earth itself was so soft that I didn't even have to put too much force into my swings to plow it properly, but that should not be too much of a surprise, since the earth in the gardens needs to be soft for the ease of cultivating new plants in it. This just means that buying the hoe today was a good call on our part.



“What about a fertilizer? Do we need to buy it later as well?”

“No. I think the weeds we’re going to pull out today should be enough to cover everything we might be needing at this point.”

Using weeds as a fertilizer? I have never heard of such a technique, but that’s probably how they handled the fertilization of the soil before chemical fertilizers were invented.

“I see. Then we should also make a fence.”

“A... fence?”

“Yeah, a simple wooden one just so that we can clearly see where exactly our garden ends.”

“And what should we do in order to make it?”

Roxanne doesn’t seem to know how to build a fence, so it was up to me to show her. We then proceeded to building the fence around the entire vegetable garden.

Even though she was confused at first, she quickly adapted and made w number of wooden stakes just like I asked her to.

“Now place them in regular intervals from one another and we will then link them all with wood and some rope.”

Using our makeshift fence that didn’t turn out that bad in the end we covered the vicinity of the entire garden. Now it was clearly visible where our property ended, leaving no room for potential arguments with the neighbors.

After that, we sowed the seeds and watered them with my Water Magic, but only after carefully ascertaining that none of the neighbors was around to see me using magic by accident. When we were done with all the work, the sun had already begun to set a little.

The work was admittedly pretty exhausting, but the sense of satisfaction I am feeling right now is something else entirely. I sat on a chair in front of the finished garden and looked at it with pride. We just finished it so there is nothing by bumped up earth in it, but given the time I am sure it will frow up to be a splendid garden for sure. Now I just want to have something to drink in my hand, and I will be totally looking like an

old man here...

No no no. I'm not an old dude to be doing such senile things. I am still young and able to push Roxanne down whenever I want to. But since we already did it yesterday during the day, so I have to refrain from doing it again for now. Self-control! Show some self-control, me!

"W-Well, I will prepare some extra water for later, and then let's hit the Labyrinth one more time. Will you guide me to the monsters?"

"Certainly!"

Sitting around won't help me keep my thoughts from going into the gutter, so I have to stand up and keep myself busy. I went to the room with the drain and created more water for us to use later. Since we worked so much in the garden, we were both pretty dirty, so we will need as much water as possible to wash ourselves up afterwards.

I continued to make water with Water Magic until I noticed that my MP has decreased significantly, so I stopped there in order not to end up feeling depressed due to MP depletion and equipped myself with Durandal again. After that we went back to Quratar's Labyrinth's second floor. There was little people there, so after replenishing MP I could fight monsters with magic through several battles.

When I tried changing my main Job to Warrior, I noticed that the total number of my available Jobs has increased by one. The new one was a Farmer Lv.1, meaning that I now have the same Job as the inhabitants of Somara, the first village I found myself in when I arrived in this world. All in all it was a pretty basic Job without any good special effects or Skills. I must have gotten it because of all the farm work that I did, like cultivating the Soil and sowing the seeds. I guess that makes all the time it took to finish gardening not go to waste. Roxanne already had that Job since way before we met, so there's no point in checking her status.

And that is how someone who had little idea about farming became a farmer by tending to his herb and vegetable garden.

CHAPTER 3

BATH

Kaga Michio

Current levels & equipment:

Explorer Lv.26

Hero Lv.23

Mage Lv.25

Monk Lv.25

Equipment:

Wand

Leather Armor

Leather Jacket

Leather Gloves

Leather Shoes

The next day, the two of us went on a shopping trip to the various clothing stores in Quratar. Our objective for today? To get ourselves some new sets of clothes of course, because even though I have my trusty jersey and Roxanne has her maid outfit that she took with her from the Slave Merchant's shop, but there is no way in hell that those clothes are going to be enough for us to wear all the time. What's more, because of all that gardening work we did yesterday, our clothes gotten more than a little dirty and needed to be washed, and for that we need the new one that we could wear as replacements when they will be getting dry in the sun. I should have thought about it before we began working yesterday, but it is too late to be having regrets now that the

deed has been done.

“Before we buy anything, let’s have a look around first. We may be looking for spare clothes only, but that does not mean that we should do a hasty purchase. If you see anything that you like, be sure to let me know, okay?”

“Yes master. Thank you for your kindness, but I think you should focus on finding a suitable set of clothes for yourself first and foremost.”

“Sure thing. Now, when it comes to the amount of clothes, how much should we buy? Is two sets for me and two sets for you going to be enough?”

Apparently Roxanne is somewhat reserved when it comes to buying new clothes for herself, which makes me think that I will have to choose something for her in the end and be insistent and firm about my choice, because otherwise she might just not accept it. Such a humble attitude is much different from the typical one displayed by the girls from Japan, and even though it can be somewhat difficult to deal with her humbleness at times, it’s a welcomed change of pace.

“If that is what you will deem as an appropriate amount, master, then I think it is going to be fine. But...”

“Hmm? Yes? What is it, Roxanne?”

“Oh, nothing really that important. It’s just that... this store is selling brand-new clothing, right?”

“Well, yeah? Or at least they all look like that to me.”

“In that case, is it really okay for you to buy such expensive clothes for me?”

“And why would there be anything wrong with that?”

When I was browsing through the various clothes that the store had on display, Roxanne started saying some weird things. Could it be that...?

“Let me guess, is there a rule stating that slaves cannot wear nice clothes?”

“It’s not as much a rule as common sense that masters wear the nice clothes while their slaves have to make due with the poor-quality ones or the ones from second-

hand stores."

So that's how it is when it comes to the clothes worn by slaves and their masters, huh? I am not from this world, so I can't really say that I understand why it has to be that way, but maybe that's really how it is supposed to be, because now that I think about it, many of the people whom I saw when we were living in Veil wore clothes that looked like they came from the second-hand shop. Now, as a person who lived in the modern-day Japan and was born in a middle-class family, I never really needed to wear second-hand goods myself and I do not like the idea all that much, but I can see how wearing good quality clothing might be a problem for the people living in the world that is as technologically advanced as the earth during the medieval times. If I were to hazard a wild guess, then the average life cycle of a set of clothing in this world must be something that goes more or less like that: rich people and aristocrats buy themselves new clothes, wear them for a few times, and sell them second-hand stores once they get bored of them. At that point they are sold to the common citizenry and the cycle continues to repeat itself as they wear the bought clothes down even further until they are sold yet again, and then, right at the very bottom of this messed up chain are the slaves, who are supposed to be wearing nothing but tattered rags to really drive the point of them being inferior to their masters across.

This is something that only an absolute scum would do out of nothing but the sheer pettiness, but unfortunately those are the rules that this world is playing by. Well too bad for you, world, because if those are your rules, then I am not going to be abiding them!

"It's going to be fine, Roxanne. Trust me. Now go and choose whatever you like."

"Of course, master. Thank you."

With that out of the way, we proceeded to properly explore the clothing store. That's right. Since I am not a proper resident of this world but someone who came here from modern-day Japan, I don't have to follow the rules established by this world if I do not find them to my liking. Therefore, I will be doing whatever I feel is right, especially if it means ignoring some unjust, douchebaggy rules made by a bunch of snobs!

We looked around the store, but from what I can see, even though there are a lot of shelves filled with clothes from top to bottom, the clothes themselves did not have that much variety to them. Most of the bottom shelves were occupied by the tunics, shirts and robes of various colors, and the bottom ones were lined up with pants and

trousers. And by the way, because some of you might not know it: tunic is the type of upper body clothing that you put on over your head, and the shirts are as shirts normally do: worn by unbuttoning them from the front and sliding your hands through the sleeves until they emerge from the other side.

What caught my attention at one point was the disproportion in the types of clothing that women could wear on their lower bodies. This store had a lot of long hemmed skirts of the type that was so long that the hem reached all the way to the ground, covering the legs completely, but there was not that much female-styled pants. Maybe it was because the women who wore pants were mostly Adventurers and Explorers who were going into the Labyrinth, while skirts were generally worn by the women in the towns and villages? And even then, wouldn't it actually be more convenient for them to be wearing men's pants because of the relative freedom of movement those pants would provide?

Roxanne was looking through all the clothes with keen eyes, and not just the ones she intended to try on, but also at the ones she thought would look good on me. Occasionally, she would even take some of them, press them against my body and mumble things like "How about this?" or "Hmm, maybe this color would be good?" and "Hmm, this stitch here is a little..."

"Uhm, Roxanne?"

"No, on the other hand, maybe something a bit lighter would be better..."

"H-Hello...?"

I tried to speak up to give her my own opinion about some of the clothes, but each and every time my attempts were swiftly being shot down by her not even paying attention to me, that's how deep in a shopping trance she currently was. To add insult to injury, she was speaking with technical, fashion-related jargon that I did not understand very well, so I had no choice but to just suck it up and let her do her thing, because she looked like she was genuinely having fun choosing all those clothes, and I in turn had fun watching her having fun, so it's a win-win situation where everyone is happy no matter the outcome.

When we finally finished buying all of the clothes and left the clothing store, half a day was already over. How do I know that? Because the house that we are renting is on the east side of the city, so when we were leaving it in the morning the sun was rising in

front of it, but now that we were heading back, it was already behind it. We really spend so much time doing nothing but shopping for clothes, huh? I mean, I was mentally prepared that it would take a long time, but to think that it actually took one half of an entire day...

“Thank you, very much, master.”

“Thank you too, for choosing my clothes for me.”

Well, as long as I get to see Roxanne’s smiling face, then I guess it was all worth it, especially since we didn’t have to pay as much as I thought we would, since we bought all the clothes we needed for only 1500 Nars.

“Ah!”

All of a sudden, Roxanne gasped as if she just noticed something that immediately caught her attention.

“Master, since we bought so many new clothes, then would it be all right for us to buy a larger tub so we could wash them all at once?”

She said, pointing her finger towards the store that apparently sold all kinds of wooden products. *Sigh* it would seem that any time the amount of one thing in your possession increases, the amount of all the things related to it increases as well, and I cannot say for sure if this is a good thing or not. But since Roxanne said that she would need a larger tub to make doing laundry easier, then I guess there is no reason for me to decline her wishes.

“Sure, why not.”

I replied while wondering how much money I would have to pay for a bigger washing tub. Since it’s made out of wood, then surely it cannot be all that expensive, now can it?

When we entered the store, we saw various wooden tubs of different sizes lined up right next to the store’s entrance, but it looks like that’s not the only thing that can be bought here, as was evident by the number of wooden cups placed here and there. We didn’t buy any when we were shopping for the wok back at the hardware store a few

days ago, so maybe it will be better to buy them here right now?

“We’re sorry for the intrusion! Is the shopkeeper around?”

“I am. Welcome, how may I help you?”

An old man who looked like a craftsman came out from the back of the shop. His Job was a villager. From what I could see with a short glance behind him, the part of the shop in the back where he emerged from looked like a workshop space where craftsmen processed wood. I guess that means that this guy is also a craftsman and probably made all of the things that are on display himself.

Instead of approaching the shopkeeper and asking him if he has what we need Roxanne did the same thing she did back at the clothing store and started checking all of the tubs while not paying any attention to her surroundings. Yup, even the awkward atmosphere of having to just stand back and watch her was exactly the same, so the shopkeeper and I just kinda stood there like little puppies that waited for their master to return from a trip to the store, and it was admittedly making me a bit uncomfortable, to the point where I tried to actively search with my eyes for something, anything to talk about with the guy. Fortunately, I think I found just the thing to do the job nicely.

“Is that the biggest size of the wooden basins you have in store?”

I asked, pointing at the largest basin in the shop which looked like it had more than one meter in diameter.

“Yes, that is the biggest one I have in store right now, but I can make an even bigger one if its going to be a special order.”

Makes sense if he has a workshop space at the back of this place. And if that’s the case, then maybe, just maybe...

“So theoretically, if I were to make an order, you would have taken it?”

“As long as you have enough coin to pay for it? I don’t see why not.”

Okay, getting more promising by the minute...

“You had such requests being made before?”

"Not that often, but they do happen from time to time whenever people wish to have something where they could wash a large amount of clothes together in one go."

"So it can be done. Good to know."

You might be wondering what am I thinking about if I am asking him such things, to which I reply: I'm thinking about ordering him to make a bathtub for us. Since I already went through the trouble of renting an entire house, I want it to have a proper bathroom.

This world does not seem to be familiar with the concept of taking regular bath, since it is considered to be a luxury that only the rich folks can afford, and the rest of the populace has to resort to only wiping themselves with damp towels, and I don't think I have to tell you that doing something like that does next to nothing for you when you just want to relax after a particularly tiring day at work or a hard run through the Labyrinth. Now that I know water magic I could always try creating hot water with it, but other people who are not as lucky as I or those capable of using magic are, and have to resort to either wiping themselves, or ignore their personal hygiene altogether, and since unconventional methods of washing yourself will definitely pump up the costs of it more and more, I can totally see people going for the second option. However, right now I find myself in a position where such dilemmas do not concern me anymore.

Right now, I have both the means and the money needed for me to afford building a bath and upkeep it. Also, if I decide to take a bath, Roxanne will definitely come in with me, and because she would enter the bath, then I would want to enter it with her as well. And while in the bath together, we will wash each other's bodies up until they will be sparkly clean, and then... and then....!!!

A bath... yes, a bath is an absolute necessity for us! Because baths are the best, and as such, I absolutely, definitely have to get my hands on it! Even if making it proves to be challenging, this is a matter of utmost importance where no cost will be too great! But the question that I have right now is: how the hell are bathtubs even made? Back in Japan it was a matter that I never even thought about, because to be frank, there was never a need for me to do so, and I have also not seen any bathtubs or anything that would even resemble them in any of the Quratar's stores that we have come across... hmm, maybe I could hire a contractor for all the interior-related work and the process of installation since the landlady said that we can make alterations to the house if we want to... but then again, attracting too much attention to myself is the last thing that

I want to do...

Bringing water from well and river and boiling it would be a considerable cost. In case that we would want to bathe every day of every other day, that would put quite a bit of strain on me MP-wise. Also, in my case, even if I can prepare water and boil it by using magic, but I cannot reveal it reveal it so casually. When it comes to heating, we wouldn't need any additional boilers or other gizmos like that because it has already been verified that water can be heated with an ordinary Fireball. He might be surprised if we tell him that we won't need a boiler, but then again, that's not really his business and I don't have to tell him every little detail, right? On that note, I don't think I would be able to put a bathtub together myself, so like it or not, I have to rely on this craftsman to do it. Thankfully, it looks like he will make it for us without any trouble

"I have a positive track record, so I think I should be able to handle any request you might have for me without any issues."

"Is that so?"

He seems to be awfully certain of his skills as a craftsman. I wonder how many people have ordered something from him and exactly how many of them feel satisfied with the quality of the finished product?

"How big is the thing you want to order going to be?"

"Hmm, let's see... ideally, I want something that would be as wide as an average person's height. Is that possible?"

The one that came to my mind when I imagined it was similar to the ones that sometimes appeared in the paintings of Katsushika Hokusai, not that this guy would know who I was talking about even if I mentioned his name.

"Should be easy enough to do. What about the depth? Is normal-sized enough or should that also be custom-tailored?"

"I think something about as deep as this one should be enough."

I said, pointing towards the biggest and deepest basin that was in the store. Since it's going to be for the purpose of bathing, I should pick something that would allow us to

sink into it just enough to have a nice, long, relaxing soak, but not something that would seem too extravagant or downright weird. I am already making quite a number of specific demands for this order, so it would not surprise me if the shopkeeper was already suspicious of my intentions behind making something like that, so I have to make sure to keep those suspicions of his to a bare minimum by sticking to the standards of something that he already has here in store as much as possible. Judging by my rough estimates, the actual depth of the deepest basin in this shop should be around 50 centimeters or something a little bit beneath that if we assume that the bottom of the basin has to be thicker than the rest of it, but I think that it should be enough to fulfill its ultimate purpose, which is to have a bath, but more importantly, to enter it together with Roxanne and have enough space left in it so that we could get a little frisky whenever the mood strikes us.

“Hmm, in that case, how about 2000 Nars for it?”

The wood craftsman thought about it for a while and finally gave me the price. I have to say, that’s way cheaper than I originally expected. I thought that for such a specific custom order I would have to pay at least twice as much as the price he offered, so that is a pleasant surprise.

“I’ll take it, please.”

“Because it’s a build-to-order, it will take around five days to make. Once it will be finished, I will send a messenger who will let you know about it.”

“All right, got it.”

It’s great that we will be notified when it is finished instead of having to come here again of our own accord, even though it’s probably going to mean that we will have to pay some additional costs for the transportation of the finished tub.

“We will be looking forward to hearing from you in a few days then.”

By the way, even though this world is operating in a medieval setting, there seems to be a proper way of addressing the residences of the citizens in the big cities. The address of our rented house is the 6th District, 7th chome, 123rd residence

“Roxanne, you found anything interesting?”

“Yes, I think this is going to be good.”

When I was having my conversation with the shopkeeper about the custom-made bath, in the meantime Roxanne found a tub that she deemed to be appropriate for the job of doing our laundry in it. Having a brief glance at it I concluded that her keen eyes allowed her to truly make the best selection possible. She handed the tub to me and I in turn showed it to the shopkeeper.

“Okay, got it. For now, can we take this?”

“Yes, of course. Thank you for your patronage.”

“We will be taking it as it is, there’s no need for transportation.”

“As you wish. That will be 50 Nars.”

Since the Job of this guy is a Villager, my 30% discount did not work on him. We just paid the full price and left the store.

“If I may ask, master, what do we need such a large washbasin for if we already bought this one?”

“It’s for something that you definitely can look forward to. Trust me, you’re going to love it.”

Now that all of our shopping was finally done, we returned home with the washbasin in hand, and once we arrived back at our place, we changed into our new sets of clothing we bought today.

“We should wash our clothes early in the day so that they could dry as soon as possible, but are we going to be entering the Labyrinth today?”

“Hmm... that’s right. All that shopping took us way more time than I anticipated... you know what? Let’s take a break from going there today.”

We have already went to the Labyrinth before breakfast today, so I think we can have the rest of the day off for a change. We’ve been making steady runs through both Veil’s and Quratar’s Labyrinths for the past few days, so taking it easy for one day should not hurt us nor our purses.

“Understood. In that case I will start washing our clothes, and once that’s done I will continue with the cleaning.”

"Of course, feel free to do that, but first... how are you feeling with the new clothes? Do you find them all right?"

"Yes, they feel really nice, thank you very much, master."

"Well isn't that nice? If that's how it is then maybe we should check how it feels to take these clothes off? After all, we wouldn't want them feeling all uncomfortable or taking too long to get out of them now, do we?"

"Oh... Y-Yes, of course... right away."

We are entering the Labyrinths practically every day, so having a day off like that feels like a much-needed change of pace, and it feels good to have one of these every once in a while. Yeah, once in a while such breaks feel super nice. Once in a while.

Later, when we were finished with checking the clothes' comfortability when being taken off, I used my Water magic to get us enough water for washing our dirty clothes, making dinner and bathing. As a result of all that water-making, even though I said that we should have today free from going to the Labyrinth, we still had to go there for a quick MP recovering trip. It's great that currently my level is high enough so that I can get us all the water we need, but I should raise it even more to avoid needing to go the Labyrinth every time I'm filling a bathtub altogether. I know that if it's just for the purpose of recovering my MP then all we need is to go to the lower floors and slay some low-level monsters, but no matter how fast I can go about it, it still consumes precious time that could be spent on doing literally anything else.

"Now then. I will take care of the main dish for dinner. The menu for today will be white stew."

"White stew... is it?"

"Have you ever eaten it before?"

"No, I can't say that I have. This is the first time I have heard such a name before."

Roxanne seems to have never eaten White Stew before. Either that, or the equivalent of White Stew does not exist in this world. Maybe I should have called it a white soup instead and see if that changes anything? Nah.

"Well, if you have never tried White Stew before, then please look forward to it."

With the ingredients available in this world I should be able to make White Stew without any particular problems.

First, put the meat, wine and water into a large pot and boil for 30 minutes to extract all the juices from the meat, making them mix with wine and water. You can also add milk to make it thicker if you prefer your stew to be that way. By the way, in this world things like milk and wine that are available in stores are held in jars, so after they are used we will have additional containers to hold other things in it. It's a complete deposit system, kinda like PET bottles or paper bags that you hold bread in so that it won't go stale as fast.

Next, you add in the vegetables, the same ones that Roxanne used while she was making her Pot-au-feu and simmer them all over low flame. I thrown some green onions in there to mask the smell of the meat. Although I read somewhere once that green onions are poisonous to dogs, Roxanne claims that there is no vegetable that she can't eat. I guess that means that even though she has dog features, that particular quirk is not among the ones she inherited from them. Besides, if those are the vegetables that Roxanne used herself, then there shouldn't be no problems.

While all of the ingredients are boiling, be sure to add wheat flour and some butter to the wok and fry it.

Next, pour the milk into the batter and boil over a low flame and keep mixing it all up until it reaches the consistency of the white roux.

On a side note, you should be able to make clam chowder and cream croquettes that way as well. If only we had a functioning oven here, then maybe I could also make gratin.

Put the resulting white roux and vegetables in a pan and boil all of the ingredients together. Finally, I tasted it and seasoned it with salt and pepper.

It's a success, as far as I am concerned.

Roxanne also ate it with a huge smile of delight on her face.

"Mashter, thish ish sho yummy!"

Maybe I should tell her that she should not be saying things like that while she's having her mouth full of white, sticky substances?

Now that we had to wait for the bathtub to be finished before any work in the house could be advanced further, we both decided that the best course of action will be to advance through the Labyrinths as much as possible.

The tactic we have adopted for our explorations was to go to the Labyrinth at least two times a day: in the early morning before having breakfast and in the afternoon so that we could jump straight to having dinner when we get back, and to have a modest time of rest before each run. That was the minimum we agreed on doing, but whenever we could, we tried to go explore them at least several times a day. While going through our Labyrinth-foraging days like that, we quickly managed to reach the Boss Room in the Veil's Labyrinth's third floor. When we reached the waiting room outside of the boss's chamber I took a moment to do a Character Reset and equip Durandal, and once that was done, we entered the Boss Room proper without hesitation. Since we have already fought the Kobold Kampfer in the Quratar's Labyrinth where it was actually the Floor Boss of the first floor, we didn't have to be our guard too much. We simply have to employ our usual strategy: we will surround it from both sides where Roxanne will occupy it in the front and I will go to its back where I will wait for the right moment to slash the bastard down with a swing of my sword. Now, I don't want to say that I am getting used to fighting the floor Bosses or overly confident with fighting them, who are essentially just a bigger, more menacing variants of the regular enemies, but... but I guess I am getting used to fighting them after beating so many of them.

When the Kobold Kampfer appeared from a cloud of green smoke in the center of the room, Roxanne took her designated position in front of it and brandished her Scimitar, which she then used to slash at it and draw its attention to herself, while I assumed my combat-ready stance at its back, waiting for the right moment to attack to present itself. Since I have my OP abilities and an even more OP weapon, it shouldn't surprise anyone that I am our Party's main damage dealer, and as a damage dealer, I should be pouring all of my efforts into attacking and killing enemies with one blow rather than focusing on avoiding their attacks or defending against them. Dodging and defending is Roxanne's role, because as worried about Roxanne's safety as I may be, those concerns are always proven to be unnecessary. No matter if this is a normal enemy or a Boss, as long as Roxanne has her superior reflexes, there is no way for any attack to reach her.

The attacks of the Kobold Kampfer are all slow and clumsy, and he is staggering under Roxanne's attacks. To be honest, I am starting to feel a little sorry for that monster.

When the Kobold Kampfer was defeated and disappeared in a cloud of green smoke after leaving behind its drop items, we moved onto the fourth floor, where I decided to keep Durandal with me for a while longer until we happen across the first encounter with the monsters native to this floor and see how tough they will be to beat.

The first monster that we encountered not long after arriving here was a Mino Lv4. So, this is the type of monster native to the fourth floor of Veil's Labyrinth, huh? It looks like a brown buffalo, or perhaps a bull, but it has a torso that looks like its strangely too short in comparison to its massive front and hind legs, giving it a bit of a comical looks. Could it be that whoever was responsible for creating the monsters for this game made a fatal design error with it and didn't bother to correct it? Normally cows and bulls I am familiar with look docile, or even kinda cute, but with the two sharp horns growing out of its head, I can safely say that there is nothing even remotely cute about this monster here.

It looks our way with eyes filled with ferocious killing intent, and then breaks into a run with its head brought down and the sharp horns pointing directly at us. If those things hit us, I bet it won't end on just light wound. It's going to hurt like hell...

...If it manages to hit us at all, that is. I mean seriously, if all it is doing is charging at its prey straight ahead, then even someone as evasion-impaired like me will be able to dodge such a simple-minded attack like that of a common boar. Then again, it's just an oversized, muscular cow, so I don't know what else I have expected.

Mino charges towards Roxanne and thrusts its horns towards her, but she simply twisted her body lightly and dodged it effortlessly, and I swung my weapon at it after dodge-rolling to the side. As a result, Mino collapsed to the ground before it got the chance to aim its horns at us again. So it looks like with Durandal, even the monsters on the Labyrinth's fourth floor can still be defeated in one blow.

The enemy became a puff od green smoke and disappeared. The item it left behind is something called Mino's Hide. If it turns out to be sturdy enough, perhaps it could be a good material for armor-making? Or turning it into some nice clothing? Anyway...

"So this is the kind of monster we will have to deal with here? Not only does it have

quite the ferocious appearance, but it also seems to be pretty powerful."

"It does look like a powerful opponent indeed... but all you have to do is to watch its movements closely so that you can safely dodge its attacks."

She's not wrong, but there are two catches to what she's saying: you actually have to be nimble enough to dodge and then swiftly counterattack, and have a keen enough eyesight to actually see the best possible moment for carrying out a dodge. As much as it pains me to say it, out of the two of us, only Roxanne is able to carry such manuevers out in a consistent manner. I don't want to always be burdening her with having to act like a decoy, so I will have to definitely do something about it in the near future.

Now that the battle with Mino was finished, I unequipped Durandal and switched back to my magic-using setup. Now that we are on the fourth floor, it seems highly unlikely that I will be able to defeat monsters other than Kobolds with one or two shots of my spells. It'll be more realistic to assume that I will need three or perhaps even four of them to get the job done properly. The obvious downside to it is that if I can't defeat them in three shots or less, it means that the probability of them reaching me before I could dispose of them will be greater, but it's not like I can do anything about it besides gaining more levels and increasing my stats.

As we moved forward through the fourth floor, we haven't encountered a group of two or more Minos. The groups of enemies we fought against always consisted of either one of them, or a mixture of just one Mino along with a Kobold, a Green Caterpillar or even a Needlewood. As a side note: Needlewoods; monsters native to Veil Labyrinth's first floor, were growing more and more scarce now. Perhaps after venturing a few more floors further we will stop encountering them at all? well, no point thinking about it now. Scarce or not, they are still enemies that have to be cut down for us to proceed.

If we only have to deal with one Mino, dealing with it can be left to Roxanne.

Since she will be done with it in no time flat, and when it comes to Kobolds, Green Caterpillars and Needlewoods, they can all be defeated before they even come within our melee distance thanks to my tried and true method of shooting a Fireball at them until they die that I have developed over my countless battles with them thus far. All

in all, I think we are actually more than ready to take on the fourth floor.

When I was thinking about all those things, a group of three Lv.4 Mino's appeared before us. Geh, I know it's about time a group made only of the monsters native to this floor appeared, but it doesn't make the prospect of actually fighting them any more appealing.

By the way, three monsters should be the maximum amount that should be encountered here on the fourth floor, meaning that technically no more monsters should appear during this particular fight. It is definitely a good thing that the monster ratio is so small on the lower floor of the Labyrinth's, otherwise we might have been in serious trouble. For the time being, let us take care of the guys in front of us.

My opening gift to them was a Fire Storm right to their ugly faces, but since one shot was not nearly enough to finish them off they simply powered through the spell and continued their charge towards us. I readied my wand and fired a second shot of magic at them, and then the third one, but it was still not enough. Are they able to withstand so many attacks of Fire Storm because of the speed gained from the momentum of their charge? But in that case, I think I can use this to my advantage!

Now that all three of them have eaten three shots of Fire Storm it shouldn't take much more for us to kill them, so while Roxanne focuses the attention of the two of them on herself, I can take care of the last one on my own. Its momentum is strong, but that means that if I just let it come as close to me as possible before evading and making my own move...

...it won't be able to change its course and respond in time!

(*Fire Storm... ughhh!!!*)

I definitely felt the sensation of its horns connecting with my hand just now, but soon after that, the fourth Fire Storm I fired at that Mino consumed it and it finally fell to the ground, dead.

I actually got hit. Its horn reached me. The thoughts that if I didn't finish it off just now it could have been pretty bad for me rushed through my head. Even with all the powers and weapons at my disposal, the fear of getting hit by the enemies and being harmed is still very much real within me. Right now, I was once again reminded that fighting monsters is a scary endeavor.

I should have expected as much. After all, these horns have to be as sharp as the weapons used by Adventurers, so its no surprise that it managed to penetrate through the parts of my Leather Armor, which might not be the best kind of protection against bladed weapons or sharp fangs, horns or claws, not to mention the fact that it does not cover my body in its entirety, leaving some parts of it exposed and therefore opened up to attacks.

Should I buy better equipment for myself to make sure that such attacks won't harm me even if they somehow manage to connect with me? Like, for example, a set of full metal armor? Because I think that one of the guys from the Party we evesdropped on way back then at the Labyrinth's entrance, the ones that were discussing whether they should stay on the third floor or move to the fourth one, had an armor like that. Granted, it will definitely slow down my movements, but the damage reduction should be much bigger in comparison to my current Leather Armor.

I know that now is not the time to be thinking about such things, but I just can't help it, especially since I know that the higher we will climb and the more floors we are going to explore, the monsters are only going to get stronger and scarier.

I tried to recall how I felt when other monsters attacked me and managed to successfully land a hit on me, and the first one that comes to my mind was that one Green Caterpillar that body-blown me. The initial shock of having a giant bug ram itself into me with the weight of its entire body was quite shocking and it was somewhat painful, but overall, it was nothing that would sweep you off your feet in such a way that you would have trouble standing back up. When it come to the Needlewoods, they are just trees smacking you with their branches, so that's nothing to write home about. As for the Kobolds, I... I actually have nothing to say about them, because I have never been attacked directly by any of them. Okay, the knives they are carrying around are more than a little unsettling, but the Kobolds themselves are so weak that one strike of the sword or one spell from the ordinary wand are enough to kill them. Or maybe I just thought they were scary because that was the first time when I saw them carrying those weapons and now I gotten used to seeing them so I do not find it as scary anymore?

In any case, now that I have finished dealing with my enemy, my eyes wondered towards Roxanne, who was fighting against the two of them at the same time. It should be more difficult for her, since she has to keep track of and avoid the attacks of not one, but two Minos at once, however...

Roxanne hits the Mino right in front of her with her Scimitar to stop it from charging blindly ahead towards me and draw its attention to herself, and then lightly dodges the charge of the second Mino with her shield. It's amazing how she is not faltering in the slightest even when she is clearly outnumbered and at a disadvantage. She dodges the attacks and counterattacks almost immediately after they miss her, slashing at the Minos's bodies and horns so hard that sparks are created with every blow. The two Mino's Roxanne's been fighting with were dead soon after that.

"Did you have any trouble fighting two of them at the same time, Roxanne? Because as far as I am concerned, fighting three Minos at once might be a little annoying. How troublesome"

"While it's true that having to face more of those particular monsters at once might be somewhat problematic, the battle was still shorter than it would have been without master's magic. Thanks to you, we could finish them off quickly and avoid any harm that would have been inevitable if the fight started to drag on."

"So I take it you won't have any difficulties taking two of them on should the need for that arise again?"

"Not at all. Just now, they were only able to make two attacks before the battle was ended. However, I cannot guarantee that I will be able to evade all of their attacks if the battle lasts longer than a few minutes at best, so I think we should avoid encounters like that whenever we can afford it."

My thoughts exactly. Aside from their charge attack being more than a little scary due to how sudden it can be, Minos are not that hard to kill if you keep your wits about you and your head calm at all times, but just like Roxanne said, we should avoid fighting bigger groups of enemies whenever we can, or grow strong enough to dispose of them in the blink of an eye. And for that, we will need more EXP and levels for our Jobs. Or to be more specific, I need more EXP and Levels for my Jobs because Roxanne is doing just fine as she is already; I am the one who has to get stronger not to constantly rely on her doing all of the heavy lifting for me.

That, and having only her fight all of the enemies, like those Minos just now would be boring and anticlimactic, since this is technically my story.

We then continued to explore the fourth floor of the Veil's Labyrinth. For the time being we have not encountered a group made out of three Mino's again, and even if we

happened across a group of three monsters, it's usually one Mino mixed with a Kobold or Green Caterpillar. As long as the group of three Minos won't show up again, then I think our trek through this floor might actually be pretty uneventful.

If two monsters show up, then they are no problem for us since we can just take them on in a one-on -one combat, and as long as we (or in this case, I) won't panic, we can deal with them in a minute or so, but if one of them is a Mino, then I have to allow Roxanne to take care of it while I go for the other one. In any other case, they were all steadily defeated.

The next trio of enemies appeared a solid while later. It was a combo of two Minos and a Kobold. Naturally, the Kobold got obliterated into a puff of green smoke by a Fire Storm before it could even begin to run towards us. Now that this loser was out of the picture, all we had to deal with were two Minos, who promptly began to charge towards us.

The first blow from the Fire Storm reached them, but did not stop them exactly the same as last time. Roxanne jumped towards the one in front and stopped it from advancing by slashing her Scimitar at it, but the second one got past her and continued to approach me with its head lowered and horns in front. I launched a second and third Fire Storm at it, but again, three shots were not enough to bring it down. I need one more spell to finish it off for good.

But before I could fire another spell, Mino, who got in my melee range lifted its head and attacked me with its horns during the downtime between one spell and the other where I could do nothing to defend myself. I tried to hastily twist my body to avoid it, but my left arm got caught up by its horn, resulting in a much sharper pain than during the previous battle where I was just barely grazed by it. It was an unpleasant kind of pain, but luckily not strong enough to make me faint on the spot.

“Uooooooooooooooooooooo!!!!!!”

Danger. My life is in danger!

Fire Storm activated, and emitted a series of sparks.

The Mino got struck by most of them, which caused it to fall sideways as it was being burned to cinders. With that final blow, the battle was over.

Dangerous.

Dangerous. That right now was too much of a close call! One wrong move and I would have probably been done for! How could I allow this monster to get so close to me so causally?! How could I allow it to happen?!

These guys are extremely dangerous! Even if Roxanne says they are easy to evade if you pay close attention, it does not change the fact that Minos are still dangerous as hell! Until now, I have been smacked by Needlewood branches and both slammed into and spat on by Green Caterpillars so I more or less know how to deal with them and how much of them I can basically facetank before getting worried about my HP, but I have yet to be exposed to a direct hit from a Mino, so its exact power is a complete mystery to me. However, there is no doubt in my mind that a day when I will get attacked by a Mino directly will surely come sooner or later. The question is: will I be able to live through that attack to learn my lesson and draw the appropriate conclusions?

No, I should not think negatively like that when I am not affected by the loss of MP. Just stay calm and think, Michio, think! Ever since I came to this world I have been attacked by a variety of monsters, and each time I was panicking and thinking that just one of their attacks will be enough to kill me, only to discover that it was not the case and I was simply paranoid about the entire thing. If even the attacks from the Floor Bosses were not enough to kill me in one shot, then there will probably be no problems with me receiving an attack or two from a Mino, even if it were to be a direct hit from its horns. I mean sure, they look like they are as sharp as a sword, but would they really be fatal? Surely they cannot be. If they were, then that would be too much of a power spike in comparison to how easy the third floor was when it came to its monsters and Floor Boss.

Except that little unfortunate incident, the exploration is going relatively smoothly so far, but that does not mean that we can relax. We have to stay vigilant at all times, since even with my Chant Omission Skill, my defensive options while using my magic-focused build are still limited in comparison to my Durandal-focused build. Swinging a sword is so simple that pretty much anyone can do it, but with magic, a significantly bigger effort has to be made in order to use it. Not only does it require the caster to concentrate his consciousness to properly formulate the spell's name or the chant (not

needed in my case), but there is also a few seconds gap between each consecutively fired spell that leaves the user potentially vulnerable to enemy attacks. That is what happened in that battle against the group of those three Minos just now, and it almost cost me an injury.

I wonder what are the other magic casters and wizards doing in order to protect themselves in the periods of the brief pauses between spells? They have to do something to keep themselves from harm's way, but since fighting the monsters requires their concentration to remain fully geared towards casting offensive spells, then what could that method of prevention be? Do they have some kind of special defensive spells in effect? Or maybe their robes and elements of clothing are enchanted in such a way that they protect them from hostile attacks?

Well, the most logical choice for them is to stay in the rearguard and shoot their spells from a safe distance where no enemy will reach them. If only we had more members in our Party, then I could do the same without having to constantly pay attention to every enemy and their distance from me and leave the fighting up close and personal to the avant-garde. If we continue to go on the way we are now, then the burden placed on Roxanne, our only vanguard member, will only keep increasing, putting her in more and more needless danger.

That being said, should we... find more vanguard members as soon as possible? And then, should we opt for someone whom we could hire for a relatively cheap price, or maybe go for increasing the number of my slaves instead? However, if I were to give my honest opinion, then I would like not to get someone who's easily disposable if I can help it, and switching old Party members for the more talented or better equipped ones will be inevitable even without grinding excessively in the Labyrinths to get money. The thing is, I have too many secrets that absolutely cannot be allowed to be made public, so it will be better to collect a certain amount of money first and then find ourselves some trustworthy, long-term Party members that will stay with us for a long time instead.

What should we do in the meantime though? Strengthen our existing equipment? Or perhaps try and get our hands on a new one? I guess that would not be a bad thing to do, considering the fact that things will only get tougher from here on out.

With every floor that goes up, the levels of the enemies we are going to encounter there will go up as well, meaning that they will only get harder to defeat with a Party that has only two members in it, so increasing the number of allies among our ranks,

and no, I am totally not saying that just so that I could have an excuse for adding more members into my harem. That development is still a prospect located somewhere in the future, because for now, we should focus on what we should do when we will reach the fifth and the sixth floor here in Veil's Labyrinth, and worry about increasing the strength of our equipment only when it will be absolutely necessary to do so.

Here on the fourth floor, the number of monsters that appear with each encounter is still relatively small, and they are all enemies that can be defeated with relative ease with both magic and Durandal, especially Kobolds that go down with one hit from literally anything, be it sword or magic. These guys appear more often than Needlewoods and Green Caterpillars, most likely because we are only a floor above the one that is their natural habitat here in Veil's Labyrinth.

It's nice to have enemies that won't give us any trouble, but I think we should get a little more hang on fighting against Minos, since the Floor Boss of the fourth floor is going to be a bigger, stronger version of them if the pattern that has repeated itself up until now is to be believed.

"Alright. Where is the next group of enemies?"

"It's over this way, master."

Steeling my resolve to fix the problem f the lacking vanguard members as soon as the opportunity for doing so arises, I proceeded to go deeper into the fourth floor under the guidance of Roxanne's nose. Anytime when there was only one Mino in the group of monsters we had to fight, we generally agreed that Roxanne is going to be the one who will be taking care of it. Anytime I see her avoiding its charge attack and not having a single scratch on her no matter how tough or rough the battles seemed to be getting, I couldn't stop myself from being amazed at how skilled she actually was. It seemed to me like for her, every opponent who relied on physical attacks as their main offensive tool was trivial to fight. That being said, every time a pair of Minos appeared, there was now a part of me that was instinctively scared of engaging them, but nevertheless, as long as I kept myself calm, I could fight them. As long as this subconscious fear of getting hurt does not develop into something more serious, I am sure I will get used to it as long as I continue to work hard and get stronger.

Now that we have conquered the third floor of the Labyrinth in Veil, we concluded that

the most sensible thing will be to do the same with the third floor of the one in Quratar, and that is where we decided to go on the morning of the following day.

"Is it just me, or do there seem to be more people here on the third floor than they were back on the second floor?"

This can be potentially problematic, since I would rather not be seen fighting with Durandal here, and with the increased number of people, there is no telling what might happen or who might catch a glimpse of it purely by accident or when they will be passing by.

"That's right. It is because the number of Kobolds on this floor is decreased, making it a better place for hunting monsters than the previous floor, where the possibility of happening upon them was still relatively high. Because of that, either this floor or the next one should have the biggest number of people on it so far, but after that, I am positive that it should start to gradually decrease again the further up we go."

"Ah, I see."

I guess that makes sense since no one wants to fight weaklings that won't give them good drop items or much EXP, but I just hope it won't come back to bite us in the asses somehow.

While going through this floor, we passed by a number of people, though thankfully not as many of them as back on the first floor. I don't wan any of them to see that I am fighting with or even carrying Durandal with me, so while we are passing by other Parties, I try to do everything I can to keep it out of sight while also trying not to look suss to them.

The enemies native to the fourth floor of the Quratar's Labyrinth are called Spi Spiders, and just as the name implies, they are spiders. However, they are not your ordinary, small-ass spiders that crawl on the floor and walls looking all gross but nothing else besides that, oh no. You see, the smallest Spi Spider is actually the size of a large dog. Yeah, now let that thought sink in. Having your skin crawl yet? Do not worry, I also feel extremely unpleasant while fighting them, especially with all those eyes of theirs darting in all directions as they try to jump up on us and attack with those creepily-thin legs of theirs. The only saving grace with them is that, just like pretty much everything so far, they are defeated by only a single blow from Durandal, so at the very least I do not have to look at their monstrous physiques for too long

before they disappear. On tha account, I guess even Minos should not be all that scary since they also should go down in one strike of Durandal. Moreover, when it comes to Spi Spiders, they are just uncomfortable to look at... but nothing else. Unlike with Minos, I do not have that dreadful feeling that "I will be killed if their attacks manage to reach me". Maybe its because I am slowly adapting to the way of life and doing battles typical for the inhabitants of this world? After all, I have spent quite a number of days here now, so I guess it would be about time for me to start getting accustomed to it, right?

As for Roxanne, ever since she became my slave and a member of my Party she was fighting whatever the Labyrinths threw at her without saying as much as a single complaint, and... and she even looks like she is happy to be risking her life on the frontlines like she is now. Doesn't she feel repulsed by having to do battle against such disgusting creepy-crawlies? I though that since she is a girl she will have at least some reservations about doing it, but it does not seem to be bothering her one bit.

The Floor Boss on the third floor here in Quratar is Spy Spider Lv.3. Although it is one size larger than the regular Spi Spider, Roxanne took the position in front of the boss, just like always. My role in this battle was once again to go to the boss's behind and wait for the right moment to strike it with Durandal.

Surprising nobody, Spy Spider collapsed onto the ground after one hit. So even a Floor Boss of the third floor that's Lv.3 was still no match for the 1HKO power Durandal has, huh? In this particular case, since the said Floor Boss was a giant spider, I am perfectly okay with that.

When the Spy Spider disappeared in a puff of smoke, the item it left behind was a bunch of small, round objects. I went and picked one of them up and used Identify on it, revealing that it was pepper. Black pepper. Kind of a strange thing for a Spy Spider to drop, don't you think? I always assumed that an enemy named Spy Spider would drop something... well, I don't know, spy related?

"Ah, its black pepper! I am sure that it must be worth a pretty hefty sum in gold, right?"

"I am afraid not. Black pepper is a pretty ordinary spice, and therefore it is not all that expensive."

So, it would seem that black pepper being a costly spice was nothing but my own selfish wishful thinking. But now that I think about it and recall the taste of the dishes

I have eaten here so far... then yeah, I guess black pepper is being used quite a bit in meat-based dishes, and since it's not a special item, but a common one that drops after you kill the Floor Boss of the third floor here, then it would stand to reason that the local shops would have an overabundance of it.

With the Floor Boss out of the way, we moved on onto the fourth floor.

"How crowded is this floor?"

"Let me check... *sniff sniff*... hmm, it seems to be a little less crowded than the third floor, but we won't find any monsters to fight unless we go further in."

"In that case, should we halt our progress here and switch to Veil's Labyrinth instead?"

Personally, I would like to see what monsters live on the fourth floor of Quratar's Labyrinth, but it's an undeniable truth that fighting in a crowded place where we might bump into someone at any given moment is not an ideal scenario for us, so we should not try to bite off more than we can chew. Making progress is important, but not overdoing things just for the sake of overdoing them is even more important in my book.

We moved to the Labyrinth of Veil and explored its fourth floor next. This time our goal was to explore while also getting me more used to fighting Minos, and I think that little by little, such an approach began to bear fruit, since after an hour or two of fighting them I noticed that I am not finding fighting them as big of a deal as I did during my first few encounters with them. I just have to fight them calmly and without panicking, and everything is going to be okay.

One part of my current training was to focus on being attacked by Minos on purpose so that I could get a hang of how strong their attacks were exactly. Their attacks are indeed painful, but not to an extent that could not be endured as long as I clenched my teeth to power through it. Worst case scenario, I'm going to have a few bruises or cuts left from the Minos's horns, but any injury that looks like it's a more serious one can be quickly recovered thanks to my HP-regenerating abilities from Durandal and my Monk Job.

When three of them appear in a single group, things are naturally getting a bit more hectic in comparison to fighting with only one or two Minos at once, but it's all down

to getting the timing of my dodges down perfectly. And speaking of avoiding...

As usual, Roxanne does not have a problem with avoiding incoming attacks even when she is facing all three Minos at once, even though having to face off against three massive opponents at once required significantly more movement and maneuverability than the battles against smaller opponents. I guess this is one of the downsides to our current exploration strategy: even though Roxanne can locate groups of enemies thanks to her keen sense of smell, it cannot tell her exactly how many enemies there will be and what they are. Running away from the encounters that seem to be too much for us to handle is always an option, but I don't want to issue an order to retreat from the battle because it might create a situation where we will flee from the enemies and they will simply chase after us, possibly creating a situation where we will be unable to properly respond to any case of emergency that we might end up getting ourselves into if one or two groups of monsters will combine into a bigger one to get us.

Rather than allow that to happen, what we need is an aggressive approach. I realize that fighting every battle regardless of how disadvantageous our positions might be is a risky thing to do, but it's actually a high risk, high reward thing: basically, you can earn much more items and EXP by defeating as many enemies as you can.

However, even if a group of three Minos was best for us EXP-wise, then naturally we were not encountering them all the time. This is a dungeon in a game after all, so just as one would expect, the enemies we were encountering were most likely generated randomly, and I think we all know that whenever a player wants something particular, RNGesus will make sure that they will not get it. And so, we fought against quite a few groups of only two Minos, or two Minos and a Kobold. Kobolds were always first to die, and after a while, I think I even stopped noticing them when I was using Fire Storm as my opening attack. There was also a combination of a Mino and a Green Caterpillar, but Roxanne does not have any problems dealing with them at once. In the end, neither Mino's nor Green Caterpillar's attacks scratched her even once. She dodged them all gracefully and lightly like a sheet of paper dancing in the wind. I know that this metaphor is a pretty strange one to be using to describe a person's ability to dodge incoming attacks, but at the current moment it is the only one that comes to my mind as the one to most accurately describe what is now happening before my eyes.

"You know what Roxanne? At this point your movements are so amazing that even though you are my model for when it comes to learning how to dodge, but on the flipside they are so incredible that I kinda gave up on trying to understand how exactly

do they work since I cannot imitate them for the life of me."

"If we're talking about just this degree of movement, then I think that this is something that even master could master with just a bit of patient practice."

(No no no, no way in hell. That's absolutely impossible.)

I know that Roxanne didn't mean to mock me with her words, but that does not change the fact that her advice was less than helpful here.

The next three groups of enemies that crossed our path were also made out of three enemies, but they were not all Minos. They were two Minos and a Green Caterpillar. In order to gain as much advantage over them as possible, I released three consecutive Fireballs, one after the other as soon as the cooldown period was finished.

"Roxanne, go!"

"Right, master!"

Almost immediately after I finished casting the third Fire Storm and send Roxanne out to the front, the Minos broke through the clouds of raging fire and attacked us. Roxanne bought the attention of the first one by slashing at it with her Scimitar while evading its charge attack and the subsequent attempts to slash and pierce her with its horns. Not wanting to be left behind, I pulled out my own sword and attacked the other Mino while dodging it as Roxanne briefly slashed it with a horizontal slash when it was rushing just past her. I also did my best to block the body blow from the Green Caterpillar that must have survived being hit with one of the Fireballs and was now coming towards me from the left. When I was trying to think of the best possible move to make next after stopping the Green Caterpillar in its tracks, an orange magic circle suddenly appeared under it.

"Web Spit attack incoming, master!"

Roxanne shouted her warning out to me. That's right, the orange magic circle under the Green Caterpillar's body means that its going to launch its special Skill, Web Spit to try and bind me in place. If I allow it to do so, that is!

Earlier I might have been scared shitless when I saw that magic circle, but right now I do not care about it!

(Fire Storm!!!)

I shot a fourth spell at it. The Green Caterpillar won't be able to use its Skill if it will be dead before it can cast it! And if it manages to cast it anyway, the thread itself is most likely going to disappear. Probably. I never managed to actually kill a Green Caterpillar mid-Skill casting so I do not know for sure.

At nearly the same time as the Green Caterpillar began releasing the threads from its mouth, Roxanne jumped away from the place where she was still battling against the Minos. Second after she jumped to the safe place, the area where she just stood has been covered by the sparks of the Fire Storm that erupted into a series of explosions.

As the sparks exploded one after the other, the white sticky threads spread and stretch widely before getting evaporated and covering the ground with its remains, a few of which ended up getting on my arm. Damn, I hope cleaning it up won't be too much of a pain in the ass.

When the Fire Storm ran its course and disappeared, so did the three monsters. They disappeared in puffs of green smoke, and the remains of the Green Caterpillar's threads melted into the air.

"Phew... I'm glad that this battle's over. I never would have expected that Green Caterpillars would still be so problematic, even though it was kind of a given now that we are on the higher floors."

I exhaled a heavy sigh and lowered the Wand which I was still holding up just in case another monster would try to get a jump on us now that our guards were lowered after just finishing a battle.

"That's certainly true. While we are on the subject, allow me to apologize, master. I was careless when I was dodging Minos's attacks, and as a result of that I ended up putting you in the place where you were vulnerable to Green Caterpillar's Skill attack."

When she warned me that the Web Spit attack was coming my way, she immediately jumped back to get back to me, and as a result, we ended up right next to each other when the threads and my Fire Storm collided with one another, but it seems that none of the thread remains got stuck onto her, unlike me. I wonder if she also dodged them, or was she completely out of their splash zone and I was the only one unfortunate enough to get that sticky, white stuff all over my hand?

“Don’t worry about it, Roxanne. These guys can be defeated with magic alone, so it’s not like they will be posing any real threat to us now. We were just unlucky that they appeared with those two Minos that absorbed our focus, that’s all.”

“Thank you for your kindness, master.”

“Don’t mention it. By the way, it’s great that you managed to avoid the remains of the Green Caterpillar’s threads, but what would you have done if I wasn’t able to use magic or if that last Fire Storm was late by a few moments? Wouldn’t that put you in quite a pickle?”

“How so? The enemy was defeated and its threads disappeared in the idle of an attack so there is no point overthinking it, but in the case that it did not happen and the threads would still be there, I was simply planning to dodge it once more, but this time even further back.”

She was planning to jump even further back, despite the fact that the dodge she made just now was already over some pretty crazy distance? Is there no end to how amazing this girl is?

“I guess you’re right with that. And it’s not like I could do much else on my end either, since here on the fourth floor I need four shots of spells to defeat our opponents.”

“True, but even when we are fighting against a group of three enemies, as long as master’s magic is able to kill one of them, that is already a huge load off my own shoulders, since fighting against two enemies at the same time is much more manageable than fighting with all three of them at once.”

For someone like me, who still has to put an actual effort into dodging instead of doing it instinctively, fighting more than one enemy at the same time is still problematic, but as long as Roxanne says that she is fine with it, I guess I have no reasons to complain.

By the way, after getting some more levels I tried to do an experiment where I tried to equip myself with a Sixth Job and filled that slot with the Job of a Merchant (which I apparently acquired after interacting with the people who already had it, but when exactly was it, I honestly have no idea) that has an effect of slightly increasing the user’s INT stat and then round it up with a Herbalist Lv.10, but even after doing all that, I still needed four shots of magic to defeat the monsters dwelling on the fourth

floor, so ultimately it was a useless endeavor on my end.

However, if there's one thing that I am certain of now, it's that increasing my INT stat as much as possible will definitely have an effect on the overall power of the magic I am using, and that Merchant and Herbalist Jobs did just that: they made my magic stronger with their INT bonuses, it's just that those bonuses were simply not big enough to have a visible effect on the number of times I had to cast a spell to defeat the monsters here on the fourth floor. It also might be that my level is still too low for the spells to be stronger, and that's one of the reasons why I decided that I will fight every battle instead of running away from them. Unfortunately, my eagerness is not enough to change the fact that the process of gaining levels while having multiple Jobs set up is still more than a little tedious, even when I am using my Bonus Skills to give myself multiplicators to the gained EXP and lower the amount of it required for a Level Up. That being said, from the purely practical standpoint, the Jobs I should be focusing on the most right now should be Hero and Mage, and while I am at it, maybe I should also fill my Magic Crystals more by using Crystal Acceleration Skill. After all, filled Magic Crystals can be sold for a lot of money, and you know how badly I will need those if I want to buy me some new slaves for my har... I, I mean for the front lines of my Party!

For the time being, I will continue on with the following setting of four Jobs: Explorer, Hero, Mage and Monk. That way, I should have a pretty nice balance of magic and offensive capabilities rounded up by some healing abilities in case things ever got especially dire.

On the day when the bathtub we ordered was supposed to be completed, we have arrived at the Veil Labyrinth's fourth floor's Boss Room. The Floor Boss for this floor was Hachinosu Lv.4 (*TL Note: To those who might be confused why the hell is the Floor Boss called Hachinosu when the regular enemies on the fourth floor are called Mino: it's basically a kind of a Japanese pun. In Japanese, the word Mino means the first stomach of a cow, while Hachinosu is the second stomach. See what they did there?*) It is the same kind of bull/cow as Minos were, but obviously it's way bigger and much more muscular than them. I'm not gonna lie, I am getting genuinely scared here. I mean, just look at how big this thing is! I barely even had the time to get used to the size of the regular Minos, but this guy's humungous size is on a totally different level. If it hits me with those giant tree trunks-sized horns of his, there's no way for me to survive that! I will definitely be finished! Is this really what we are going to go against here?! Isn't that kind of an overkill, even for a monster with a Floor Boss status?!

I might have been bewildered at first, but it has only now occurred to me that since there is only one enemy here, then we will be able to employ our usual strategy of having Roxanne keep the boss busy from the front while I will go to its back to molest it with Durandal. It should be as easy as always...

...or at least that's what I thought, but then it tried to kick me in the head with its hind legs, scaring the living shit out of me! God damn it, if that giant hoove hit me, it would easily break at least a dozen of my bones!

Doing my best not to go right into a panic attack, I slashed at Hachinosu's ass from the right, then from the left, then from up to down and down to up and then from upper right to lower left and lower left to upper right.

The entire battle was more chaotic than I would have liked, but thankfully my barrage of slashes was enough to kill the Floor Boss, granting us free access to the next floor. I guess this was just another case of a Floor Boss looking all big and scary only actually be easy to defeat once you get the hand of its attack patterns down or have a Party member occupying its attention from the front while you hack away at it from the back.

Even after such an intense boss battle, Roxanne was, as one would expect, completely unscratched and looked to be totally unfazed both by the Hachinosu's size and its ability to attack those who would stand behind it. I have to keep it a secret from her that I was scared the whole time, or else she might think that I am a lame master.

When we reached the fifth floor, the first group of enemies we encountered were Minos Lv.5. I slashed one of them with Durandal, but much to my surprise, it was not defeated with a single strike. I have to say, I am impressed that it was able to one-shot pretty much every enemy throughout the first four floors, but I also think that it was about time for the difficulty bar to be raised higher, since there was no way for things to always go too smoothly for us. Having accepted that inevitable fact, I defeated a Mino that I was facing against with Durandal's second slash.

The next group of enemies we have encountered after Roxanne guided us to it was made entirely from the new type of monsters, the ones native to this particular floor: Cheap Sheeps. Even though they looked all fluffy like regular sheep, their attitudes were not friendly at all. They were quite ferocious and looked like they were ready to bite your face off if only you allowed them to do so. They also have horns, but unlike those of Minos, the ones belonging to the Cheap Sheep are not straight and sharp, but

thick and curved in a shape that resembled a spiral. Being hit with that will definitely hurt, but they do not look as terrifying as the horns of the Minos that were like small spears.

I shot the one before me with Fireball while Roxanne focused on the other two and slashed away at them with her Scimitar.

The battle ended shortly after without any major difficulties.

“So that is what the monsters of the fifth floor of Veil’s Labyrinth are like, huh? I have to say, after Minos on the fourth floor, I kinda expected something even more scarier, but they turned out to be... pretty disappointing, all things considered.”

“I wholeheartedly agree. Their movements were exceptionally slow in comparison to Minos. It’s like they were actually moving in slow-motion throughout the entire battle.”

Roxanne, don’t take this the wrong way, but when faced with you, I think everything looks like it is moving in slow motion. I wonder if the upper floors of the Labyrinths will have monsters that will give her a run for her money when it comes to speed? On second thought though, maybe it would be better if there were no such enemies. Having to fight something that even Roxanne could not dodge or keep up with is definitely not something that I would like to do, not now, nor in the near or far future.

“Let’s fight here a little bit more and then we’ll go back home. Today is the day when my order from that wood-worker should be arriving, so I don’t want to miss the messenger with the finished product.”

“Okay. As you wish, master.”

After fighting a few more groups of Cheap Sheep on the fifth floor we decided to call it a day and go back home. The most important thing we have learned during this round in the Labyrinth is that even though I can apparently no longer defeat enemies with only one hit from Durandal, I can still fight them effectively since all I need is just one more strike.

When we got back home, it didn’t take long for the messenger from the wood-worker’s shop to arrive with my requested order. And it took him exactly five days to prepare

it, just like he said.

“Oh, is that the thing you have requested, master?”

“Yes. It has finally arrived!”

Not waiting for the wagon to arrive, I left the house in excitement to meet the messenger outside.

“Here’s your order, as requested.”

“Thank you very much for delivering it so fast, We will be taking care of it from here.”

After confirming everything, the messenger moved to the back of the wagon to get the bathtub off of it. The first thing that I noticed about it was...

“Wow, this thing is huge!”

I knew it was going to be big because I ordered it as such, but the sheer size of it blew my mind. Looking at it from up close, this thing was even bigger than what I was imagining when I was looking at other tubs back in the store, the ones that I used as the base for what I was requesting.

A large, perfectly circular tub was placed vertically on the loading platform of the carriage that was being drawn by a single horse. The overall size of it is... I think it is three meters in diameter. About half of the basin sticks out from above the carriage, making it look like it was something that would be hard to transport with just one horse, and yet here it is, right on our very doorstep.



If this thing was any bigger it would be difficult for me to call it a proper piece of furniture, but even as it is now, I think this bathtub emanates an aura of strangely imposing intensity, but since I was the one who ordered it to be made in such a way, wide enough for two people and with the depth going above the height of an average person, I have no one but myself to blame for how it turned out.

"This is the item that you ordered to be custom made, master?"

"Yeah, the one and the same. Now, let's see... hmm, all the boards look like they are thick and sturdy, and they all look like they can hold their fair share of weight..."

Maybe that's how the bathtubs are supposed to be made, but the boards that make the tub's floor are even thicker than the rest of them. I looked at Roxanne, hoping that she will be able to offer me an explanation to this particular riddle.

"The bottom boards have to be thicker than the rest, because if they were to be too thin, then the whole bottom would immediately break when it would be exposed to too much water. By making them in such a way, we can prevent that from happening."

But the one who answered me was the messenger guy instead. Here I was thinking that he was just a simple deliveryman, but maybe he is actually involved in the production process?

Anyway...

So, the bottom of the bathtub might actually break if too much water is being poured inside and the bottom boards are not thick enough, eh? But then, how much water can fill into this bathtub, exactly? Let me just think about it and do the math.

One liter of water is a thousand cubic centimeters and one centimeter x one centimeter x one centimeter equals one cubic centimeter, so... one hundred centimeters x ten centimeters x one centimeter equals one thousand cubic centimeters, meaning one liter, and since one meter is one hundred centimeters, then if the length and the width of the entire bathtub are both one meter and the depth is one centimeter, then that would mean that it can hold ten liters of water... wow, that is a lot more than I expected. The surface area of the bathtub's base is roughly πR^2 , and since the radius is one meter, then that would be 3.14 square meters. If the depth of this thing is about fifty centimeters, then that gives us $3.14 \text{ square meters} \times 50 \text{ cm} \times 10 \text{ liters}$ which gives us a total of... one thousand five hundred and seventy liters? And since one liter

is equal to one kilogram, then...

Oh... my... fucking sweet jesus!!!

No Michio, calm down and think about it once more. Cool that hot-blooded head of yours and do the math again, just to be sure.

Doing the math furiously

After doing all of the calculations multiple times in order to be absolutely sure that I did not make any mistakes anywhere, I arrived at a conclusion that I did everything correctly and the end result checked itself out every single time. Really? Does this bathtub really is able to contain 1.57 tons of water in it?

That is... a tremendous amount of it, and I mean it in an unironic way. Also, I didn't think that the day will come when I will be forced to use a unit of measurement as big as tons in my daily life calculations. But I guess that explains why the boards used to make this bathtub needed to be so thick: if not, the whole thing would not be able to properly contain all the water needed to take a proper bath without breaking the tub with its sheer volume. And while we are on the subject of storing water in the tub, I wonder how well it's going to be handling hot water and if the hot water itself won't be cooling off relatively fast without having some means to constantly keep it boiling?

"W-Well, for the time being, shall we bring it inside?"

"Yes, my master"

Even though it barely fit through the door because of its sheer size, Roxanne and I managed to bring the washbasin into the house without wasting too much time to do so. You know what, no. I think that at this point there is no point in calling this thing a washbasin, even if it was based on it and others might think about it as a giant washbasin. Personally, I don't think that calling it a bathtub would be sufficient now. For me, this thing here is a full-fledged wooden bath now.

"Roxanne, be careful not to get your fingers stuck between the tub and the walls, okay?"

"Of course. I will be sure to be careful."

The whole thing was too heavy for us to be carrying it indoors, but thanks to it being

all perfectly round we could move it around by rolling it on the ground. The only time we had to exert a little bit more effort was when we were getting it through the doorways, but other than that, we were perfectly fine with just the two of us. We ended up putting it in the room next to the kitchen, the one with a drain that I have secretly designated to be our bathroom.

Even though we only have this bath right now, I hope that we can decorate it with more bathroom-appropriate furniture soon enough, because even with the tub taking a large portion of the room, there was still a lot of space left in it to fill up. If I were to hazard a rough guess then I would have to say that the entire bathroom was about the size of eight tatami mats (*TL Note: roughly 13.2 square meters, if anyone's interested.*), so after settling the bathtub it, we still have roughly ten square meters to fill as we see fit.

“Master, I know that this is the custom item that you ordered back at the washbasins shop, but what are we going to be using a one so large for, especially since we have already bought a larger washbasin for laundry purposes?”

“Can’t help it but to fill curious now that the thing has finally been delivered, huh? Very well then, listen and be ready to be surprised. You see, this thing here is actually a custom-made bathtub!”

I declared so to Roxanne, filled with pride. That being said, now that said bathtub has finally arrived, it will have to be filled with water, and just that process might be... more than a little pain in the ass. I have already established that since I have the ability to use magic then we would not need to draw water from a well or a river, but now that I actually started going over the logistics of filling the bathtub with without the aforementioned methods, it only now dawned upon me that in order to have just one bath a crapload of water would have to be made with my Water Magic, and then I would also have to use Fire Magic to heat all of that water up, and all those things will likely eat through all of my MP in no time, causing me a lot of headaches and plunging me into depression.

“A bathtub... you say? As in... something you use to take baths in?”

“Yup, exactly. Just like you said, you use it in order to take nice, long, relaxing baths. If you don’t mind, then I would like to start preparing one right away.”

"Understood. Is there something I can help you with."

"For the time being, why don't you bring some jugs in here? We can fill them up while I will fill the tub with water."

Unfortunately, I have no idea exactly how long the entire process of filling the tub with water is going to take, but I will use my Water Magic as many times as it takes to get it done as soon as possible. The fastest way to go about it should be to use consecutive Water Wall's back to back and have just enough MP left to use Warp so that I could go replenish my MP in the Labyrinth when I will start feeling my mood worsening.

First things first, we took the entire bathtub and washed it until it was squeaky-clean, and after that Roxanne brought a few jugs that were placed inside of the tub.

"Could you place all of them a little bit farther from one another?"

That way some water is bound to be spilled outside of the jugs once they will be filled to the brim, but that would only be a problem if they were placed on the ground. Now that they are in the bathtub itself, we can spill as much water as we need to without worrying about it going to waste.

(And now to raise the water's temperature... Fireball!!)

I threw a Fireball int one of the filled jugs to see how much warmer it would make the water. It went from straight up cold to somewhat lukewarm.

(Looks like it'll need at least a second shot, huh?)

And I fired a second fireball into the jug. This time, the water was hot enough not to need a third shot, so I repeated the process with the other jugs until they had enough water in them. As for why am I going about filling the bathtub in such a roundabout way, the answer to that is pretty simple: the jugs are made out of pottery which is somewhat heat-resistant, so no matter how many Fireballs I will fire into the water that is being stored inside of them, nothing bad should happen to them. On the other hand, since the bathtub itself is made out of wood, so there is always the danger of the tub itself catching fire and getting burned if I tried to throw Fireballs directly into it. There are probably more effective ways of increasing the water's temperature without risking doing any damage either to the bathtub or the surroundings, but for the time being noting better than what we are currently doing is coming to my mind. The other option available would be to pour the cold water into the tub and then shoot Fireballs

at it until it gets to the desired temperature, but I have a feeling that it would take way too many spells to be called cost-efficient, so until we won't figure anything better out, the method of using water-filled jugs with Fireball-heated water and then emptying it into the bathtub proper is probably our best bet. The rest is only a matter of rinse & repeating the entire process as many times as needed.

However, the issue of finding the best method for filling the bathtub with water was not the only one we would need to take care of: it seems that when it comes to the water placed in the jugs, one Fireball only makes it lukewarm, and the temperature that can be called just right is reached after adding another shot into it. That is cool and all, but that only stays true for as long as the water remains in the jug. We have multiple jugs that have to be filled and then heated, meaning that when I will move on to take care of the second jug, then the third one and so on and so forth, the water that has already been heated in the previous ones will start to cool down, so it will most likely require two more shots of Fireball to be heated back to the desired temperature... No, that sounds like more of a hassle than it is actually worth, not to mention that it would also take a long time to fill in such a way. Hmm, what to do, what to do indeed... maybe it would be better to lower the overall temperature by diluting it all with water from another Water Wall at the very end?

No matter what I am going to decide to do in the end, it won't change what I have to do now: go to the Labyrinth in order to get back all of the MP that I have used up to fill all of the jugs with water.

It is hard. I have to admit: filling the bathtub with hot water proved to be a much more of a difficult task than I ever imagined. And to add to the list of gripes that I already have, the process of recovering MP might also not be as efficient as I would have liked because we are in our house in Quratar, and the place where we are going to get my MP back is the Labyrinth in Veil, meaning that a trip back and forth is going to deplete my MP anyway.

Currently, the quickest way to prepare a bath for me and Roxanne looks more or less like that: first, I use almost all of my MP up to create water with Water Wall that's going to be used to fill the bathtub, and then I use as many Fireballs as needed in order to heat up the water stored in ceramic jugs. When that part is over, I have to make sure to have just enough MP left to go to the Labyrinth, get back all of my MP, make the trip back and then repeat the entire process until I run out of MP again so that the cycle could continue. Do you see the picture that I am trying to paint here?

However, whether we like it or not, the Labyrinth of Veil is the only place where we can go to do things like that because of how deserted its lower floors are. That is one aspect in which Veil's Labyrinth is a much more convenient place than Quratar's Labyrinth, where even the first few floors are almost always crowded with people no matter what time of day you would try to go there. That is why even though this is a closer, much more efficient option, we cannot go and use it.

Why is that? I know it might sound stupid from me because I already told that a number of times, but it is an option that we simply cannot allow ourselves to take, because with that many people around on every floor (the higher floors might have less people, but at this point in time this is purely my speculation and not a confirmed information) there will always be the danger that someone might see me either using magic or swinging Durandal around, and we cannot afford to go to the higher floors where there would be less of them too fast without proper preparations. Should we try doing that after all and take the risk? Or should we stop and continue at our current pace that is relatively safe and risk-free?

Putting that musings aside for the time being, we made a round around the Veil Labyrinth's lower floors where I got my MP back after taking out a few Kobolds and Green Caterpillars. Since I have my Bonus Skills that give me more EXP for defeating enemies and lowers the amount of EXP required for Level Ups, then maybe if I gain enough levels with the Mage Job, I will get so much MP that what we are doing right now will no longer be necessary? Well, I guess I will just have to wait and see, and remain patient until then.

Another thing that I sincerely hope will improve with time, would be my speed of switching between sets of equipment whenever I reset my character from a Durandal-focused build to a magic-focused one, because I have to do it every single time whenever there might be people around in the Labyrinths. All for the sake of keeping my abilities and OP sword a secret from others. That being said, did my Bonus Skills list contained something like a Skill that allowed you to keep like two sets of different items that could be switched between at any time? Because I don't think it did, which is a kind of a shame, because that would be very useful in our current situation, not to mention that it would be pretty neat to swing Durandal at one moment only to change it to wand and magic on the spot.

"Ugh, if it'll always take so long to prepare, then I am afraid we will be forced to only

take baths once a week at best.”

““Once per week”? What does that mean, master?”

“... It means once or twice every ten days.”

“Is that a big issue?”

“Not as much an issue as... you know what? Nevermind.”

That was a small conversation that happened between us when we went to the Labyrinth so that I could recover my lost MP for the second time. Well, instead of a conversation, I guess it would be more accurate to say that it was just me complaining while Roxanne listened to me without saying as much as a word. As such, I am sure that even though she would never have said that out loud, Roxanne is probably thinking that I must be some kind of unhinged weirdo who uses incomprehensible words that no one besides me understands. It’s a good thing that she bought my story about me hailing from a distant eastern country (which is not technically wrong, by the way, since back in my old world, Japan *was* an eastern island nation), because I can always explain it by saying that this is how the people of that land to the east, whatever that land can actually be, talk during their everyday lives. Also, this exchange of ours allowed me to discover an interesting tidbit of information about this world: even though they have something akin to a calendar that allows them to track down the progress of time needed to know things like when will be the day of collecting taxes or when the first day of spring will arrive, there seems to be no concept of a week here, which admittedly is pretty weird, but ultimately I guess it should not hinder any of my plans for living here all that much.

When we got back home and resumed the process of filling the bathtub, the temperature of the entire room began to steadily rise, until at one point the entire bathroom was basically turned into a sauna, that’s how hot and steamy it actually got, to the point where it was getting a wee bit difficult for me to breathe. For the time being I asked Roxanne to wait outside of the bathroom since I didn’t want her to get affected by the heat, since just by staying in that steaming hot room for a while I have become so drenched in sweat as if it was a scorching-hot summer day. I worked on filling the bathtub like that until I almost ran out of MP again.

“Here you go, master. Have yourself a towel to wipe all of that sweat off.”

"Thank you, Roxanne. You're just too kind."

When I left the room to avoid turning into a dried-up, shriveled mummy, Roxanne was already waiting for me outside with a clean towel in tow. I gratefully took it from her and used it to wipe the sweat off my face.

"What do you want to do now, master? Are we going to the Labyrinth one more time?"

"Yeah, you got that right. We are heading to the Labyrinth alright."

With the washcloth that she gave to me, I wiped the sweat off my face and neck. I probably have some of it on my back as well, but there's no time for me to be worrying about something so trivial when we need to go to the Labyrinth again. Come to think of it, how long have we been repeating the cycle of me filling the jugs with water, heating them up, filling the bathtub until I run out of MP and going back and forth between our house and the Labyrinth to replenish it? Was it an hour, two hours or even longer? I don't really know, but I do know one thing: if I am willing to go to such lengths just to have a bath with Roxanne, then it has to mean that I am a huge pervert. But you know what? I am perfectly fine with that. If having a willpower of steel and determination to go through with anything that is necessary to complete the goal you have set out to do makes you a pervert, then I will gladly become one.

After going back from the MP recovering trip I continued the work of filling the bathtub, until finally it looked like there was enough water in it for us to have a nice, long soak. It took way more time than I would have liked it to take, but hopefully the end result is going to be well worth it. All that is left to do now is to prepare a few spare jugs with hot water, just in case that the current amount of it was not enough after all.

"Alright... I think... I think it is finally ready."

I declared with a triumphantly panting voice after walking out of the bathroom. Right now, the bathtub is filled with hot water in about ninety percent, give or take, resulting in the entire room being filled with piping-hot steam. It's a shame that this room does not have a window or any kind of ventilation shaft in it, because that way we might end up getting light-headed in no time.

"Thank you for your hard work, master. You look tired, are you sure you don't want to rest for a bit?"

"Thank you for worrying about me, but I'm fine. Since we still have some time, let's use it to go to the Labyrinth one more time and then have dinner once we return. And once we are done eating, then we can have a bath together."

I got another washcloth from Roxanne and wiped the sweat off of me once more. It only occurred to me in the middle of it that I could have not done that since I am going to enter the bath in a few moments. But first we have to eat dinner. Only then after we finish eating we will enter the bath. The bathtub should be able to keep the water heated for some time, so we do not have to worry about arriving in the bathroom after dinner only to find an ice-cold bath.

"Uhm... Are you sure it is okay for me to take a bath together with you, master?"

"Of course it is okay for you to do so, Roxanne. After all, I have ordered this bathtub to be made the way it is made with exactly that intention in mind."

I wonder if she asked that because she dislikes taking baths and that was her way of being subtle about it because she did not want to hurt my feelings after I poured so much time and MP into preparing this bath just for us? Even if she herself does not want it, then I guess just this once it would be okay for me to use my authority over her as her master to order her to do it. It would leave a foul taste in my mouth, but that might be the only way here. Unless...

"You don't want to take a bath with me, Roxanne?"

When in doubt, always ask directly instead of taking wild guesses.

"It's not like that, master. Usually the only ones privy to taking baths are nobles and aristocrats, and you told me that I should wait outside instead of going in with you when you were still pouring water, so..."

"I only did that because I didn't want you to get sweaty because that whole room is now filled with steam. You saw how sweaty I was when I walked out of there, right?"

"Is that so? And here I was thinking that this bathtub was another special thing that you wanted to keep a secret from everyone else and that's why you wouldn't want me to look at it and use it."

Did you thought I would be so petty as to do something selfish like that? Oh Roxanne, my sweet Roxanne. I really think that she is still taking our master-slave relationship way more seriously than she needs to.

While returning the washcloth back to her, I gently stroked her doggy ears.

“Well, you’re right about it being special. This bathtub is special to me, because I ordered it with the thought of the two of us taking a bath in it together.”

“Oh, uhm, well... in that case, I guess there is no reason for me to say no to this proposal, is there?”

“Yes, I definitely want you to enter it together with me, Roxanne.”

“Yes, of course. Thank you, master.”

Good, my persuasion attempt turned out to be successful. Looks like Roxanne is going to bathe together with me of her own free will. If she refused me to the very end, then she would not know what kind of luxury she was missing, so I am glad that she made the best choice possible in this situation.

After finishing all the work for the day and eating dinner, we could finally take a bath. Admittedly, the water inside was a little bit too hot for comfort, so I used a few Waterballs in an attempt to cool it down for even a bit, but I can already see that precise adjustments of the temperature with magic alone will be quite difficult. At times like these, I really am missing the greatness of the modern-day technology.

I put my hand into the water and began to stir it in circular motions. Will this be enough to help cool it down a bit? I don’t know about here, but usually it tended to work with the bath I had at home back in Japan.

I also figured out how long it would take to make hot water, so from the next time onward, I will be able to save time by heating the water in the tub directly with Fireballs, which should make things a little easier for me. But just a little. Will it be a little easier if my level goes up? Hard to say at the current moment, honestly.

Lemons are also floating in the bathtub after I threw some of them there. I don’t know if it’s exactly the same as the lemons I am familiar with, but they are probably lemons because their name was translated as lemon. I would have preferred the yuzu fruits instead of lemons, but in a pinch they are a nice enough substitute. They have a nice

scent, and it should not be possible for them to be dissolved in water.

Roxanne sets a lantern in the corner of the room and begins to undress herself. She washed herself lightly, and then she finally entered the bath where I was already waiting for her in anticipation.

It feels good.

Warm water wraps itself around my whole body as I lazily spread out my limbs.

Because of how big this bathtub is, it feels like I am in an actual hot spring.

It's not a cypress wood one so it doesn't have a mellow woody scent, but it's still wonderful nonetheless. I placed a towel on the edge of the basin, put my head on it, and laid down with my eyes closed. Roxanne also laid down next to me. She stretched out her arms and hugged herself briefly before assuming a totally relaxed posture. Her thin and supple body is right next to me. Thanks to their buoyancy, I was able to see her breasts floating above the hot water's surface and have a nice long look at her seductive legs.

Roxanne's skin is so wet and silky smooth when she's wet, just by looking at her like that I could feel a certain part of me getting hot and bothered already.

"Aaah, this is the best."

"Yes, soaking like that does feel really good."

I feel like we both meant different things by what we have said just now, but Roxanne seems to be happy about this, so I guess it does not matter all that much.

お湯の中、ロクサースの肌はなめらかだ。
しつとりかつさらさらしていて、気持ちがいい。

「はい。とても
いい気分
です」

「うん、
最高だ」

ロクサースと一緒に風呂に入るのは、
思つた以上に素晴らしい。

Then, I felt something rubbing against the inner sides of my thighs. What a comfortable feeling. Curious to see what it was, I grabbed it with my hand.

It was Roxanne's plump, shapely butt, and her tail that grew out of her back slightly above it. The hair that made her tail is spread in the water like some kind of exotic aquatic plant. She rubbed herself against me, and in turn I also slid my hands around her soft body that was flushed pink from the heat of the water that surrounded us.

This is truly a surprising discovery.

"Roxanne, your tail is really pleasant to the touch."

"Is that so? Thank you very much for the kind words."

To show her appreciation, Roxanne started moving her butt and tail right next to me, sending a series of gentle ripples along the surface of the bath's water. I never had a dog myself, but I am sure that this ticklish feeling is how it feels to have your pet wag its tail against your skin. It was a fluttery feeling that calmed the heart.

Since she possesses certain dog qualities like her droopy ears or the tail, I thought that she might try to avoid getting those parts of her body wet, but apparently it didn't bother her in the slightest.

Taking a bath with her is even more wonderful than I could have ever imagined. It's a shame that we cannot do this every day because of how butt-hurtlingly long the entire process is, but if at all possible, then I would like to do this with her every ten days... no, once a week... no, every five days! Or you know what, screw it, make it every three days!

She continued to gently rock her body to the sides, causing her tail to brush against the entirety of the lower half of my body, sending jolts of pleasurable sensations all throughout it. In the meantime, I continued to use my fingers as a comb to keep the hair of her tail from getting all tangled up with one another.

At one point I have submerged myself in the water entirely and then quickly emerged back while pushing my wet hair back with my fingers.

"Master?"

"Ahh, there's no better feeling than getting your hair nice and wet when they get all

sticky and dirty. You should try it out as well, Roxanne.”

“Yes, gladly.”

And then Roxanne lowered herself down into the water, submerging herself completely. Since a bit of her hair were sticking out above the surface, so I stretched out my arms towards them and washed them for her together with her doggy ears. The feeling of the hair on her head was vastly different in comparison to the fur of her tail, but it still got entangled with my fingers in the hot water like normally.

(Shouldn't she be out to catch her breath right about now though?)

I didn't measure it down to every last second, but by my rough estimations Roxanne has been submerged underwater for about a minute now. But just as I was about to start seriously worrying about her, she emerged from underwater with a loud gasp, splashing water everywhere around her, and her two bountiful hills were displayed right before my eyes in their full glory.

“Puaaaaah... you were right, master. That felt truly refreshing!”

Baths are truly great. No, great is too small of a word to properly convey how amazing they are. The baths are well and truly the best thing under the sun!

CHAPTER 4

SOAP

Kaga Michio

Current levels & equipment:

Explorer Lv.29

Hero Lv.26

Mage Lv.29

Monk Lv.28

On the morning the next day, I woke up hugging Roxanne, feeling the warmth of her body against my skin.

Maybe it is because that was the first proper bath that I have taken in quite a while, but because of that and what naturally came after that, I feel like the sleep that I just woken up from was the best one I had in quite a while. To be honest, the bed and the sheets are so warm and cozy that I do not feel like doing anything at all. I just want to stay the way we are now and continue to bask in this blissful moment. As for Roxanne, after she took the bath with me her skin feels like it is much more moist, elastic and smooth to the touch. The feeling of her pressing herself against me as she hugs me is absolutely wonderful. Oh how I wish that the bath's beneficial effects could stick around for longer than they actually do. This sensation is honestly something that you can get absolutely addicted to!

Roxanne slowly opened her eyes and gave me the usual morning kiss as I continued to stroke her hot skin. Then she slowly stretched out her tongue and entangled it around mine. I responded to her in kind, enjoying the taste of our sticky kiss. When we finally had enough, we let go of each other's mouths.

“Good morning, Roxanne.”

"Good morning, master."

"Let's enter Quratar's Labyrinth today."

"As you wish."

After getting ourselves fully equipped and bringing the map along, we headed out and entered the Labyrinth of Quratar.

Now that we have broken through the four floors of the Veil's Labyrinth, the next logical step according to the plan we have agreed on was to clear the fourth floor of the one in Quratar. The monsters that inhabited that floor were Cheap Sheep, the same kind of monster that we found in the fifth floor of the Veil's Labyrinth. Back there, I needed to use two strikes from Durandal to defeat a single one of them, but since here they are one floor below, they should go down in one hit.

Maybe it was because there were many people wandering around this floor, but we managed to reach the Boss Room without running into that many random encounters with regular enemies. Luckily for us, there was no one in the waiting room, so we were able to jump right into the Floor Boss battle.

The green smoke gathered in the middle of the room like always, and soon after, the Floor Boss made its appearance. And its name is... Beep Sheep Lv.4. this is the identity of the Quratar Labyrinth's fourth floor's Floor Boss. It began to squeal (or meehing, or baahing, or whatever it is that sheep do) as soon as it materialized and noticed our presence in the room. I thought it was going to sound intimidating, or be so high-pitched that it will make my ears hurt, but no, no such thing happened. It was just a normal, loud battlecry. After fighting the Cheap Sheep on this floor and getting the hang of their battle tactics I can say that they are more annoying rather than dangerous, so this guy should not be a tougher challenge to topple than the Hachinosu was, and after taking a nice long look at it, it does not even look all that ferocious. It will take more than an oversized lump of wool to scare the pants off of me, you know?

With keeping our focus and careful positioning, we should have no problem taking this guy down, so just like always, I left the front of the boss for Roxanne to take care of. I took my established position at the back of the Floor Boss and prepared to slash at it with Durandal. But then...

An orange magic circle started forming beneath the Beep Sheep's body, so I hurriedly

whacked it with my sword to interrupt the Skill chant from being completed... or that's what I would have done if I was not too far away from it!

"What skills does the Beep Sheep have?!"

"I do not know that!"

Damn it, it looks like I cannot count on Roxanne's help with figuring out what this guy can do.

At the very least I think it is safe to assume that it won't start spitting out sticky webs and threads like the Green Caterpillar did. And even if it did something similar to it, then I can always prevent it by casting Fire Wall, but if I have no way of confirming what exactly is it going to do, then I will not be able to plan our actions accordingly. Now, even though Durandal has the ability to interrupt the chanting of the Skills used by the enemies, I am too far out of that guy's melee range to be able to stop it even though I desperately want to do so. In this particular case, my own cautiousness got the better of me!

Damn it, the circle is almost complete! A little more, just a little bit more and I will be able to...

I desperately threw myself forward and managed to slash the Beep Sheep's body just as it was to unleash its Skill.

(*There! Phew, safe!*)

I managed to stop the Skill from being activated, but it does not mean that I was in the clear just yet. Noticing my presence after I slashed it, Beep Sheep crouched on its front legs and came right at me with a kicking attack from its hind legs. Seeing that attack coming, I had to jump back to avoid getting hit by it. Heh, stupid sheep. It will take much more than that to stop me!

Just from my battle against Hachinosu I can say that got more than enough experience in fighting enemies that used their hind legs to attack those who are standing behind them. I just have to do exactly what Roxanne told me earlier: observe the enemy's movements carefully and wait for the right moment to perform a dodge involving the minimal amount of movement possible. Sure enough, I accepted that I will never get on Roxanne's level of being able to do so swiftly and gracefully that no attack would touch me no matter how close it would brush against me, as it was evident by that one

time when Roxanne managed to avoid the Green Caterpillar's Web Spitting attack without as much as a single strand landing on her while I got my entire arm covered in it, but even a clutz like me should have no problems with the attack that I can see coming from a mile away.

I was able to escape the hind legs kick by jumping back and then retreating some more just to be sure, but when I recovered myself and re-adjusted my posture to resume my offensive, but when I focused my attention on the Beep Sheep, a sight most dreadful has befallen me.

A magic circle appeared under the Beep Sheep's body for a second time.

Oh crap, this is bad!

I ready my weapon and break into a mad sprint. I can't believe how big of an idiot I was for not noticing something that obvious much sooner. From the very beginning, the Beep Sheep's goal must have been to give itself more time so that it could activate its Skill again after I interrupted it. Come to think of it, maybe that first Skill activation coupled with that hind legs kick that forced me to back up quite a bit was an intentional manuever that aimed at getting me, the one wielding the more dangerous weapon away from it? But wait, monsters from the fourth floor of the Labyrinth should not be that intelligent to be able to plan something as cunning as that, meaning... meaning that it was all the more woefully stupid of me to fall for such a trick. Way to go, Michio you dimwit, you have officially been outsmarted by a goddamn sheep. A mixture of anger and fear began to rage within me as waves of cold sweat started to go down my spine.

I swung Durandal, but this time there is absolutely no way for me to make it in time. Even if I used Rush or Overwhelming, it would still not be enough to cover the rest of the distance between the two of us. The magic circle is completed, starts glowing with a blindingly bright orange light, and then...

“Guoooooh....!!!”

(!?

That sensation and the numbing pain accompanying it... was I... was I attacked just now?

It would seem that Roxanne has been attacked by something as well, because she was

holding her stomach in exactly the same way I did.

What was that attack that hit us just now? Teleportation? Telekinesis? Or perhaps some kind of omnidirectional attack redirected to our stomachs so fast that we weren't even able to react to it in time?

"Are you okay, Roxanne?"

"Yes, I am fine... watch out, master!"

The Beep Sheep tried to headbutt me, but I barely managed to block its attack with Durandal. Even so, it does not mean that I got away completely unscratched from it, because while I the attack did not connect with me, I could feel the sheer force of the impact reverberating throughout my hands that were gripping the sword and slowly spreading along my entire arms length and seeping all the way to the bones. Now that I had a moment of peace, I briefly glanced at my Leather armor around the area where I have been hit by the boss' Skill. It was visibly damaged, but still holding together nonetheless. If I was not wearing it, then that attack could have pierced right through me.

"Any ideas what the hell was that just now? How was it possible for something so big to attack me in a split second without even noticing it."

"I don't know. I was also attacked without even realizing it."

We slashed the Floor Boss with our weapons and distanced ourselves from it, only to rush in and attack again.

In between the Beep Sheep attacks, I looked at Roxanne and confirmed that she has sustained the same wound that I did. That was enough for me to confirm that I absolutely have to kill this fucker as fast as possible. No matter how many wounds I will receive and how much damage will be dealt to me, as long as I will connect some of Durandal's attacks with the enemies then I should be able to go back to having full health. However, that goes only for me and my OP weapon, but not for Roxanne. She unlocked the Herbalist Job just like I did so she should have some emergency medicine on her, but other than that she has no way of recovering her own health, and that is why she focuses so much on evading the attacks that come her way. But, just like we saw just now, not even she is able to evade some of the attacks, especially if she cannot

even see them coming. Her levels are also lower than mine, I have to prioritize defeating the enemy in front of me as fast as possible so that she wouldn't be in constant danger and have enough time to actually recover.

"Could it have been some kind of status effect that affected our cognition in some way?"

"It's hard for me to say with absolute certainty, but from my perspective it looked like all of a sudden you stopped moving for quite a while, master."

"I stopped moving? Really? I don't remember doing such a thing."

"Yes, it looked almost as if you were asleep, or petrified."

"Asleep, huh?"

Asleep... sheep... ah, so that's it. It must have been something like that!

I don't know how it managed to do that without me noticing, but the Skill that the Beep Sheep used must have put me to sleep, much like in that stereotype where children are told to count sheep jumping over the fence to help them fall asleep faster.

But..... have I really fallen asleep due to the Beep Sheep's Skill? I mean sure, it would not be all that improbable for it to possess an ability that would put the target to sleep or stun it, especially since that chant-like mewing of it did sound like a kind of a warning call signalling that such an attack is incoming, and it would explain why I failed to notice what was happening around me until it was too late: I must have been put under the Beep Sheep's spell and lost consciousness which has been regained the moment an attack hit me, or to put it in the more technical terms, when my body has been exposed to an extensive physical trauma. That's only my hypothesis though. Let's ask Roxanne about it to be absolutely sure.

"Roxanne, are there Skills that the monsters possess that could put their prey to sleep or immobilize them in any other significant way?"

"Yes, some of them have effects like that."

And there you have it. At least now I know that some enemies do possess terrifying techniques like that. And this one is especially nasty, because it practically guarantees that you are going to get hit at least once before you finally snap out of it. In that case,

the best course of action would be to not allow the enemy in front of us to use that Skill of his ever again, so I need to Rush to it and stick to it like glue and don't stop swinging my sword.

My biggest concern in our current situation is that even though I know Roxanne was also attacked by the Beep Sheep's Skill, I have no way of knowing exactly how much damage she suffered with that blow she took, since I can only see my own MP and HP pools when I use Identify on myself. For the time being, I think three or so strikes with Durandal should be enough to bring me back to full health, but if I don't want things to get dire very quick I should do everything in my power to avoid getting hit with any more of those Skills. Also...

"Roxanne, switch with me!"

"Roger!"

We swapped our positions, so now Roxanne was in the back of the Beep Sheep and I stood in front of it, but I was not planning on simply staying there, waiting for it to come at me with its attacks, oh no. Instead, I ran from one of its sides to the other, whacking them with Durandal and getting back all the HP that I lost. The Beep Sheep did not stand there taking it either, because it tried to follow after me and ram me with its curved horns. Is it just me, or am I catching this monster's aggro way more easily than Roxanne did?

I deflected the horns of the boss with Durandal's dull side and then countered immediately after with the sharp one. Every time it tried to attack me with its horns, I would repeat that process while jumping back or to the sides to evade an occasional body slam attack. After a while, the Beep Sheep did something new, which was a headbutt attack it performed after bending its front legs and lowering its head with its horns facing forward. It looked dangerous, but that was it. In truth, it was even easier to dodge than the horn swings, because just like with the Minos on the previous floor, all I had to do to get out of the harm's way was to wait for the last possible moment and then do a dodge roll. As an added bonus to risking such a perfect timing-dependent maneuver I managed to confuse the Beep Sheep, who seems to be just as bad as making sharp turns during its charges as the Minos and Hachinosu. Good. That gives me even more chances for an attack.

In the meantime, Roxanne was also attacking it from the back, but the damage she was doing to it with her Scimitar should be laughably small in comparison to the DPS from

my own weapon.

At some point The Beep Sheep started using its hind legs trying to kick Roxanne, but since she is a much more graceful dodger than I can ever hope to be, she dodges its outstretched hooves with minimal movements without letting herself be reached by them. No matter how many times I see her evade the enemy attacks, I still cannot believe that a person can actually move with such nimbleness. It's like she's moving, but at the same time that she's not, and just when you think that she's been hit it turns out that it was nothing but a vanishing afterimage.

Her dodges are the complete opposite my own. Where Roxanne simply moves her body literal inches to the side, I need to roll or jump away, creating a large gap between the enemy and myself. That might work in tight spots, but as was evident by the earlier situation, when enemy possesses Skills, such a way of dodging is not an effective one if you want to interrupt their chanting. Even now I still have some difficulties with a swift continuation of the battle because after every dodge I have to do a short Rush to get back up close and personal with the boss.

But after what seemed like ages of just dancing around trying to deal damage, it looks like a chance to truly go in for the kill has finally presented itself to me. The Beep Sheep charged at me, and then immediately went for a sweeping attack with its horns, first to the left, then to the right, then to the left again. Now all I have to do is to position myself in the right place, and...

The Beep Sheep's head moved to the right, carried by the momentum of its previous attack. It shook its horns wildly at me, but right now I could easily read the trajectory of the entire attack. Dodging out of the way of the incoming horn, I raised Durandal and dropped it at the Beep Sheep's neck in one powerful motion. Its blade tore through the skin, muscles and the tissues underneath, severing the boss's head from the rest of its body.

Finally, the Beep Sheep has fallen. It left its item behind and then disappeared in a cloud of green smoke.

"Okay... it's... it's finally dead. How are you holding up, Roxanne? Is your body okay? Are you hurt anywhere? When I snapped back to reality after being hit with that Skill I saw that you got hurt as well, so..."

"Yes, I did suffer some damage, but I've used recovery items several times now, so I should be fine for now. Nevertheless, thank you for being concerned about me, master."

You don't have to thank me for it, Roxanne. You're my precious companion, so of course I would be worried about your well-being. If something ever happened to you, I would not be able to forgive myself for it.

"If you think you have any kind of lingering damage left, be sure to tell me. Recovering our health and keeping ourselves in the best possible condition is our number one priority after all. And also, I... I don't want to lose you..."

"Understood. If I notice any abnormalities, I will be sure to tell you immediately."

With that said, we have proceeded to the fifth floor as I kept Durandal equipped on me just in case any dangerous enemy would pop up and tried to attack us.

"All right, we have made it to the fifth floor. So, how is it, Roxanne? You smell any people nearby?"

"*Sniff Sniff* Hmm... there should be a lot less people here in comparison to the fourth floor, and I also sense a monster nearby. How would you like to proceed, master?"

"Let's go have a look at the monsters inhabiting this floor then. Just, you know, let's be cautious about it, okay?"

"Yes!"

Now that we caught up with our progress of the exploration of the Labyrinth of Quratar in comparison to the Labyrinth of Veil, it was high time to see what kind of enemies are we going to encounter here. Normally I would have opted for going back home, especially since the Floor Boss fight was especially tough, but since the both of us managed to heal ourselves back to full health and we both still had the energy to spare, then I decided that why not, let's at least go and see what will be there in store for us.

Walking forward under Roxanne's careful leadership, we have soon reached the place where the monster she mentioned was located. It was called Collagen Coral Lv.5. So this guy is the monster native to the fifth floor of the Quratar's labyrinth, huh? It looks like a round rock... on a thin, twig-like body... supported by only a single leg? And it is

approaching us by hopping on that one leg very slowly... I mean okay, but... what does collagen has to do with anything here? Maybe it means that the rock-like thing acting as this guy's head is actually soft and easy to cut through? Let's check it out!

I slashed it once with Durandal to see what would happen, and let me tell you, I was only partially surprised. Because the monster is called Collagen Coral, a part of me was hoping that it would mean that its head will be all light and squishy and easy to cut in half, but it was anything but that. Quite contrary to my assumption, the material this monster's head is made of was surprisingly hard, and making a dent in it required a pretty decent amount of strength to be put behind the slash of my sword. Is it because its head is made from solid rock? No, not rock. Since it's called Collagen Coral, then I guess coral has to be its main component. Yeah, that makes sense.

Naturally, one blow was not enough to kill it, so I had to whack it in the head a second time. I guess that means that the fifth floor is the natural borderline of sorts, a place where one strike from Durandal is no longer enough to kill monsters. I have to remember that: floors one through four: pretty much everything except Floor Bosses can be one-shotted easily, but from the fifth floor onwards, every single battle, even against the mob enemies will require more effort from us.

The monster collapsed in a puff of green smoke and disappeared, leaving behind an item. Now, let's see what we have here...

“Coral Gellatin, huh?”

The body of the monster was all sturdy and hard to cut through, but when I touched this Drop Item, it turned out to be solid, but decently soft, to the point where I could easily make a dent in it by pressing it down with my finger hard enough. Maybe that was what the Collagen in the name “Collagen Coral” referred to?

“I wonder if maybe we could make some decent jelly out of it?”

“Excuse me, but what exactly is this “jelly”, master?”

“Nothing, it’s nothing, forget I said anything. Just a little thing we had back in my homeland, is all. More importantly, do you know if this thing is edible or not?”

I asked Roxanne after I picked up the item and handed it over to her so that she could put it back in her backpack.

"I don't know if it can be eaten on its own, but I heard that butchers use it when they are making sausages and they want them to maintain their shape. Also, I heard that once it is dissolved in hot water, it can become a pretty strong adhesive that can then be processed into glue. With enough of it, we could make enough glue that we could then use to attach the carpets to the walls like we talked about a few days ago."

"Is that so?"

An adhesive used in the production of glue, huh? Then maybe it will really be quite convenient to have as much of it on us as possible? Also, Roxanne's talk about carpets reminded me that we have indeed talked about buying a few of them so that we could use them as decorations in our house to make it look less empty.

"Okay, we will worry about that later once we get back home. Can you scout ahead with your nose?"

"Of course... *sniff sniff* *sniff sniff* there is someone a little bit further ahead. If we want to avoid being seen, we can go through the path to the left, but be advised that I do not sense any monsters there as well, master. The path to the right contains some monsters, but if we go there then we will be at risk of being seen."

So it is a choice between three possible routes then. The left one is automatically out of the question, because according to Roxanne there is literally nothing for us to find there. The way forward is also off limits to us, because you know, people. I could always switch from The Durandal Build to Magic Build and we could try going through the path to the right, but that might not be the best option under the current circumstances. We are currently on the fifth floor of the Labyrinth, the floor where one strike from Durandal, my best Bonus Weapon, is no longer enough to defeat monsters as quickly and efficiently as I was doing it on the lower floors. Two hits from Durandal are not all that bad, but when it comes to magic, I needed four shots of it to defeat a single enemy on the fourth floor, and that was already becoming a kind of an issue whenever we had to fight larger groups of enemies back to back without an option for me to switch back to Durandal Build so that I could recover my lost MP whenever it was dropping to the critical zone.

Here on the fifth floor, I would presumably have to use five shots of magic to defeat a single enemy, making it even more counterproductive. And if all of that was not

enough drawbacks, we are back to the subject of people. If there is even the slightest possibility of someone already being there or going there and seeing me use magic, then that is a risk that I absolutely cannot and will not take.

Sigh I was hoping that what Roxanne said about number of people dwindling around the fifth floor will turn out to be true, but once again I have received a grim reminder that reality is often disappointing. Well, no use crying over spilt milk I guess. Maybe the situation will improve as the day goes on, but right now, during the early morning, it looks like there is little else we can do in here. If we want to do whatever we want without worrying about anyone butting into our business, then we will have to change places.

"Do you think that just one piece of Coral Gellatin will be enough to glue one carpet to the wall in a way that it won't detach itself from it after a few hours?"

"I think the amount we have on us right now should be just enough for a single carpet."

"Well in that case, there is no reason for us to be overdoing things if we absolutely don't have to. Let's go to the Veil's Labyrinth for a bit and then let's go back home so we can grab a bite to eat, shall we?"

"Sounds good to me."

If I don't want us to be seen, then there is no place better for it than the Labyrinth in Veil. It's almost completely empty, and we have never once bumped into any other Parties as long as we were going there. Truly, the Labyrinth of Quratar should borrow a page or two from the Veil one in that regard. If only it was to be like that, then our lives would be much simpler. By the way, I hope I don't have to spell it our for you, but the plan to go find a carpet in the Imperial City has been postponed until after we eat breakfast. For the time being though, we will spend some time on the fourth floor in Veil's Labyrinth, fighting against Minos, since I want to get used to fighting them some more. We could have gone to the fourth floor of Quratar's Labyrinth to fight against Cheap Sheep, but I prefer Minos from Veil's Labyrinth because they are much more straightforward and easier to deal with. At least with them I do not have to worry about them whipping unknown Skills out of their asses.

To change the subject to something less triggering: I am wondering what kind of carpets are they going to be selling in the Imperial City.

There was no carpet-selling stores in Veil, but from what I saw back at Alan the Slave Merchant's shop, they are not all that different from what I was used to seeing back in my old world. In that case, the thing that I have to be wary the most of... would be the price of carpets. As per the rule I have made for myself, I want to limit the needless spending of my money as much as possible, and that goes especially for the gold coins, the most valuable that this world has to offer. So for the good of my wallet, I sincerely hope that I won't have to bust out gold coins just to buy a single carpet.

After we got back home and finished eating breakfast, Roxanne and I made preparations to go carpet-shopping in the Imperial City.

We went out to the wall portal in the Adventurer's Guild in the Imperial City. There are tall buildings on the other side of the road. The Adventurer's Guild was also a magnificent building, with tall side-buildings on either side of it.

Although it is tall, there are no buildings that look like they would have more than five or six floors, and they were all made with the same type of brown brick, making me feel as slight sense of intimidation and oppression whenever I looked at them. It feels like I was lost in ancient Rome or Baghdad, even though I was never in either of those places, only seeing them on tv and in pictures.

The road in front of me is wide and straight. I remember reading in a history book that the medieval cities were made up of intricate roads that did not allow the enemy to easily pass through them in cases of invasions, but apparently the Imperial City took a different approach than that.

"It is my first time being here while not having any kind of urgent business to attend to, but this city is definitely an impressive one."

"Could not have said that better myself. And the roads here are all wide and as straight as they could be."

"If my memory serves me correctly, then I think all of the roads here in the Imperial City were designed that way as a part of a series of countermeasures against a monster or demon attack. After all, with the streets like that, you can spot any potential threat as it approaches from miles away, and that would not be possible if the streets and buildings were designed in a different way."

Ahh, so it is actually because of a practical reason like that? I see, that definitely makes

sense from a city planning point of view. Come to think of it, Imperial City is the third city that I have visited for now, and so far all three cities had a different layout: Veil was constructed like a grid or a Go board and Quratar has roads that expand radially from the Labyrinth that acts as the city's center.

The layout of the capital was certainly designed by a clever man. Just as Roxanne said, with the street so straight and wide you can see really far away. With streets like these, there is no way that those standing on guard duty would not be able to notice any threats to the citizens like monsters wandering inside of the city after they wound up there from beyond the defensive walls or getting in through the occasional cracks and holes in it. From what I managed to gather from my observations it does not seem like the empire is in a state of war with any of its neighbors, but such a layout of this city was definitely not meant for the peaceful times, or at least that is what my gut feeling was telling me. People may talk all they want about countermeasures against the swarms of monsters, but this setup is also an ideal one to handling the threats of the human variety. If anyone was dumb enough to attack the capital openly, they would definitely not go very far before being wiped out from afar.

"Is that so? Well, since we are already here and there is nothing rushing us, do you want to go on a casual stroll?"

During our stroll around the Imperial City I managed to confirm what kind of shops were there and what exactly were they offering.



Aside from the monster/bandit security angle, there was one additional benefit of having wide roads that were pretty tightly secured: with such an open road, the probability of getting pickpocketed should be extremely low. Maybe I am overthinking this, but even with the most of my silver and gold coins stored in the Item Box, I cannot feel completely safe without knowing for sure that there are no ways for thieves to pickpocket Item Boxes. Until I confirm that with one hundred percent certainty, I will walk around crowds of people with the highest level of vigilance maintained.

As for the shops, most of them were gathered around the Capital City's Adventurer's Guild, which has to act as the main landmark of the downtown area.

Most of the shops in Quratar were made with the intention of Explorers being their target demographic, and as a result of that, they were lacking in variety of the products they had to offer. The only things they had to offer were miscellaneous goods and daily necessities as well as the basic weapons, armor and groceries. All in all, they got you covered as far as the basic items went, but little else besides that. In comparison, the shops here in Imperial City seem to be a bit more casual.

What I mean by that is that they seem to be geared towards everything a typical resident of a big city might need, and they also have a certain sense of class to them. Just look at the clothing they sell here, and the difference will become pretty apparent. The clothes sold in Quratar all looked like a rural ones that have already seen their fair share of wear, tear and use, but from what I see on the displays of the clothing stores here, the products they are offering look like something that might have been sold in the shops with brand clothing that could be found in Ginza. Needless to say, they are all expensive as fuck.

Even the displays and the windows of the shops were all made from glass... yeah, when it comes to luxury, this place really is a cut above all the other cities we have visited thus far.

"Look, master! A carpet store!"

What Roxanne pointed at with her finger was indeed a carpet store. It was not on the ground floor, but on the first floor above the other shop, but even so, it had a solid set of steps leading up to it, there was a rug in front of the door so that people could tidy the soles of their shoes before entering, and the inside of the shop itself was spacious

and luxurious to such a degree that a part of me was thinking tha a riff-raff like me has no place in here. The place was literally lined up from top to bottom with carpets in all sorts of colors and intricate embroideries that made me think of haute couture (*TL Note: Basically expensive, fashionable clothes produced by leading fashion houses*) items that were sold on earth. Maybe it was because of the closeness of the Adventurer's Guild, or maybe because this is the Imperial City, but even though I was expecting the quality of goods offered here to go up in comparison to other cities, I would have never expected that it was going to be to such an extent. Maybe we should leave and go fins some other shop, the one that will be much more merciful to our money? How about that, Roxanne? No? Aww...

Even though this carpet store was on the Imperial City's main street, the inside of it was unexpectedly quiet. The carpets on the floor were all made from soft and fluffy materials, adding some relaxing aspects to the coziness factor.

"Welcome."

"Hello, and sorry for the intrusion, mind if we have a look around the shop?"

"Of course, take as much time as you need."

A middle-aged female clerk bowed her head lightly and gave us a polite greeting, watched over us from her spot in the middle of the room where she without budging for even an inch.

Other than the two of us there weren't that many customers to speak of inside, making me feel as if were here alone with the clerk lady. Trying my best to suppress the creepy feeling that she was carefully watching our every move, Roxanne and I proceeded to inspect each and every one of the store's carpets, both the ones on the floor and the walls as well as the ones placed on small podiums and rakes scattered here and there around the entire building.

"How about this one?"

"I think it is not bad... but if we want to display it as a decoration, then I feel like we definitely need something a little more flashy and representative."

"How about this one then. It definitely looks like it's made from better materials than that previous one."

We took a look at the carpet with geometric patterns that was placed on a low platform. It looks like a pretty well-made carpet to me. The patterns are all different, but none of them were too vivid or extravagant. Rather, their colors were all warm and gave you a sense of calming just from looking at them.

“You really can tell that much about a carpet simply from touching it for a bit?”

“Yes, and I am sure that with a bit of practice you could learn to do that as well, master.”

Just like with dodging enemy attacks the same way you do it, huh? Sorry to disappoint you, but I do not think that’s happening anytime soon.

Roxanne slowly examined more carpets by touching each and every one of them and staring at them pretty intently. One with geometric patterns, reddish-brown one, a dark one, brown one with yellow stripes and so on and so on until she went through majority of them.

“How about these ones?”

“They look like they would stand out too much in our house.”

Roxanne told me that after scrutinizing the carpets with a serious look. If Roxanne says they would not look good in our house, then I have no reason to distrust her. After all, girls always have better judgement when it comes to those kinds of things.

“How about these other ones then?”

“Hmm, they are certainly not bad, but...”

“Pardon my intrusion, dear customers, but is there anything I can help you with? What kind of goods are you exactly looking for here?”

The female clerk walked to us and offered her help with perfect timing. As expected of someone who must be well-versed in the art of customer service after a (what I assume to be) a lifetime of work here?

“Ah, yes, your advice will be greatly appreciated, ma’am. Actually, we are looking for a carpet that we could hang on the walls in our house as decoration.”

“Understood.”

"For starters, could you tell us how much do the carpets in this section of the shop cost? Like this one, for example?"

I pointed at the carpet that Roxanne was now holding in her hands.

"The carpets around sir's left side are the non-luxury variants, so the price of each one of them oscillates around three thousand Nars. As for the carpet held by your Wolfkin companion, both that one and all the other ones near her, their retail price is about five thousand Nars each, because they are all luxury products designed and crafted by the way of special order commissioned from the famed carpet manufacturer, Dobrou."

While it is good that apparently I won't have to bust out my gold coins to buy a carpet, these prices still seemed to be a little bit on the expensive side. Since we want not something to be placed on the floor but rather as a decoration to be mounted on the wall, we won't be needing anything too extravagant.

"And what about the carpets that are cheaper than the ones you have already shown us?"

"Those carpets right here are the ones that are made by the local manufacturer. While not exactly on the same level as the luxury items we are offering, they also cannot be called cheap or badly made."

"Uh-huh, I see. And their price?"

"Three thousand Nars per item."

"Hmm, okay. What else do you have?"

"This way, please."

And the female clerk guided us to the products that were located at the back of the shop, where the carpets were all arranged on the stands near the walls. Are those carpets as good as the ones in the front, or are we now getting to the "options for poor saps" part of the establishment?

"I have a question before we move forward. What sizes are the carpets you sell here in?"

"Most of our carpets are of the universal size, and that is such that a fully grown, adult

Adventurer could be easily rolled up in it.”

Really? That’s the description you’re going with? Because let me tell you, it is, well, a very, very specific one. Also, if they are truly so big, then if we decide on buying one we will probably have to carry it together, since there is no way only one of us could haul something so big around. And there is another issue that we might end up having with it besides that. Is it going to be okay for us to Warp back to Quratar with such a huge carpet? Now that got me seriously thinking, because as much as Warp is better in comparison to Dungeon Walker and Field Walker, being so restrictive when it comes to the size and the number of the items you may carry with you during the Warping procedure is its most crippling shortcoming. In the worst-case scenario, we might end up being forced to ask one of the Adventurers in the Adventurer’s Guild to give us a ride back home.

But even then we have no guarantee that it’s going to work... Ugh, that’s a tough nut to crack, but thankfully I am not alone in this. Let’s ask Roxanne what she thinks we should do.

“What do you think we should do, Roxanne? Should we take the carpet that you’re holding?”

“I think that is the best one out of the ones we’ve seen so far, but let us look around some more first.”

“All right, sounds like a plan.”

It’s good that she made such a suggestion, because if we decide to buy a second carpet in addition to the one she has already selected, then I should be able to use my 30% discount Bonus Skill. So, while Roxanne searched one part of the shop, I moved to the other in search of something that would catch my eye.

“Roxanne, how about this one over here?”

“This one?”

After noticing a carpet with a dark brown and orange checkered patterns on one of the back stands, I beckoned Roxanne to my side to show her what I found. I don’t know what’s her opinion about it is going to be, but personally it looks so interesting that I

ended up liking it almost immediately when I laid my eyes upon it. And since it is not in the front of the store I am sure that its price should be relatively affordable as well.

"Ahh, I see this one caught your interest, sir? Excellent choice. Although the designer responsible for making this one is still young, they are already considered to be an up-and-coming genius in their craft, and we in this store wholeheartedly recommend their works."

A genius, huh? I wonder if it is because that person's skills, whoever they might be, are that advanced, or is it because he or she is crafting such quality products by using the limited technology available to them here in this world?

"I think it's a good carpet. It might not look like it at first glance, but it has been crafted carefully and meticulously."

If Roxanne is saying that, then I have no reason to doubt her intuition and sense of beauty.

"In that case, can we get this carpet along with this one right here, the one that my companion is holding onto?"

"Of course, thank you for your purchase. As a special service for buying a product recommended by our store, the price for the two rolls of carpets you want to buy shall be reduced to five thousand six hundred Nars."

"Awesome."

All that talk about "special service" means that my discount worked exactly as I intended it to, making the purchase that much easier. If I did not have that Bonus Skill, then I do not know if I would have decided to buy two of those carpets. Luckily for us, that is no longer one of our concerns.

The female clerk holds both carpets under both of her arms and carries them to the counter like that, and then she waited for us so that we could finalize the payment, which was made by only whipping out my silver coins. The woman then rolled the carpets up, tied them with a piece of string and handed them over to us.

Roxanne and I took one of them each, and I immediately noticed that despite how they looked they were weighting quite a bit. If that woman managed to lift two of them at once like it was nothing, then she must have quite a bit of actual strength in those frail-

looking arms of hers.

"Before we leave, I hope you won't mind me asking about one more thing: can those carpets be transported with Movement Magic?"

"Yes, it is possible to do so. If you roll them up into a certain size, you will be able to travel with them by using Field Walker. This shop was made with Shield Cement so you will not be able to do it inside of here, but on the back wall in the corner here there is a hanging carpet display that acts as a space that you can cast Movement Magic on. The display itself is also changed every single day, so there won't be any problems with that."

Oh, what do you know, so it is possible to move them while using Movement Magic after all. That's actually quite nice of them to take something not so obvious into account. So according to her, all we have to do is to go to where the display is located, cast Field Walker (or in my case, Warp disguised as Field Walker) and voila, we can be on our way home. And if they are replacing the display every single day, then that means they do not need to be worrying themselves about the possibility of theft, because the way Movement Magic works is that in order to travel between two set locations the portals have to be in the two fixed places. If that condition is not met, then the fast travel will not be possible. Also, I have to admit that it has never once occurred to me that such a countermeasure could be used in order to prevent Movement Magic's misuse. Maybe I should try employing it for myself from now on?

With out business in the carpet shop concluded, we headed towards the carpet hanging at the display. The female clerk did not follow after us, but simply returned to her original position in the middle of the shop, escorting us with her eyes, which felt just a tad bit uncomfortable, if I am to be completely honest with you. At the very least I don't have to worry about her standing next to us when I cast the spell, but just to be on the safe side I still did my usual thing where I pretended to move my mouth as if I was reciting the chant for the spell as I casted Warp.

Then, a certain thought occurred to me. The clerk here said that even though the carpets are quite big, you could still travel with them with Movement Magic as long as you roll them up, but she was saying that you could travel with Field Walker, she never said anything about Warp. I know it's probably because Warp is a Bonus Skill and the NPC might not be aware of its existence, but it does not change the fact that there is always a possibility that something that might be possible with Field Walker might not be possible to do with Warp, as unbelievable as it sounds. But if I won't be able to

travel with the carpet while using Warp to get to our house, then what? And what if it won't be just when going from other places back to our house, but to the Adventurer's Guilds as well? That would be the worst disaster possible! There are many Adventurer's Guilds in this world and they will definitely be a convenient spots for travelling, so I want to continue using them, both when I have something to transport with me and when I do not. The only saving grace to this whole situation right now is that even if my Warp fails, the only one who is going to witness this is going to be this shop's clerk, and since she is an NPC I really doubt she will go around talking about this to anyone, but on the off chance that she might do just that... I think I might be forced to do some unintentional murderhobo play.

As I was thinking about such things, the black portal of warping appeared on the carpet like normal, so I went inside... And what do you know, I have emerged at the destination I have set, the living room in our house, without any problems or difficulties. Looks like warping from the portal at the carpet has been successful. Good. It seems that there was no problems with warping even when it is being performed on a non-solid surface. That means that so far there was no accidents whenever I was using Warp to move around, and all the problems that I constantly imagined with it were nothing more than me simply getting overly worried for no apparent reason. Phew, that makes me feel relieved. Anyway, why was I worried about all those things anyway? I had no reason to think something will go wrong, but I ended up doing so anyway. Is getting too worried when I have no plausible reason to another one of my bad qualities that I should work on fixing? Maybe, possibly, but the time for that will be later. For now, since we managed to get back home safe and sound with our carpets, we can proceed to prepare the glue for affixing one of them to the wall.

“So, how exactly do we make glue out of Corral Gelatin?”

I asked Roxanne about that when we put down the carpets and took out the item that dropped from the Collagen Coral. Roxanne then took it to the kitchen and placed it inside one of the pots, after which she poured in some water inside and started boiling it over low flame, making it look like she was giving it a hot water bath.

“The procedure itself is actually pretty simple. All you have to do is to place the gelatin in the pot, light a fire under it so that it starts to melt from the heat, and when it does, you have to leave it to cool off for a bit and that's that.”

"Wow, it really is that easy? And here I thought there was going to be some hidden trick to it."

I'm not sure if it's surprisingly easy or purposefully devious. Be that as it may, as long as the process of making glue is simple, then so much the better for us, and I can't think of any easier method than melting something with hot water and leaving it to cool down.

"As I said, now we just have to wait for the adhesive to cool down, so in the meantime we can take the carpets and roll them out before we prepare one of them to be hanged on the wall. On that note, have you already decided which one are we going to use as decoration, master?"

"I think it would be best to use the carpet you chose for that, Roxanne. As for the other one, we can lay it down in orb bedroom next to the bed."

"All right."

"All we have to do now is to get it to the first floor, which should not be difficult with the two of us carrying it at each side, so can I ask you to help me out with it?"

"Of course. It shall be done as you wish."

Roxanne and I then carried a checkered carpet to the bedroom and placed it next to the bed. Since it was still early when we woke up in the morning we had a spare change of clothes prepared for when we get back, but now that I rolled out the carpet next to the bed I felt like I didn't really want to change just yet. When fully rolled out and spread on the floor, the carpet was about the same size as the bed, so it should be just big enough for us to lay down on it without our feet sticking out of it (our heads would be okay since I placed it in such a way that it was right next to the room's wall), in which case...

If my assumptions about this thing are correct, then it should be just big enough for the two people to have some "fun" on it.

Oh no, this is bad. I feel like something is starting to awaken inside of me.

"Now that I see this carpet all rolled out, I realize how luxurious having such an item feels."

"Uh-huh, it sure feels like that. But don't just stand there, Roxanne, come and lay down here with me. It feels reaaaally nice."

I laid down on the carpet and invited Roxanne to join me after testing if it is comfortable or not myself.

"Okay."

Roxanne did just as I asked her and laid down by my side.

"Ohhh... you were right, master. It feels so nice, and soft, and fluffy..."

"I know, right? Oh man, I could totally get addicted to this..."

Can I take it as an okay sign for us to have some fun on the carpet? I think I can, right?

"Do we have some free time before the glue finishes cooling down?"

"I think we do."

And with that, I, Kaga Michio have awakened a new fetish within myself: Carpet Play.

A few hours after we played on the carpet, I realized that apparently I have obtained a new Job for myself: Cook.

Cook Lv.1

Effects: Increase DEX (small), Increase STR (tiny), Increase AGI (tiny)

Skill: Rare Ingredients Drop Rate Up, Item Box Operation

Cook, huh? It is definitely nice that it has so many effects and Skills associated with it, but to be frank I would have preferred it much more if it had Increase INT as one of the available stat increases since that could prove to be of help with strengthening of my Magic Build. The Skill unique to the Job, however, might come in pretty handy. I mean, Rare Ingredients Drop Rate Up means that enemies should have a higher chance of dropping rare ingredients as Drop Item, thanks to which we will have more options opened for experimenting with cooking food. It might be especially useful with

Kobolds since they are so weak that farming items from them should not be much of an issue and I am curious what other items other than Kobold Salt they would have to offer. Assuming they even have a Drop Item other than Kobold Salt of course.

“I will go do the dishes now.”

“Sure, take your time.”

Looking at the description of the Cook’s Job and its effects and Skills once more, I once again realized that the world of this game is Labyrinth-centric to its very core, because normally everyone who would see the Job titled “Cook” would probably assume that it will be a Job that either strengthens the ability of the user to cook or makes all the processes related to cooking easier or faster, but here, the Cook Job is doing neither of those things. All it is doing is to give me an increased drop rates for the rare cooking ingredient to be obtained from defeated monsters, but that’s about it. It would be nice if it had a bonus effect that goes along the lines of *“Prevents the ingredients stored in the Item Box from rotting”*, but I guess that would be asking too much, huh? Unless it is a hidden effect and I won’t see if it works until I will give it a go of course.

Okay, for now, let’s see what this whole Item Box Operation thingy is about. Character Reset... add Cook Lv.1 to the list of my equipped Jobs... set it as a First Job... all done... now select the Item Box and...

(*Holy Cow it’s huge!*)

When I finished adding Cook to the list of Jobs and selected it as my First Job for the time being, the biggest distinction that I have noticed was that the capacity of my Item Box has been practically doubled. When I had Explorer Lv.30 set as my First Job, I could fit thirty types of thirty different items in it, but now it looks like I can store thirty types of sixty different items in it, so yeah, the overall capacity has been doubled.

(*All right, that’s admittedly pretty neat. But now, let’s see if the system that is governing the Item Box is able to distinguish which Job’s Item Box the items are placed in... there.*)

I switched my First Job back to Explorer and moved part of the items from the Cook’s Item Box to the Explorer’s Item Box so in order to have the same amount of items in both Item Boxes, and when that was done I tried to remove Cook from my list of Jobs... only to find out that I was not able to do that at all. So the system does distinguish by which Job’s Item Box the items are placed in.

To briefly summarize what I learned from this Item Box experiment just now:

1. When both the Jobs of an Explorer and Cook are selected, the size of my current Item Box has doubled, increasing from thirty types of thirty items to sixty types of thirty items.
2. The overall capacity of the Item Box is split between the two Jobs, meaning that I can store thirty types of thirty items in the Explorer's Item Box and another thirty types of thirty items in the Cook's Item Box.
3. When activating the Item Box Skill, it seems that the system governing it cannot make the distinction between the Explorer's Item Box and Cook's Item Box.
4. However, the system can make the distinction between the contents of these two Item Boxes.
5. I can change my First Job to Explorer with items staying in its Item Box and remove the Cook Job if no items are stored in its, but if you equip the Cook Job and put items in the newly expanded space in the Item Box, that Job can no longer be removed until you won't take all of the items out and return to the previous size of the Item Box

Those are the apparent rules that govern the combined Item Boxes and how the system distinguishes between them.

But as to whether or not there are more rules or those existing ones will not be altered or changed in any way, I have no way of determining that at this point in time.

However, the size of the Explorer's Item Box is thirty types of thirty items because right now the level of my Explorer Job is at Lv.30. If my level increases and Explorer will change from Lv.30 to Lv.31, then the size of the Explorer's Item Box should also increase from thirty types of thirty items to thirty one types of thirty one items, so maybe the ever-increasing size of the Item Box will facilitate some changes in it further down the road? What about the Cook then? Well, since it started with thirty slots for items at Lv.1 I think it might actually be what the Item Box Organization Skill is all about, so it is probably safe to assume that this number of thirty slots is going to stay the same no matter what level the Job itself will become. Even if I level the Cook's Job to Lv.30 or Lv.31, the capacity is probably going to stay at thirty all the time.

No matter how it is going to turn out in the end, the current setting where the Cook's Item Box has to stay at a fixed size no matter what the level of the actual Job is felt like a natural one to me, and thinking about all of the factors that might or might not facilitate changes in it only made my head hurt when I tried to wrap it around them.

Finally, given the overall size of its Item Box, I think it is safe to assume that the requirements to unlocking the Job of a Cook is to have the Explorer's Job at Lv.30 and cook something.

Since I got my hands on the Job with the Skill Rare Ingredients Drop Rate up, I decided to go to the Labyrinth of Veil's fifth floor while having it as one of my active Jobs to see how was that going to work, but much to my disappointment none of the Cheap Sheep we encountered there seemed to have dropped anything that would be out of the ordinary. Not a single rare ingredient, just the regular ass ones. We even went down to the fourth floor to see if Minos would drop something else, but that was a bust as well. Tch, what a bunch of useless cows! Then again, maybe Cheap Sheep and Minos only have common drops and do not have anything that could be classified as rare on them?

"Roxanne, just to make sure that we are both on the same page here. There *are* monsters that drop rare ingredients when they are killed, *right?*"

"Yes, they definitely are there."

"So technically speaking, as long as we keep killing them, they should drop something different than their regular drops at some point, right?"

"Yes, that is what I believe."

"Okay then, I'm going to trust you on this one. On to the next group of enemies, please."

Since Roxanne has a much better sense of smell than I do, I guess we will eventually find an enemy that will drop something rare if we just continue to follow along her guidance.

"Maybe we should try going to another floor?"

I proposed after the next few battles where the result was the same as with all the other ones.

"We might as well. I think that the higher we will go, the better chances we are going to have."

"While we are still on the subject, I wonder if one type of enemies has only one type or rare ingredient that can drop from them or do they have multiple ones?"

"I think some of them do, but I never had any opportunity to verify if that is true for all of them, or just for a select few."

"Okay, we gotta start somewhere. How about Minos?"

"With Minos that started appearing from this floor onward, I think they have multiple rare drops that are floor dependent. For example, the ones here on the fourth floor drop one type of beef, but on the higher floors they might drop things like boneless ribs or other kinds of meat that can normally only be bought at the butcher's shop."

In other words, that is another incentive to keep climbing higher and higher inside of the Labyrinth: the higher the floor, the bigger the risk, but also better chances of obtaining items of higher quality.

"Also, I think there are other kinds of cow-related enemies dwelling on the higher floors, and they would definitely drop other kinds of meat that Minos won't be able to provide."

"Is that so?"

Good to know that we might have an alternative way of obtaining meat.

"And since you mentioned the butcher already, do you think we could sell the meat obtained from the enemies for some nice dough?"

"Dough? Why would a butcher pay us with that?"

"I meant money. That's how we sometimes call money back where I came from."

"I see. Unfortunately, I do not think that meat obtained from Minos is worth all that much even though it is a rare item."

So far I have only shopped at the butcher's once and I only bought ham and some chopped pieces of meat without paying too much of an attention to the other types of

products the shopkeeper had to offer there. On a side note, I wonder if all the shopkeepers who run their own shops in the cities used to be Explorers or Adventurers who decided to pursue the business route because they were unable to make enough money in the Labyrinths? It would certainly make sense, since you can get a lot of ingredients relatively easy, and once you place them in the Item Box they will not rot no matter how long you will hold them there.

“Since we have been on the topic of meat how these past few minutes, would you like to buy some of it for the next dinner or two?”

“Yes, and once the herbs in our garden grow bigger, we will be able to make even better dishes by combining them.”

“That’s settled then.”

Roxanne’s right. For the time being the herbs in our garden are too small to harvest them properly, and the only spices we have on us are the Kobold Salt from Kobold Kampfer and black pepper from Spy Spider, both of whom are Floor Bosses. Once the herbs grow ready to harvest, then we will be able to go to town on the bigger number of recipes, but that is another bridge that we will have to cross no sooner than when we will get to it, so there’s no reason to think about it too much right now. When it happens, I will leave that to Roxanne.

Before we continued the exploration, I removed the Cook’s Job and replaced it with Explorer. After that, we were able to quickly break through everything the fifth floor of the Veil’s Labyrinth tried to throw at us. Cheap Sheep were a given, but this time we even managed to cut the Floor Boss of the fifth floor, the Beep Sheep without getting hit and allowing it to use its Skill even once. I think it is safe to say that this combination of enemies no longer is any particular threat to us.

Once I made sure to always stay close to it and interrupt any of its attempts at trying to cast Skills, the victory was easily ours to claim, and it was even easier when Roxanne was taking the position in the front, leaving me in the back to do my thing with Durandal where I slashed the Beep Sheep in a rinse and repeat pattern. Even when it tried to kick me with its hind legs, I always tried to sneak an attack or two at them before it went to recover its posture without jumping back too far away from it. That was my countermeasure against its attempts to create a time-buying gap between us

The next morning, we took a map and run through the entirety of the 5th floor of

Quratar's Labyrinth straight to its Floor Boss. The boss of the fifth floor of the Labyrinth of Quratar gave us a little bit of trouble because it was a little tricky where the Collagen Coral had its front and backside, but other than that this battle was not a big deal for the two of us, and I managed to beat it simply by swinging Durandal at its general direction.

"Here is the medicine you gave me master. There was no need for me to use it."

Roxanne handed me the medicine pills she was keeping in her backpack in case of emergencies.

Not knowing what would happen, I gave Roxanne some medicine pills before the boss battle. This is a valuable lesson that I learned from the boss battle with Beep Sheep the other day: to always have an alternative method of healing available on hand, since I wanted to avoid making the same fuckup we did while fighting the Beep Sheep and falling prey to its Skill ever again. I also brought a few antidote pills with me, just in case if some of the enemies had Skills that could inflict poison upon their target.

"Wouldn't it be better for you to hold onto them until we will see what are we going to be dealing with on the sixth floor?"

"It will be okay. In Quratar, the monsters dwelling on the sixth floor are Minos, just like the ones on the fourth floor in Veil."

The monsters on the sixth floor of Veil's Labyrinth were the same ones that live on the second floor of the one in Quratar: Naïve Olives. We have already fought plenty of them before, so taking care of them was relatively easy for us. As an added bonus, I was able to defeat all of the Lv.6 monsters on that floor with only four shots of magic, so hunting and grinding for levels on the sixth floor was a literal piece of cake.

As a way to celebrate our breaking through the Veil's and Quratar's Labyrinth's fifth floors, I have prepared another bath. Well, I say it was a celebration, but the truth is that I simply wanted to force Roxanne to go in with me so that we could have a little slippery & wet fun. The thing that did not change since the first time I prepared the bath was how troublesome it was to fill the entire thing with hot water from scratch and then keeping it warm enough so that it would not go cold on us throughout the entire preparation stage. At times like these, I think we could really use some pipes

and a faucet. All we would have to do would be to guide the pipes from the source of the water to the bathroom, twist the faucet and voila, worry only about making it hot enough. It would have been quicker, more efficient and allow me to not waste so much time to go back to the Labyrinth over and over again in order to recover MP.

The Labyrinth in Quratar is almost always too crowded to go on MP replenishing trips there, so we end up going to the one in Veil practically every single time, but that just puts me in a loop of back-and-forth trips that are not cost-efficient, because they eat up a good chunk of the MP that I have worked so hard to restore, so it always feels like a kind of a wasted effort. Not to mention that the process of constant shifting between Durandal setup and Magic setup and the need to collect all the items as well as taking my Magic Crystals in and out of the backpack so that they could collect the energy from defeated monsters.

If only there was not so many people in Quratar's Labyrinth, then we could go there to recover my MP without any issues, and that would even make something as tedious as grinding the EXP more bearable, since higher floors with higher level enemies would naturally reap even more and better rewards. But since that is not possible, we have to stick to Veil's Labyrinth whether we like it or not. It would have been a totally different story if I could fight the monsters without having to switch equipment, Jobs and Skills all the time and not worry about Magic Crystals, but unfortunately I am not quite at that power level just yet.

Anyway, back to the topic of bathing.

Initially my intentions were to prepare baths for us only on special occasions, but I can't shake off the feeling that this conviction of mine has been thrown out the window sooner than you could finish spelling the sentence "*Roxanne is the best girl in the world*". Why?

Because I realize that it was looking for more and more excuses to be taking them so that I could have my "fun" with Roxanne in the water, and taking a bath as a "celebration" after conquering another floor in each Labyrinth turned out to be just the thing I needed to make that happen.

Thanks to that, I have been more enthusiastic when it came to exploring the new floors in the Labyrinths and I tried that much harder during the Floor Boss fights. Some of you might think that it was a really scummy way of motivating myself to do something as crucial to my survival in this world, but that is just how it works, you know? And

besides, every motivation is better than having no motivation at all in my book. It was exactly that mindset that allowed me to breeze through the sixth floor of Veil's Labyrinth in no time flat. That should be no surprise, am I right? I might have it easier than most because of my OP Bonus Weapon and Bonus Skills, but that does not change the fact that trekking through both of the Labyrinths day in and day out is still a physically exhausting job to do, and no one with their brain intact can deny that there is no feeling in the world better than having a nice, long soak in the bathtub after a hard day at "work" followed by enjoying some sexy times with your girl right after that.

Besides, with the way that Labyrinths are constructed, meaning that Floor Bosses are always the same "type" of monster as the ones inhabiting the floor itself and that they are the same for every Labyrinth but spawning on different floors, fighting a few groups of them was always enough to give us the general gist of what we could be expecting from the big baddie. In the case of Veil Labyrinth's sixth floor, the monsters there were Naïve Olives, on the sixth floor in Quratar had Minos and Hachinosu as its Floor Boss. Since we already had prior experience with fighting both of those types of enemies, we broke through both of those Labyrinth's sixth floors with our eyes closed.

As we were going through the seventh floor, we saw two monsters, one we have already seen and two that we did not. It looked like a goat. This is the type of monster native to the Veil Labyrinth's seventh floor? What is this entire Labyrinth, a giant ranch or what?

When I used Identify on it, it turned out that this monster was called Escape Goat Lv.7. Well yeah, it certainly looks like a goat. First of all, I will try using Fire Storm on both the Cheap Sheep and Escape Goat and see how many of them will I have to use to kill them.

(*Fire Storm... huh?!*)

The spell was successfully cast, but before it could connect with the enemy Escape Goat it... it literally escaped. What, the hell?!

"Uhm, Roxanne?"

"Yes, master?"

"Yeah, uhm... care to explain what just happened here? I'm afraid my brain is still too

shocked to comprehend it properly."

"That was probably the passive Skill that the Escape Goats possess. As the name implies, whenever they sense even the slightest whiff of danger, the first thing they will try to do before doing anything else is to run away until they won't feel threatened anymore."

Roxanne explained that to me while the explosions from the Fire Storm that I unleashed just now were serving as a pretty flashy, but ultimately useless background to her short lecture.

(Then maybe inform me about such things ahead of time so we could avoid such nasty surprises in the future, okay?)

Well, if they got away now, then I guess there is nothing we can do about it except chasing right after them... huh? What in the...?!

"Mehe... mehe... *snort* ...!!!"

However, just as I was about to get a move on and chase after the Escape Goat in order to hunt it down, it came running back straight towards us with its horns pointing forward. Now this is confusing. An Escape Goat that, according to Roxanne's words, was supposed to run away at the first sign of danger, and yet there it is now, charging at us as if it was actually an Attack Goat instead.

"Please stand back, master! I will handle this Escape Goat!"

Roxanne declared, stepping in front of me with her shield raised high.

In the meantime, I also prepared Durandal and assumed my usual combat stance, ready to take on the Cheap Sheep that retreated along with the goat.

The Escape Goat is not as ferocious as Minos were, but it has the same stern look on its face as they did, and much in the same vein, is not cute-looking at all, even though the goats I remember from earth all looked so docile and passive that they probably would not hurt a fly even if it attacked them first. Unlike Cheap Sheep, the Escape Goat's horns are like ice picks that are curved slightly upwards, so getting skewered by them is undoubtedly going to hurt like all hell, and probably do more damage to me

than Mino's horns since this guy right here is Lv.7, which is admittedly pretty darn terrifying now that my brain starts overthinking it.

Okay Michio, just keep calm and do what you always do. Ready the sword, wait until the enemy, who has slipped past Roxanne when the Cheap Sheep suddenly changed its direction to charge right at her, is going to be as close to you as possible... now move to the left to avoid the tip of the horns going through you... that's right, just like that... and now when the Escape Goat is exposed... give it the good old Durandal bitch slap! Or I should probably say a good old one two, because since this is a Lv.7 enemy, it did not fall down after that one strike, even though it hit it right in the torso. In that case there is no reason for me to even try busting my magic build out, since if Durandal was not able to one-shot the goat, then magic will not do any better.

“*Snort*... *Snort*... Meheee...”

After it went forward a bit due to the momentum that carried it, Escape Goat turned around towards me and once again held its head low, pointing its horns towards me. Heh, if only it learned from that previous hit it sustained that it will not amount to anything. I just have to wait for the right moment again... and dodge!

Thanks to me being constantly vigilant, I was able to avoid the escape Goat's second rush attack. Now it's only a matter of turning around... and delivering the second strike!

The Escape Goat that was slashed for the second time let out its last “Mehee...” before collapsing and turning into green smoke. Hehe, how do you like that, huh?! I have to say, I am pretty proud of how I was able to dodge two of its attacks in a row without messing any of my dodges up halfway through. Now that if what I call growing up as a fighter!

Okay, since Roxanne has her hands full with the Cheap Sheep, it's high time for me to take care of that other Escape Goat which has been standing outside of our range this entire time. Come on now, have at... you?

I don't know if it was being complacent or unusually smart for a monster from the Labyrinth, but up until now the other Escape Goat which was present since the beginning of the encounter has been keeping itself in the back, not engaging us in battle like the other one and the Cheap Sheep. However, now that its companion was gone, instead of joining the Cheap Sheep on the fray and charging at us, that one remaining Escape Goat turned tail and tried to run away!

"Huh...?"

Fuck! When I saw it running away like a coward instead of taking the aggro from me my brain froze for a solid few seconds, giving the damned goat an opening it need to initiate its escape! It is already too far away for me to reach it with Durandal and I will never catch up to it if I simply try to chase after it, so my only option is to switch to magic and try kill the damn goat with it hoping that one shot of magic will be enough to do it!

(Please allow this to work, please be enough... Fire Storm!)

The activated spell generated sparks around the Escape Goat and then engulfed it in a series of fiery explosions. If the previous Fire Storm that managed to reach all three of the initial enemies managed to inflict enough damage to it, then this spell should be enough to definitely end its life.

(Yes!)

As it turned out, that one spell was enough. When the Escape Goat emerged out of the explosions, it was only to make a few weak steps and collapse to its side where it disappeared. Good. So it would seem that my earlier attacks did do enough damage to it.

(All that is left now is the Cheap Sheep that Roxanne was fighting. Let's see how she's doing.)

Since I took care of all the Escape Goats, all Roxanne had to do was to finish the Cheap Sheep. Being at Lv.7 naturally means that it will be tougher than the ones we met on the lower floors, but since it is not an Escape Goat then at the very least it will not try to run for its life whenever it feels threatened. Instead, it only tried charging straight at her whenever she was in front of it or kick her with its hind legs whenever she was moving towards its backside. That one shot of Fire Storm was obviously not enough to kill it, and since Scimitar is much weaker than Durandal, their battle was still ongoing. Well, since I am already done with the other two then there is no reason for me not to go and help her a bit, so I moved over to where Roxanne and the Cheap Sheep were and slashed it from the side, collapsing it on the spot. I don't know how many times Roxanne managed to hit the Cheap Sheep with her Scimitar, so I am only going to calculate the damage that only I have done to it: one slash from Durandal and one fire Storm. Whatever damage Roxanne did to it plus everything that I have

inflicted was enough to kill it, and now it simply perished and disappeared in a cloud of smoke like two other monsters we fought. And since we are already on the topic of Escape Goats...

It's great that we were able to finish the battle without letting any of the enemies escape, but I have to admit that this ability of theirs is pretty troubling.

Back on the fifth floor, instead of just one attack, I was able to defeat all of the monsters with two attacks from Durandal. As Roxanne and I have already established, that probably means that from the fifth floor onwards, I will need at least two attacks to defeat the enemies that are going to stand in our way, and that amount will most likely only keep increasing the further into the Labyrinth, or in this particular case, the higher we will go. Also, judging my that one shot of Fire Storm that managed to catch all three of the enemies in it at the start of the battle, I would hazard a guess that the Escape Goat's ability to escape from the battle activates itself when their HP falls to about fifty percent of its original value.

After the encounter that concluded just now we proceeded through the seventh floor only to happen at the lone Cheap Sheep Lv.7. Since there is only one enemy, this is going to be a great occasion to test exactly how many magic shots I am going to need in order to dispatch a single enemy with it. There was no need to use Fire Storm, so I launched a Fireball at it. And then the next one. And the next, and then two more of them. All in all, defeating a single enemy took five shots of magic, one more in comparison to the enemies on the sixth floor, who still required only four of them.

"The enemies on the seventh floor require five shots of magic in order to be defeated, huh? Looks like I will have to resolve myself to fighting longer battles from now on. I only hope that the increase won't be significant."

"Do not worry, master. At our current level, I do not think we should have any major problems with defeating enemies here as long as we remain focused and keep our vigilance about us at all times."

I am afraid that this is easier said than done. The longer the battle lasts, that means more time when we will have to fight against the monsters. In turn, fighting monsters for a prolonged period of time means that the number of times where we will be attacked by the monsters is definitely going to increase.

Usually this is the part where I start saying that as long as I have Roxanne with me then everything is going to work itself out on its own, but just because she can dodge the enemy attacks like its nothing, that does not mean that I can constantly push her into harms way on the front lines simply because that is more convenient for me. Even if she says that she is fine now, sooner or later she is bound to give in if too much strain will be placed upon her.

Now that I have gotten more of a hang on fighting various types of different monsters and begun to learn how to dodge their attacks more gracefully (although I still have ways to go to get on Roxanne's level when it comes to that), I think it would be a good idea to conquer the seventh floor at a more steady pace while being more aware of our surroundings, especially since for the time being I don't think we are going to have a repeat of the situation from the fourth floor where I allowed my paranoia of getting hurt to make me afraid of the Minos whereas in reality they were not all that difficult to deal with, only my panicked brain has made them out to be like that in my head. In a stark contrast to that, we have broken through the fifth and sixth floors of both Veil's and Quratar's Labyrinths so fast that it is actually legitimately scary, so it might be a good idea to calm down and have ourselves a little change of pace and go easy on ourselves for a while instead of running through the Labyrinth's contents at a breakneck pace.

The next enemy we happened across was a lone Escape Goat Lv.7. Since it was by itself with no other monsters near it to provide it with reinforcements, I decided to defeat it from beginning of the battle to its end by only using magic. I have already confirmed that I will need five shots of it, so as long as it won't start running away and dodging my attacks like crazy while doing so then everything should be over relatively quickly, right?

Up until the third Fireball that it has taken straight to the face it behaved like any other monster, meaning that all it was trying to do was to charge blindly towards me, but once the third Fireball connected, its Skill must have kicked into effect because while in the middle of a charge attack it suddenly stopped, changed directions and attempted to escape.

Three shots of Fireball right? Right, I made doubly sure not to mess up my counting. If three shots of Fireball were enough to bring the Escape Goat's HP down to roughly fifty percent, then that definitely reinforces my earlier theory about escape command kicking in when they are at half HP. If only I was just a little bit closer to it, then I could have just Rushed to it and finish it off with a sword slash or two, but unfortunately I

have to keep using magic to finish the job. Oh well, it has already been hit with three Fireballs, so two more should do the trick. Yeah, I can definitely do this!

Or that was what I thought, but as per the goddamn usual, this world just had to shit in my oatmeal and then rain piss on my parade. Fourth shot of Fireball connected nicely, just as I intended, but the fifth Fireball has narrowly missed the Escape Goat's ass, leaving it free to escape. Seriously now? You really are going to make me bust out an AoE spell to use against a single enemy just because of one missed skillshot? Ugh, fine, whatever, I'll do it, okay? See, I'm using Firestorm to finish it off just before it could turn the corner and escape for good. Sheesh. Good thing that I still have more than enough MP left, because if I was driven to its red zone now and started having negative thoughts because of one goat, that would be both pathetic and extremely unnerving.

"Great work, master. Even though it almost looked like it was about to escape, you still managed to defeat it with your magic with ease. As expected of you."

"True enough, but that does not change the fact that they still are some seriously troublesome monsters."

And that does not even begin to describe it. The enemies that are all about running away from the battles and nothing else are truly the worst kind to deal with in video games.

"Should we avoid fighting them from now on in order to save our time and strength?"

"That would be an ideal scenario, but you don't have to push yourself too hard to try and find groups of monsters without them. It's not that they are unbeatable for us as we are now, but having to run after them or use magic every time they attempt an escape would be extremely counterproductive, so if we can help it, we should make it our priority for the time being to fight monsters other than them."

Having Roxanne and her nose here with me is a very big help. If I were here by myself, there's no way I would be able to tell where the monsters are and how many of them are there and I would simply thrash around trying to finish every encounter as fast as possible only to fail miserably. But with Roxanne here, we can just avoid fighting Escape Goats altogether and focus our efforts on fighting other, easier to beat monsters.

"I understand. From now on I will try searching for groups of monsters that do not include Escape Goats among them."

"Roxanne, you really are wonderful. Thank you for always doing your best for me."

"No, I should be the one thanking you, master. I will do my best to be even more helpful to you in the future as well."

"I will definitely be looking forward to it."

If we can avoid fighting against Escape Goats altogether, then so much the better. But in the case where we will have no choice but to fight them, I have to make sure to hit them with Fire Storm to kill them before they will have the chance to run away, and if that tactic fails, hit them with as much magic shots as possible and then immediately move in for the kill with Durandal's two strikes in rapid succession. It will always be a tradeoff between the speed of battle and battle efficiency, but whatever ends up happening, as long as I have Roxanne with me there is no need for me to be getting too nervous.

Afterwards, we simply walked around the seventh floor exploring it and fighting the occasional groups of enemies. Thankfully, we didn't bump into that many more Escape Goats, but whenever we did, we always had to make them our priority target so that they would not run away, which annoyed me to no end.

The next morning, we went into the Quratar Labyrinth's seventh floor along with its map.

Back when we were breaking through the fifth and sixth floors of both Labyrinths like it was nothing, Roxanne was always in the front of enemies and I was keeping myself busy in the back, and that strategy was working wonders especially in the Quratar Labyrinth's sixth floor which was inhabited by Minos and as a result had a Hachinosu as its Floor Boss. The only difference to our regular strategy was that whenever it tried to kick me with its hind legs, all I had to do was to move away and slash diagonally at it instead directly from behind. All in all I was hitting it with Durandal pretty comfortably and without overexerting myself all that much, until the boss started to shift its position because it deemed me as a higher priority target. I expected him to do it when enough damage was dealt to it, but to be honest, I didn't expect it to be so nimble and surprisingly sly when it comes to turning around. Since Minos and Hachinosu are basically little more than oversized, more muscular bulls, I thought the

only things they will be good for was going to be charging in, attacking with their horns and kicking whatever came behind them, but apparently I was mistaken in that regard. However, as surprising as it initially was, it essentially changed nothing in our fighting strategy. All I had to do was to get out of its range, then move myself to its sides and attack again from there. Like that, we have safely defeated the Hachinosu without getting hit by it even once.

Once that was done and over, we moved on to the seventh floor of Quratar's Labyrinth proper.

“I don't know why, but it seems like there are a lot fewer people here this morning, or at least that's how it seems to me.”

“You're right, master. With only this many people around here, I think it will be safe for you to use your magic without getting worried about anybody seeing you and finding out about it.”

“That's great to hear, but I wonder if it will be the same during the evening. Because if so, then we might be having a problem.”

It would seem that the number of people present in the Labyrinth really is decreasing the further up we are climbing, but what I want to know is whether or not this floor will be just as empty in the evening as it is right now, because if there won't be anyone else here by the time there will be time for me to draw the water for the bath, I might just teleport here instead of Veil's Labyrinth and save a bunch of MP that way. But that would be possible only if the place will be just as deserted as it is now, which I honestly highly doubt, since it is a well-known fact that the Labyrinths are much more crowded in the evening than during the early mornings. On the other hand, if there would only be a few people in here, then maybe I could do some MP recovering with just Durandal as long as we would make sure that there will be no other people near us? Anyway, whatever ends up happening, I just hope that there will soon come the day where I will be able to find myself some nice, quiet MP recovering ground that I could use inconspicuously without having to constantly be afraid about getting found out.

“There will definitely be more people here in the evening, but I am afraid that I do not have any good estimates as to how many more of them will there be exactly though.”

"That's fine for now. For the time being, can you take us to the nearest place where the monsters are? We have to get a good look at what we can expect to find here before proceeding further, after all."

"Yes, of course. This way, please!"

We proceeded forward with Roxanne's guidance until we happened across the first monster encounter of the seventh floor of Quratar's Labyrinth. As it turns out, it was...

"Geh... you again?"

As it turned out, the monster native to the seventh floor is actually a Slow Rabbit Lv.7, the very same one that I was fighting in the forest behind the first village, the village of Somara. I have to say, the sight of something so familiar has made me more than a little nostalgic.

"Oh? Have you fought against Slow Rabbits before, master?"

"I did, in the forest outside of the village about three hours of cart-riding away from Veil. However, the ones I fought there were low-levelled and weak, so I never expected them to end up as the enemies in the Labyrinths."

"They might have started appearing in the Labyrinths because one of the newly-discovered ones was located deep in the forest, and if the stories about it are true, it supposedly had Slow Rabbits as the monsters that inhabited its first floor."

"A newly-discovered Labyrinth, you say? And here I thought that the one in Veil was supposed to be the newest. I wonder if they start popping up like mushrooms after the rain now?"

"They might not appear as frequently, but it's true that a lot of them have not been discovered yet. And this new forest Labyrinth is supposed to be a pretty "young" one, since it has yet to reach fifty floors in size."

So the Labyrinths that have yet to have had more than fifty of their floors explored are considered "young" ones, huh? That piece of info might come in handy in the future, but for the time being let's return to the task at hand: exploring the seventh floor and talking about Slow Rabbits.

Even though it was supposed to be a Lv.7 monster, it was just as easy to fight as the

ones I fought back in that forest. It is slow, it does not have any weapons in its mouth whatsoever, and the only means of attack it has is the ramming attack that is so laughably easy to avoid that it is not even funny to look at. So yeah, even though it is of a higher level than the ones that I remember, the Slow Rabbit from Quratar's Labyrinth is still an easy-to-manage enemy.

The monster continued to jump towards me with an obvious intention of attacking me, but instead of feeling even slightly intimidated by it, all I feel is my conscience telling me that I am definitely going to have a moral hangover when I will kill this guy. Ugh, look here, buddy. I know that you are cute, and that cute-looking movements of yours make me feel like an asshole for what I am about to do to you, but you have to understand that I have no choice in the matter at all here. I am an Adventurer (well, actually an Explorer/Hero/Warrior... you get the gist), and you are a monster, and that means that in order for me to keep on advancing forward, you have to go down. This is going to hurt you a lot more than it is going to hurt me, but know that at the very least I do not feel happy doing this.

And so I burned the Slow Rabbit with five shots of Fireball to its face. Even though the Labyrinth's are each like their own separate entities, they all seem to be following one common rule: as long as the floor is the same, then all the different kinds of monsters residing in them are going to have the same amount of HP. That is why even though the Slow Rabbits near Somara village were complete scrubs that I could kill with nothing but a Copper Sword, the ones here on the seventh floor of the Labyrinth have as much health as Escape Goats and Cheap Sheep, hence the five shots of magic needed to dispatch them. The Slow Rabbit turned into smoke and died, leaving an item behind it. It was Rabbit Fur, another item that I was all too familiar with.

“Rabbit Fur? I remember selling it to the merchant in the village that I visited when I first came to this country, but the price for it was not all that high. You think that it’s going to be the same if we try to sell it to the Adventurer’s Guild?”

“Yes, unfortunately. I do not think that any Guild would buy it for a decent price, but I heard that you can earn more money off of it if you take it to the clothing stores around the Imperial City.”

Roxanne picked up the Rabbit’s Fur and handed it over to me.

“Is that so?”

"Yes, that's right, or at least that is how the story went the last time I've heard it."

"Hmm, I think I understand why that might be the case, but still, it's kinda weird to me that people would find such a common item in such a high demand."

Since Slow Rabbits are the enemies who generally appear on the lower floors of the Labyrinth and their fur is a pretty common item with a rather high chance of being dropped by them whenever they die, many people would probably get an overabundance of that item as long as they would have taken enough time to grind it from the Slow Rabbits for a bit. That is also why the Adventurer's Guild has more of that item than they know what to do with it, and hence they do not want to pay all that much for it whenever someone is bringing them more of it, but what makes it so apparently special that the clothing stores would be willing to pay for it more than others?

"So, would you be so kind and enlightened me why would clothing stores be paying better money for the Rabbit Furs than the Guilds?"

[As you wish, master. While it is true that the Adventurer's Guild, or any other Guild for that matter, does not have much of a need for Rabbit Fur because those who dabble in the Labyrinth exploring business have no use of such a material, the same cannot be said about the people who live in the cities, especially the young aristocratic women. To them, a coat made of Rabbit's Fur is an excellent article of clothing to wear because it is great for keeping you warm, especially during the winter season.

However, there is one major downside to the process of making such Rabbit Fur Coats. In order to make just a single coat from Rabbit's Fur, you are going to need quite a large number of them.

"Hmmm? I see, I see."

(Who would have guessed that such an underwhelming item can be used for something useful?)

I thought to myself while dangling the newly-obtained piece of Rabbit's Fur before my eyes.

"I hope it goes without saying, but having a seamstress create such a coat is not a small

and cheap undertaking either. Since the seamstresses have to sew together many pieces of Rabbit Fur, some of them pretty small and some of them the exact opposite, the process itself is always taking an exceptionally large amount of time and effort from them, so they always charge a lot of money for it and that eats away most of the profit they are making from them, and that is also why they are not commonly seen on the streets, even in places such as the Imperial City.”

“And the shops compete with one another to see which one will be able to create the best coats in line with the current fashion trends?”

“Trends?”

“No, it’s nothing.”

Putting the matter of the fashion trends of this world aside, there is no way in hell that various clothing stores would not compete with one another to see which one can deliver a better product that will net them the most money possible. It does not matter whether it’s my old world or this new, game-like one, because of there is one thing that always remains unchanged, it is how fierce the competition in the women’s fashion department can get without any rhyme or reason to it whatsoever. To that end, I wonder if this world has its own equivalent of that one organization form earth that would try to protect the Slow Rabbits from being hunted for their fur? I can totally see that happening, but... no, on second thought, let’s not go there.

“Do you want a Rabbit Fur Coat, Roxanne?”

“No, not really.”

Fuck. There goes my dream of seeing Roxanne in a soft, fluffy coat. Ad she ruthlessly denied it without a second of hesitation.

“All of the members of my race, the Wolfkin, have a naturally high resistance to the cold, so there is no need for me to be wearing a coat to keep myself warm.”

“So you are saying that your kind is strong against the cold, huh?”

“Yes, that is the quality that all of the members of the Wolfkin race are born with.”

So, this must be that specific race’s special racial ability. In other words, even if it will be cold outside, Roxanne should be fine as long as she will have some light clothing on

her. Also, now that I actually gave it some thought, it would definitely look odd and out of place if she who is my slave were to wore something that is almost exclusively reserved for high-class ladies.

Imagining it right now, light clothing might be what really suits her. I think that the ones that would look especially good on her would be the ones that would expose a lot of skin and properly showed off how curvaceous her chest is.

"Well, in that case, I have a proposition for you, Roxanne."

"Of course, master. What is it?"

"Since you are so resistant to cold, then how about I hug you to keep myself warm at night from now on?"

"Ah... yes, most certainly. If I can be of use to you that way, master, then I will be more than happy to do it."

She sounded a little bashful, but one glance at her wagging tail was enough to tell me what were her true feeling about this.

"Great, it's decided. Now then, since we are already here, why don't we go hunt the Slow Rabbits and try to get as many Rabbit Furs as we possibly can? This time, feel free to guide us to the place that has as many of them as possible, okay?"

Since Roxanne already told me that there seems to be not as many people as usual here, I made sure to properly use that occasion to hunt the Slow Rabbits on the seventh floor of Quratar's Labyrinth until late in the morning. Since I took a map of this floor with me we do not have to worry about exploring this floor and we can divert all of our attention into hunting monsters by asking Roxanne to take me to the place where there was a lot of them and there was not many people nearby. Admittedly, despite its undeniable repetitiveness, it was an activity that I have enjoyed more than I was expecting to be. Maybe it was because now that I knew that there is nothing rushing me to go to the next floor I could simply turn off my thinking and focus entirely on swinging my sword and shooting magic around. Hunt Slow rabbits and collect their fur, go to the next place where they are present, and then rinse & repeat, that was a pattern that we were currently following. Thanks to that, we have managed to aquire more than an entire Item Box section's worth of Rabbit Furs and my levels have also risen accordingly, so I guess this particular Labyrinth bout was a success through and

through.

Having completed all of the objectives we have set for ourselves for now we returned home and made breakfast, after which we made our way to the Imperial City.

Just a short walk away from the Imperial City's Adventurer's Guild we happened upon a clothing store that looked promising. It was a solemn-looking one with large, expensive-looking double doors located at the first floor of a magnificently-decorated building. The door itself were constructed in such a way that they could be both pushed forward and pulled backwards, and from what I was able to see when people were going in and out of there, the inside of the store itself was also quite large, because the ceiling looked like it was close to three meters, and the polished stone floor made the entire establishment look more bright and welcoming than your typical shop with "normal" floors. No matter how you look at it, this is a store that sells only luxury goods, and it is exactly because of that that I hesitated go inside. So far we didn't have any incidents where we were kicked from the store or denied entry based on our looks alone, but this is not Veil or Quratar, this is the Imperial City we are talking about here.

"Master, there seems to be a poster placed here. It says that this shop is buying the goods that people are willing to sell."

As we stopped some distance away from the entrance, Roxanne found a poster placed on one of the walls. If this is really about buying things that people want to sell, then depending on how much they would be willing to pay for our Rabbit Furs, it might very well turn out that we have already hit the jackpot.

"Really? What exactly is written there?"

"Uhm, let's see..."*All the customers wanting to sell Rabbit Furs, lease enter the shop through the side entrance. Do be advised that the shop will only buy the furs in batches of one hundred units*". That is what it says."

Well I'll be damned, talk about uping the scales here! To me it looks like they only want to do business with serious traders, because that quantity barrier will instantly shoot down any small-time buyers (read: people like us) who only want to sell a few of the Rabbit Furs for some quick money. *Sigh* but you know, a part of me kinda expected something like that, except a little less blatant and upfront like that. Just a moment ago I remarked that this is a store that looks like it sells luxury goods, right? So maybe that

is why the owner of this store or whoever was responsible for putting that poster up assumed that no run-of-the-mill Explorer or Adventurer would even think of coming here? And also: seriously, you only accept one hundred units of fur and more? That is way more than we have on us at the current moment, so there is no point in even walking into that store now. Even if we filled the entire Item Box with just Rabbit Furs and nothing more, we would still have to carry an number of them in our backpacks, denying ourselves the possibility of getting any other items, and that would be too counterproductive.

“Unfortunately we do not have a hundred of them, so we will have to collect more and come back to sell them later. In the meantime, why don’t we go for a little stroll around the shopping district before we will go back home?”

“Alright. Where do you want to go?”

“Let’s go check what is over there and see where the road is going to take us from there.”

We could have backtracked to the Adventurer’s Guild and see what other things the main street had to offer, but my gut feeling was telling me that it might be more beneficial for us to go and explore the places that were off the beaten path this time. Who knows, maybe we will find something nice in there? At times like these, it’s better to just trust your own curiosity and go with the current and see where it will end up taking you.

Even though we have entered a side street, it was still filled with a number of small shops. As expected of an Imperial City. This place really is on an entirely different level in comparison to other cities.

“What’s that over there?”

“What are you looking at, master?”

“That store over there, the one with all the weird... mushrooms... and plants and all... is this an ingredients store? Or perhaps a food store?”

The store that I was talking about had a bunch of mushrooms and other weird-looking plants on its display. And also fish skeletons and jars with liquids of various colors and

densities.

“Maybe this is a drugstore? Or perhaps a pharmacy that also sells items and potion ingredients?”

“No. It doesn’t seem to be the case here. Look.”

Looking into the back of the shop from the entrance, there were also dried lizards and frogs, and even a bat hanging upside down. Overall, I say it was pretty disgusting.



We had no need for any of those obviously dubious items, and honestly, I don't know if I would get my hands on them even if somebody paid me for it, so we just walked past it without ever looking back. It would be a whole different talk if that place was also selling potions or medicinal slaves, but no, it does not look like that in the slightest. The only purpose all of those creepy-looking things might have is to be used in some definitely sketchy rituals, and if that's the only thing this place has to offer, then it is in our best interest to stay as far away from it as possible.

Well, even in modern Japan, there were still people who would be willing to buy such occultic shit, so the demand for such things must be even bigger in this medieval world, but I do not count myself among the ranks of the freaks who enjoy things like that. Even if that store was selling something as simple as a cold medicine, I still don't know if I would be willing to drink it out of fear that something poisonous might have been added there without my knowledge.

Continuing our stroll, we passed by a certain shop where I instinctively stopped dead in my tracks when the aroma that was wafting from it reached my nose. Hmm, this smell, I feel like I have smelled it before, but where exactly... no... no way... could this be... no, Michio, keep it together. You don't know if that assumption of yours is on point or not, so let's start by confirming it first.

"Huh? What is this place? A jar store?"

I tried my best to hide my expectations and racing heart under the guise of genuine surprise when I threw that question into the air.

"I think it is probably a store that sells seasonings."

From the looks alone it was not at all obvious that this store, located a fair distance away from that previous, sketchy-looking one might have been the one that sells seasonings, and I certainly would not have been able to tell without having a closer look at it first, however, the smell of some of the jarred liquids has definitely reminded me of Japan! As weird as that may sound.

"Welcome. We are selling various fish sauces in this shop."

The old woman greeted us and explained what was the purpose of her shop without us even asking, meaning that she must have been listening to the conversation between me and Roxanne.

“Fish sauce, huh?”

No wonder that it reminded me of home then. This might just turn into a discovery of the day!

“Does that mean you also sell Shoyu (*TL Note: the most basic of the basic types of Japanese soy sauces that uses wheat as its main ingredient*) here?”

“Shoyu? I am afraid I have no idea what you are talking about, boy. What is this “Shoyu” that you speak of?”

“No, it’s nothing, nevermind. Just tell me what is your most popular sauce.”

When I spoke the word “shoyu”, I noticed that it was not translated into Brahim, so perhaps soy sauces like I know them from back home do not exist here? That would have been quite a shame, because I was really hoping that I could someday get my hands on it here. What a bummer. But I cannot lose hope just yet. So what if they don’t have shoyu or anything that would even remotely resemble it? Maybe they have other fish sauces in stock that are going to be exactly the same or similar to the ones that I am familiar with?

“Hmm. You said to give you our most popular sauce, but truth to be told, all of the products we are selling here are pretty popular with the residents of the capital.”

Oh for crying out loud! You see this, people?! That is exactly why in the modern times we have this convenient little thing called sales rankings! Thanks to them, it does not matter if all of the products offered by the store sell “good”, because the rankings will always tell you which ones of these “good” products will sell better than others and form a nice hierarchy from the least selling “good” products to the most selling “good” products. That way, you won’t ever get scammed into buying “good” products that will end up only being subpar at best and costing way more than you can actually afford. Popularity, is not the only quality that is important in the business, but I can see that people living in these times have yet to realize that simple fact. Unfortunately that is something that I cannot say to a newly-met shopkeeper, so I have no choice but to keep silent about it, and the only thing I can reply to her with is...

“Is that so?”

“If you still insist on it, why not try this one then?”

The old lady poured some of the sauce on a shallow plate and handed it over to me, and I scooped a little drop of it with my finger in order to closely inspect it before trying it.

“*Sniff Sniff*!!!!!!”

It has an incredibly strong, unpleasant smell that makes me sick in a second I smelled it. How about the taste then?

“..... *lick* ... ugh... my god...”

Not only it smelled so bad that you felt as if instead of going through your nose it was sticking onto it instead, but it is also incredibly bitter and spicy. What is this shit even? Rotten natto or funazushi?! (*TL Note: Natto: a dish of fermented soybeans with a very pungent flavor and gluey texture that is eaten chiefly in Japan and usually served over rice. Natto is prepared by fermenting steamed or boiled soybeans with a bacteria, especially Bacillus subtilis natto. Funazushi: A form of sushi made with carp packed in salt and rice and aged for several years.*) In my honest opinion, this can hardly be called a sauce, or even food! Just look at Roxanne! She has not even tried it and she is already making faces as if having to smell it was some kind of torture to her! Not surprising, since her nose is much more sensitive than mine. It's okay, Roxanne, you don't have to push yourself to do it, its enough that I had to go through it. I don't want to see you suffer anymore!

“Don't you have anything a little bit more... normal in stock? Because this thing right here is a little...”

“Hee hee hee. It seems that it was an impossible combination after all, just as I expected.”

Just as you expected? So what, you want to tell me that this strange concoction was nothing more than you playing pranks on us?! The old lady did not respond at all, and instead passed another plate onto me.

“This sauce right here is truly our most popular product. Try it and tell me what you think.”

This time the smell of the sauce I was given was also strong, but thankfully not quite

as strong as that previous abomination. Or maybe that's just part of the old lady's strategy whenever new customers come around: First she gives them that awful sauce in order to paralyze their sense of taste so that everything she presents them afterwards would be considered as passable. Because if that somehow turned to be true, then I have to praise her for how shrewd and cunning she actually is.

I dipped my index finger into the small plate once more and then licked it with reservation. Maybe it was because she saw that I wasn't making any funny or pained faces, but Roxanne soon followed in my footsteps. That was already a big improvement from how she was not even able to taste the first sauce at all because she was that repulsed by its smell alone.

When I licked it, it reminded me of a Chinese soy sauce with how sweet and spicy and slightly salty its flavor was.

"And, how is it?"

"I think it tastes good, and it does not have the same unpleasant smell like before."

I asked Roxanne for her opinion, and she gave me an affirmative nod.

She was definitely right. With this sauce, I didn't have that feeling from the first as if the smell was sticking onto my nose without wanting to let go, which still clings onto me, burning my nostrils like the stench from badly prepared Kusaya (*TL Note: a Japanese style salted, dried and fermented fish. It has a pungent smell and is similar to the fermented Swedish herring Surströmming*) And if it felt that bad for me, then I can only imagine how hard it was for Roxanne.

"Without a doubt, that is the most popular product offered by this shop. You won't regret buying it, of that I am absolutely sure."

There are many things that I would like to say to her right now, but once again, it will be better to bite my tongue and just roll along with whatever she is saying. If I started shit-talking her now, then there is a possibility that she might increase the price of whatever sauce I would be willing to buy, and I do not want that. For my own benefit, I have to keep up appearances.

"So, how much for the sauce?"

"The small jar is 300 Nars. The larger one is 500 Nars."

“Okay, then I will take one large jar, please.”

Considering what these sauces are, I guess those would be pretty fair prices. But my hunch about this sauce is correct, then it should be the best possible seasoning for both meat and vegetables we could have asked for. And since the large jar of the sauce was actually twice the size of the small jar, having to pay two hundred Nars in exchange for almost twice as much product received almost felt like a steal to me. One large jar of Chinease Soy Sauce (Provisional Name) it is then!

“Thank you for your patronage, young man. Do come back in the near future.”

The old lady’s Job was a Villager, so my thirty percent discount did not work, meaning that I will be forced to buy the large jar of sauce for its original price. I placed the sauce jar in Roxanne’s backpack, and then we were on our way out from the fish sauce shop and walked back towards the Adventurer’s Guild.

While we were on our way back there, we walked past something that looked like a small park of sorts. It was filled with various food stalls that looked like the ones that were selling fast foods back in Japan during summer festivals and such. There was a shop that sold grilled meat skewers, a shop that sold something that looked like pizza where ingredients were placed on raw dough and then cooked over flame in a special kiln, sandwich-selling shop that was selling... well, sandwiches made by cramming all sorts of things between two slices of bread and many, many more.

“Why are there so many stalls? Is there some kind of event going on right now?”

“No, I do not think so. Even if it is, it’s nothing that I have heard about.”

Roxanne is probably right. If it was an event or a festival, it would gather more people around than the scarce few that were present in the small park around the stalls. But if it is not an event or a festival, then what is it, exactly? Maybe some kinds street food sale held on a daily basis? There was even one stall where the only people who gathered there were children. The stall’s clerk was selling some spherical food of brown color. Is this Takoyaki? Or maybe some kind of candy?

“Do you know what you are selling over there?”

“No, I have no idea. But... *Sniff Sniff* but it is something that smells really sweet.”

“I see. Would you like to try it, whatever it is?”

“If... if it is not too much trouble...”

Oh my god, how can she be so cute when she is getting all bashful like that?

“Okay, then I will go and buy it. Wait here, it will only take a minute.”

Something sweet is just what I need right now in order to cleanse my palette after that disasterously bitter sauce that granny gave us.

Leaving Roxanne’s side, I walked to the food stall that was selling that sweet thing. As soon as I approached, a sweet, pleasant aroma began tickling every inch of my nose. Yes, this is definitely how a candy smell. I never even realized how much I was missing them until just now. When it comes to the brown Japanese sweets, rice crackers are what typically comes to mind first. I wonder if this is going to be something similar to them, or perhaps something entirely different?

“How much for the candy?”

“Ten Nars per piece.”

“Then I will take two please.”

When I placed my order, the stall owner immediately got to work. He took the pot with the sweet-smelling liquid and poured it into a smaller pot and began to stir it, at first slowly, only to gradually increase the speed and intensity of the stirring motions. The way it looks like, he is definitely not making rice crackers. Maybe this is going to be something more along the lines of the castella mixture?

Eventually, after all the stirring he did the liquid has become very thick, to the point where it began to pile up in the middle of the pot like a small gooey mountain, causing the kids who watched the entire process of candy-making from the sidelines to erupt with loud cheers as if they were watching some kind of magic show. I have to say, that sight even managed to get a small smile out of me.

When the thing looked like it was ready, the stall owner instantly removed it from the pot, wrapped it around in some provisional wrapping made from leaves and passed it over to me. I handed the money to the stall owner and received my finished order.

Same as with the granny from that sauce shop before, this guy had the Job of a Villager, so my thirty percent discount did not work.

With the two rather big pieces of candy in tow, I turned around and prepared to walk back to Roxanne, but I stopped and glanced at the children who were looking at the candy in my hands ever since that guy began making it.

“You want one?”

I asked them while eyeing the candy in my left hand.

“U-Umu...”

The girl who stood the closest to me nodded shyly. I do not know these kids, and there is literally nothing compelling me to do anything for them, and yet...

“Here, you can have this.”

I handed my candy over to the girl and the other kids.

“Really?! Wow, thank you, mister!”

“Don’t mention it.”

There is something truly magical in seeing little kids enjoying simple things like that. After observing the kids as they went away while happily munching on the candy, I also left the stall and finally went back to Roxanne.

“Are you sure about that, master?”

“Yeah. Besides, I already know how they taste anyway. Here is your share, Roxanne.”

That’s right. I couldn’t tell by the smell alone, but now that I see the finished product I am one hundred percent sure what this candy is.

It is honeycomb toffee. I will probably sound like a piece of useless trivia at the current moment, but I once tried making it as a science experiment when I was still in junior high school, only to somehow end up with soap instead. Even if it was not all that long ago I cannot say that I clearly remember the taste of the one that I have made, but I am pretty sure that I can say with all confidence that it would not be the same as, because all I can remember is thinking that I thought that it did not turn out all that

well. And the one I just bought? I only managed to scoop a little bit of it for myself, but it was enough to make the bitter feeling in the back of my throat and nose to go away. That is how I expected a real honeycomb toffee to taste. And as I look at Roxanne who's happily wolfing down her own piece of it, I get all but assured that buying it was the right decision.

"Is it good?"

"Yes! So sweet and tasty, it practically melts in my mouth!"

Roxanne nodded vigorously. Good. That is all I needed to hear. Also, I have to admit that while this honeycomb toffee does not have a start to its equivalent from my world, it definitely has its own kind of unique taste and charm to it. However...

Making Roxanne happy with this small gift was definitely worth spending the money on it, but if I am correct in thinking what I am thinking right now, then it might be possible for this little stroll to yield a rather unexpected result. Now, let's see whether I am right or wrong here...

While we waited for Roxanne to finish eating her candy, I turned to the side and glanced towards the stall of the candy-maker while pretending to be looking in an entirely separate direction. What am I trying to do? Well, trying to see what that guy used to make the honeycomb toffee mixture of course.

In modern-day Japan, honeycomb toffee is usually made when you melt baking soda in liquid sardine and then heat the whole thing up, causing the carbonic acid to be emitted and then swell up. Even though the methods might differ due to the obvious disparity in technological advancement, I think the candy made on that stall also uses that very same principle, because the liquid mixture rapidly swelled the moment the heat was applied to the pot it was poured into.

As I continued to observe the stall owner, he turned his back to me at one point and opened the box he was keeping at the back of the stall, most likely the one where he was keeping the ingredients needed to make the candy: water and two kinds of powders he kept in separate pouches. He then poured the water into a bowl and added a solid bits from both pouches of powders, most likely in order to make the base liquid that would serve as the base of the honeycomb toffee.

This might be the opportunity that I was waiting for, so I am not going to miss that

chance!

I looked at the box and concentrated my sight on the contents of what was inside it, and then used Identify. What I saw there were essentially two ingredients: Kobold Sucrose and Shell Powder. Unfortunately, I was not able to properly identify what that Shell Powder was made of, but my guess is that is a mixture that uses sugar as its main ingredient. Sucrose is a type of sugar as well, but mixing two types of sugar with one another would not be nearly enough to make honeycomb toffee. The main ingredient needed here would be something that would make the entire mixture rapidly heat up and expand. When that shell powder was heated, it definitely must have released carbon dioxide, so I think it is fairly safe to assume that the Shell Powder is most probably baking soda, or to put it into more technical terms, sodium hydrogen carbonate (*TL Note: Or to simplify it, sodium bicarbonate*).

That being said, these are all my assumptions not based on any concrete evidence, so I might as well be completely off the mark with everything I have said just now. The only thing that I know for sure is that the guy has three main ingredients that he uses: water, Kobold Sucrose and Shell Powder, but that is about it when it comes to the things that I can be absolutely sure of. I could always try asking the stall owner about it directly, but since the method of making it might be his trade secret I highly doubt that he would be willing to share anything other than the names of the raw ingredients with me, and even that I am not so sure about. But thankfully, that is exactly what I have Identify for. With it around, I do not have to worry about silly little things like people trying to keep the names of ingredients from me. Oh, but please, do not misunderstand, okay? It's not like I need to know all those things because I want to start making my own honeycomb toffee (which is fairly easy: you just have to mix sugar and baking soda with flour, and all of those ingredients or their substitutes should be available here). No, what I want to make is something else entirely, but let's leave the talk about it for a bit later, okay?

“I’m done eating, master.”

“I see. And? Was the candy to your liking?”

“Yes, it was absolutely delicious! Thank you for the treat”

“That’s great to hear. Come now, let’s go.”

After a short distance, I asked Roxanne in a whisper:

“Say, Roxanne... how can we obtain Kobold Sucrose? Is it another drop from Kobolds?”

“Yes. I actually heard that this item can be obtained from the advanced form of Kobolds that can be found on the higher floors in the Labyrinth.”

Advanced form of Kobolds? Does she mean Kobold Kampfer, or perhaps there will be some other variation of it once we will reach even higher floors of in the Labyrinths in Veil and Quratar? I do not know, but that would make sense since regular Kobolds and Kobold Kampfers we have been fighting up until now were leaving only Kobold Salt behind them, and no matter how much of them we hunted, they never dropped anything else, even when the Cook Job equipped, which made me think that its Rare Ingredients Drop Rate Up Skill might actually be useless.

“Do you know what a Shell Powder is?”

“It’s a fire extinguishing agent. Everybody knows that.”

“Fire extinguishing agent?”

“You... you didn’t know about that, master?”

“Back in my homeland we were using very different things as fire extinguishers, so this is my first time hearing that Shell Powder can be used for that purpose as well. To tell you the truth, this is my very first time happening Upon Shell Powder at all.”

More like I didn’t know about it at all and just pulled out that excuse straight out of my ass just now, but it seems to have worked well enough, because Roxanne did not look like she wanted to question my words at all. So now would be a good time to get some more information about Shell Powder and its properties, so...

“Can you tell me more about Shell Powder and how exactly it can be used?”

“Of course. Shell Powder itself is actually an item dropped by the enemies called Clam Shells. In and out of itself it is not strong enough to negate or counteract the effects of Fire Magic, but when you apply it to a fire that already exist, it will quickly extinguish it.”

“And what about totally nullifying the effects of Fire Magic? Is there an item that can do that?”

"Yes, I was just about to get to that. If you want to completely negate the effects of Fire Magic, then you would have to use Scallop Extract, Scallop Shell's Drop Item, but one dose of Scallop Extract can only negate one Fire Magic spell at a time, so if you wanted to negate Fire Magic continuously, you would have to carry multiple Scallop Extracts with you."

(Hmm, in that case it looks like Shell Powder is something different from the baking soda that I know about.)

Because there is no way in hell that an ordinary baking soda would have any magic-stopping properties.

"Would it be possible for the Shell Powder found in Wheat Flour to be mixed and then heated in order to be used for cleaning purposes?"

"You want to try using Shell Powder in such a way?"

"That's right, if that would be possible, that is. Can it be done?"

"I have never heard of anyone using Shell Powder for cleaning purposes, so I honestly do not know."

Damn, so is this something different after all?

"What about Vinegar then? Can that be used for cleaning instead?"

"I have never heard anyone mentioning something like that either."

I was expecting such an answer from her, but I wanted to ask that question nonetheless, just so that I could be absolutely sure that I have thoroughly exhausted all of my options. For that matter, I wasn't even sure if this world had vinegar in it, but since Roxanne did not react in any strange way when she heard that word and it got translated into Brahim properly then they must have it. This is good news, because the only alternative to asking about it would be to walk round the shops that might be selling it and try every vinegar-like product that I could get my hands on, and since vinegar tastes just awful, this is not a prospect that I would be happy about.

In any case, it looks like this world has vinegar and baking soda in it, but at the same

time it does not look like the people in this world know that both of those things can actually be used in getting rid of all kinds of stains on all kinds of surfaces and in removing dirt in general. This is a bit problematic, but it is not any kind of a major setback for what I want to try out, and as long as I show Roxanne that she can clean using those two ingredients, I do not really care about other people still being kept in the dark about it.

Our next stop was the general store where I asked the female clerk behind the counter if they were selling Shell Powder, and after getting an affirmative answer from her I also bought an additional two cooking pots (it never hurts to have too many of them in case one of them ends up getting damaged or destroyed, and even if it does not, having more spares around is always a good thing) and a bunch of Kochi fruits. Since I bought more than one product and the owner of the store had the Merchant Job, this time I was able to properly utilize my thirty percent discount, saving a nice bit of money that would otherwise go to waste. When that bit of additional shopping was done we went back to the Adventurer's Guild where we warped back home.

Now, you are probably wondering what I am going to be making with all those things that I just bought, huh? Well fear not, because I can finally give you the answer you wanted to hear! As I mentioned before, the purpose of that shopping was not so that I could make honeycomb toffee better than the one I made as the science experiment back in junior high. I want to make something a little bit more practical. Using all of the ingredients that I have gathered... I want to have a shot at making soap. That's right, your eyes are not deceiving you, you read that correctly. I want to make a legitimate soap that we could use to clean ourselves up properly whenever we will be taking a bath.

Truth to be told, I would be much more confident in this whole endeavor if I had access to some nice rice bran, but I should be able to make do with what I already have here with me: a mashed Koichi fruit, which should act as a nice soap berry substitute, since it's vegetable oil contains fatty acids, just like rice bran oil.

The ingredients I am going to use to make soap are as follows:

1. Mashed Koichi Fruit
2. Shell Powder

When combined, the fatty acids (?) from the Koichi Fruit's vegetable oil (?) and sodium

bicarbonate from Shell Powder's baking soda (?) should create fatty acids sodium salt, or in other words, your regular, plain old soap.

As for the procedure of creating it, I remember it quite well, even though the memory associated with it is a rather painful one, much like the most of the memories of my school life. That day, as per the usual I was left with no option but to make my science experiment together with the teacher, since all the other kids in the have already made groups of their own, and even if they didn't do that, I am positive that every last one of the classmates from my group would either not talk to me and assign me any tasks at all, or they would do everything in their power to make me feel miserable and unwelcome. And what's that? What about making groups in accordance with the numbers from the attendance list? From the reasons stated above, this would not have worked as well. I hate to remind myself of this, but I was mistreated or ignored by pretty much everyone around me. So yeah, there you have it.

In any case, if you have baking soda, you can make soap. Everything rides on that particular assumption here. Ideally, I really would have like to have some bona fide rice bran and pure vegetable oil in order to ensure that the chances of this little experiment succeeding would be as high as possible, but you know, beggars can't be choosers, so I will just have to do my best with what I have been given, and if it ends up not succeeding, there's no point in beatig myself up over it since that will be my first attempt at making something from a truly modern world in the one where technology is pretty much nonexistent. Later, when I will have some free time on my hands, I might just go t the Imperial City and have a look across various shops to see if they will have a rice bran, but for now I won't worry myself with it anymore and focus on the tsk at hand.

Immediately after returning back home, I headed straight to the kitchen with all of the ingredients in tow. I prepared about half the pot worth of water and proceeded to bring it to the boiling point. If all goes well, then I might as well start using this pot and a separate jar I bough exclusively for the purposes of storing soap in it. Next, I grounded the Shell Powder and added it into the water which was already boiling.

“Ooooh, it’s frothing! It’s beginning to froth!”

The bubbles started forming on the surface of the water and Shell Powder mixture. So I was right, this is baking soda after all! In the meantime, I was carefully stirring the mashed Koichi Fruit in a separate container. If this will be anything like the rice bran, I will have to add in a crapton of it in order for the whole thing to succeed. I also do

not remember the exact amount of the bran that had to be added, so I will have to make sure to stop adding it whenever I will deep the amount to be right. I just hope that I won't end up adding either too much or too little of it, ruining the entire thing as a result. Next thing I had to do was to mix both the mashed fruit and the water with Shell Powder together, and when I did that, it formed a brown, muddy liquid in the pot, and it kept on getting thicker and thicker, to the point where the simple act of stirring it all in the pot was beginning to seriously tire my hands. By the looks of it, it seems to have worked better than I have initially expected it to work. Something is telling me that the soap that I made as a byproduct of that honeycomb toffee experiment looked more or less like that.

"What is this, master? What are you making?"

Having apparently been done with tending to the herbs growing in our little garden, Roxanne came over to me and looked at my creation over my shoulder with a curious look on her face.

"I am trying to make soap, although I have no idea whether it will work out or not."

"You know how to make soap? That's amazing!"

"Thank you for the compliment, but as I said, I have no idea if this is going to turn out alright at all. Worst case scenario, I might have simply wasted all the ingredients we just bought for nothing."

"Maybe so, but just the fact that you know how to make is is amazing in and out of itself!"

Well, if I didn't know how to make it then I guess I would have been plenty impressed as well, but since this is elementary knowledge in modern-day Japan, I guess knowing the process of how to create soap and what ingredients is it made of is not that big of a deal.

"Now, I want you to take this here Shell Powder and use it when you will clean next time. If my hunch is correct and this will work exactly as I think it will, then all the dirt you will use it on should be coming right off."

"Really? Is it really going to be that good?"

"Of that I have no doubt."

"I didn't know about that. Well, in that case, I will go and test it out immediately. Oh, but... how exactly should I use it? Spread it all over the floor and wipe with the dry cloth?"

"Sorry to break it to you, but you missed with your guess. It is actually pretty simple to use it: just dissolve the powder in warm water and then use a damp washcloth to clean the floors with it."

"I see now. I will make sure to follow your instructions carefully, master. Well then, off to the cleaning duty I go."

I handed the extra Shell Powder that I bought to Roxanne and watched her as she left the room, all eager and fired up to try the cleaning method that I just told her about. I still do not know if the Shell Powder really is baking soda and if it can be used for the cleaning purposes, but if that little cleaning experiment fails, I can just buy more Shell Powder and dimly start from scratch one more time.

Now that I know that the Shell Powder is essentially this world's baking soda, maybe I will give trying out its various uses a go? For example, during the ski training camp in junior high we went to Nagano, a prefecture that is famous for its hot springs, and I distinctly remember that one type of the springs at the resort we were staying in had something called "baking soda spring", and I remember that at first I was weirdly cautious of it because, you know, who in their right mind would go adding a freaking baking soda into a bath, but after I gave it a try I was very pleased with it, so I think it might be worth my while to actually give a baking soda bath a try. Also, I feel like I should mention that the main activity at the skiing camp was skiing alone, so that was one of the few occasions where I can say that I genuinely had fun doing something simply because for once in my lifetime I was not forced to join any kind of group.

Okay, the soap looks like it should be done any minute now, and once it will be completed, I will no longer have to feel uncomfortable after taking a bath due to not being able to clean myself up properly. But then...

"Uhm... in the off chance that I will run out of it, how do I replenish it? Will it be enough to add the Shell Powder to the dump cloth on onto the cleaned surface itself?"

At first Roxanne was jumping with joy with her eyes all sparkly, but she soon returned

to the kitchen with a perplexed look on her face as she asked me how to use the cleaning Shell Powder properly. Makes sense since what I handed off to her was a ready mixture of the Shell Powder that has already been dissolved in the water, so of course she would have no clue on how to do it herself.

"No. You will have to do what I did just now. If you run out of the water mixed with Shell Powder, just replenish the water and dissolve more powder in it. In order to achieve the best possible effect the water has to be warm, so if you will need it, be sure to come and tell me and I will boil some of it for you."

"Okay. Well then, off I go. This time for real."

"Sure, take your time."

For me it is basic knowledge that I don't even have to think about too much, but I am still forgetting that my viewpoint is biased as hell since I am not of this world. But now that I have shown Roxanne how to properly clean using Shell Powder, I have every reason to believe that she is going to put all that I have shown her into practice and it will become second nature to her in no time.

"Master, this is so amazing!"

Eventually, Roxanne came running back with her eyes shining like a pair of stars. It seems like the cleaning with Shell Powder went well.

Finally, the time has come to remove the pot from the heat. Judging by how it all looked, I guess it was a success, but I ill not know for sure until it all dries up. And that is going to take roughly an entire day. A little long, but it is not like I need it right this instant, and since we have plenty of things we can do to kill time, the actual wait should not be all that long. I moved the pot with the soap into a shaded corner of the kitchen where the sun would not reach it and left it there.

After that, we went and entered Veil Labyrinth's seventh floor and continued our daily exploration routine.

(Okay, set the usual Jobs I usually use for exploring... Job Settings... huh?)

When I performed a Character Reset so that I could equip myself with Durandal, I noticed that I have apparently unlocked yet another Job:

Alchemist Lv.1

Effects: Increase INT (small), Increase DEX (tiny)

Skill: Plating

A Job of an Alchemist, huh? But when exactly did I get that... oh, wait, could it be that... Alchemist... alchemy... chemistry... yeah, I must have unlocked that Job when I made soap. After all, my attempt at making it was basically a chemical experiment, not a cooking one, so I guess that would make sense. The condition for unlocking it must have probably been something along the lines of “triggering a chemical reaction” or something like that. However, the real question now is what I should do with this Job.

When it comes to the monsters on the seventh floor of the Labyrinth, I cannot defeat them with one normal strike with Durandal; I need two normal strikes in order to take them out. However, based on some experimental trial and error I made during our previous explorations, I noticed that I can actually kill the monsters with one strike, but it needs to be the one combined with Warrior Job’s Skill, Rush. If I try anything other than that then it won’t work, and I will have to use more than one strike.

But, here is the thing: my usual combination of Jobs is Explorer, Hero, Mage and Monk, and with my current go-to setup of Bonus Skills I don’t have enough Bonus Points left to add Warrior as a Fifth Job, and I definitely cannot throw any of the other currently assigned Jobs out because they all have Skills that I am using pretty much all the time. I absolutely need to have Explorer around so that I can continue to use its Item Box, Hero Acts as my main source of increases to all of the stats and its Overwhelming Skill is useful whenever I have to gain the upper hand over an enemy by having them move in slow motion/moving so fast that it seems like everyone and everything else around me moves in slow motion, Mage gives me access to the Beginner Magic of every element, and Monk is my source of healing whenever I am not using Durandal as my main weapon and therefore cannot capitalize on its HP and MP recovery Skills.

If I opted for a less magical and more physical build without using as much magic then maybe I could remove Monk and only use Durandal for healing, but if I do that then I am going to lose the additional MP granted to me by the effects of one of Monk Job’s unique effects: Increase MP (tiny), and in my opinion it’s always good to have more MP on hand because more MP means more uses of offensive Skills and less chance that I am going to run out of it and end up all depressed.

Since Roxanne is able to dodge pretty much anything that comes her way I guess I do not have to worry about her getting hurt seriously enough, meaning that I can check how a different setting of Jobs would work. With that in mind, the Jobs I have chosen were Explorer, Hero, Mage, Monk and Warrior

After checking this particular setting and confirming that it works quite nicely for the purposes of recovering MP, I removed the Warrior and set Alchemist as my Fifth Job. Okay, time to see what this Job's Skill can do.

(*Plating!*)

When I chanted the name of the Skill in my head, a target indicator appeared before my eyes, just like with the Warrior's Skills. Basically, it's telling me that I can choose what to cast Plating on, huh? In that case, let's choose Durandal as the designated target... or not. On second thought, let's not do that.

Durandal is an important weapon for me. It is the first Bonus weapon that I obtained in this world, and the one that has saved my ass from many dicey situations. It is simply too good for me to be risking using a Skill whose effects I still don't know on it. For all I know, it might make it stronger, but it might as well cause the blade of Durandal to become brittle and prone to being damaged when the plating itself will be removed. So I order to avoid that, I have to check how it works on something else instead. And since we are in the Labyrinth, I know just what we should do.

"Roxanne, I want to perform an experiment, so guide me to an enemy that is by itself, preferably not am Escape Goat."

"Understood. Should I look for one right now?"

"Please do."

At first, I should try this Skill against a monster and see what it will do to it. Escape Goats are a no-go for that purpose, because the probability of them running away before I could conduct the experiment properly is just too great. I need literally anything other than them.

"Oh, master? If you don't mind me asking, could you tell me what kind of experiment are we going to be doing this time?"

Roxanne asked me while we were already on the way to the location of a single monster she managed to track down. Ever since she became my slave, we have performed quite a number of experiments together: the ones whenever I happened to obtain a new Job and wanted to test its Skills, the one where I wanted to test how weapons other than Durandal are going to fare in combat against the monsters, the ones where I tested all the different kinds of magic that became available to me when I got my hands on the Mage Job, and now the soap-making experiment and the one we are about to do right now. Maybe she already got used to me being an experiment-loving master, and that's why she asked about the current experiment's purpose beforehand?

"Do you know what alchemy is?"

"Alchemy? You mean the art used by the greedy people to turn metals such as iron and lead into gold in order to make money?"

So alchemists do exist in this world, huh? But it looks like they are not too popular, which is really no surprise. If they really can turn ordinary metals into gold, then that must mean they have a crapton of money. Will I be able to do that as well as long as I level that Job high enough?

"I-Is that how alchemists are viewed in these parts of the world? Well, in that case I regret to inform you that the experiment that I wanted to do involves alchemy."

"Huh?! You can make money, master?!"

Roxanne shouts with her eyes widely opened.

"Unfortunately. I only obtained the Job of an Alchemist after I made that soap, so for the time being the only Skill I can use is Plating, and that is what I want to test."

Even if this world is a magical one, the economy would go down to shit in no time flat if every alchemist could turn metals to gold just like that, so it's probably a good thing that they cannot do that so casually, or at least I hope so. Perhaps they can do that, but keep it a secret, just like I do with my abilities? And if they could, then how would it be done? Can Plating be used for it, in a sense that they could cover normal metals with a thin layer of gold and sell it as the legitimate article?

Whatever the case, all I want to do now is to check how Plating works.

“I see. I’m sorry forgetting overexcited like that.”

“Don’t worry about it.”

The monster that Roxanne guided me to was a single Cheap Sheep. This should be enough for a test subject. Standing before the monster, I activated Plating and selected the Cheap Sheep as its target. Now I hope that the Skill will take effect and won’t fail miserably, but I won’t know if its going to be a success or not until I actually attack the damn thing, so let’s get to it!

Readyng my sword, I ran towards the Cheap Sheep in the same moment as it began to run towards me as well, most likely after using Rush. Using Rush as well, I instantly closed the distance between us and swung Durandal down, but one blow was not enough, so I had to follow it up with another one. Only then the Cheap Sheep has fallen.

“Hmm?”

“???”

At first glance it looks like nothing has changed, so even if Plating was successfully applied to that Cheap Sheep, I have no way of confirming exactly what kind of effect it had on it. At the very least, I gained confirmation that it is not an offensive Skill, because it didn’t shoot or generated anything in the area. Either that, or the Cheap Sheep had resistance towards it, much like Needlewoods have their resistance to Water Magic.

“The result of this experiment was inconclusive, so how about we switch locations? Let us go to the second floor now.”

We moved to the second level of the Veil Labyrinth, where I switched to my magic build to conduct the next experiment using magic. Then we found a lone Needlewood, a perfect test subject. With my current build I should be able to one-shot it with my magic, so let us apply Plating to it and see what happens when I attack it.

It survived! The Needlewood survived my attack, so I needed one more shot of Fireball to finish it off.

“What happened just now, master? It looked like something was limiting the power of your spell.”

"A limit, huh? Yeah, that about sums it up perfectly."

From Roxanne's point of view, it certainly could look as if my magic got weakened, but what happened was actually the exact opposite. It's not that I got weaker, but the Needlewood got tougher thanks to Plating. By the looks of it, it must be a Skill that erects a kind of protective membrane around the target. That is why that Cheap Sheep needed two strikes instead of one to be killed, even though I was using Rush. The actual percentage of damage reduction must not be all that great, but right now my bigger concern is that I don't know how long this Skill lasts. As long as I don't know that, I cannot use it as my insurance in battles.

But verifying that should be relatively easy.

"Roxanne, let's find one more lone monster, but this time, I want you to strike it first before me."

"Okay!"

When we happened upon a Green Caterpillar, I attached plating onto it and then had Roxanne attack it once before firing magic at it. It died in one shot.

It's not that the addition of that Scimitar attack was enough to defeat it, but rather that Roxanne's attack used up the stack of plating placed on the Green Caterpillar, allowing my magic to work as it was originally intended. This gives me certainty that plating is a defensive Skill that can negate one attack, regardless of it being magical or physical.

Before aquiring Plating, the only means of defense I had were the Wall type spells, but now my defensive arsenal has expanded, even if only by a little bit. The exact amount of damage reduced might be level dependent and get stronger on higher levels of Alchemist's Job, but it can still be immensely useful to me if applied in the right moments during battles, so you can be sure that I will be using it for all its worth.

After that, we decided to take it easy for the rest of the day, simply exploring until the end of the evening. The next day, we spend the most of the day gathering Rabbit Furs in Quratar's Labyrinth so that we could amass as many as we possibly could after clearing our backpacks and organizing the space in my Item Box and then sell them in that clothing store we saw in the Imperial City, and in the evening we switched locations to Veil Labyrinth's seventh floor where we fought monsters and gained more

levels all throughout the evening, as per our usual routine.

When we got back to our house, I came to check how the soap was doing, but much to my disappointment, it was not yet all solid like all those bars of it that I was so used to seeing. I wonder exactly how long is it going to take for it to solidify properly? In the experiment back in junior high, the teacher used the refrigerator to harden it almost instantly, but unfortunately, there are no refrigerators in this world, which means that I just have to wait for it to harden on its own. But exactly how long is it going to take? A week? Month? I really have no way of knowing, and I cannot wait for that long either, so we will have to simply make do with what we already have here.

When we finished eating dinner, we went to the bathroom and began preparations to make the bath. Today is definitely the day when I will wash Roxanne using the soap that I have created!

While we were standing there, getting undressed, I kept stealing glances at Roxanne as she was removing her clothes one after the other. I probably said that a million times already and am just sounding like a broken record, but her bombshell body is simply spectacular no matter how many times I get to look at it. For a girl she is tall and thin, and all of her limbs are slender, not to mention that her chest is something that other girls her age would definitely get jealous of. To top it off, she has thick thighs, slim waist and a really plump butt adorned with her fluffy, adorable tail; in other words, she has practically everything that a normal, healthy guy might want in a girl, and this walking perfection belongs to me and me alone. Huehuehue, I really am a lucky guy to have someone like her as my partner. But enough digressing, it's about time to move on to the main event of today's evening.

"Finished undressing?"

I asked, trying to sound as casual about it as possible.

"Yes, I am done."

"Good. In that case, let us wash each other."

"Uhm, should I not be the one to wash master first?"

"Normally that would be the case, but not this time. Now that I have made soap, we have to try if it is working as it should be, and for that, we have to wash each other up for maximum effectiveness."

Roxanne expressed some doubts, but I promptly hastened to quell them. It might be a little bit crude to be saying this, but the only reason why I went through all those trouble of making the bath, finding a way to fill it with water and now making soap was so that I could have some nice, soapy fun with her, so I am not going to let anything stop me now when I am literal inches away from seeing my fantasy fulfilled.

I want to wash Roxanne as soon as possible. I want to cover her with bubbles from top to bottom, and I want her to cover me in the same way as well. All I have to do now is to push her just a little bit more, and she should have no objections whatsoever about doing this with me.

“So this is going to be another experiment?”

“Yes, exactly. The one meant to test if I managed to create good enough soap for us to be using it from now on.”

Are those words going to be enough to convince her? Technically they should be, since I focused on the practical aspect of what we are going to be doing in a moment, so she has no reason to say no to it. Come on now Roxanne, don’t fail me now!

“Understood. Then... please go ahead and wash me... master.”

Yes! It seems that Roxanne understood what I was trying to say without me having to explain it in too much detail, which is definitely great, but with all of that said, what we are about to do is really going to be a legitimate experiment, because thinking about it for a moment, I have never done any tests to see if this soap is safe for the people to use. What if, for example, it turns out that it is too alkaline to be using on the skin, and Roxanne is going to hurt herself while using it? If that were to happen, I would have never forgiven myself for it, so I have to do everything I possibly can to make sure that such a thing will never come to pass, even by complete accident.

Which is why I have to exercise extreme caution with it.

I soaked the washcloth in hot water and made as much foam as I could by rubbing it together. Before using it on Roxanne, I am going to test it out on my own hand first. The foam and the bubbles form relatively easily, so everything’s fine in that aspect. It is certainly not the amount that I am used to seeing after using shampoos and soaps I had in my old house in Japan, but for the time being this will definitely make do for us. It’s been a good minute since I applied the soap, and the place where I put it is not

tingling or burning in the slightest, so this soap probably turned out safe for usage after all. Just to be sure, I applied more of it onto my arm, but there was no problems with it whatsoever. Does this mean that we have ourselves a green light? Probably yes.

“Hmm... it does not sting or anything, so I think it should be safe to put it on our skins. Roxanne, show me your hand for a moment, if you would.”

“I see... okay. Here you go, master.”

Roxanne stretched out her left hand and waited for me to apply the soap onto it, which I did after a short moment of hesitation. I made an ample amount of foam and smeared it over a part of her forearm by making piston-like movements with my fingers. Okay, so far, it does not seem like anything out of the ordinary is happening. Her soap-covered, moist skin feels incredibly good to the touch.

“This is the first time that I have made legitimate soap, so if you start feeling funny or that anything seems to be off, even if it’s just a little bit, be sure to tell me about it right away, all right?”

“All right. If anything happens, I will tell you about it immediately.”

After smearing the soap on her palms, I moved and did the same across her entire arms. Enjoying their softness, I slowly made my way towards the shoulders, and then took a turn to go for her armpits.

“Fufufu~~~... m-master, that tickles... fufufu~~~!”

Smirking at her cute reaction, I grabbed the washcloth and doused it in the soaped-up water one more time, but I am only going to use it to make more foam, and nothing else. This is Roxanne’s body we’re talking about after all, so I want to experience it in its entirety with my own hands. Then, moving on from her armpits I made my way down, all the way to the bases of the sacred mountains. I moved from the bases all the way towards their summits, and then moving slowly, as if I was covering a canvas with paint I dyed them both white, as if it just snowed over them. As I wash them, they shake a little, causing the foamy snow to froth and raise the pinkish peaks even higher. But soon enough the time will come for this snow to melt and uncover the first buds of spring waiting patiently under the white blanket.

“Ahh~~”

This is amazing. The slipperiness of the foam, coupled with the softness of her elastic skin, this sensation is just out of this world.

"Master, it feels so good... ever since I met you, I have experienced so many wonderful first times, including this one..."

She pants as I move towards her stomach. Roxanne, That's so hot!!!

"Since today is your first time using soap, then as a special service I will wash your hair, back and tail for you, but only today. I won't be doing it tomorrow."

"Huh? Why not?"

"Because using too much soap can actually damage your hair, and I think we both would like to avoid anything like that happening to us, right?"

"I see, so that's why."

"Yeah, that is exactly right."

Or at least that is the story that I heard in the past, back when I was still a little whelp. And since I have no idea how to make the specialized beauty products like shampoo or hair conditioners, it would probably be better to let our hair rest for a few days before washing it with soap again. Yup, this is what all the kids in Japan were taught ever since they are young, so there's no reason to stop following that logic now. Preparing to wash Roxanne's entire body for her, I got a good amount of soap on both of my hands and rubbed them together to create as much fluffy foam as possible.

First I got it all over her back, and once they were taken care of I carefully moved to wash her tail, for which I also had to employ both of my hands, which I then used to ruffle the tail's fur a bit before stroking it politely with my foamed-up fingers. It felt comfortably smooth, just like when you would wash a dog's tail. I never had a dog myself, but I imagined that this is how washing its tail up would feel.

After bubbling her whole body up and letting go of her tail, the time has come for me to move towards her head. I took a washcloth and used it to make even more foam than I used when I was going over the rest of her body. Then I placed it all on top of Roxanne's head and began moving my hands in stirring motions, as if I wanted to

combine the soapy foam and her hair together.

"You okay there? You're not feeling itchy or got the foam in your eyes?"

"No, I am all right. Thank you for worrying, master."

I washed not only the hair on her head, but her doggy ears as well. Even though I am touching it and playing with it every single day, cleaning it with soap was a brand-new experience with a whole new set of sensations related to it. Their front, back, their very base, I gently took care of it and scrubbed them with my fingers until there was no part of it left unwashed. As her ears were being washed, bubbles mixed with the droplets of water began to drip from their tips and hair down onto her body, but she did not see any of them, because she still had her eyes closed to prevent foam from getting into them.

Now that her entire body has been thoroughly scrubbed with bubbles, I could take a step back and enjoy the full picture of my work. I have to say, she looked like a human figure made from bubbles, which got a small chuckle out of me.

After washing her all over like that, it looks like she is wearing clothes made entirely out of foam that are similar to the ripped clothing from my times. Watching her stand before me in this white, bubbly getup is strangely alluring in its own right. Is it because parts of her body are clearly visible to me, while others remain obscured from my sight? And beneath all of that foam... there is this gentle warmth of her body. I can't help but wonder... if I press on it hard enough, will I be able to touch it directly? To touch her... Roxanne...

"... Ah! M-Master..."

I hugged her without even thinking about it. The need to do this was stronger than me, and I did not want to do anything to stop myself from doing it. I did this without thinking, but it can still be bad, so I have to come up with some kind of excuse, and quick!

"Uhm, you know... this way, we can wash each other up more effectively without using as much soap. In the country that I hail from, it is a traditional method of washing between men and women who are close to one another that allows them to deepen their relationship even further"

I fed her a bunch of conveniently arranged half-truths.

“Members of the opposite sex really wash each other like that?”

This is not entirely true, but right now I am willing to make every lie possible in order to enjoy this bubbly Roxanne for as long as I possibly can.

“I see.”

You see? Well that’s great, because I am not ready to give up this soft, slimy sensation up just yet. I want to continue to touch her and enjoy the moist feeling of her skin rubbing against mine.

“That’s right.”

I declared in order to strongly affirmed the legitimacy of my words. Roxanne’s willingness and readiness to accept each and every one of my words as honest-to-good truths is both a little disappointing and kinda terrifying, but it cannot be helped. You know what they say, right? That it is very rude to be looking a gifted horse in the mouth? Well, my original intention was to simply have ourselves wash each other up normally, but as always, my greedy, pervy nature ended up causing me to ask for that much more. Then again, I should have guessed that it was going to end like that from the very beginning.

“... who are close to each other, huh?”

“Huh? Roxanne?”

I don’t know if I was starting to see things from all the heat and steam of the bath, but I could swear that Roxanne had a strange glint in her eyes just now. Could it be that my talk about how this is something that couples that are close to one another are doing awakened something inside her or caused some kinda switch to be flipped?

“In that case... can I wash master’s body up as well?”

She asked while taking off my towel and shyly wrapping her hands around my waist!

Her movements are a little bit awkward, but overall, they all feel pretty nice. She clings onto me moving ever so slowly while she is diligently trying to cover my entire body with soap. Even my most important part, so I leave it all to her and allow her to wash me however she sees fit.

Along with the bubbles that gradually cover my entire body, I can also feel her massive mountains touching my back, and from time to time, her fingers also happen to brush against my crotch, of which she takes full advantage, looking at me with moist eyes and asking provocative things like:

“Am I doing it right?”

“Y-Yes, thank you. Being washed by you feels really good, Roxanne.”

“Fufu, I am glad to hear it.”

Just as I did for her before, now Roxanne also washes every part pf my body: hair, neck, torso, arms, legs... every last inch of my skin has been caressed by her soap-covered fingers, bringing me to the very height of satisfaction.

“Look out, master. I will be washing the soap off of you now.”

When she finished washing me, she drew the hot water into her palms and poured it onto my head, flushing all of the bubbles from my body and into the water. When I was finally clear of it all after a few such water showers, we just laid in the tub and enjoyed the sensation of the hot water that was wrapping itself all around us.

“My skin feels so smooth and comfortable...”

Roxanne says as she washes the soap off her arm and squints her eyes happily. It looks like she is satisfied with the results of the soapy bath, and if she is happy with it, then that makes me happy as well.

“We would have quite a problem if it didn’t feel that way. I guess that means that the soap experiment was a success after all.”

“After using so much of it, it somehow feel as if I have been reborn.”

“I’m glad to hear that, but you were beautiful even without using it, so I do not think it is going to change all that much.”

“Oh, t-thank you very much...”

I wonder if that was the best thing that I could have said as a follow up to this entire situation? After all, there is no doubt in my mind that Roxanne was already stunningly

beautiful ever since I have first laid my eyes upon her, but the soap made her shine even more, so... should I have agreed with her? Or perhaps said something a little bit more daring? *Sigh* I guess I missed my chance, huh? But in the end, I guess things have worked themselves out pretty nicely even without that, so it is all fine.

CHAPTER 5

CARELESSNESS

Kaga Michio

Current levels & equipment:

Explorer Lv.32

Hero Lv.29

Mage Lv.31

Monk Lv.30

Equipment:

Wand

Leather Helmet

Leather Armor

Leather Gloves

Leather shoes

In the morning after the night when we washed each other with the newly-made soap, I woke up with a squeaky-clean body feeling all refreshed. Who would have thought that doing something so simple as washing yourself properly was going to have that much of a positive effect on me, both physically and mentally. But truth to be told, taking a proper bath was only one of the reasons for me waking up feeling better than ever since I have ended up here. As for the other reason...

“Mmm... fuu... *kiss* ...”

Certainly, last night has been quite refreshing, both to me and to Roxanne... for a variety of reasons. Currently she is straddling me, allowing me to feel the smoothness of her clean and polished lower body with my own lower body. The feeling is so addicting that I want to do nothing else than to grab a hold of her and hug her all day long without leaving the bed even for a minute.

She kisses me on the lips, continuing our ritual of waking me up with kisses every single day. Her lips are so soft that I feel like my tongue and the inside of my mouth are going to be melted in an instant if she continues to do it uninterrupted. It is so moist, and warm, and slimy and it slides across my own tongue as if it had a will of its own... Huh? Do I realize that this has nothing to do with soap, and that it is like that by itself? Well of course I do! It's just that whenever I have an occasion to praise how good Roxanne is with her tongue, I am going to take that chance, no questions asked.

"Good morning, master."

"Good morning, to you as well, Roxanne. Just like you said yesterday, your skin so pleasantly smooth to the touch."

"Thank you for the nice words, but that would not be possible without the soap that master created."

"True. *Sigh* as much as I would like to stay like this and enjoy the feeling of your skin beside me, I'm afraid we have to go back to Quratar's Labyrinth in the morning. Are you all right with such course of action?"

"Of course. As long as it is something that master wants to do, I have no reason not to follow your decision and go with you wherever they might lead us."

As much as I did not want to do it, I had no choice but to let go of Roxanne and start to prepare myself for another long day of grinding for levels in Veil's Labyrinth and hunting for Rabbit Furs in the Labyrinth of Quratar.

In this world, it has been generally agreed that the time of day universally known as "evening" arrives around 10:00 PM, or at least that is more or less when the candles are being lit and lamps are filled with oil. These two things are necessary if you don't want to spend the evening hours in complete darkness, and while individually they might not be all that expensive, then considering that candles and lamp oil both get used out rather quickly, so it is more than certain that you are going to have to buy

more than just one or two of them, and that can be quite a costly undertaking when you take into consideration that you would have to buy enough of them for at least a few days, or perhaps even a week. Now, given our financial situation, try to guess how much candles or lamp oil I would be willing to buy. That's right, you guessed correctly: none whatsoever, since at least for the time being they are not something that we absolutely need in order to function properly when it gets dark, since in this world there is not much to do when the sun goes down anyway, aside from hanging around taverns or having sex. Well, saying that there is not much to do is not an entirely accurate thing, but so allow me to rephrase what I just said a bit: there might or might not be much to do in the evenings, depending on which "tier" of society you happen to belong to.

Since we have chosen to live our lives as Adventurers for the time being, our main source of income is going to the Labyrinths and selling whatever we managed to find in there or obtain from killing monsters, we have to take an especially good care of our bodies and make sure that they are always going to be in tip-top condition if we want to avoid running into any difficulties, and I personally don't want Roxanne to overexert herself more than she has to. The burdens that I am already placing on her shoulders are quite enough, so if there is anything I can do in order to take even the smallest portion of those burdens away, then I am going to do it, even if it is something as small and insignificant as going to bed early to get as much sleep as we possibly can, waking up when it is still pitch-black outside so that we could go to the Labyrinths when there will be as few people inside them as possible.

Fighting away my drowsiness, I slowly got out of bed and looked for my change of clothes to put on. When all of our preparations were finished, I created a Warp portal to Quratar's Labyrinth, and thus another day of our dungeon crawling began.

Hunting Slow Rabbits on the seventh floor here sounds, and admittedly is, a pretty repetitive undertaking, but we have no choice but to do this if we want to complete one of the small goals that Roxanne and I set for ourselves: obtain one hundred (Or even more than that, just to be safe) or more Rabbit Fur's and sell them to the clothing store in Imperial City for profit. However, one hundred pelts is quite a large number, and we want to bring all of them to one of the more luxurious-looking establishments located on Imperial City's main street, and I feel like arriving there with all of them in tow is going to cause me quite a lot of nerves. On the bright side, thanks to my access to Bonus Skills, selling such a large amount of Furs is going to be even more profitable than it would normally be, because if there is a Bonus Skill that grants a thirty percent discount when buying things, then there must also be a Bonus Skill that does the same

when selling things to others.

We entered the Labyrinth and headed towards the seventh floor, where the Slow Rabbits dwelled. Instead of following the map of the floor, I allowed Roxanne's nose to be our guide, since she is infinitely more reliable when it comes to detecting enemies than some scrap of paper, giving us a much higher Slow Rabbit encounter rate than every other Explorer or Adventurer could ever dream of. Luckily for us, we do not have to worry about Slow Rabbits not dropping their furs whenever they are defeated, because so far every last one of them dropped it without fail, which means that a Rabbit Fur must be their common Drop Item with one hundred percent chance to being dropped. As a result of that, we managed to get more than a hundred Rabbit Furs in no time and we will soon approach over two hundred Furs out of the initial one hundred, so I think that we might as well try and go for three hundred of them, because if we will keep up the pace at which we are currently going, then we are going to get that much without any major difficulties as well. If my Item Box was bigger we could have tried to get more than three hundred, but regrettably, three hundred free spaces for items is the maximum limit with the current levels of my Jobs.

"Ah! Master, look!"

Also, while going through the halls of the seventh floor, we made a surprising discovery that made coming here this early in the morning well worth it.

"What is it, Roxanne? Did you find something?"

"Yes! I believe there is a hidden passage here!"

"Really?! Let me see!"

Roxanne was right. Slightly off to the side of the main corridor there was a hidden passage in the wall. When we entered it after Roxanne confirmed that she can't smell any monsters lurking nearby, we found a most peculiar thing some distance from the entrance to the secret corridor.

"Roxanne, what is that?"

"This is a treasure chest, master!"

"A treasure... chest? This thing right here?"

"That's right!"

Roxanne rushed towards the treasure chest in excitement, but I still could not understand what was she getting so fired up about... because the thing that she described as a treasure chest looked like a simple mound of soil to me, very similar to the ones that moles make whenever they stop digging through the ground and want to come back to the surface.

Is this really the famous treasure chests I have heard so much about, and not just some kind of trap meant to lure in naïve people blinded by the prospect of getting their hands on some easy loot? Also, according to Roxanne's words, treasure chests contain the belongings of those who have died while going through the Labyrinth, so it can be said that this is a pretty morbid take on the typical system of randomly generated loot found in most RPG games, but through the standards of this world, I guess its inhabitants will see nothing wrong with it.

Back when we were only trekking through Veil's Labyrinth I have never seen even a single one of those pop up, most likely because that Labyrinth is practically deserted and almost no one goes there, or at least to its lower floors. As a result there was no one who could have fallen prey to the monsters living there, resulting in there being no treasure chests whatsoever.

As for Quratar, we have not seen treasure chests up to this point either, but not because there was no people, oh no. Quratar's Labyrinth is always teeming with Adventurers and Explorers alike so there are bound to be more treasure chests here, but so far we were only sticking to the shortest possible routes to the Boss Room, focusing very little of our time towards exploration outside of the path dictated by the map. That is one reason., the other one being that with so many people here at any given time of the day, even if some treasure chests were to spawn, they would all be picked clean by the time we have arrived at the scene. We were probably only able to find this one because we came here unusually early even for us looking for the Slow Rabbits to slay and snatch their Furs off of them.

Keeping a safe distance from the lump of soil, Roxanne poked it with her Scimitar a few times, but nothing alarming has happened. Still, it does not mean that we are in the clear just yet. This treasure chest might still be rigged with the kinds of traps that we cannot even begin to imagine, so we should still exercise extreme caution in

interacting with it.

"Do you think it is safe to open this thing up just like that? What if it is a trap?"

"It should be perfectly safe to open. And even if it was not and it turned out that it was, for example, a Mimic masquerading as the treasure chest, all we would have to do to claim the treasure is to defeat it, which should not be difficult with master's strength."

Talk about having absolute confidence in her reply. Seeing her being so sure about that reassured me as well... but wait, what was that about Mimics? They have Mimics here?! In that case, maybe I should stab this treasure chest a few times to see it is going to suddenly come to life only to drop dead in the very next second?

"Roxanne, maybe I should..."

But before I was able to suggest that to her, she already stabbed her Scimitar into the mound of earth and lifted it up from the ground like a carpet. I see. So, it looking like a mound of earth was a sort of camouflage, huh? In truth, whatever this treasure chest was actually made of was more like skin, or a piece of paper. I guess things like that are one of the reasons why even the people native to this world cannot say for sure if the Labyrinths are truly alive or not.

Back to the treasure chest before us, the item that it contained inside of it was Leather Gloves. Just an ordinary set of Leather Gloves, without any Skills or Skill Slots to it whatsoever. We are relatively close to the end of the seventh floor now, so I guess the rumors that treasure chests contain the equipment of those who tried to brave the Labyrinth's corridors is not just a baseless rumor after all. I can definitely imagine people getting impaled by the Escape Goat's horns or bitten to death by Slow Rabbits' fangs even though these are not pleasant images at all. Well, these Leather Gloves are not a great piece of equipment by any means so it probably will not be worth all that much, but there is nothing we can do about it now besides selling it in the equipment shop, which is good, because it will allow us to have that much more extra Nars for whatever we would want to buy next. Who knows, maybe if the person who was the original owner of those gloves invested in better gear he would have still been alive instead of biting the dust and having his armor and weapons serve as random prizes for other people who came here after him? Let this be another reminder for all of you. Labyrinths are dangerous places, and coming into them without proper and careful preparation will only end up in catastrophe for you.

"Whoever you might have been, we will be gratefully taking this. Namu amida butsu."

"Namu amida...?"

While praying for the souls of the deceased Adventurer or Explorer who dropped those, under Roxanne's questioning gaze, I picked up the Leather Gloves from the treasure chest as the ground around it deflated and returned to its perfectly flat shape.

After that surprising encounter with the treasure chest, we have returned home before the sun fully rose to have breakfast. When we were done eating, we had ourselves a short break, after which it was off to the Labyrinth with us again. Since we explored Quratar Labyrinth's seventh floor earlier, it was now the time for us to go to Veil Labyrinth's seventh floor for the purpose of exploration and increasing our levels. Unfortunately, I cannot say that our run there went all that well, mainly because the accursed Escape Goats continued to be a royal pain in the ass thanks to their pesky Escape Skill, which they were using every time they were at death's door and when they were conveniently too far away from me to reach them in time to kill them with Durandal or my magic, which annoyed me to no end, because we did not earn all that much EXP and did not get many items. But even so, we decided that we won't go back to Quratar to hunt for more Rabbit Furs. We have established that we will only do so in the mornings, and at this point it became such a routine thing for us that we didn't even have to think about it, so there is no point in changing that now just because we had a kind of a shitty luck when it came to the enemy RNG this time.

But since we are on the subject of Quratar... there is one alteration that might prove beneficial to us if we decide to implement it into our morning Quratar Labyrinth runs: I would like to try and divide our time there between getting Rabbit Furs and trying to take on the Floor Boss of Quratar Labyrinth's seventh floor. But first thing's first, we have another thing that needs to be done.

When we woke up the next day, we got dressed and went to Quratar's Labyrinth to hunt some more Rabbit Furs as usual, and we managed to obtain more than three hundred of them without any major incidents happening to us along the way, meaning that we managed to achieve the goal we have set for ourselves, so after we got back home in order to have breakfast, we knew what our next stop before going to Veil's Labyrinth was going to be: we are going to Imperial City's clothing store in order to sell all of those Rabbit Furs. We warped to the Imperial City's Adventurer's Guild, made our way to the store and walked through the entrance specified in the poster in front of the store as the one meant for those who wished to sell Rabbit Furs. Once we

were inside, I noticed that this side part of the store was not divided from the rest of it by any walls, doors or even curtains. It was a simple side entrance to the store, from which you could see the inside of the entire store and go anywhere you wanted without being stopped.

As expected, the counter was located at the far end of the shop, straight ahead from the main entrance. I assume that this is where we will have to go in order to get right down to business with selling the furs in our possession.

"Welcome. Since you have used the side entrance, then I assume you are here to sell Rabbit Furs, correct?"

"Yes, that is correct. That is what we have come here to do."

And old male clerk came up to us and offered us a polite greeting. When I used Identify on him, I saw that his Job was that of a Merchant, so if I will play things right, we might be able to get even more money from the selling of those Furs than we have originally intended. Sweet.

"In that case, can I ask you to follow me to the counter?"

"Of course. Please, lead the way."

The man bowed his head to us, turned around and walked towards the counter, and we followed after him. To be honest, I was quite surprised at how polite and professional this guy was towards someone who just came to the store from the street. I thought that we will be taken to some kinda staff room, but apparently no, everything is going to be handled in the main part of the store like with any other client.

As we approached the counter, two other female clerks appeared seemingly out of nowhere and rushed towards the male clerk, lining up at both of his sides behind the counter. As expected of the personnel working at such a luxury store (or perhaps it would be more accurate to call this place a boutique?), they all look like they were so skilled in what they were doing that there was not even one wasted motion in their movements, and even when they were standing still they had this aura of gracefulness around them, especially the two onee-sans. They might have not quite been on Roxanne's level when it came to beauty, but if I saw them out on the city during the day I definitely would have turned over my shoulder when they would be passing by

me.

Since all three of them were Merchants and not Explorers or Adventurers, I mumbled silently to myself, pretending that I was casting the spell for the Item Box to appear, and when it materialized, I took out all of the Rabbit Furs and placed them neatly on the counter one right next to another. As soon as I was done, all three of them began taking and arranging them on their side of the counter. Wow, just look at them go, it's almost like they were machines programmed to do this kind of thing perfectly... oh, wait. They are NPCs in a game, so I guess that makes them not all that different from machines, right? Anyway, they were taking my randomly placed Rabbit Furs and organized them in a few piles there they stacked them on top of each other by taking not one, but several of them at a time. In no time flat, they made as much as thirty piles of ten Rabbit Furs each. Seeing all of that unfold right before my very eyes, I could not help it but to feel impressed, so much so that I applauded them in my mind.

"We have finished counting. Overall, there are three hundred Rabbit Furs here. Do you wish to sell all of them?"

The male clerk counted the number of fur hills on the counter and confirmed the exact amount.

"Yes, I do."

"As you wish. Please, if you could wait just a moment."

He bowed politely and left the counter, presumably to get the money I was going to receive for selling all of those furs, which should be quite a lot.



"We will be taking this then."

One of the female clerks said to me as she took the piles of furs and followed after the male clerk.

"Yes, thank you for your hard work."

The other female clerk, the one who stayed behind at the counter with us. I wonder why did she stay behind when the other went with the male clerk? Maybe that is her programmed behavior, to stay at the counter if there is no one else behind it in case that any other customers came to the shop? She also bowed her head to us and smiled. Even if she is only meant to be staying there like a mannequin, it is still amazing that the creators of this game implemented her with such courtesy gestures. It might not be all that much, but it really makes me feel appreciated as a customer. Though I cannot help but to wonder, do they behave like that towards all the customers, or just towards the ones who come in here in order to sell Rabbit Furs?

I don't think that just about any Explorer, Adventurer, mercenary or a person doing odd jobs would even come to such a high-class clothing store in the first place, but if they did, would they be treated the same way as anyone else based on their appearance alone? After all, Roxanne told me that the coats made from Rabbit Furs are very popular mainly among aristocratic women, so maybe it would be more reasonable to expect such ladies of noble birth to be frequenting stores like this one, even more so since this is the Imperial City, so the percentage of the people of noble and aristocratic birth is bound to be much higher here than in any other city in the empire. What I am trying to say is that even though we have any reason to feel inferior to all the other usual customers of this shop, a part of me still feels very out of place here, instinctively knowing that commoners should not try to forcefully involve themselves with the nobility and the establishments they are visiting, but this is only a small voice sounding in the back of my head, so I do my best to ignore it and continue to lift my head proudly.

In order to clear my head of such concerns, I tried to take a look around the store, however, there was not all that many actual clothes placed on display. There are mostly rolls and sheets of various types of fabric, so it is quite possible that instead of selling regular clothes, this store specializes more in selling made-to-order goods.

As I continued my surveillance, the male clerk finally came back to the counter, carrying a tray filled with coins with him. Indeed, there was a lot of them crammed in

there, so much so that I was afraid that they might start spilling from the tray's sides at any moment now.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting, dear customers. Our usual price for one Rabbit Fur is twenty Nars, but since you have brought quite a lot of them with you, we are willing to offer you a special price of twenty Nars plus a bonus of additional six Nars for each of the rabbit Furs you have sold us."

So that is why there are so many silver coins in that tray. He said that it was a special price, but I know that this is thanks to my thirty percent increase Bonus Skill. Taking all of that money from the tray which has been placed on the counter, I am putting them into my string bag rather casually and then off to the backpack it goes after the string has been tied tightly enough. Normally I would have taken my time to count every single coin to see whether they tried to scam me or not, but in this case it would be too much of a pain in the ass to do so, and this man has been so polite with me ever since I walked through the door to the store that I think I can give him a little benefit of the doubt. Besides, the math for this particular transaction is rather easy.

Normally, I would have gotten six thousand Nars for selling three hundred Rabbit Furs worth twenty Nars each, but with my thirty percent bonus, I sold three hundred Rabbit Furs for twenty-six Nars each, which gives me seven thousand eight hundred Nars, paid with seventy-eight silver coins. See, no reason for me to count them at all when it is all so transparent.

"Very well then, we gladly accept it."

"Pardon me for asking this, Mr. Customer, but since you brought so many Rabbit Furs with you during a single visit, I feel inclined to ask: are you and your companion Adventurers, by any chance?"

The male clerk asked that of me when I finished putting the money in the backpack.

Oh, what is this? Could this be some kind of hidden event? Might as well check out what this is about then.

"We are, as a matter of fact. Why do you ask?"

"When you were hunting for the furs you just sold, did you happen to obtain any other

items from the monsters that dropped them, like Rabbit's Meat, perhaps?"

"Yup, this is definitely going to be one of those fetch-type quests, no doubts about it.

"Rabbit Meat? No, I believe we did not happen upon any such item during our hunts. But, forgive me if it sounds a bit rude... but what would you need Rabbit Meat for in a clothing store?"

"Ah, yes, of course, about that... that is indeed not the type of goods that would be sold in this kind of shop, rather... that would be something I would like to acquire for my personal use."

"And how much of that Rabbit Meat would you want?"

"I would gladly accept even a piece or two of it, as long as it would be by tomorrow."

"By tomorrow, huh? Roxanne, what are the chances of us obtaining some Rabbit Meat by tomorrow?"

"I would say pretty good, because Rabbit Meat should be the Drop Item left behind by the Floor Boss of the seventh floor of the Labyrinth in Quratar."

Roxanne gave me the information that I requested out of her. A Drop Item from the seventh floor's Floor Boss, huh? Then it is no wonder that he would only ask someone who looked like an Adventurer if they had some of it on them or not.

"Yeah, so... as I already said, we do not have any Rabbit Meat on us right now..."

"I understand. I'm sorry to have troubled you with my selfish request out of the blue like that..."

The male clerk's eyes were filled with disappointment, like a little puppy that was just said that he cannot get on the couch with its owner. He wants to get his hands on that Rabbit Meat that badly that he is willing to ask complete strangers for help with it? Honestly, seeing him like that makes me feel incredibly uncomfortable, so...

"... but I don't think that getting it by tomorrow would be impossible. We should be able to procure some of it for you."

"Really?! You would really do me such kindness, even though we are complete

strangers?"

"Sure, why not? I mean, we were planning to go to the Labyrinth where we will be able to get our hands on it, so obtaining a few extra pieces should be a piece of cake for us."

I said with absolute confidence in my words. After all, if we can handle the normal enemies on the seventh floor, taking down its Floor Boss a few times should not be all that difficult, right? Even though we have yet to clear that floor ourselves and have no idea what the actual Floor Boss looks like and what it can do, we have a map of the entire floor that we can use to follow straight to the Boss Room, and it is certain that the boss is going to be some kind of variation of the Slow Rabbit, so we should have no problems with swiftly dispatching it.

"Then, can I ask you to bring me one or two pieces of Rabbit Meat by tomorrow?! Please, it is very important for me!"

The male clerk pleaded all the more vehemently.

"Wow, you really are hell-bent on getting your hands on it, are you not? Is that thing really so valuable?"

Based on my previous experiences with ingredients that were dropped by Floor Bosses, they were always a pretty common one that would not give you much money if you tried to sell it.

"Obtaining it is not all that difficult, but since it is quite tasty, it can get pretty expensive if you want to sell it at the butcher's shop. And since it is typically eaten on several special occasions, that makes it all the more valuable and in constant demand."

"I see."

Normally we would go to Quratar's Labyrinth and hunt Slow Rabbits and try to take on the Floor Boss if possible, spending our time there until the sunrise, then we would go back home to eat breakfast, after which we would go to Veil's Labyrinth to grind levels and items from the monsters we encountered there, but to be completely honest with you, Escape Goats and that Escape Skill of theirs have really been getting on my nerves recently, because of how they seem to abuse that Skill, our search of the Veil Labyrinth's seventh floor has not been proceeding as smoothly as I would have liked it to go. So, I feel like a little change of pace is exactly what we need right now. Therefore, tomorrow we will go to Quratar's Labyrinth first thing in the morning and

stay there for a bit longer so that we could hunt as much Rabbit Meat as possible!

"All right, we're going to bring you some Rabbit Meat. But just let me ask you this: do you have any means of storing that meat once we give it to you?"

"Unfortunately, since I am not an Explorer like you, I do not have access to the Item Box where I could store all my items, but you do not have to worry yourselves with that. However many Rabbit Meats you will bring me, I will be very much content with that number."

Ingredients are the type of items that will not spoil or go rotten no matter how long you will keep them in the Item Box, but since this man is a Merchant, he does not have access to Item Box, so he will have to find other way of preventing it from going bad, even if we do deliver the Rabbit Meat to him while it will be at the height of its freshness. It is a good thing that he is perfectly aware of that, because it eliminates the possibility of him blaming us for the eventual spoiling of the meat.

"Okay. As long as you are fine with it, then so are we."

But still, even though he needs this meat so badly, asking people you don't even know still takes a lot of guts to pull off, and a crazy amount of good fortune as well, but on the flipside that would also explain his unusual level of politeness towards us: he was so nice because he wanted to ask us about the Rabbit Meat, most likely ever since he saw us walking through the door. For whatever reason, he is really adamant about obtaining the Rabbit Meat, and since he cannot obtain it himself, he was forced to rely on the help of Adventurers and Explorers who would have happened to come to the shop, and apparently fate, or perhaps nothing but blind luck had decided that those helpers would be us. And now, whether we like it or not we have to rise to his expectations. It's a little stressful, but I also have to admit that having someone rely on you with high hopes is not that bad of a feeling.

On the morning of the next day, we woke up slightly earlier than usual, put on our clothes and equipment and headed out to Quratar's Labyrinth with a map of the seventh floor in tow. Our target for today: reach the Boss Room without making any unnecessary detours, defeat the Floor Boss, obtain Rabbit Meat from it, and if possible, repeat that whole process two or more times.

When we arrived on the seventh floor, we immediately found ourselves some secluded corner, pulled out the map to see what route we would have to take to arrive at the

Boss Room in the shortest time possible, and added Roxanne's nose into the mix.

"And? How is it? Are there many people around?"

"Not all that many, but still more than usual this early in the morning. Right now it might be a bit dangerous, but once we go a little bit further in, it should be possible for you to start using magic without the risk of somebody seeing us, master."

"Great. All that's left now is to get to the Floor Boss and defeat it."

Looking at the map myself, the road from the seventh floor's entrance room to the Floor Boss room is relatively straightforward and does not have all that many branching paths to it, so as long as we stay on track we should be able to reach it in no time flat, excluding some unavoidable encounters with the Slow Rabbits.

Although there are fewer people here on the seventh floor, I should probably still use Durandal for most of this floor before switching to using magic, just to be sure that I will avoid any potential problems that might stem from me being seen by someone, even if by accident. After I recover my MP here for a bit, it really should be fine for me to use magic all the way to the end of this floor, where I will switch back to Durandal again to fight the Floor Boss.

Despite not being able to use magic until we were about halfway through it, this floor was overall not that bad. Since the Slow Rabbits were rather... well, slow on the attack and were simply hopping around for most of the time, We had no difficulties with dispatching them, and soon we were a stone's throw away from the Boss Room.

"The Boss Room should be a little more up ahead. *Sniff Sniff* Looks like someone is already there."

"Someone's there? Well that's new."

Since there are people waiting outside of the Boss Room, then I would better put my wand away in the Item Box. Would not want anyone to see it and piece together that since I have it then I can probably use magic, which would be pretty strange for someone who has Explorer listed as his Main Job now, right? Yeah, taking Durandal out is definitely going to be the smart thing to do here.

Overall, there were six people waiting in the Waiting Room outside of the Boss Room. They were most likely here because that must have pretty much the same idea we had: that if they decide to come to the Labyrinth so early in the morning, there will be little to no competition for fighting monsters and finding potential treasure chests. All right, that means I have to keep Durandal out of sight until they will enter the Boss Room to fight the Floor Boss and we will be left alone. I am not risking anyone having as much as a glance at it and figuring out what it actually is.

Shortly after we arrived in the waiting room, the door to the Boss Room opened and five people entered. So it was not a full Party of six people? The only one left behind was a lone Explorer-looking dude... and he had the audacity to go and stare at Roxanne's chest! Look man, I know, okay? I know that Roxanne's boobs are amazing... but they are mine! Mine and mine alone, no one else'! So you can stare at them all you want, but staring is all you can do. This magnificent rack shall forever remain out of your reach!

"Just the two of you?"

The guy talked to us while we were waiting in front of the Boss Room.

"That's right. What about you? You alone?"

To be honest, I feel an overwhelming urge to punch this guy in the dick for ogling my Roxanne with his lecherous eyes, but it should be okay to talk to him and display that I am above such petty grievances.

"Yeah. I am trying to save enough money so that I could buy myself more Party members, but so far things have just not been working out very well for me on that front. The thing is, no matter how much money I manage to save up one way or another, I just can't seem to save up enough, because after you take all the costs of buying food and daily necessities, it always ends up being not enough to buy even a single Party member."

Oh wow, he is talking so casually about something so shady as buying himself some slaves because he cannot afford to find regular people who would be willing to form a Party with him. I guess that pretty much solidifies my belief that in this world slaves are a perfectly normal thing and it is not taboo in any way to be talking about them or buying them for yourself. I don't know about you, but I certainly would not want to start a conversation with random guys met in a fucking dungeon with how much I

want to get myself some slave pussy, but maybe that is just my prime and proper Japanese mentality speaking. Given enough time I should be able to adapt to how people in this world act and think, but for the time being some old mannerisms are bound to be still rubbing off on me, so I have to be careful not to do or say something unnecessary that might cause frictions between me and the people I talk to.

Also, I wonder what the slaves themselves would have to say about such a situation. I glanced back at Roxanne to see if she was uncomfortable with the subject of slaves being brought up so openly, but she was simply standing behind me with her eyes closed and a slight smile on her face. That makes sense, since even though I am her master and she is my slave, our relationship is quite a far cry from how it was usually portrayed in the history books and media from my old world. But if we do not look like a typical master and slave, then how are others seeing us? As a young couple, perhaps? Then again, that might not be the case, because pretty much everyone would definitely think that such a beautiful girl as Roxanne is way out of the league of a plain-ass boring guy like me.

Okay, I have to stop thinking about such distracting things so much, because right now it will lead me nowhere. Since we are waiting here though, might as well allow this guy to talk some more and get his worries out of his system. I am not particularly interested in his whining, but it is not like we have anything better to do to pass the time.

“W-Well, I was in the same boat as you not that long ago, so I understand how you feel.”

If I had not met Roxanne, I might have very well turned out like this guy here, having to go through the Labyrinths all by myself.

“To be honest, I am afraid to be facing the Floor Boss since I am all by myself, but unfortunately, I just cannot afford to go exploring any other Labyrinths.”

“You don’t say.”

I can say from my own experiences: if you stumble into a Trap Room filled with monsters all by yourself, you won’t be in a big pinch, or royally screwed. You will be fucked, with a capital F. But here in Quratar’s Labyrinth there are always lots of people on most of the floors, so that risk is greatly reduced. On the other hand though, more people means less chances for monster encounters, and less monster encounters means less EXP needed to level your Jobs up. And to top it off, unless you have access

to cheat-like Skills like my Warp that allows you to teleport to the Labyrinth from practically anywhere in the world as long as you have the MP to do it, you would have to pay the admission fee to even be allowed to enter Quratar's Labyrinth every single time, and there is no way in hell that this would allow you to save money. It is unfortunate, but that is just how the business rolls in here.

"It has been two years since I entered the seventh floor, and throughout all this time, I was unable to clear it. But now that my level and the capacity of my Item Box have finally increased, I think I finally have a chance to go to the next floor, so I am going to take that opportunity since it has presented itself to me."

"Well, best of luck to you then. I hope you will be able to do it."

"Thank you for your kind words. Even though I am all alone in this, I feel like I will be able to pull through one way or the other. Call it blind optimism if you want, but I feel like Lady Luck is on my side today."

The Explorer dude entered the Boss Room with a light smile on his face when the door opened a short while later. Two years spent on the seventh floor alone? How fucked up is that? He looked like he was around my age or perhaps a little older, so if he spent two years here, then how old was he when he started going to the Labyrinths alone? Looks like the world of Explorers is much more brutal and unforgiving to those who cannot find themselves a Party than I initially thought.

I do not really care about how other people are doing in the Labyrinths, but now that I have Roxanne with me, I am grateful that I will never have to tackle their challenges while having no one to back me up. She might be just one person, but even so, the difference of having her here with me is a huge one.

Before it was finally our turn to face the Floor Boss, another Party came and stood in line behind us, so I had to keep Durandal hidden from their eyes.

"OK, we are going in. You ready, Roxanne?"

"Yes. Let us go, master!"

While psyching ourselves up, we entered the Boss Room and I prepared Durandal for battle. After the door closed behind us, I noticed that the Floor Boss was already there,

waiting for us. It was a red-colored Rapid Rabbit Lv.7. So this is the Floor Boss of this floor, huh? I have to say, even though its red coloring looks pretty menacing, overall this guy is looking pretty cute. It even is the same size as the other Slow Rabbits.

“HIIIIIIIIIIIIIISSSSSSSS!!!!!!”

Or not! This goddamn thing is not adorable at all! Also, this is the first time when the Floor Boss was already waiting for us when we have entered its chamber. So far, every time we entered the Boss Rooms, they were all materializing from the green smoke that was gathering after the door closed behind us, but this time there was nothing like that. The monster was already waiting for us in the middle of the room, all ready for battle, so I hurriedly assumed a battle stance with Durandal readied in front of me.

As soon as the door completely closed behind Roxanne, who was following after me, Rapid Rabbit began to move, dashing towards us with incredible speed.

Fast! This thing is way faster than I ever could have imagined!

Rapid Rabbit approached us in the blink of an eye. To me, it looks like it is at least three times faster than the usual Slow Rabbit! Could it be that this red coloring of his is what is making all the difference? I raised Durandal into the air and dropped it down onto the Rapid Rabbit as it was going for my leg with its fangs bared, but it dodged my attack without losing any of its amazing speed. I tried to predict where it would be going next and aim my next attack a little bit further, but it also dodged it, this time by making a sharp ninety degrees turn to the left! I swung Durandal in that direction without even looking at it, but of course such a half-assed attack did not hit it, missing the mark completely and utterly.

(Ugh! Why won't you just stay still so that I can hit you, you damned rabbit?!)

Until now, the Floor Bosses were all giant monsters, so even if the had somewhat fast attacks hitting them was not much of a problem due to their sheer size, but since this bastard here is the same size as the small fries, its speed and menuverability is what is making this battle all the more difficult. Unless we find a way to hinder its movement or create an opening so that we could land a solid hit on it, this will go on forever until it will drain us out of our strength!

Changing its course with the next charge, Rapid Rabbit targeted Roxanne. It got as close to her as possible, and then jumped towards her upper body. At this rate, it is

going to hit her... or not, because when it was just about to sink its fangs into Roxanne's neck, she swiftly moved to the side until she was out of the way of the monster's attack, and then she used her momentum to deliver a spinning slash right into the Rapid Rabbit's neck. Hah! How naïve of you to think that you would be able to hit her, you stupid beast! Of course my Roxanne would be much faster than you! Seeing that she could match the Rapid Rabbit's movements and beat it at its own game filled me with a fresh wave of confidence and determination. That's right, there is no need for me to be afraid of this boss when I have Roxanne by my side. Together, we can definitely bring it down!

When it picked itself up from the ground, Rapid Rabbit once again changed its tactics and went towards me for the second time. I tried to observe its movements more carefully and adjust the speed of my own attacks, but it still managed to evade them, even though this time they were much closer to hitting home than before. Still though, a miss is a miss. If I do not want the entire battle to ride on Roxanne's shoulders once more, I have to figure out a way to make my attacks connect. I am the main source of DPS in this Party, so if I play this right, one or two attacks will be all that I would need for this fight to be over with our victory!

"Don't be so full of yourself, monster! You're going down!"

Rapid Rabbit is heading for me again. When I was following it with my eyes, I think I noticed something that looked like Leather Armor in the corner of my eye, but since we are in the middle of a fight, I decided to ignore it for the time being. Once we deal with this Floor Boss, there will be plenty of time to check out our surroundings, but for now, handling the Rapid Rabbit requires my full attention.

It was hopping back and forth between left and right to confuse me, making aiming my attacks with Durandal exceptionally difficult. But nevertheless, I have to aim Durandal and do something instead of staying in place like a sitting duck or a damage sponge. A battle is always about being as far ahead of your enemy as possible. I reading one of its movements ahead is not enough, then I will just have to read two or three steps ahead!

Predicting the course of the Rapid Rabbit's assault, I adjusted Durandal in my hands and swung it in the appropriate direction. I thought I nailed it this time, but once again the boss altered its course of movement just before my blade was able to reach him, escaping unscratched, all the while maintaining its speed, until...

"Ghaaa!!!"

I felt a sharp pain in one of my sides. I guess that means that its attack managed to reach me after all. But even so, I have to power through the pain, withstand the impact of the blow and follow the boss with my sight in order to figure out what is it going to do next.

The fight is not over yet. Not by a long shot. As long as I have my will to go on and refuse to give up, I will find the right moment to strike and beat it!

Rapid Rabbit headed for Roxanne at its astonishing pace. It moves lightly from one side to another and jumps at her again at full speed, but she once again spun around and repelled its assault with the strike of her Scimitar. Looks like she already has the timing of its attacks down, and utilizes that knowledge to her advantage. It's a shame that I am not like her and I cannot do the same, but it is quite all right, because I have my own way of fighting. I know full well that movement speed alone is not the decisive factor that determines the outcome of a battles, because even those who are the swiftest on their feet will not be able to achieve victory without possessing the strength to back it up.

Once again, rapid Rabbit rushes in, targeting me. It must have determined that Roxanne is too dangerous to fight since she can counter its attempts at attacking her effectively. Choosing me as you priority target because you think me inferior to her... I can only call that incredibly careless of you!

I waited until Rapid Rabbit was in my point-blank range, and then...

(Over... overwhelming!)

I unleashed Hero's Job Skill: Overwhelming. As soon as I did that, the movements of the Rapid Rabbit, previously too fast for me to follow them properly with my eyes, have slowed down significantly. Yes, now I can see it clearly. I slowly turned sideways to move away from the trajectory of its plunge attack, prepared Durandal and then turned back around on my heel... And unleashed a flurry of attacks upon it.

Hahahaha! You feel that, you damned beast?! This is my way of fighting! Now that I have used Overwhelming, I can get multiple attacks in at once when there is nothing you can do about it!

Now that I have delivered so many blows to it that it could not have survived that even if it possessed zombie mode, all I have to do is to retreat a safe distance away just to be on the safe side, and wait for Overwhelming's effect to end while being out of the harm's way. Now, just be a good little Rabbit and turn into my meat so that I can finish the quest for that dude in the clothing store, and don't you dare make me use Overwhelming more than I have to!

As soon as Overwhelming's duration ended, time has begun to move at a normal pace again. Because of that, it looked as if Rapid Rabbit has been suspended in the air by some invisible force that begun to slash away at it at the same time. It was a gruesome spectacle, but of an incredibly satisfying kind. Just like I ordered it to, the boss, or rather what was now left of it, fell onto the floor and rolled over to the side. Thanks to Overwhelming, the victory was now ours. Subsequently, Rapid Rabbit disappeared in a cloud of green smoke, leaving behind its Drop Item: a piece of Rabbit Meat.

Rabbit Meat. I guess this is the item we were asked to bring to that male clerk at the clothing store back in Imperial City. He asked for at least two pieces of it, so that means we are halfway through fulfilling his request. But first, we will have to wash it thoroughly once we get back home, since I do not believe that laying on the ground would be good for the meat's sanitary values, and the last thing we need would be the client declining to accept it because it is dirty or aht it possibly caught some nasty bacteria from being on the ground too long.

“Amazing, master! That was amazing! Simply amazing! I have never seen you ove in such a way before!”

While I was carefully picking the Rabbit Meat up from the ground, Roxanne spared me no amount of praises.

“W-Well thank you.”

“Your movements just now were so amazingly fast that I have nearly lost sight of you for a moment!”

“*Nearly lost sight of you for a moment*”, huh? So Roxanne was able to see my movements after I activated Overwhelming after all? It's actually pretty amazing of her that she only “nearly” lost sight of me instead of losing it completely. But don't get too excited about it, Michio! She is only impressed because of Overwhelming's speed, although for me instead of giving me an increase in my own speed it simply looked like everything

around me slowed down almost to a standstill.

“Anyway, there is something that I want to check out.”

“Yes, what is it, master?”

“While we were fighting the Rapid Rabbit, I think I saw some equipment in one of the corners in this room, so I would like to check out what it was. I think it was right around... here.”

In addition to the Leather Armor, the equipment that we found in the room included a pair of Leather Gloves and Leather Shoes. I also picked up a Single Copper Sword. Overall, we will not be able to sell all of those items for that much money, but an extra income is an extra income, so you will not find me complaining about it. I simply took all of them and placed them in my Item Box.

“You said that sometimes equipment is dropped in the Boss Room as well as the Floor Boss’ Drop Item, right?”

“Umu. To be more exact, I think the equipment drops every time that the previous Party that challenged the Floor Boss gets defeated by it.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes. It should be even more apparent since the Floor Boss was already in the room when we entered it.”

I thought that it was pretty strange that the Floor Boss was already here when we entered, since it was the first time something like that ever happened to us. Up until now, every Floor Boss we have encountered appeared in the room only after we reached the center of it by materializing from a gathering cloud of green smoke. At first I thought that this was some kind of rare encounter pattern occurring, but thinking about it carefully... Roxanne did say that whenever the Floor Boss defeats the Party that tried to challenge it, it would be waiting for the next one to arrive, but I always assume that they will despawn first and then spawn again between encounters and not literally stand there waiting for their next opponents to arrive. But since it was already here... then... then that means that the equipment I just took must have belonged to the Explorer dude who went to fight Rapid Rabbit before us, right?! I... I see. So he got killed by the Rapid Rabbit after all that talk about feeling like Lady Luck was on his side today, huh?

I stood up and took another look at the room to see if there was anything else worthy of interest left here, and just when I thought that there was nothing...

Blink

(*Huh? What's that?*)

After examining the ground where I found the equipment once more, I noticed something shining laying amidst the dust. It was a Black Magic Crystal. Could it be another one of that Explorer's possessions? If so, then he really must have no idea how to handle it properly if it was still black after two years of him staying on the seventh floor of the Quratar's Labyrinth alone. The order of colors, depending on how much magic power they have stored within them goes black ==> red ==> purple ==> blue ==> green ==> yellow ==> white, so if I were to take a guess I would say that he must have been keeping that one is his Item Box the entire time believing that it would still be gathering magical energy from defeated monsters, while in reality it is the exact opposite. In order to gather energy and change colors, Magic Crystals have to be present somewhere on their owner's body or else the only thing they will gather is jack shit. If he understood that, he would have had at least red, or maybe even a purple one on him. Or maybe he already sold the one that was filled and obtained a new, empty one. In that case all of the money he got for it were probably stored in his Item Box, and after an Explorer dies, I do not think there is any way of retrieving the contents of the Item Box that belonged to him. Shame.

Last time when I checked it, the Magic Crystal I had on me had already turned green, so maybe it is about time to go and sell it to the Adventurers Guild. Based on what Roxanne told me about them, turning a Yellow Magic Crystal into White Magic Crystal would take too much time, so usually people sell their Magic Crystals when they turn green or yellow. Maybe I should also do the same sometime soon?

“Ah, master! You found a Black Magic Crystal! As expected of you, your luck never stops to amaze me!”

“Yeah... except it just happen to be laying here...”

“Black Magic Crystals are usually harder to find if they are on the ground because they do not shine as bright as the other ones, which makes them harder to spot, so even if it was just sheer luck, it is still amazing that you were able to spot it. You should be proud of yourself, master!”

"Yeah... certainly, you are right..."

So that's how it is, huh? Certainly, that Black Magic Crystal did not shine in the same way that my own Magic Crystals did. Compared to them, it looked almost matte and lifeless, so I would not be surprised if someone were to mistake it for just another ordinary pebble in the Labyrinth's corridors, that's how difficult to spot it was. If not for that one weak accidental blink, I would have probably missed it entirely as well, and I would never have even noticed it. The same goes for the equipment of that Explorer who walked here before us. Without Identify, I would have probably dismissed all those pieces of equipment in the corner of the room as just another element of the background to be glossed over. Maybe I should make it a habit to scan my surroundings with Identify even if there is seemingly nothing to be found around me? That way, I will have absolute certainty that I am not missing any potential loot.

Then again, being overly cautious like that will probably make me look like some sort of idiot who does so because he has nothing better to do with his time, not to mention that keeping an eye on literally everything around me also seem like something quite impossible to do.

Now, the question is: what should I do with this Black Magic Crystal? Hmm...

"Well, this Magic Crystal is black, so it means that it is pretty much useless to us right now, right? All we can do with it now is to either sell it or keep it with us until it accumulates more magic power within it."

"Uhm... or we could just fuse master's Magic Crystal together with this one..."

Roxanne told that to me.

"Fuse them... together?"

"Yes. If you press two Magic Crystals together, they will be combined into one Magic Crystal."

"But won't the magic power stored in the Magic Crystal with less magic power stored get lost in this way?"

"It is okay, master, magic power will not get wasted, so you do not have to worry about

that. As I said, when fusing two Magic Crystals together, you combine two of them into one, but it works not just for their physical shell, but for the magic power stored within them as well."

I was thinking it would be nice to have a spare Magic Crystal on me, but since Roxanne recommends fusing them together so much, then I guess there is no harm in trying it out. And besides, even if it somehow ends up in failure, it will be all right, because a Black Magic Crystal is only worth ten Nars at best, so it is not like losing it is going to impact me in any particular way.

I took out a Green Magic Crystal from my backpack. Even in the dim light of the Labyrinth, it was still shining beautifully in comparison to the Black Magic Crystal in my other hand. I would definitely be able to spot something like that even if it was on the ground, because that shine is pretty distinct.

"Eh? Master's Magic Crystal is already green? But was it not red not that long ago?!"

"It was, but now it has become like that. Pretty shocking, huh?"

I tried to play it off as casually as I could.

"Yes, that is amazing! How did you do it, master?!"

"That's a secret."

I cannot tell her that my Magic Crystal has already become green because I have a Bonus Skill called Crystal Acceleration which drastically increases the speed of gathering the magic power from defeated monsters by multiplying its obtained amount, right? Roxanne would definitely freak out even more if she found that out. But while we are still on the subject of Magic Crystals and how they shine... since the last stage of filling the Magic Crystal is the White Magic Crystal, I wonder how brightly that would shine in the dark? Maybe in the same way like a flashlight, or perhaps a streetlight? Anyway, I bet that finding it is going to be so much easier if it ever happens.

I then placed my own Green Magic Crystal in the palm of my right hand, and the newly-found Black Magic Crystal in my left hand, and then I pressed the two of them together, just like Roxanne showed me. As a result, the Black Magic Crystal sunk into the Green Magic Crystal without any kind of resistance. It was a strange feeling, combining the two solid objects like they were neither hard nor soft like that, but it was also kinda addicting, like popping each individual bubble on a roll of bubble wrap. I think I could

get used to doing this, that's how oddly satisfying it felt.

"So, will this do?"

"Yes, that is literally all there is to the entire process of fusing Magic Crystals together."

"So they can become one just like that, huh?"

When the entire process has been completed, the only thing that remained was my Green Magic Crystal. Since its color did not change even after fusing it together with that Black Magic Crystal, I guess it means that it did not have all that much magical energy stored within it, and it does not surprise me, since the requirement for changing the color of the Magic Crystal from green to yellow was to accumulate the magical energy of a total of ten thousand monsters. With my Crystal Acceleration Bonus Skill it will definitely go faster than that, but I have no doubt that the amount needed will still be quite big.

I placed the Green Magic Crystal back in my backpack, and with that business concluded, there was no more reasons for us to be staying in this Boss Room anymore, so we moved on unto the eighth floor.

"Roxanne, can you smell if there are any monsters nearby?"

"As you wish, master... *Sniff Sniff* *Sniff Sniff*... hmm, I smell a single Needlewood nearby, but that is it. I do not sense any other monsters in our near vicinity. Do you want me to guide you to that monster now?"

"There's no need for you to do that now. I was not planning on fighting anything on the eighth floor, even if we managed to get here. That battle against the Rapid Rabbit was pretty tough, so there is no need to be pushing ourselves too far just for the sake of going a little further ahead."

I stopped Roxanne from going in the direction where she sensed the presence of the monster. Looks like the eighth floor of the Quratar Labyrinth is occupied by Needlewoods, but even though I already know them and their attack patterns like the back of my own hand, I have not felt like fighting them right now at all.

"I see. In that case, should we go back and face the Floor Boss of the seventh floor again?"

"No, since we know that there might be other Parties waiting to face the Rapid Rabbit, going back to the seventh floor and waiting in queue to the Boss Room would only bring us more unwanted trouble. Instead of proceeding with the eighth floor here, let us go to the Veil's Labyrinth, since we have yet to break through the seventh floor there. We can always come back here tomorrow if we won't have luck with the seventh floor's Waiting Room being empty."

"Understood."

I don't know why, but somehow I do not feel like going for a rematch with the Rapid Rabbit just now, so I came up with whatever reason for postponing the second battle with it until tomorrow. Could it be that the death of that friendly Explorer guy has shaken me more than I realized? Probably so, because with each step I took, I felt more and more like I didn't want to do anything at all, falling deeper into the embrace of apathy.

Needless to say, even though we went to Veil's Labyrinth to do some exploration and monster hunting, this particular bout there did not go very well and we haven't gotten much further, because everything I did was done mechanically, without me actually putting my backbone into it like I was supposed to be doing. I just lost all the motivation, like a tire that has been deflated after being pierced with a sharp piece of glass lying on the road. The only thing that kept me from collapsing under my own weight which was crushing down upon was the knowledge that Roxanne was right next to me, so I could not allow myself to show any weakness in order not to make her worry any more than she already was.

That night, I did it with Roxanne... over, and over, and over again. And unlike all the other times we did it with each other, this time... it was pretty rough and violent. I probably did that in order to slip away from the grasp of death that I felt around me stronger than ever (*TL Note: Curious words coming from someone who literally wanted to off himself two volumes ago*) and in order to prove to myself that I am here and I am alive, and to find a reason to keep on living.

Yes, now I can say that for sure. The death of that random Explorer hit me pretty hard. It's not that I grew fond of him, because that would be strange after only meeting once and exchanging like, what, only a few sentences? No, it was not about that. The death of that guy came as such a shock to me most likely because if the events went differently, then we might have as well switched places.

He might have been the guy with a slave going through the Labyrinths with a reliable partner at his side, and I could have been a sad loser stuck on one floor of the Labyrinth for two years, too underlevelled and poor to buy myself slaves or be accepted by any other Party, destined to die on the day when I finally mustered enough courage to try and change something in my current, pathetic life.

He knew, He knew full well that Labyrinths are dangerous places; places where your life can come to a swift end as soon as you lower your guard for even a second. And yet, he still chose to go and challenge the Floor Boss of the seventh floor, simply because he increased his level and expanded the capacity of his Item Box, which gave him a boost in confidence so big that he was certain that Lady Luck was on his side that day. Well, you can see how much she had his back. She had his back so much that now he was nothing more but food for the Labyrinth of Quratar and all of his items are now in my possession, waiting to be sold for whatever sum of money I am going to be offered for them.

So yeah, while I should not have been affected by this seemingly random happening all that much, just knowing that it could have been me fills me with worries and anxiety that I cannot seem to shake off of me no matter how hard I try to do so.

When he was going through the door and turned back to say goodbye to us, he had a light smile on his face. How can I know that I will not be doing the exact same thing, maybe not tomorrow or in two days, but sometime in the future, the one in which I fall to some Floor Boss unnoticed and not remembered by anyone?

I just... I simply cannot believe that there might come a moment where all the hard work I have been doing up until now will be completely and utterly shat on. Taking that Explorer as an example again: before coming to the seventh floor where he got stuck for two years he had to clear the previous, sixth floor along with its Floor Boss, and all the other floors and their Floor Bosses before that. Even after encountering a seemingly unsurmountable wall, he simply continued to do his best until he gained enough confidence to try and break the impasse that was keeping him from taking a shot at the possibility of changing something in his life for the better. And all of that, just to get killed by a fucking red-colored rabbit? Talk about irony. Maybe that is why I am seeing so many similarities between that guy and me? We both tried to do our best while fighting alone, simply trying to get by from one day to another hoping that tomorrow would bring some positive changes with it... and we both could have it all

end in an instant by trying to bite way more than we could chew. I don't know how that guy managed to get through all seven floors of the Quratar's Labyrinth while fighting by himself and being armed in nothing more but Leather Armor, Gloves, Shoes and a Copper Sword, but if not for my stat distribution, Bonus Skills and Durandal that I got thanks to them, I am positive that I would have died a miserable death sometime soon after arriving in this world. Maybe even during the Bandit attack on the village?

Heh, it is so strange that I have never even put too much thought into things like that before, even while going through the Labyrinths and fighting against enemies that scared the living daylights out of me, but now here I am. I only knew that guy for like what, five minutes at best and I did not even see him actually die but I cannot sleep thinking about how his life might have went down if only he managed to survive and get to the eighth floor just like we did? If I keep this up, then I will definitely go through the rest of the night without getting any sleep at all, and in a place like Labyrinths that can be as bad as coming inside them without any weapons or armor. The roads to them are much like broken bridges: you can traverse them if you stay careful enough, but one wrong step will send you plummeting into the dark depths below that wait so that they could swallow you whole.

It is already bad that we have done next to nothing in the Veil Labyrinth because of my moping, so allowing this sorry state of mine to drag onto tomorrow simply because I thought too much is absolutely out of the question. However, if there is one thing all this thinking done right, it was reminding me of the one, simple truth that I seemed to have oh-so-conveniently forgotten: Labyrinths are dangerous death traps, where death might be lurking literally around every corner.

That is my state of being after what we have been through today. As for how Roxanne is holding up... I cannot say for sure. All this time she looked perfectly fine and unfazed, but maybe that is because she is a native resident of this world, so she is more used to being in the presence of death than someone like me, who grew up relative safety and never had to worry about getting hurt or dying. So it might be that she is perfectly fine, like I said, or she might have also been affected but she is simply not showing it, trying to put up a front for my sake. Whichever of those two it is, she accepted my offer of having sex without any protests like usual, and did not speak a word of complaint even when things got a little rougher after a few initial times, and you can be damn sure that I used that acceptance of hers to the best of my ability. We were going at it nonstop for a few hours straight, until our bodies finally gave up and we collapsed on top of each other from exhaustion, our consciousnesses drifting away into the dreamlands, leaving all the worries behind.

On the morning of the next day, I was once again woken up by a hot kiss and Roxanne's hot tongue entwining itself around my own. Ahh, I will never get tired of the sweet feeling of drowning in Roxanne's kindness whenever she does this to me.

"Good morning, Roxanne."

"Good morning, master."

"Did you sleep well?"

"Yes, as good as always, which is a little surprising considering how many times we have done it yesterday. Speaking of that, are you not tired, master? Maybe you should lie down and rest some more? Or at least drink some water?"

"Thank you for being worried about me, but I am fine now. Or rather, I should be the one getting worried about you since I pushed you down so hard."

"Ah, O-Oh no, it's fine, really! I mean, I was a little surprised when you suddenly became so forceful, but... but it didn't feel bad, so..."

"Oh... W-Well in that case I am glad that you enjoyed it. Okay, as for our plans for today, in the morning we are going to go to Quratar's Labyrinth as per the usual. Our target for today is to defeat more Slow Rabbits to get their furs, and defeat the seventh floor's Floor Boss one more time. Is that all right with you?"

"Yes, it shall be done as you wish, master."

To be honest, it still feels as if something whacked me in the head pretty hard, causing it to become numb and desensitized, but I cannot just stay home and mope around in bed forever. Trips to the Labyrinth are our lifeblood here, so we cannot allow ourselves to lose even a day of precious exploration. Forcing my groggy body to move, I somehow managed to get myself up.

The Explorer that I met yesterday is dead, that is most definitely an undisputable fact. It is also a fact that I can end up the same way at any moment. But if you think about it rationally, skipping on going into the Labyrinths just because I am afraid of death is the worst possible thing I could do right now. If I allow myself to skip it even for a day, then I will most definitely skip it the day after as well, causing the spiral of skipping on Labyrinth-going to propel itself forever, leaving me as the same weakling that I am now just because I did not want monsters to harm me.

So I have to take the risk of getting hurt by them and fight them, because that is the only way for me to obtain more EXP to Level Up my Jobs and get stronger, and when I will become stronger, that automatically means that I will be that much safer. Not to mention that I also have Durandal, and my ever-so-reliable Roxanne to back me up whenever I will find myself in trouble.

That is why I decided to go the Quratar Labyrinth again. I have made my decision to keep on going, and I cannot falter in it no matter what.

In order to enter the Labyrinth the day after tomorrow, you must first enter the Labyrinth tomorrow, and to enter the labyrinth tomorrow, you must first enter the Labyrinth today. No exceptions, no excuses, no complaining, this is simply something that you have to do. Of course, going there after what I have been hit with yesterday is scarier than it was before, but this is a purely psychological problem of mine that I will have to overcome with the strength of my will.

That's right. It is kind of like with balancing on a rope. It is easy to do this when said rope is safely spread on the ground where no harm will come to you even if you fall down from it, but walking on a rope that has actually been suspended in the air? That is another matter entirely.

When it comes to people, there is not that much physical difference between them, but psychological differences are more diverse and frequent. Some are more resistant to things like fear and traumas, while some are less resistant to them, but you know what both of those types of people have in common? The fact that sooner or later they will all have to confront them, one way or another, so if I can choose when I will have to face mine, then I prefer to do it now instead of waiting for the right time to do so to come to me first. Instead of being forced to traverse the rope while it is still in the air, I will bring it to the ground myself!

For the first half of the dungeon, I just focused in hunting as many Slow Rabbits as I could while following Roxanne's guidance. When it comes to the actual battle, Slow Rabbits themselves are not that difficult of an opponent to dispatch, even when they are all Lv.7. In that regard, nothing has changed since yesterday, and it made me breathe a sigh of relief. It is okay so far. I can definitely do it. I do not feel like my life is threatened so far. It does not matter whether it is a Slow Rabbit, Mino, Escape Goat or any other monster. They might be dangerous and only grow more dangerous the

higher we will climb, but as long as they will not use any Skills that I am not aware of or try to take my by surprise, I will be able to handle anything they might be throwing at me as long as I remain calm and analyze their movements carefully. Like that, we have made our way through the second part of the seventh floor, arriving in the Waiting Room before the Boss Room.

Okay, this is it. We will try to fight against the Rapid Rabbit for the second time now. With all the things that we have learned about it from our fight yesterday, hopefully this time things will go much smoother.

Just as I expected, the second time challenging the Rapid Rabbit was indeed easier than the first, mostly because I now knew that the easiest way to counter its speed was to use Overwhelming to slow it down. When we defeated it and it disappeared in a puff of smoke, the thing that was left behind was a piece of Rabbit Meat, just like yesterday. Part of me was hoping for some kind of rare drop to go along with it, but no dice for now, we have to make do with the meat alone.

This particular piece of Rabbit Meat looked like it could easily be enough for two or three people to eat, so I think we can bring this piece here back to the male clerk and keep the one from yesterday for our own usage.

“Okay, we got what we came here for. That man in the clothing store said that he wanted a maximum of two pieces of Rabbit Meat, so I think he should be pretty satisfied with what we got here for him, don’t you think?”

“Yes, he definitely should not have any qualms about both the quantity and the quality of the meat.”

“Right, but here’s a question, Roxanne. To my understanding, Rabbit Meat is not a rare drop from Rapid Rabbit, but a common one, meaning that it will always be dropped by it when it is defeated. But if that is the case, then why is it treated like some kind of delicacy worth of requesting people to get it for you when it should be the same just like any other meat you could find at a butchers shop?”

“Well, you are right that it is not hard to get it, but unlike the other types of meat, Rabbit Meat is pretty expensive. So much so in fact, that for regular citizens each time they are able to get their hands on it, it is treated with a real feast. I think it is also what the nobles tend to eat most of the time.”

So it would seem that this meat is valued by the commoners and nobles alike. Understandable, since no matter where you go, people will always want to eat delicious things whenever they have the chance. But here, since such a good meat can only be acquired as a drop from a Floor Boss in the Labyrinth, shops and the people are probably heavily dependent on its deliveries on Adventurers and Explorers who would be willing to part with this meat, hence the high price of it, since not every human is probably suited to become someone who could go to the Labyrinths and hunt the monsters for their materials themselves.

“Sounds pretty rough.”

“It is, but in my humble opinion, Rabbit Meat is well worth it, since It is very delicious.”

“Would you like to try having it for breakfast then?”

If it really is as delicious as Roxanne describes it to be, then we should definitely try it.

Fighting Floor Bosses in the Labyrinths can be much more dangerous than fighting regular enemies, but it is something that cannot be avoided. They are nothing more than beasts who can only blindly follow their instincts and stepping stones that those who wish to advance further through the Labyrinths have to traverse, proving that their instinct of survival and intellect are vastly superior to the animalistic urges of monsters, and that we are rightfully the species that deserves to eat better and lead more comfortable lives than them.

“Yes, I would very much like to try it.”

“All right, that settles it then. Before we go back to the Imperial City, we are going to defeat some more Rapid Rabbits and get their meat for ourselves.”

“Roger!”

We left the Boss Room and then went back to the seventh floor’s Waiting Room in order to challenge the rapid Rabbit again. The strategy for this next battle is much the same as in the previous two encounters with it: wait until it gets close to me, use Overwhelming, hit it while it gets slowed until it dies and profit off of it.

In comparison to the other Floor Bosses I had to face both in Veil’s Labyrinth and in Quratar’s Labyrinth, Rapid Rabbit is, without a shade of a doubt, the most dangerous of the bunch so far. But after fighting it two times now, I can say have began to

recognize the patterns in which it was attacking, decreasing the danger and the risk of sustaining an injury in a battle against it by quite a large margin. Combine that with the knowledge of the strength gap between us, and the danger will decrease even further.

All that is left to do now is to use all of that to my advantage. Because that is what we humans do. We exploit the weaknesses of others for our own benefit, so why would such logic not be applicable here in the Labyrinths when it comes to fighting monsters? I can fight the Labyrinth and its monsters steadily and calmly, carefully judging and analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of every enemy.

The most important thing is to not allow what's happening around me to get to my head too much. That's the safest thing to do after all. Do that, and nothing will be able to stand in your way, inconvenience you or upset you.

Rapid Rabbit jumped towards me with its teeth bared, but I just slashed it diagonally with Durandal. See? If you take the calm and collected approach to the fight, there will be nothing that will be able to stand in my way, even allowing me to seize victory without having to rely on Overwhelming too much.

After suffering a direct hit from me, the monster changed the course of its actions and this time opted for charging towards Roxanne, but even that attempt has failed, because she shifted her upper body slightly to avoid the incoming attack and then immediately countered with a fast spinning slash. That attack alone was enough to send the Rapid Rabbit flying backwards. Needless to say, its attack did not even reach her. I always thought that Roxanne should be kept as far away from the frontlines as possible since she does not have my levels of DPS, but even against a Floor Boss wielding overwhelming speed, she was still able to hold her ground. It is not that she is in danger here, she is the dangerous one! With her in the front and me in the back, this guy is already as good as dead!

“GHYYYYYYYIIIIII!!!!”

It screamed as it took another hit from Roxanne's Scimitar and switching its attention back to me. Sorry buddy, but now that you have taken so many hits, this next one is bound to be the last, so prepare yourself!

I used Overwhelming to slow the Rapid Rabbit down, and then unleashed a flurry of attacks on it while it was completely defenseless and at my mercy, or rather, the lack of it. There can be only one conclusion to it then: it falls onto the ground and disappears in a puff of green smoke, leaving behind another piece of Rabbit Meat.

"Now this should take care of all the ingredients we need, right, master? I am so looking forward to our breakfast today."

"Same here. By the way, how exactly should we cook the Rabbit Meat to get the most out of its flavor?"

I asked Roxanne as she picked up the leftover Rabbit Meat from the boss.

"Rabbit Meat is pretty versatile in that regard, being able to be prepared in a variety of ways, so the more appropriate question here would be: how would master like it to be prepared?"

"Well..." Even though she asked that of me, I cannot really answer that since I have never cooked rabbit meat before. She says that there is a myriad of ways po prepare it, but which one would be the correct one? You might think that this is a pretty trivial matter, but to me it is actually rather important. My mother died when I was a very young lad, so throughout the most of my life I had to learn how to cook, since my father was an asshole who could not prepare even the simplest of meals even if his life depended on it.

At first most of my attempts always ended in a culinary disaster one way or the other, but gradually, throughout the systematic process of continuous trial and error, I finally learned how to prepare pretty decent meals. But that was back on earth, where I had the modern technology that made the entire process that much easier, as well as a virtually limitless pool of ingredients I could choose from. But here, things are going to be a tad bit more difficult. Not only do I not have access to all the tools I was so getting used to handling, but the supply of ingredients is also heavily limited, meaning that if I want to make something truly tasty or exquisite, I will have to rack my brain pretty hard to achieve the desired results. The only saving grace is that this time around I am sharing my house with someone who also is able to cook, and she is more than willing to help me prepare the meals, so at the very least the entire work will not be riding solely on my shoulders.

That being said, throughout all those years where I had to cook for myself, I never once

had to cook rabbit meat, or any kind of Japanese wild game for that matter. I know that it is generally said that pretty much all kinds of meat can be prepared in the same way but with different tweaks to them, but since this will be my first time doing something like that, I would like to know for sure how should I prepare it in order not to let a perfectly good piece of meat to go to waste or become heavily underutilized, forcing us to throw some of it out.

“Hmm. In that case, how about preparing in in a Shema-yaki style?”

“Shema-yaki style?”

Since she used the word “yaki”, then I am assuming this will have something to do with frying the meat?

“Yes.”

“And... how exactly does that work?”

“Basically, you just slice the Rabbit Meat and wrap it in Shema leaves before frying them.”

“Okay, sounds easy enough. What about those leaves? Are we going to have to buy them?”

“I think that will not be necessary. The Shema plants we planted in our herb garden should be sprouting about now, and there should be enough of its properly developed leaves to be harvested.”

Roxanne explained to me. Recently, I noticed that she has been taking more initiative when she was talking with me, not limiting herself to only offer explanations for the myriad of questions that I was throwing her way on a daily basis. It is a very good thing, and I sincerely hope that she will continue to do so even more in the future.

“Sounds good. Let us prepare it in this Shema-yaki style then.”

“All right!”

This is the first time I have ever heard of such a dish, but since it is something recommended by Roxanne herself, then there is no way for it to be bad, so I agreed to her suggestion before she changed her mind. Personally I enjoy eating grilled meat to

a great degree, so I cannot wait if this Shema-yaki is going to be on par with what I used to know in Japan. Well, of course it will not, but who knows, maybe I am in for a pretty pleasant surprise?

After we finished hunting for the Slow Rabbits, we briefly went to the town to buy bread and some vegetable that would be served together with the meat for our breakfast, and then we went back home.

While Roxanne went to the garden to gather all of the herbs we would need, I took it upon myself to do some preparations with the meat. First things first, I took the Kobold Knife that dropped from one of the Kobold Kampfers as a rare drop and whacked the meat with its blunt side for a minute or two. I do not know if rabbit meat is the kind of meat that has to be tenderized before it is actually cooked, but this method seems to be working for other kinds of meat like chicken, beef or pork, so it should probably be fine. When I was just about done with that task, Roxanne went through the door, carrying the herbs in her hands.

“Done gathering herbs from the garden?”

“Yes. Thankfully, Shema is a type of herb that sprouts pretty quickly, so I had no trouble gathering as much as four servings worth of it. But I think that we should still wait with harvesting its roots and other things we planted, just to make sure that they all had enough time to mature properly.”

“Oh, so we can eat the roots as well?”

Looking at these Shema leaves from up close, they kinda look like giant ginger leaves. Who would have thought that we are going to have herbs like that in our garden? So, based on what Roxanne told me earlier, we are going to be wrapping those leaves around the meat and then fry them, correct?

“Yes, the roots of the Shema herbs are primarily used for the purpose of masking the meat’s bad smell. It is one of the most commonly-used herbs around here. Ah, and before I forget, I also happened to sharpen some skewers while I had a moment of free time. We can use them to hold the leaves wrapped around the meat together and prevent them from falling apart when the meat begins to fry.”

“Ohh, how clever!”

I am guessing that those roots must be similar to garlic then. Man, this Shema is turning out to be a pretty useful herb.

Next, I used the knife to crush and grind Kobold Salt and Black Pepper into as small of a powder as possible and seasoned the tenderized Rabbit Meat with them. After that, it was time to wrap the seasoned meat in the leaves, and pierce it with skewers that are going to be holding this “packaging” in place. After that, we poured some olive oil into the wok, where we then threw the meat when it got all hot and sizzling, fried all of them until they looked just about ready, and...

Ta-dah!!! Chief Roxanne’s Shema-yaki style Rabbit Meat has been finished! Nothing else left to do but to have a bite to see how it tastes, so don’t mind if I do. Time to dig in!

“*Munch Munch*... This is pretty good!”

“*Munch Munch*... *Munch Munch*... spicy, and yet so tasty!”

Despite having some degree of spiciness to it (maybe because Shema leaves are similar in taste to leaf pepper?), this dish tasted quite good, and the mixture of its flavors was quite rich and exquisite. It was like a symphony in my mouth that went on and on without stopping. It was like these herbs were made specifically so that they could compliment the mellow taste of the meat itself.

“Delicious! It is as if the meat was melting right in my mouth! I never knew that Rabbit Meat could be this good!”

“I know, right?! Maybe it became like that because of the tenderizing I subjected it to?”

“Tenderizing? What exactly did you do to tenderize it, master?”

“Oh, nothing that complicated, really. I just went and whacked it a few times with the blunt side of the Kobold Knife so that it would not be so hard, and that must have done the trick.”

“I see. I never knew that meat could be tenderized in such an intricate way.”

“Well, you know now. As they say, you learn something new every day.”

“Yes, certainly!”

Judging by how the whole dish turned out and how Roxanne reacted to it, I dare say that this has been a huge success. And the best thing is that since the ingredients are all relatively easy to procure, then we might just be able make this dish whenever the fancy for it strikes us.

We can get Olive Oil as a drop from Naïve Olives who can be encountered either on the sixth floor of Veil's Labyrinth or the second floor of Quratar's Labyrinth. Kobold Salt can be obtained from Kobolds, which can be found on the third floor of Veil's Labyrinth or the first floor or Quratar's Labyrinth. Black Pepper drops from Spice Spider, the Floor Boss of the third floor of the Quratar Labyrinth, and finally, we can get Rabbit Meat from Rapid Rabbit, Floor Boss of Quratar Labyrinth's seventh floor, the one where we currently are.

After breakfast, we have returned to the Labyrinth to hunt some more Slow Rabbits for their Rabbit Fur and Rapid Rabbits for their meat. I have to admit, now that I have gotten the taste of how good Rabbit Meat is, I might have gotten addicted to it, I definitely want to eat more of it, and since items don't go bad in the Item Box no matter how long they are kept there, we can always save some of it for later instead of eating it all at once. When we were done after a few attempts, we warped to the Imperial City. We have more than enough Rabbit Meat on us, so we might as well fulfill the request of the male clerk at that clothing store while selling the additional Rabbit Furs we have accumulated.

This time, instead of going to the side one, we entered the store through the front entrance, because our business here is not about selling the Rabbit Furs. No, today, we are here to deliver the Rabbit Meat to the male clerk that apparently runs the show here.

"Welcome, how can I be of service... oh, you are the pair of Explorers from yesterday. Since you are here, then does that mean...?"

"Yes it does indeed. Two pieces of fresh Rabbit Meat coming right up, exactly like you requested."

"Thank you so much for doing this for me. Please, if you would be so kind as to come with me, I shall prepare your reward right away."

After receiving a rather enthusiastic greeting, the male clerk beckoned us to follow him to the counter in the back of the shop, just like he did it yesterday when we

entered the shop through the side entrance. On our way there, I “chanted” the incantation for the Item Box to appear, and then I took two large pieces of Rabbit Meat from it.

“Here you go.”

Even if we hand those two pieces of Rabbit Meat away to him, we will still have enough left for ourselves, and in case we will run out of it, all we have to do is to travel back to Quratar Labyrinth’s seventh floor and defeat the Rapid Rabbit to obtain more of it.

“Once again, thank you, I am truly indebted to you. Normally I would pay one hundred and sixty Nars for one piece of Rabbit Meat, however, you and your companion have amicably accepted my selfish request even though you had no obligation to do so, so in order to show you my appreciation, I will give you a special price of four hundred and twenty six Nars for these two pieces of Rabbit Meat.”

You say it is a special price, but I know that is just a thirty percent increase in price thanks to my Bonus Skill. It is so obvious at this point that I do not even feel like mentioning that I am using it anymore. Why did you think I decided to give you two of them in the first place, huh? Precisely because I knew that the Skill would activate that way, allowing me to claim bigger profit. You might say that this is incredibly shrewd of me, but that is how it works in those kinds of games: if you have the Skill that can be used to give you an advantage, then you are using them without fretting about the small stuff.

I brought two of them to increase the percentage by 30%, but although it was exactly what I was aiming for, I is not surprised. I do not feel as happy as I usually would be. Maybe I am getting too used to it?

“Sure enough, that is fine with me.”

“Very well. Then, if you could be so kind as to wait here for just a moment.....”

The male clerk took the plate and disappeared into the room behind the counter.

“May we take a look inside the store while we wait?”

I talked to the remaining female clerks. Since we have to wait for the male clerk to come back anyway, might as well kill the time in a proactive manner instead of standing around all awkwardly.

"Yes, of course. I can give you a quick tour if you so desire, dear customer."

"Very well then, please do."

And so we took a look at what exactly this store had to offer, although pretty much nothing has changed since we were here yesterday, reinforcing my belief that this clothing store must be dealing mostly in ready-made goods. However, that does not mean that there were no clothes present on the displays at all. Even though they were not that many, they all still looked beautiful, shining with the glossy luster typical to high-quality fabrics. As expected of the clothes targeted mostly at the women of the noble state. Even the thin shoulder straps on the dresses looked as if a great deal of time and detail were put into making them.

Out of all of those women's clothes, one item in particular caught my attention: a camisole that looked like it was made out of silk, or perhaps satin, and was very similar to the ones from my old world. It was not completely see-through, but just thin enough that it would probably leave nothing left to the imagination if Roxanne were to put it on. When I too it in my hands to see how it looked in its entirety, I noticed that it was quite long, and that its lower hem was gradually opening up the lower it went, to finally split apart around the crotch area, so rather than calling it a simple camisole, it would be better to call it a camisole dress.

"This item is very popular as both sleepwear and an innerwear among aristocratic women."

The female clerk, who followed closely behind us, explained with a very professional voice while keeping her eyes closed all the time. I am thankful that she did not scold me for holding and eyeing such an item even though I am a man, meaning someone who is not supposed to be wearing clothes like these, but nevertheless I hurriedly put it back where I took it from in order to avoid making any unnecessary misunderstandings.

"How is it, Roxanne? Do you like it?"

I asked Roxanne about her opinion on that camisole dress.

"Uhm, well... I think it is a little..."

“Personally I think that it is quite nice and that it would look great on you. How much is it?”

Light clothing like that would definitely suit Roxanne. If you wear this over your bare skin. Oh I can already picture how she wears it over her bare skin, and it is... hue, huehuehue...!

“We are selling them at an affordable price of eight hundred Nars per piece.”

Even though she just said that this price is affordable, I do not know the market value of Nars as currency, but I do know one thing: it is expensive. Just this one article of clothing is more expensive than all of the causal clothes that I am wearing combined, except for the equipment parts of it. At the very least I can understand why it costs so much. After all, things made from silk are never cheap, but thankfully it just so happens that I have a Bonus Skill that will take care of that particular setback, even if only partially.

“Okay, we will be buying two of those then.”

“Uhm... are you really sure about that, master?”

“Yes, as sure as I can possibly be, so go ahead and pick up a second camisole for yourself. Do not mind me, just go ahead and take whichever one you like the most.”

I nodded at Roxanne and allowed her to choose the second item. Even though it will cost quite a lot of money, it is going to be all worth it as long as it makes Roxanne happy and give me some additional eye candy to look at while we will be staying at home. However, me allowing her to choose for herself had one significant downside: since this is a really high-end store, there are a lot of different colors to choose from, and because of that, Roxanne is taking her sweet time making the selection. And by taking her time, I mean really, really taking her sweet time.

I tried to offer my input to help her make the choice, but at the end of the day I do not know if it will be of any good, because my vision of what is looking good might greatly differ from what she considers to be good.

Red one do not suit her, and like they could make her look plumper than she actually is; green is a nice and calm color, same as yellow, which looks refreshing on her, but I think that the ones that would suit her the most are black and pink.

“I like the color of this pink one with frilly designs on it.”

I said, pointing at the light pink camisole, the first one that I noticed. It was not the bright variant of pink, but rather a pale one, which looked like it could make a nice combination with the natural color of her skin.

“This pink one right here? I understand.”

Roxanne nods and choose that one. Phew, tha is one camisole down, another one to go.

“I’m sorry to have kept you waiting. I am ready to give you your payment.”

Eventually, when the male clerk returned with our coins, Roxanne was still in the middle of deciding what to take, unable to make the choice. I know that she was doing this because she wanted to make sure to make the best selection possible, but a part of me wished that she would not take so much time every time she was to decide on what to buy.

“Roxanne, go ahead and choose the other one, okay? I will handle the payment for the meat in the meantime.”

I went back to the counter and received the money the male clerk has prepared and placed them in the drawstring back taken out of my backpack. It was fourty silver coins, so keeping that much in the bag without hiding it in the Item Box should still be fine.

“At first glance it looks like it will easily tear apart, but upon closer inspection it is rather durable.”

“Yes, that is because all of the camisoles here are being manufactured from exceptionally good materials.”

“I see. And how do I wash something so delicate?”

“All you have to do is to wash it gently in warm water with the addition of mashed Kochi fruit.”

Roxanne continues to choose her clothes while listening to the female clerk’s explanations. At this rate, I am afraid that it might be nighttime before she finally picks

up something she will find to her liking.

It took a considerable amount of time, but ultimately Roxanne decided a pair of white and light pink camisoles. In my honest opinion, both of them were a jackpot. Using my Bonus Skill to get a discount, I paid one thousand one hundred and twenty Nars instead of one thousand six hundred Nars for the both of them. If this was not a game world where pulling such stunts was perfectly legitimate I would have probably been accused of trying to scam that shop, but because of my thirty percent discount no one even bat an eye, even though we paid less than they initially thought we would have to pay.

Most of the shops in the modern day would do everything they could in order to mitigate the benefits of customers using discounts to their advantage, simply because that would mean they would be getting less money on their end. But here is the world of this game, such a concept does not seem to exist at all, most likely because typical NPCs living in the cities have not been made to be inherently evil towards the players. It might not look like much, but in my opinion it is a pretty honorable thing to do, because normally you would have to go to many lengths just to obtain the right for a discount, like being a regular customer of a given shop, or collecting enough stamps on a special card, which might not be an ideal solution to regular Adventurers or Explorers who cannot afford buying things from high-end establishments all the time. If I was someone who would only have to make-do with cheap accessories or only with buying the cheapest stuff kept in the corner of the shops or the discounted products near the cash register, I would have probably felt the same way. Well, it would have been like that if the shops here *were* anything like the ones I have known, but thanks to the fact that they are not, I was able to snatch myself a pretty sweet deal.

My feelings of having made an outstandingly good purchase have only been strengthened when we got back home and I saw Roxanne wearing the pink camisole dress. Oh yeah baby, buying this for her was a bullseye indeed!

Then, in the evening after we came back home from our short trip to the clothing store in the Imperial City...

“W-Well? What do you think, master? Does it look good on me? Does it not look strange?”

“Oh no, not in the slightest! It’s amazing! It looks very good on you!”

“T-Thank you... very much.”

The pale pink color looked great combined with Roxanne’s skin, just as I expected. The silk camisole looked elegant and supple as it was shimmering and sticking closely to her body, accentuating the lines of her curves at just the right places.

The parts of her that are highlighted especially well are the two massive mounds on her chest that are pushing up against the fabric of the camisole from the inside, as well as the two small bulges resting on top of those mounds, looking like a pair of rare fruits just waiting for me to pick them up and partake of them.

Normally, just seeing Roxanne’s naked breasts is one hell of a visual experience for me, but seeing them covered by this camisole is an entirely different experience altogether, as if I was gazing at something even more powerful, even though it should not have been possible.

As I thought, I am really glad that I bought this camisole for her. It is impossible for me to hold myself back against it after I was exposed to the combined softness of the silk and the luster of Roxanne’s skin.

I guess that in terms of temptation, this was a pretty bad purchase. Now that she is wearing something as erotic as that, there is absolutely no way that I will be able to stop myself from lustng after her whenever we will be alone.

Fuck, this is really bad...

“Roxanne...”

“Yes, master?”

“You are the most beautiful girl I have ever seen.”

“Uh, t-thank you for the kind words, mas... Mmmpff...!”

I sealed Roxanne’s mouth with a kiss before she was able to say anything else.

Tonight, I am going to have myself some real good time, and it is going to be the best. Night. Ever.

The next day we also went inside the Labyrinths in both Veil and Quratar, spending time in them from early morning to the early evening. Nothing eventful happened, it was our usual routine of grinding for items and levelling our Jobs, and in the evening it was bath time and sexy time with the negligee-wearing Roxanne. So far, we have not stumbled into any more problems in the Labyrinth, but now that we have been on the seventh floors for a while and we were finally ready to take on the eight floors, it was high time for me to start thinking what our next move should be.

Starting from the eighth floor and upwards, we will have to face against groups of up to four monsters at once, meaning that I will have to fight against two enemies at once while Roxanne will be taking care of the other two. Up until now we were managing just fine against groups of three monsters, but I wonder if more of them to fight at the same time is going to put a bigger strain on us than before?

For the time being we were having it relatively easy on the eighth floor and Roxanne also looked like she was still doing fine, but I want to focus more on my magic.

“Haah... okay, let us return home and take a bath.”

As usual, we went back home and I started making preparations for us to take a bath, where...

“Roxanne, I am sorry to be asking this of you, but would you mind helping me with MP restoration at Quratar’s Labyrinth? I used too much of it trying to keep the water at optimal temperature.”

“Of course. Since we are already going, then shall we rent some equipment before heading to the Labyrinth proper?”

“Sure, I don’t see why not.”

I feel kinda bad asking her to come with me, but filling up the bath and keeping the water warm still takes quite a lot from me MP-wise, so there is nothing I can do about it. We just have to go and finish up our business as soon as possible so that we could go back.

For the purpose of restoring my MP, we went to the seventh floor of the Quratar Labyrinth. Lower floors would have been better for it level-wise, but with the Slow Rabbits of this floor, we can also gather some additional Rabbit Furs while I continued to whack them around with Durandal, getting back bits of MP with every strike that

successfully connected with them.

Following after Roxanne's guidance, we found a group of monsters consisting of two Minos and a single Slow Rabbit.

"Master, I will be going on ahead!"

"Right! Just remember: don't do anything careless!"

Roxanne charged towards the enemies with her Wooden Shield raised to her chest and her Scimitar already brandished. This is nothing new to us at this point, so as long as we keep a steady pace, we should be perfectly fine.

With the way things are shaping up, it looks like Roxanne will fight against a Mino and Slow Rabbit, so I will have to deal with the other Mino, which is going to be a piece of cake. All I have to do is to keep my guard up and wait until it initiates its charge attack just like it is doing now... and then I have to wait for the very last moment to duck to the side... and deliver the first strike! Now wait until it repeats that attack, not being able to comprehend that the outcome is just going to be the same as before... aaand done! With the second diagonal strike from Durandal, the first Mino fell to the ground and disappeared. Now that this one has been taken care of, the only ones left should be the Slow Rabbit and the other Mino which should be heading towards Roxanne right about now...

(*Huh...?!*)

Or at least that is how I thought it was going to go down, but I was mistaken. Roxanne was engaging the Slow Rabbit, that much was true, but instead of focusing its attention on her, the second Mino was charging towards me instead!

(*Going for me instead, huh? Well, go ahead, do your worst!!!*)

I shook Durandal at it, aiming to cut its head cleanly in half since I knew that at this rate I will not have enough time to dodge its attack properly. My strike managed to hit the Mino, but because the impact of it was quite strong, it made Durandal's edge vibrate and caused the fingers of my left hand, which were gripping onto its handle tightly to slip up a bit. Not nearly enough to make me let go of the weapon, but unfortunately just enough for my fingers to get stuck, as a result of which the Mino's horn managed to pierce my index finger.

“khhhh.....!!!!”

Oh... my... FUCK!!! What the hell is this?!!! It pierced only one of my fingers, but it hurts so much that I cannot help it but to tear up. Did it crack the bone of my index finger? Or perhaps broke it or downright shattered it?!

“G..... g-guh.....!!”

At first I thought that maybe this wound will not be a serious one, but the more time passed, the sharper the pain that was echoing from my finger throughout my entire body was becoming.

In retaliation, I slashed the Mino with all my might, killing it. But even though I have emerged victorious, the damage has already been done, because I was not careful enough. I did not wear my Leather Gloves because I assumed we will only be hunting for a little bit and so I will not be needing them. And you know what's even better? That I ordered Roxanne to wear her Leather Mittens regardless.

The Magic Crystal is still in my Item Box for now. This can't be helped, because when using Durandal, I have to get rid of the other Skills such as Crystal Acceleration and the one increasing the value of the magic power it obtains from each slain monster. I didn't know the exact specifications of how exactly that second Bonus Skill would work, so I just tried not to mess with it as much as possible unless it would be absolutely necessary.

Thinking about it now, let's say you defeat 20 monsters and raise your level by one as a result. If you use the Bonus Skill that lowers the required EXP value to $1/10^{\text{th}}$, you could raise your level by defeating only two monsters instead. Then, what happens when one monster is defeated without the required experience value Skill, and another monster is defeated with one tenth of the required experience value Skill active? It will not be as effective as when you would slay both of them with the Skill in effect.

On the contrary, if you defeat one monster with that Bonus Skill active and then ten monsters without it, will your level still rise? Maybe, but I never had the time nor the opportunity to verify this so rigorously.

Not all monsters give the same amount of EXP, and it is not possible to completely match the types and numbers of monsters to suit your levelling needs every time you fight. If you mess up, you might end up hunting dozens of monsters without that grind

being productive. And since I sometimes have to juggle from using Durandal to using magic, that process of grinding would take even more time, and I still cannot manage my Skills so effectively as to fit all of the ones I need into a single OP build. I wonder if I will ever be able to pull that off?

For the time being considering the possibility of waste, it is okay for me to not mess with the Magic Crystal and EXP related Bonus Skills.

When all of the monsters have finally been defeated and my MP has been sufficiently restored, we immediately returned home. With the injury I have sustained, I did not want to do anything else right now.

Even though we were sitting in hot water for a while now, I feel like my finger still hurts without showing any signs of getting better. And here I thought that using Durandal would make it feel better in an instant. Apparently that is not the case here. I guess I just got too used to thinking that Durandal's HP Absorption Skill can heal every little injury that I will sustain. Just another reminder for me not to underestimate the Labyrinths unless I want them to tear me a new asshole.

"Are you okay, master? If you are feeling lightheaded, then maybe you should get out of the bath and cool off for a bit?"

Roxanne looked over at my hand with a worried expression on her face. Great, look at what you have done now, Michio, you got Roxanne all worried. Heh, serves you right for ignoring her advice that you should always, ALWAYS wear full set of armor when going into the Labyrinth, even for a brief trek through it. But no, I had to act like I knew better and did not wear any hand-protecting gear thinking that this will be a quick trip to recover MP and immediately go back.

"Yeah, I feel fine. It is just that I am feeling a little lightheaded from the shock of sustaining that wound in that battle earlier."

"This is not good then! Are you really sure you are fine?"

Yes Roxanne, I am fine. In the first place, it is entirely my fault that I got wounded like that because I was being too careless, even after I constantly mock the enemies for charging blindly at us and that experience with that dead Explorer guy which should have told me that in the Labyrinths there is no such thing as being too careful. So yeah,

this particular L is entirely on me, no doubts about it.

"Oh, I know what I can do to make you feel better, master?"

"Really? What do you have in mind?"

"I heard that in the past, in times well before our current era, licking the wounded place and applying saliva on it were one of the most reliable methods of helping the injuries heal faster."

"Licking the wounded place, you say...?"

She just gave me a nice idea. Let me see if this will work...

I raised my hand and placed my index finger right in front of Roxanne's face.

"You know what, Roxanne? You might be right. Maybe my injured finger really will heal faster if you lick it for me.".

"E-Eh?! Uhm..... I..... I do not think that I will have to lick master's entire finger... if I remember correctly, that is not exactly how it works but..... if it is for the sake of helping you recover faster, then....."

Roxanne seemed confused at first, but when I mentioned that we are only trying to see if this will help in accelerating the recovery process of my injury, she did not look like she was particularly opposed to the idea of doing it for me. Good, very good indeed. That is exactly the reaction I was waiting for.

Taking a hold of my hand with her own hands, she brought my finger closer to her mouth.

"Uhm... this will be my first time doing something like this..... so be sure to tell me if it hurts or not, okay?"

"Okay, got it."

Roxanne started to open her mouth just a little bit, her pale pink lips slowly widened the gap between them with every second, exposing the inside of her mouth to my eyes.

Her bright red tongue is so glossy and wet... I cannot wait to feel it all over me.

Roxanne brought her face closer to my finger and closed her lips around it, wrapping my index finger in a heavenly fluffy feeling.

The inside of her mouth feels pleasantly warm, soft and moist as her thick, slimy tongue enveloped itself gently around my entire finger.

Roxanne closes her eyes and slowly sucks on my finger. While she is doing so, strands of her long hair tickle the sides of my hand. Even though she is a Wolfkin possessing some werewolf qualities, her hair, much like the fur on her tail and back, are quite nice to the touch. What she is doing to me right now is brilliantly bewitching, radiating the charm and allure of an adult woman, even though we are roughly the same age.

I tried not to move it at all so that I would not hit her teeth by accident, and simply allowed her to go at it at her own pace.

For someone who claims to be doing something like this for the first time in her life, she is doing it rather skillfully. It feels unbelievably good.

Roxanne's soft tongue wraps itself around my finger many times, and each time she pulls back away from it, a white thread of saliva appears between my finger and her lips, connecting them in an unquestionably seductive way, only for it to disappear when she was closing in on me again, putting my finger back into her mouth, gently rubbing it against the inner walls of her puffy cheeks

It felt as if her benevolent, soft mouth was going to heal my wounded finger in no time.

Her crimson lips opened up again, showing me the inside of her mouth in all of its crimson glory. When it trapped my finger inside of it once more, I could feel all of Roxanne's saliva washing over me as her tongue resumed its licking motions. Back and forth, back and forth, back and forth... by using those bobbing motions, she was making it really hard for me to control myself and not move an inch so that I would not accidentally hit her in the back of her throat..... but a part of me wants to do it oh so badly, just so that I could see how she would react to it. Maybe someday, one day, but definitely not today though.

All in all however, that was an amazing healing session.

"Well? H-How was it, master?"

She asked, swallowing down her saliva when she was done licking my finger clean. M-

My god, that was erotic as hell!!!

"It felt great. The pain is all gone and my finger does not hurt anymore. Thank you for your diligent service, Roxanne."

"That is good to hear. I am always happy to help you, master, but...?"

"But...?"

Roxanne turned her face away rather shyly before continuing.

"Does my mouth really possess such healing properties? Perhaps this is some kind of Skill that I possess without even realizing it?"

"No, I do not think that is the case here."

"But it has to be! The way you described it, it would seem that it has healing effects on par with those of Healing Magic!"

"I have indeed said that, but trust me, it really is nothing of the sort. That being said, it does not change the fact that it was absolutely amazing. If something happens to me in the future, I will be looking forward to having you heal me in this way again."

"Ah... yes, I will gladly do so again."

I complimented the way Roxanne sucked me off, which made her promise that this was not a one-time gig only, but rather something that is going to keep on happening whenever the situation is going to demand it. Great job, me. That was some clever coercion if I ever saw one. Who knows, maybe I really do have a silver tongue when it comes to talking with girls.

Anyway, if getting hurt means that I could ask Roxanne to do such amazing things for me more often, then suddenly the Labyrinth is not looking like such a scary place anymore. Maybe I will even try faking some injuries just so she could "heal" me like she did just now again?

Having regained my strength both in the physical and mental sense, I have gotten a new surge of motivation to take on the challenges of the Labyrinth once more.

〈To be continued in 『A Slave Harem in the Fantasy World Dungeon Volume 4』



PtFF by: traktorA7EN



異世界迷宮で
ハーレムを

4

Shachi Sogano

蘇我捨恥

illustration 四季童子

ハーレムを 異世界迷宮で

4



背の低い女の子だ。
小さい。

セリー 16歳。

かなりの美少女である。

Shachi Sogano

蘇我捨恥

illustration 四季童子

こ、これは
こたまらん。

右にはロクサースの大きな胸が。
左にはセリーの華奢でかわいらしい体軀が。

酒池肉林。

この
これだ。
この贅沢。この栄華。

皮の帽子をセリーにもかぶせた。
帽子を動かすと髪の毛全体が揺れた。



新しくパーティーメンバーにならう。
セリーにいいところを見せたい。
美少女だしな。



朝、ロクサースに抱きついた状態で目覚める。
ロクサースはやはり、抱き枕として優秀だ。
足は伸ばして、反対側のセリーと絡んでいた。
セリーの足は細くて華奢だ。

Chapter 1: Sherry, Part 1

『Player Name: Kaga Michio』

『Current Character Levels & Equipment』:

Jobs:

Explorer Lv.32

Hero Lv.29

Mage Lv.31

Monk Lv.30

Equipment:

Wand

Leather Helmet

Leather Armor

Leather Gloves

Leather shoes

To give you a brief summary of the events that happened thus far, I guess it would have to go a little bit something like this: I got transported into the world of an online game that I wanted to try out as an alternative to killing myself due to how miserable my life up until this point has been, and now that I have been living in this strange, medieval fantasy world for a while, I

gradually got more and more used to my new lifestyle which involved delving into the dungeons, which are called Labyrinths in here, where I hunted down monsters and explored in order to make a living for myself and the slave that I bought, Roxanne. Today, just like any other day, we went to the Labyrinth from the early morning to maximize the potential profits as much as possible and to limit the possibility of me being seen by other Adventurers and Explorers. Now, you might be thinking to yourself: but Michio, why are you being so cautious about being seen by others since this is a game world, not a real one? Well, it is because of the stats that I managed to roll for myself when I was creating the Character which I assumed I would be using in the game, and the Bonus Points associated with them turned out to be insanely high, giving me access to some pretty OP Bonus Skills like Warp, which basically allows me to teleport pretty much anywhere in the world, be it inside of the Labyrinth or outside of it as long as I have enough MP for it and even more OP Bonus Weapons like my most trusted partner and the savior of my ass: The Holy Sword Durandal, which allowed me to make the majority of the fights with monsters a breeze that ended after one sword strike. . . you see the picture I am painting here? These abilities are basically like cheats, so I am trying to keep a low profile so that nobody would get suspicious of me, which could bring me no amount of trouble that I most definitely do not want in my new life now that I managed to introduce some semblance of stability into it.

Today, Roxanne and I went to the seventh floor of the Labyrinth of Quratar, where we are currently renting a house, early in the morning. Our target for this morning visit there? To hunt down as many Slow Rabbits as possible so that we could collect their Drop Items: Rabbit Fur and sell it in one of the clothing stores of in the Imperial City, where we recently happened to complete what I would call a miscellaneous quest for the male clerk who worked the front desk there, which ended up with him taking a debt of gratitude with us. This debt, which would normally be a pretty useless thing, can actually be used to get ourselves one huge advantage: normally, the shop where that male clerk works only accepts Rabbit Furs for sale if you bring over one hundred of them, but right now, that limitation does not apply to us, so we can bring as many of them as we want, which will be pretty convenient in making the fund gathering for my next big purchase that much easier.

Now that we have cleared the seventh floor of Quratar's Labyrinth and gained access to the eighth floor, it means that from that point onward we will have to be facing against groups of monsters made up to a maximum of four of them. This means that we will most likely be dividing such groups in such a way that Roxanne will fight two monsters at the same time and I will also be doing the same, which means that things will definitely start getting rougher for me since Durandal is no longer able to one-shot the enemies we are fighting with, needing two strikes to kill them instead.

If you asked me, with her absurd dodging abilities, Roxanne should still be able to effortlessly take on three enemies at the same time, leaving me to deal with the last one in the group. Ever since I started taking her to the Labyrinth with me, we had this unspoken agreement where she would take the aggro of the bigger part of the enemy's group on to herself so that I could safely engage only one monster at a time in a one on one battle, and I was fine with that because as much as I tried to copy what Roxanne was doing, that is observing the movements of the monsters carefully and evading their attacks at the last possible moment, most of them were still too unpredictable for me to be doing that reliably, thanks to which my confidence in my ability to fight more than one enemy at the same time did not increase at all. And to make things even worse, even when I am using magic, hitting the targets that are constantly on the move, jumping around from one place to another in a matter of seconds is just as hard, if not even harder than trying to hit them with normal weapons. Take the Floor Boss of the Quratar Labyrinth's seventh floor, Rapid Rabbit, for example. Hitting that guy with magic is straight up impossible, and I was only able to land my blows on it when I used The Hero Job's Skill, Overwhelming to slow the flow of time around me (or was it that I got such a speed boost out of it that everything else seemed to be moving like dorito-encrusted flies?) to such a degree where I could whack away on it while it was powerless to do literally anything else. That is exactly why I decided that instead of proceeding onto the eighth floor, it would be better for us to stay at the seventh floor where we could fight against the groups of enemies that we already knew and knew how to deal with them instead of plunging ourselves into uncharted territory, at least for the time being. Here on the seventh floor, the maximum number of monsters that a single group can contain is three, and as long as there will be three enemies, then we could use our ideal strategy of Roxanne dealing with two of

them, leaving me to duke it out with the last one.

「Guh. !!!!」

But then I remembered that time during our last trek through Quratar Labyrinth's seventh floor when we were fighting against a group of three monsters: one Slow Rabbit and two Minos. At that time, I also thought that our usual strategy was going to work the same way it always did, but it turned out that I was gravely mistaken. Even though the attention of both Minos should have been focused on Roxanne, one of them ended up charging towards me, and due to how unexpected it all was I was unable to block its attack properly, injuring my finger as a result. This just goes to show: while in the Labyrinth, you absolutely need to be on high alert at all times and keep a close watch on your surroundings, because there will always be a chance that a monster that was not supposed to target you is going to target you after all.

Anyway, there you have it, the reasons for my reluctance to go beyond the relative safety of the seventh floor where we do not have to deal with too many enemies at the same time.

Right now, we were engaging a group of three Slow Rabbits in battle. Just as their name implied, they were pretty slow and mostly just hopped around on the battlefield giving you plenty of time to take care of them, but even such monsters that seemed to be pretty harmless at first glance could still be dangerous if you let your guard around them. They might not look like it, but those fangs of theirs could easily tear through a persons throat if they happened to be allowed to latch onto it.

I dodged the jump attempt from the Slow Rabbit to my right, and then smacked the Slow Rabbit in front of me with my wand before I backstepped a bit and unleashed a spell to deal with the both at once.

(Fire Storm!!!)

Even though it is undoubtedly powerful, using magic has one major downside: when casting your spells, you are leaving yourself completely defenseless, even if it is only for a few seconds it takes to launch the spell.

properly.

Chapter 1: Sherry, Part 2

Thankfully, my Fire Storm manager to hit both of the Slow Rabbits properly, leaving only one of them left, and that one ended up heading towards Roxanne, since she was much closer to it than I was, and as expected, she was able to easily avoid any of its attempts at attacking her. Using both her Scimitar and her Wooden Shield, Roxanne pushed the Slow rabbit back away from her and more towards me, giving me more than enough space to fire another spell, Fireball this time, which hit it square in its exposed back, burning it in an explosion of flames.

Now that all three of the Slow Rabbits were finally dead, their corpses disappeared in a puff of green smoke, leaving behind their Rabbit Furs as Drop Items. . . no, wait just a goddamn second. . . . hey, there are only two Rabbit Furs, even though we defeated all three of them and Rabbit Fur was supposed to be their common drop with almost one hundred percent drop chance? What the fu huh? No, hold up! Wait a minute! I think I see something. . . . yeah, my eyes were not playing tricks on me. Instead of a third piece of the Rabbit Fur, a small stone, or perhaps a Magic Crystal way lying some distance away from the place where the last Slow rabbit has fallen onto the ground. Upon closer examination, it looked like a small, shining pebble, similar to Magic Crystal, but at the same time somewhat different from it. What is this Drop Item, exactly? I have never seen something like that before.

「Wow, you did it, master! You managed to find a Skill Crystal!」

Before I could use Identify on this thing, Roxanne jumped in and offered me an explanation. Oh, so this is a Skill Crystal, huh? Then it is no wonder that I did not know what that it, since this is my first time acquiring it. Now that Roxanne finished her abrupt explanation, let us have a little look-see at this thing with my Identify, shall we?

『Skill Crystal: Rabbit』

Yup, Identify basically confirmed Roxanne's words. This thing in my hand is most definitely a Skill Crystal. It is roughly of the same size as the Magic Crystal, so I would not be surprised if the people who do not possess Identify were mistaking one for the other. From what I have heard before, Skill Crystals are items that are used to grant various Skills to both weapons and equipment, as long as they have free Skill Slots in them. Or at least that is how it should be if I remember correctly.

「So this is a Skill Crystal, huh? I have to say, it is a little hard to believe that something like that dropped from such a simple monster.」

「Yes, I agree. This is also my first time seeing a Skill Crystal in person.」



「First time seeing one in person? Then how did you know that this was a Skill Crystal, and not just another Magic Crystal?」

「Because I have heard a lot about them from various stories.」

Heard about them from the stories? Is that literally all it takes to gain knowledge about things in this world, or is there something else that I am not noticing here? Well, now that I take a closer look at it from up close, I guess it kinda shines a little bit differently than a Magic Crystal and its color is different from the standard ones of the Magic Crystals (Black, Red, Purple, Blue , Green, Yellow and White) but is that really enough to tell the difference without seeing both of them at least once in your life so that you could compare them?

「Is that so?」

I felt like that was the best possible answer in this situation.

「Thanks to master's amazing abilities we are able to defeat a lot of monsters in quick succession, so I thought that we are bound to happen upon one eventually, but the fact that we were able to obtain one so quickly makes me positively thrilled.」

I guess that hunting for and obtaining Skill Crystals might just be the main reason why some Adventurers and Explorers enter the Labyrinths in the first place, huh? That is definitely something I am able to understand, because those things are bound to be a very rare drop that should sell for a very high price. How can I be so sure of that? Well, because ever since I have come to this world, all I was doing was essentially nothing but monster hunting, and after all this time, this is the very first Skill Crystal that I have managed to obtain.

That being said, even though we might be able to obtain a substantial amount of Nars if we sold that Skill Crystal, I do not think I am going to do that. Now that I have gotten my hands on one, I would definitely like to give it a try and see how it works on the equipment with the empty Skill slots.

Whenever I use Identify on a weapon or a piece of equipment, I sometimes see that it has an empty Skill Slot, but I wonder if the procedure of infusing them with Skill Crystals is really as simple as combining the two together in the same way that I fused two Magic crystals before?

According to all the information that Roxanne has shared with me before, more often than not, an attempt to fuse a Skill Crystal to a weapon or equipment usually ends in failure. Because of that, I think it would be safe to assume that weapons and equipment that have been successfully infused with them can be safely classified as 「rare」 in terms of rarity while the ones that come with empty Skill Slots on them have to be at least 「uncommon」. However actually fusing the Skill Crystals with weapons and equipment is not that simple as it seems, because apparently you need someone with the Master Smith Job in order for the fusion to be successful. And as if that was not hard enough, only the members of the Dwarf race can become Master Smiths.

So, all things considered, I guess you could say that in this particular matter the odds are stacked pretty heavily against us with so many hurdles to surpass. I mean seriously, where will we even find a Dwarf with a Master Smith Job who would be willing to help us?

「Ah! Eh. . . . EEEEEEHHHH??!!！」

「What is it, Roxanne?! What happened?!」

「I-It is about the color of Master's Magic Crystal! I. . . I do not know how I should explain it, but. . . but it changed its color! It was still green only a little while ago, but now it is already yellow!」

Now that we have been done with our morning portion of the hunting on the seventh floor of Quratar's Labyrinth and we returned home, Roxanne was making quite a fuss about the color of my Magic Crystal when she checked out on it during the post-Labyrinth equipment inspection. When I looked at it myself, I saw that it has indeed changed its color from green to yellow, becoming a Yellow Magic Crystal instead of a Green Magic Crystal.

Man, this might be the chance I was waiting for! According to my intel,

Yellow Magic Crystals should sell for over a one hundred thousand Nars, and with so much money to our names, we should have the bare minimum of the funds required for me to buy myself a new slave, under the assumption that a Dwarven slave with a Master Smith Job is going to cost roughly the same amount of money that I paid for my ownership of Roxanne. In that case, I think we should pay a visit to the Slave Merchant in Vale as soon as possible.

「Roxanne, I would like to go to vale with you this afternoon.」

While we were eating breakfast, I decided to share my plans with Roxanne. If we are to visit Alan-san in his Slave Shop, then naturally I would prefer if Roxanne accompanied me during such an outing.

「A visit to Vale, you say? Is this something that I can help you with, master?」

「I-I. I guess you could say that. You see, the thing is I would like to visit Alan-san in his Slave Shop.」

「The Slave Shop? So it is about master buying a new slave so we could expand our Party like we discussed before?」

Chapter 1: Sherry, Part 3

「First things first, I want to make some adjustments to your will.」

「My will? Is there something wrong with how it is currently written?」

「I guess you could say that. Oh, but do not take it as anything personal, okay? We have been together for some time now, and throughout that time you have done so much for me that I feel like the least I can do to repay your kindness is to alter your will in such a way that in the event of my death you will be set free.」

The master slave system that is operating in this world works in such a way that in the event of master's death – no matter what the circumstances of that death were – the slave assigned to the master is going to die together with them unless there are provisions against it in the contract. To put it in simpler words: if the master bites the dust, then by default the slaves follow him to his grave. It is a system that has been designed to act as a deterrent from slaves turning against their master and make an attempt on his life, but right now I feel like there is no need for me to have something like that anymore. I trust Roxanne completely, and I have a feeling that she has also placed her trust in me.

「Uhm. . . thank you very much for your consideration, master. . . but may I ask where did that come from? Because that seems like a pretty big topic to talk about so casually. . . 」

「Where did that come from, you ask? Hmm. . . There is no special reason for that in particular. . . or rather. . . I guess that I just wanted to let you know about it beforehand, since you will also need to be present when the adjustments to your will are going to be made, and I felt like it would be best to have you be aware of my intentions instead of dropping it down on you out

of the blue. Also, I trust you and I know that you knowing about it will not change your attitude towards me in a negative way, so you can be sure that will not be doing anything scummy like secretly changing the will back behind your back. That is also why I do not think that this is actually all that big of a deal to talk about, really.]

To tell you the truth, I do not know if Roxanne's presence is going to be strictly necessary, but I figured that since it is a matter that is directly related to her then it would be better to have her there with me when it will happen and to also have her know what was going on.

「..... I see. So that was your line of reasoning. You are right, master. Even though I know of your plan now, it is not going to change my attitude towards you in the slightest, but. . .」

「I know, Roxanne. But I decided to put my full trust in you, even though such a thing might and probably will be frowned upon by the rest of society, but even so, I have already made my mind about that, and I am not going to change it. The will affects you, so I wanted you to know that I want to make changes to it to improve your situation. Also. . .」

I knew that Roxanne was not going to betray me and stab me in the back now, but I still want her to have a physical, tangible proof of my trust in her. But then. . .

Roxanne stood up from her seat by the table with a clatter.

「Hmm? What is it, Roxanne? Is something. . .?」

. and then she knelt on one knee right in front of me.

「. . . wrong? What are you doing?」

「Master.」

「Y-Yes? What is it?」

「If you truly decided to place your full trust in me, then please, I want you to leave my will exactly as it is now.」

「Leave it as it is? But why? Are you really sure about that?」

「Yes. Whether it would be in my life or death, I want to always follow you wherever you may go. Also. . . 」

For that next part, she lowered her voice so much that I was barely able to hear what she was saying.

「If you trust me, then do not make a will of your own.」

「. Eh?」

All of a sudden, Roxanne said something that I was genuinely not expecting. What exactly could she mean by that? What would she not want me to write my own will?

「I. . . I am sorry, Roxanne, but could you please repeat that so that I could understand?」

「Yes, of course. I will say that as many times as you wish, master. You do not have to write your own will.」

「B-But why though? This is the part that I cannot wrap my head around! Why would you. . . ?!」

「As master's slave, it is my duty to be the shield that protects you from harm no matter the circumstances, so I will not allow you to die in the Labyrinths. If I failed to fulfil that duty and survived on my own, it would mean that I am a disgrace as both a servant and a warrior. That is why I want to ask you for one thing, and one thing only: continue to order me to fight by your side.」

Roxanne said that with a straight face. It caught me so off guard that I forgot to chew the meat that was currently in my mouth and finish the rest of my share of breakfast and just stared at her, mouth agape. She does not look like she is joking about that. Moreover, she seems to be deadly serious about it.

「W-Well of course I am going to keep relying on you in the matters related to both Labyrinths and combat and I totally understand your point, but look, this

is a matter that is totally separate from the issue of the will, would you not say?」

「Yes, I do, but this is no longer just about that. I want to protect master until my last, dying breath, not because I am obliged to by our master-slave contract, but because I want that as a person. And to continue to know that I will always have your trust, I want my will to remain unchanged as a proof of that!」

So that is her reasoning behind it, huh? Admittedly, it is more than a little bit strange, but if that is really what she wants, then. . .

「Hearing you say that makes me very happy, but Labyrinths are not the only things that might kill me, you know? What if I was to one day die because of an illness, or a sudden myocardial infraction?」

「Even though I know heart problems or disease might claim us at any moment, it changes nothing to me. No matter what the cause of your death will be, I would still wish to keep my will in its original form so that you would not have to worry, and follow you to the afterlife when the time comes, no matter when that time might be.」

Myocardial infraction did not get translated to Brahim language, which was not all that unexpected seeing how it is a medical term from a modern world, meaning that a medieval one such as this would not be medically advanced enough to even know that an affliction like that existed in the first place. Or rather, the people of this world might know the condition of heart attack itself, but they probably do not yet know what exactly is causing it.

If you also did not know, heart attack is otherwise known as myocardial infraction because it is a medical condition where the arteries that supply the blood to the heart muscle are getting infarcted. Maybe here it is known under some different, localized name, or perhaps it is lumped together with all the other similar illnesses under the common name such as 「Chest Illness」?

「Uhm. . . are you really sure you want to leave it as it is?」

Chapter 1: Sherry, Part 4

「Yes. I am absolutely sure that that is how I want to leave it, so do not worry about it anymore, master.」

「Uhm. . . you really mean it?」

「Yes. I really, really mean it.」

Roxanne's eyes were shining with determination like I have never seen before in them. Looks like she really is serious about keeping her will as it is without making any alterations to it whatsoever.

Also, this might be just me getting a little bit sidetracked, but this whole situation looks kinda as if she was a Knight who is swearing allegiance to her new lord. Yeah, given the development of this world's civilization, I would not be surprised if it could be seen in such a way.

「Okay Roxanne, fine. If that is what you wish for, then we can keep our contract exactly the way it is now.」

「Thank you for your understanding, master.」

「But I feel that I should at least ask: why are you willing to go to such lengths in regards to this matter?」

「Because I think that master is a truly wonderful person. . . no, I think that you are a great man. Even though you are so young, you are already so strong, and you have more amazing abilities than I can possibly count, and you are adept and capable at using them. Even though now we are starting pretty small, I am sure that given enough time, you will definitely be able to achieve great things one day. Based on my experienced, if anyone else would be in the same position as you they would allow it to go over to their heads,

but not you. You are still kind and compassionate towards someone like me, who you should be treating like nothing but a lowly slave, your personal possession, so I feel like I have to return that kindness to you in any way I possibly can.]

So in the end, it all boils down to her sense of loyalty, similarly to how it was with the samurai in the Edo period and their lords in Japan. If my guess and observations about her are correct, she probably longs to live her life in accordance with the warrior's code, upholding all of its noble values such as loyalty and honor. And if that is the case, then rejecting her here, it would be a straight-up insult to her and all that she stands by and aspires to become. So the only thing that I can possibly do here is . . .

「All right Roxanne. I see that you are serious about this, so I will accept your feelings. However, there is still one thing that I feel like I absolutely have to say: even though you praised me so much, I do not thing that I will accomplish anything great, or even worthy of mentioning in my life.」

「And I am sorry for being so blunt about it, but I wholeheartedly disagree, master.」

「You are free to do so, but it will not change the facts. Then again, maybe I was the one who said that in the wrong way, so allow me to rephrase that: I am here right now precisely for the sake of not doing anything that would put me on everyone's radar.」

I am not an original inhabitant of this world after all, so why would I do anything to change it in any way. If someone like me, who bends the rules of this world simply by having access to a tool that allows to change my abilities and characteristics in any way I see fit began to take unnecessarily flashy and eye-catching actions, it would only cause unwanted confusion in everyone around me and quite possibly caused me to gain attention of the big-shots of this world, and that is something that I would like to avoid at all costs. The only thing that I want right now is a quiet, simple life where I would not have to worry about anything, and for that to happen, I have to constantly be on my guard against getting drunk on the power that is in my possession. I mean, do not get me wrong, it is all well and good to possess the strength and use it in good faith, but if that strength leads to carelessness and

reckless behaviors fueled by the belief that I am invincible and nothing will be able to harm me, it will bring doom upon me sooner rather than later. Just as the flames that are isolated from the oxygen that would empower them are naturally going to disappear all on their own, I should also make sure to extinguish my own fire without spreading it too much.

「I . . . I am afraid that I do not understand.」

「And you do not have to understand. Just know that this is what I think about myself. Now come on, we should finish eating breakfast before it gets all cold.」

「. Understood, master.」

It was done in a kind of a forcible manner, but I managed to convince Roxanne not to pursue that subject any further.

「With all that being said though, the matter of the will does not affect the second reason why I want to go to Vale's Slave Shop. If we are not making any adjustments to Roxanne's will then you do not need to go with me if you do not want to, but it remains a fact that once we will reach the eighth floor in the Labyrinths we will have to be facing against a maximum of four monsters at once, and because of that, I think it is high time for us to acquire more members for our Party, since it can be hard for just the two of us to fight effectively from now on. At the very least, I think that what we would need the most would be a good warrior who would fight at close distances, since while we explore the Labyrinths I tend to fight more with magic, which is effective at longer distances, but makes it so that there will be situations that I would not be able to handle with it, like those ones where the monsters that were not interested in me at all are suddenly changing their minds and end up targeting me after all. That is why I thing that another member of the vanguard who could fight together with Roxanne would be ideal, but if you have your own opinions on the matter, then please, go right ahead and share them with me.」

This is an important matter that we have to discuss, but it does not change the fact that this is still a kind of an awkward topic to talk about right after we had that little spat about changes to Roxanne's will. Be that as it may, it is a

conversation that needed to happen eventually. I guess I have become a little more talkative due to my guilty conscience from basically tricking Roxanne into green-lighting my idea of creating a harem for myself. . . but wait, do I really need to feel guilty about this? No, I do not think I do! After all, it is not set in stone that the next Party member I am going to acquire for myself will be a woman. Yeah, exactly! Since right now the person we require the most would have to be a Dwarf with Master Smith Job and a warrior at that, then the image that naturally comes to mind is that of a short, muscular, bearded man hammering away at the weapons and armor pieces on an anvil. . . although I cannot say that a prospect of having another girl in our Party is not an enticing one. Just thinking about scenarios such as waking up in the morning with Roxanne and another beauty at each of my sides. . . or having my body washed by them during a soapy bubble bath from the front and the back at the same time. . . hehe, hehehehe. . . .

Oh crap. Just imagining it right now is already awesome, and when I think that this fantasy might very well be turned into reality. . . .

However, the biggest unknown right now would be the price I would have to pay for another slave. Roxanne herself was already expensive since she possessed the unrivaled beauty, had a kind and caring personality and could also detect enemies in the Labyrinths through her sense of smell alone. . . and she was also serving me pretty well in bed, so even though I had to go through a lot to get her, ultimately it was all worth it.

Chapter 1: Sherry, Part 5

I think we have to prepare ourselves for the eventuality that the purchase of such a clearly specialized personnel will definitely not be a cheap one. However, no matter how much money this next slave purchase is going to cost us, I feel like we cannot allow ourselves to make any compromises on it, because our safety in the future battles in the Labyrinths is going to be depending on it.

「I think that bolstering our ranks with the new Party members is a good idea as well, since it will definitely be exactly like you said, master: the higher in the Labyrinths we will go, the more difficult it would be to fight the increasing numbers of enemy monsters with just the two of us alone.」

Good, it looks like Roxanne is not opposed to the idea of getting more Party members after all.

Going back to the issue of choosing a male or a female slave for my next one for a bit, this is a problem that runs deeper than it initially looks. I mean, just think about it. Labyrinths are supposedly like a living organism all their own, and so they actively seek out ways to kill Explorers and Adventurers so that they could use their remains as sustenance for themselves to grow and expand, so there might come a time when I will end up having to sacrifice one of the Party members to prevent the rest from getting annihilated and allow them to escape with their lives. Should it come to such a worst-case scenario, then admittedly I would have an easier time sacrificing some bearded old man instead of a potential hottie that could still be of good use to me outside of the Labyrinths, either with house chores or in the sheets during the night. Yup, taking an old man might just be the best thing to do after all from a strategic point of view, actually. Having someone like that on board means that I will easily know who to sacrifice in the event of things getting dicey beyond the point of no return, and be able to make that decision in a

split second without any delays or having second thoughts. If such a time ever comes around, I will do everything I will have to do to ensure that Roxanne and I will emerge from such a predicament without as much as a scratch on us! It might sound like a dickish thing to say, but thank you, some random old man that I have yet to meet and turn into my slave. The sacrifice that you will be forced to make one day will definitely not be forgotten, because you will sacrifice yourself so that Roxanne and I, two younglings who still have their entire lives to live, which you can be sure as hell that we will do at your expense. And after that, it is No More Old Man! No more. . . oh, but. . . but then it would be back to just Roxanne and I, so we would be back at square one, huh? Well, dang it.

「You think so as well? That is good to hear then.」

「Yes. That is why I think I am going to come along with master after all. Would that be all right?」

「Sure it would be, most definitely. Having a second opinion is always appreciated, especially since there are still many things that I do not know about or do not fully understand, so I am gladly going to take any advice you would be willing to offer me.」

This is also going to be a good opportunity for me to see how Roxanne is going to react to my attempt at picking a girl as the new slave. If it so happens that I will try to pick a girl and she is going to hate that idea, then I will not push it any further and just pick a guy instead.

「Very well then. Just let me know when we will be going and I will be sure to be ready to depart at any time.」

「Please do.」

Then again, another thing that I forgot to consider with taking a man as the next member of our Party. An ideal choice would have been an old man who could be easily sacrificed without any regrets if push ever came to shove, but what if the old man I would acquire turns out to actually be a perverted old man?! Having someone like that in the same Party as Roxanne would be pretty dangerous, not to mention that it would make me hellishly angry! I

swear to God, if I catch such an old geezer eyeing Roxanne's chest EVEN ONCE, then the old fart will be sentenced to death. . . no, scratch that, EXECUTED on the spot! So note to self: if I ever decide to include guys in my party, old, young or anything in between, it does not really matter. What really is going to matter is that I will have to discipline them in such a way that they will know they cannot look at Roxanne, cannot talk to Roxanne, are forbid from so much as breathing the same air she does or else! She is my very first slave, and that makes her special in such a way that I am the only one who is allowed to interact with her. Arghhhh! But even such a strict discipline would not amount to anything, since if we all lived together in our house in Quratar, they would still be able to see Roxanne's glamourous body clad in nothing but the negligee that I have bought for her just the other day. ! Just as I thought, old guys and men would be useless to me! No More Old Guys! No More Men! From now on, I am introducing a new policy: only girls and young women are allowed to be added to my Party from now on! That is my final word, and something I will not be budging on no matter how others might beg me to do so!

After we finished eating breakfast, we warped to the Labyrinth of Vale where we hunted for the good portion of the day after which we went to the Adventurer's Guild located in the town of Vale. This was the little detour that we had to do before heading off to Alan-san's Slave Shop so that we could sell all the items we have obtained during our trek through Vale Labyrinth's seventh floor.

「We would like to sell all of those items, please.」

「Certainly. Please give me a moment while I calculate the exact amount, sir.」

There is another reason why we did some hunting in the Labyrinth before coming here, of course. Now that I am selling all of the items we got from the monsters there, I can safely utilize the gimmick of my Thirty Percent Discount Bonus Skill. Since my aim is mainly to sell the Yellow Magic Crystal here, doing so along with other items will not make the whole operation as conspicuous as it could have been if I was selling the Yellow Magic Crystal alone and nothing else beside it. After all, one hundred thousand Nars is ten gold coins. If I only sold the Yellow Magic Crystal with the Thirty Percent Discount Bonus Skill active, I would obtain one hundred

and thirty thousand Nars for it, in other words: thirteen gold coins, and there is no way in hell that the Adventurer's Guild's staff would not notice this clear-as-day discrepancy. That is why I should avoid selling anything else or buying things from the Adventurer's Guild and make my shopping somewhere else for a good while, just to decrease the chances of me being placed on the Guild's blacklist and getting my face remembered. Maybe, I should avoid coming to Vale to do shopping altogether for a while, after purchasing my new slave today of course.

Thankfully, today is going to be the first time I will ever sell the Magic Crystal that I own so there should not be too suspicious of me, but there is a possibility that they might catch the wind and connect the dots if I were to come and sell another Magic Crystal to them, so I should make sure to only do that again after a substantial amount of time has passed as well. After all, I could only accumulate so much magic energy in my Magic Crystal due to having the Bonus Skill Crystal Acceleration, which increases the speed at which Magic Energy is being gathered into the Magic Crystal. Without it, getting my Magic crystal from Black to Yellow would have probably took many, many years of tedious grinding.

Chapter 1: Sherry, Part 6

With my Bonus Skills, the speed of accumulating Magic Energy in Magic Crystals is approximately sixty-four times faster. Even though it is pretty darn useful, I do not have all that many occasions to be actively using it since there is a multitude of other Bonus Skills that I have to distribute my Bonus Points towards if I want our trips through the Labyrinths to be as relatively easy as they have been up until now, but purposefully downgrading to using Crystal Acceleration x8, x16 or x32 would be counterproductive, since now that I had a taste of how useful Crystal Acceleration x64 can be, there is no wa for me to be using its inferior versions.

Just before we headed out through the Warp portal back in our house in Quratar, I had a little talk with Roxanne to confirm how the selling of the Magic Crystals worked:

「Will we be able to sell Magic Crystals at the Adventurer's Guild?」

「Yes, we should be able to sell them there without any problems in particular. In fact, I think most of the Guilds will accept them for purchase.」

Roxanne gave me an answer, confirming my initial suspicions. Now that I know that we can sell Magic Crystals in practically every major Guild, it means that we have six locations where I can sell my items to avoid attracting any unnecessary attention: Adventurer's Guild in Vale, Explorer's Guild in Vale, Adventurer's Guild in Quratar, Explorer's Guild in Quratar, Adventurer's Guild in Imperial City and Explorer's Guild in Imperial City. From now, if we alternate our shopping trips between all those places, none of them should be able to add two and two together, or at least I hope so.

However, there is always a possibility that even while selling things in bulk, the people working at the reception stalls might get suspicious about the

increase from ten gold coins to thirteen gold coins anyway, so perhaps it would be better to stop using my Thirty Percent Discount Bonus Skill whenever I am going to be selling Magic Crystals, which would allow to avoid all those trouble whatsoever?

I placed the Yellow Magic Crystal in the tray before me along with the rest of the items we obtained from slaying the monsters in the Labyrinth, placing them in such a way so that they would cover the Magic Crystal as much as possible.

「Those are all the items you wish to sell, or is there going to be anything else?」

「That is going to be it, thank you very much.」

The female clerk took the tray with her and then disappeared into a room in the back where she will proceed to count all of the coins she will be supposed to give me. If I said that I am not looking for the result of that counting of hers with nervous anticipation, then I would be straight up lying. Is it going to take the same amount of time as usual? Or maybe it will take a bit longer because she will have to double check if she counted everything correctly?

「Sorry for the wait, sir. Here is the money for the items you have sold.」

Now, lemme just count the gold ones real quick myself: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen... all right, thirteen gold coins in total! And with that, I think it would be best for us to go and leave the Adventurer's Guild as quickly as possible.

The receptionist lady did not look as if she noticed anything suspicious about the entire transaction, but you can never be too sure, and I am not going to be overstaying my welcome if I can help it, so I quickly grabbed all of the coins from the counter and placed them in the Item Box, and the silver and copper ones into my drawstring bag and promptly proceeded to walk out of the Guild building.

「Okay then, now that that's done, shall we go to the Slave Merchant's place?」

「Yes, master. Let us be on our way.」

This transaction that we just did also show me one thing: it would seem that the people working behind the reception counters do not pay that much of an attention to the processes other than accepting the items from the clients and counting of the money they need to pay them for them. If they were conducting a more thorough checks, then someone would definitely noticed that something with my transaction was out of the ordinary and checking everything out would have taken way longer that it actually did, which was not all that longer from the usual waiting time. Who knows, maybe it is the adopted policy of the Guild's to not dwell on the money from items brought in by Adventurer's and Explorers too much? You know, maybe that is actually for the better. If anyone started snooping around me and investigated how much money I am earning and what are my living conditions, that would be quite a problem (**TL Note: You mean like the IRS?**) so I am perfectly fine with them if they want to be lax about it. You will not see me encouraging them to be taking a more proactive approach to it, oh no, not in a million years.

When we left the Adventurer's Guild, we found ourselves walking through the streets of Vale for the first time in a while, but I cannot say that much has changed about this place during our absence. Or maybe some things did change, but it is just that I did not notice them due to how we would always Warp straight to the Labyrinth without ever taking the time to make a detour around the city?

Arriving at the Slave Merchant's shop, we knocked on the front door and were greeted by usual servant of . . . huh? Wait, what was the name of the owner of this shop? Because I seem to have forgotten it just now. Well anyways, the servant came to greet us, just like all the other times I have been here.

「Yes, how may I help you?」

He asked.

「We would like to see the owner. Go and tell him that Michio came.」

「Michio-sama, right? Understood. Please, follow me.」

He opened the door for us and took us to the usual guest room, where we were told to wait for the owner to arrive in a moment. Huh? This room again? Could it be that they think that I came to return Roxanne because I am dissatisfied with her? Well, in that case, I guess I have to do everything to show him that this is not the case.

「Roxanne, you go ahead and sit down as well.」

「Is that really all right?」

「Yes, it is totally fine.」

Having Roxanne sit right next to me is the least I can do to openly show that I am not treating her in a disrespectful manner that would make the owner think I came here to return her. *Scoff* Me, returning Roxanne? That is the richest joke I have heard recently.

「Good heavens, if it is not Michio-sama? It is a pleasure meeting with you today.」

「Likewise.」

The store's owner came into the room after a few minutes of waiting, and as soon as he opened the door, I used Identify to check what his name was. Alan. Oh yeah, his name was Alan the Slave Merchant! Now I remember! Man, it is such a nice and simple name, how could I have ever forget it?

「Sorry for showing up unannounced, Alan-san」

I stood up and greeted him politely, but Roxanne only did the same after a brief delay where she looked at me with a slight confusion written on her face, which I found somewhat strange. For all I know, she should have been taught proper etiquette in this establishment, but to omit something so important as standing up and bowing to the person that you are meeting with. . . no, wait, it might not be that at all. Perhaps. . . perhaps she has been taught that as a slave all she would ever have to do would be to obediently stand

behind her master without uttering as much as a single word. Yeah, that has to be it. It is not that this part of the etiquette teaching has been purposefully ignored, but rather that neither Alan-san or the personnel of this shop ever thought that she will find herself in a situation where that would be required of her. Looks like having her sit down might have resulted in the reverse of what I originally intended, and only ended up needlessly embarrassing her. God damn it!

Chapter 1: Sherry, Part 7

「No no, it is quite all right. Feel free to visit my store anytime you want. Now then, please, have a seat.」

「Thank you. Do not mind if I do.」

Alan-san's servant then brought herbal tea with him, but instead of bringing three cups: one for me, one for Roxanne and one for Alan-san, he only brought two cups, which he then placed in front of me and his employer, not giving Roxanne as much as a passing glance, which was a very rude thing to do. Even if he realizes that she is a slave, she is no longer the property of this shop, but *my* companion, and I am not going to allow anyone to disrespect her like that!

「First of all, allow me to say that ever since I bought her, Roxanne has been *a very good and reliable companion* to me, both during the battles in the Labyrinths and in the matters related to daily life outside of it. Because of that, I have decided to come here again to buy myself someone who could join us as another member of our Party.」

I started the conversation with such a statement where I have purposefully placed emphasis on the words 「very good」 and 「reliable」 and also made sure to say them before the servant who brought us tea could leave the room so that he could hear what I was trying to communicate loudly and clearly: I am not interested in selling her. Not now, not never. You hear that, you servant asshole?!

「I see. That is a wonderful thing to hear indeed.」

Alan-san replied with a faint smile on his face as his servant left the room in a hurry. Okay, now that we got that out of the way. . . it might not be a good

idea to be so open about my intentions right from the get go, especially when talking to a merchant out of all people, but since my purchase this time can definitely be classified as a very specific one, then I think this one time being completely honest with him might actually be to my advantage.

「Now, in regards to my next purchase, there is something that I would like to ask you about first?」

「Oh, and what that might be? Go ahead, I am listening.」

「Would it be possible for me to buy a slave who has a Master Smith Job here?」

「A Master Smith slave, huh? In other words, you are looking to buy a Dwarf. I assume it would be for the purposes of blacksmithing and Skill Crystal infusion?」

「Yes, that is correct.」

I nodded my head at him. I do not know if he is naturally so observant and able to draw conclusions or is that something he acquired after the years of working as a Slave Merchant, but having him read me like an open book, while definitely uncomfortable, was a necessary evil that I have to put up with in this case.

「I see. Yes, if it is smithing that you need then it definitely makes sense that you would like to obtain a blacksmith slave for yourself. However, I am afraid that I will have to cool your enthusiasm down a bit.」

「Why is that? Is it impossible to get your hands on slaves with a Master Smith Job these days?」

So, making the purchase of a slave with such a specific Job is a no-go after all, huh?

「Oh no, it is nothing as dire as that. But, well. . . while not impossible, I would say that it is quite difficult. Before we continue, I feel inclined to ask, and I hope you will understand that I am not trying to be disrespectful: are

you aware that the process of fusing Skill Crystals with equipment and weapons tends to fail more often than succeed?」

Alan-san asked me that after he made a brief pause.

「Yes, I am fully aware of the risk that this process involves.」

「Good. That fact will not change just because the Master Smith is a slave, but there is an entirely different problem related to it. Namely: when failures begin to pile up one after the other without even a single success to speak of, how do you think most masters react? That is right, the most common reaction is that they begin to doubt the abilities of the Master Smith slave. There are many nobles and wealthy city-dwellers who have their own slave-blacksmiths in hopes of having them smith them the highest quality weapons and then infuse them with Skill Crystals. . . but more often than not such business transactions tend to not end up all that well for either side. . . or both of them.」

The fusion of Skill Crystals often fails. If I remember correctly, I talked about it with Roxanne, and it was then that I knew that some of the blacksmiths use that fact to their advantage so that they could commit frauds and prey on the people who are unaware of that fact., and that is probably the reason why most of the smiths are reluctant to take the Skill Crystal infusion commissions or are outright refusing to accept them altogether. And since the chance of failure remains the same no matter if the Master Smith is a slave or not, then it might as well be that the slave that I will end up buying will not be able to make even one fusion a successful one. But since I understand the risk involved with the process of fusion, then the least I can do is to not get unreasonably angry at the Master Smith, even when the failures do end up piling up.

「Is that so?」

「Yes. I am afraid that it is so indeed. Of course, Dwarves themselves are aware of that better than anyone else, so when Dwarven Master Smiths become slaves, they will usually change their Job to something else in order to prevent getting themselves abused over their smithing abilities.」

「And that is why there are no slaves who are simultaneously Master Smiths?」

「I would not say that there are 「no」 slaves like that, but they have definitely became more of a rarity in recent years. Also, I am afraid that I have to inform you that because of that the price of the individual Dwarven Master Smith slave tends to be quite high, definitely higher than that of your ordinary slave.」

So that is the exact reason why they are so hard to come by. Well, I cannot say that I do not understand where they are coming from, because when you stop to think about it for a moment, then it definitely looks like all that awaits Dwarven Master Smiths once they become slaves is nothing but a downward spiral of misfortune due to the people who paid a lot of money for having their Skill Crystals fused to their equipment and weapons getting increasingly angry when they were keep on spending money without getting any tangible results back.

With Dwarven Master Smiths, it looks like everything seems to be boiling down to the bad reputation they get for their increasing failures. Due to this bad rep, more and more Master Smiths tend to hide the fact that they are Master Smiths, and it would not surprise me if it also discouraged ordinary Dwarves from becoming regular smiths, a Job that is pretty much synonymous with your usual image of a typical Dwarf. Because there is not much of them in supply and the demand for their services continues to exist, their prices and the prices of their services continue to skyrocket into unimaginable sums of money. You would think that this is going to be it, but no, this is just the tip of the iceberg. Even though the services of Master Smiths are expensive as hell, it does not mean that the probability of success increased. Actually, it is exactly the other way around: prices keep getting higher, while the amount of failures stays relatively the same, not even dwindling for a little bit. With every consecutive failure in the fusion process, the master's dissatisfaction only grows, because let us face the ugly truth here: no one wants to keep someone who is not going to be cost-efficient around. If something is going to cost them an astronomical amount of money, then it is a given that the masters of the Master Smiths would expect the investment they made with them to start paying back at some point, only to

be repeatedly denied that expectation, and that leads us to the bad reputation, which grows bigger and bigger with every accumulated failure. And that is how the circle of their suffering continues to go round and round.

Chapter 1: Sherry, Part 8

It is a vicious cycle, but it is not like I can do anything to break it, so let us just leave it at that and move on.

「Now, knowing all this, do you still want to buy a Master Smith Dwarven slave, Michio-sama?」

Now I know how difficult it is to get your hands on a Dwarven slave with a Master Smith Job, but in my case, they do not need to be Master Smiths specifically. As long as I can get my hands on a Dwarven slave, I can always use my Party Job Settings to switch their Job back to Master Smith. So, with that in mind. . .

「I am fine with the Dwarven slaves not being Master Smiths, but I definitely would like the ones that would be comfortable with going to the Labyrinths on a daily basis. Do you happen to have some of those? Because I heard that Dwarves can make for a first-class vanguard, is that correct?」

「Yes, your assumption is indeed correct. Dwarves are a physically powerful race, so they can be of use not only in the vanguard, but in all the roles that require high amounts od strength and endurance, be it a knight with two-handed greatsword or a defender with a tower shield.」

「Oh really? Then that means they definitely are what I am looking for right now.」

I heard a little bit about it from Roxanne, although it was nothing more than a simple talk, since back then we did not discuss the possibility of me obtaining Dwarven slaves for myself because there was no need for us to do so, but thinking about it now, perhaps I should have been just a tad bit more inquisitive? Then again, that was till during the time where I preferred not to

talk to Roxanne about the matters related to other slaves because I considered it to be a bit of a touchy subject, but at the very least I know that the races such as Dwarves, Beastkin like Roxanne and Dragonkin are the best suited raced for the vanguard, which is kinda confusing since in most RPG games humans are usually the best tanks or meat shields, especially the Knights or Paladins. Does that mean that these beastly races are secretly OP? Or maybe that simply means that in comparison to their non-human counterparts, we humans are the ones who are actually pretty weak? Because I can totally see that being the case.

「However, as regrettable as it may sound, right now I happen to have only a single Dwarf here in my shop, and I do not think that her personality would make her a fitting choice for being put on the battlefield.」

「That is truly regrettable.」

He said that he does not think that 「she」 would be a fitting pick for the battlefield, so this must mean that the only Dwarf in the entire Slave Shop is a girl, exactly like I wanted. . . is what I would have liked to say, but in the current situation, whoever that girl might be, I cannot simply jump the gun with her, because that would put me in a losing position in this negotiation. So be calm, Michio. Be calm and remember that this is business, and in business, it is often best to take a slow and steady approach to things to secure victory for yourself.

「Perhaps, if you are still going to insist on getting yourself a Dwarven slave no matter what, I could write a letter of recommendation for you. With it, you could easily visit another store that just might have what you need, and they would do business with you without any trouble or difficulties. So how about it? Would you like me to do that?」

「I will not lie, that would be pretty great of you, but are you sure it is okay to be sending a customer away to one of your business rivals like that? Will it not be bad for your business?」

「Normally that would be the case, but I do not mind it.」

「Really? Is slave trading not the kind of business where you have to make

each and every customer count if you want to stay afloat and be driven out by the rivalling shops?」

And more importantly, am I your precious customer, or is it that you do not have any need for me after all and you are just entertaining yourself by talking with me? Or maybe he has somehow figured out that the last time I bought Roxanne from him I have done so by cheating my way into paying thirty percent less for her with my Thirty Percent Discount Bonus Skill? Because if that is the case, then I might be pretty much screwed in here.

「You might be surprised, but this line of work does not suffer from a lack of potential customers, even though some people might view the ownership of slaves as somewhat. . . unsavoury for the times, but we have our own shipping routes and enough of an established customer base to allow ourselves to ignore any such voices of complaints. Also, because every Slave Shop receives its slaves from a different area, there is no business rivalry to speak of to begin with, so at times we the shop owners are able to accommodate each other like that.」

「So every Slave Shop actually has its own sphere of influence and the area of operations?」

「That is right. For example: this fine establishment that I happen to own services the entirety of the town of Vale, and also stretches all the way towards the plains to the south of it.」

So there are special circumstances to trading in slaves, huh?

「So that is how it is.」

「As I said, I will be more than happy to write you a letter of introduction to the Slave Trading Company based in the Imperial City that I am on particularly good terms with. They have an excellent reputation and a steady supply of slaves of all races throughout the entire year, so I am sure that if you decide to do business with them, you are going to be thoroughly satisfied.」

「You are pretty confident about that, huh?」

「What can I say, spring is a busy farming season where slaves are especially needed for their worth as physical labour in the fields, so you can say that they are in constant demand.」

I thought that they might be in demand when there is the most manual work to be done, but it is nice to receive a confirmation like that from someone who knows what he is talking about. But if spring is a busy season, then does that not mean that the slave companies will not be as eager to sell their slaves to individual customers if they can make more money selling them to farm owners or nobles who have their own patches of land? If I were them, I would have done it like that and then waited with the selling of the slaves to the individual customers until after the intense farming season would settle down. And looking at it from the buyers perspective, the hasty purchases also do not make any sense. If you know that you are going to need many slaves to tend to your piece of land, then the smart decision would always be to prepare as many slaves as you can in advance. If you do not possess the talent or the ability to be forward-thinking like that, then that probably means that the ownership of slaves is not something you should be dabbling into.

「All right. Got it.」

I guess I will simply have to go pay them a visit and see for myself if it is going to be like that or not. Even if they end up doing business a little bit differently from what I am used to, it should nor be too much of an inconvenience for me, as long as I will be able to get what I want. The only thing that I will have to keep a careful eye on is going to be the price.

「If you are saying that I am definitely going to be satisfied, then I guess I will take you up on your word.」

「Before we do that, would you like to have a look at the other people I have right now who might fit well for the position in the Party's vanguard? Most of them are men, but I think that you will find a few who might satisfy yours needs among them.」

「Hmm. . . thank you for the kind offer, we might as well do that since I am already here.」

Chapter 1: Sherry, Part 9

Just like I said, since I am already here, then it will not hurt me in any way to just go and have a look at what Alan-san is offering in his Slave Shop right now. It is certainly a better option than going back so soon after taking the time to come all the way here, and he must be feeling the same way. I guess that is just the businessman side of him speaking: he has a customer right in front of him, so he probably cannot help it but to want to try and sell some of his slaves to me.

「If it is all right with you, Michio-sama, then I will allow myself to remove all of the slaves whom you have saw the last time you were here to make a purchase. How about it?」

「Of course, I don't mind it at. . .」

But no, wait a second. When I was here last time as a customer it was when I bought Roxanne, and before that I was introduced to a bunch of other female slaves, but none of them managed to catch my attention, that is how utterly remarkable they all were. But if he does that, then. . .

「. . . I mean, if you do that, it will leave only the men in the room.」

「Yes, that is right. But this is an unavoidable scenario if you do not want to look at the slaves whom you have already seen during your last visit, would you not say?」

Hmm, he is definitely right. But on the other hand, I have already decided that I did not want any guys in my Party, so maybe. . .

「You know what, it is fine. I do not think that I need to see anyone else besides that Dwaren girl. . .」

「Oh, so you remembered that she is a girl after I mentioned her gender only once during the entire conversation? I have to admit, you have quite the attention to details, Michio-sama.」

「T-Thank you very much.」

I regretted allowing those words to leave my mouth as soon as I have said them, because that was a huge fuckup on my part. It might have been nothing more but a slip of the tongue, but it does not change the fact that I allowed it to slip that I do not care about the other slaves and am only interested in the dwarven woman!

「Now, before we go see the slaves, including the Dwarven girl you seem to be interested in, do know that she has only arrived here recently.」

Hmm? Is it just me, or is Alan-san looking a bit more flustered than usual today? What a rare sight.

「I-I see. Is that going to be a problem?」

「No, not particularly. While her education as a whole might still be a bit lacking, she has already shown that she has a good memory and aptitude towards learning new things as they are introduced to her. For instance, she has only been here for a few days, but she has already mastered the Brahim language to such a degree that she should not have any trouble speaking it fluently and communicating with you without any problems. Her overall training might still be incomplete, but other than that, she should not be inferior to any of the other slaves offered in my shop in any way.」

Yeah, I think I might be onto something here. Normally Alan-san looks and talks like he is all confident, and perhaps just a little bit smug, but right now, he seems to be unusually... meek, or defensive, even. Could it be because of that one tidbit that he mentioned? The one about this Dwarven girl not completing her training as a slave just yet? Yes. Yes, that has to be it! He said that she has not been properly educated yet, and no matter how you look at it, that is obviously her biggest weak point!

When I came here to buy Roxanne, her price was so high because she was

already through with her training and she learned Brahim and proper etiquette so that she could serve any master who would have bought her properly. It was all so that her value as a commodity could increase, but it is not like that with that Dwarven girl. According to Alan-san she has only learned Brahim so far and the rest of the necessary skills has yet to be taught to her, and if it is like that, then it means that is a weakness that I can definitely exploit, since they have not finished fully increasing that girl's value just yet.

「I see. Thank you for giving me this warning. Still, if you do not mind, then I would definitely like you to show her to me anyway.」

「..... Certainly. Although I cannot say that she is someone whom I can present to my customers with my head held high just yet, you have shown incredible kindness to this shop and my business before, so I will gladly bring her to you, Michio-sama.」

Next, Alan-san left the room, saying tha he needed some time to prepare everything for me. Taking advantage of the fact that we have been left alone in the room, I took a glance at the cup with my herbal tea. Even though I clearly stated that my intentions in coming here today were not to sell Roxanne, that servant asshole did not bring the third cup for Roxanne, and while Alan-san was here I was too nervous to drink as much as a sip of it, but it would be a waste to let it go cold, so instead of me having it . . .

「Would you like to drink my tea for me, Roxanne? I do not know why, but for some reason I am still not used to drinking this.」

「Thank you very much, master.」

And so I gave my herbal tea to Roxanne. Haha, suck this, you slave-hating servant. You did not want Roxanne to drink this herbal tea? Well too bad, because now she was able to have a taste of it anyway! At least now I do not have to worry about this tea containing any kind of weird medicine or drugs in it like I was doing when I came to pick Roxanne up, because after that little Bandit raid incident, I think I have done more than enough to get on Alan-san's good side and succeeded in showing him that I do not have any ill intentions in regards to him or the business he is running. Thanks to that, we not only managed to secure ourselves a letter of recommendation for a slave

trading company in the Imperial City, but we also (probably) cemented our business partnership as the merchant and his customer, so I think that our visit here today can be describe as an all-out win-win for all parties involved.

「Roxanne, since that new Party member of ours would be fighting together with you in the vanguard position, are there any specific things or qualities you would like them to possess? Any suggestions or wishes at all?」

「Hmm. . . no, not really. I think that whatever master chooses to go with is going to be the best choice possible.」

Whatever I choose will be the best choice possible huh? The thing is, 「What I want」 is exactly why I am so troubled right now. Well, that was more or less the answer that I was expecting. Well since Roxanne herself said that she is going to leave that to me, I guess there is nothing to worry about, aside from if she is going to end up getting along with the girl that I will end up choosing. I got Roxanne because Alan-san assured me that she is going to be amazing and it turned out that he was right, so if we look at it from that perspective, the Dwarf girl should be amazing as well, even though her training is still incomplete. I just have to keep my mind open and judge her as she is without being prejudiced towards her.

I talked with Roxanne for a bit, and after a while, Alan-san came back to us.

「She is going to be here soon, but before that, I would like you to take a look at the male slaves first. Pardon me for suggesting this, but would you mind having your companion wait in the other room while I bring all of them here? I think that this is going to be the best thing to do safety-wise.」

Chapter 1: Sherry, Part 10

「You are right. This seems like the most sensible thing to do since we do not know what these guys might have done if they saw a girl as beautiful as Roxanne.」

「Uhm, master. . . I really think that it will not be necessary to. . . 」

「No, Roxanne. I have to agree with Alan-san here. Leaving you in one room with a bunch of guys who did not have any contact with a woman, especially one as beautiful and attractive as you is definitely not a good idea, so please, do me this kindness and wait in the next room until the male slaves are all gone, all right?」

「Understood, master. I will trust in your judgement.」

Okay, that's good. If she was to stay in here while the male slaves were brought in, then it was pretty much a given that all hell would have broken loose, especially if these guys have been here for a long time without any contact with the members of the opposite sex whatsoever. If they saw someone like Roxanne after such a long period of (at least I assume) sexual abstinence and probably not being in contact with women for such a long time, it might even be possible that they would try to rebel against Alan-san if only it meant that they could have a shot at pushing Roxanne down and having their way with her.

And just like that, after leaving Roxanne waiting in the guest room, I went after Alan-san upstairs to have a look at the male slaves he had available at the moment. After scaling the set of stairs onto the first floor, we entered one of the room that was the closest to the stairs. And there. . . .



Uhm. . . yeah, okay, I. . . oh my fucking god where do I even begin with this one?

When I entered the room, the sight before me could only be described as. . . overwhelming, to the point where even if I wanted to comment on what I just saw, the words did not want to leave my mouth no matter what. Just one glance at them was enough to fill my head with all sorts of questions that I wanted to ask Alan-san, but I do not know if he will not find some of them to be offensive. These guys are. . . they certainly look like all of them could fit into the vanguard position exceptionally well. But, the thing is. . .

They are all scary as fuck! I am literally, legitimately scared of all of them! Was Alan-san really expecting me to pick one of those? I mean, I probably would have chosen one of them, but only if I was desperate enough not to seek any potential alternatives, and let me tell you, I am not that desperate just yet! For the current me, picking someone from among them is utterly impossible. If I could, I would have respectfully declined and left the room right now, but I feel like I cannot do it out of fear that they are simply going to get killed by them if I so much as look at them the wrong way. . . but surely none of them would have risked that now, would they? No, with the owner by my side all this time, I am sure that none of them would have tried to do anything stupid. . . unless I am wrong of course and they would have jumped at the opportunity to kill us both the first chance they got? No, that should not be possible. Since they are slaves who belong to Alan-san's Slave Shop, or, in other words, they are Alan-san's slaves right now, they should be bound by the limitations of the master-slave contract, meaning that if they off him, then they will kick the bucket as well.

Man now I am really glad that I did not take Roxanne here with me. If she were to come inside this room together with us, this place would definitely turn into a bloodbath regardless of the master killing countermeasures protecting Alan-san. If that scenario came to pass, then I think I would have no choice but to defend myself with my sword. . . which I did not have on me right now, because what kind of idiot would be walking into a store with a weapon from the visit to the Labyrinth still on him, huh? A suspicious idiot, that is who, and I am definitely not someone like that. And even if I had it with me, there is no guarantee that I would have been able to brandish it in

time to actually defend myself.

No, the longer I stay here, the more I want to leave. I want nothing to do with those guys, I just want to get the fuck out of here and forget I was ever in there.

We were not the only people in the room. Other than Alan-san, myself and the male slaves, there were also guys who looked like bodyguards in the corners of the room, but to be honest, their presence did not do much to make me feel safer. They had the same look to them as the gangsters in all those detective movies, you know, the ones that would hang around dark alleys in the middle of the night just so that they could mug you from all your belongings and then just straight up shank you in the gut just for the hell of it? Yeah, that kind of gangsters. The way they looked at me was telling me one thing: they were ridiculing me for being here, wanting to buy slaves, but you know what? Perhaps they are right. I mean, if I really decided to take one of those guys as my slave, I am sure that I would have ended up dead or rebelled against after only a few days, because money is not the only thing you have to possess if you want to have your own slaves. You also need enough charisma to make them not want to murder you simply out of spite or because they do not like you.

Back when I was still in Japan I heard of the interviews where the interviewers were putting an unimaginable amount of pressure on the interviewees, but I never heard of the opposite thing ever happening, which was pretty ridiculous, because I am the customer here. I have come to this place looking to buy some slaves for myself and these guys were the possible candidates, and yet, not one of them looked like they gave half of a shit about it. I literally felt as if they, the examinees, were exerting pressure upon me, the examiner, to just leave them the hell alone. And believe me, that is what I wanted to do right now. Just get the hell out of there and be done with this hellish place.

A customer intimidated by the slaves into not wanting to buy them. I do not know how much strange shit has Alan-san saw throughout his career as the Slave Shop owner, but that has got to be a first for him.

「So, how was it? Did any of those fine men stroke your fancy?」

Alan-san asked me once we finally walked out of the room. I really wanted to tell him how I truly felt and exactly where he can stick such dumb questions. . . but now is definitely not the time for that. Just know that I would never decided to buy any of the men who were out there, not even in the midst of the biggest desperation.

Absolutely impossible. Not in a million years. But if he needs to hear an answer, then I might as well tell it to him in such a way:

「They all look incredibly promising. . . but I just do not think that someone like me could utilize the [people with such talents properly.]」

That is not me being humble by any chance. That is my honest to God opinion on the subject.

「If you would like to interview some of them individually, then that can certainly be arranged.」

Is what he says now. Thank you very much for your willingness to do something like that for me, but dude, that is not at all what I need right now. Since he is willing to go to such lengths just to help me make a purchase, then he definitely has to be a good person, or at the very least that is what I am willing to believe. Also, there might be some people who will definitely enjoy the company of such a. . . colorful crowd, but regrettably I do not count myself among the ranks of such people.

Chapter 1: Sherry, Part 11

Besides, it is not like consulting them all individually would have changed much. I just have a feeling that instead of feeling like an examiner who is being pressured by his examinees to leave the examination room so that they could all cheat away in peace, it would be a very different kind of pressure: the one similar to being invited to the office of a mob boss who then presents you with a group of his hitmen and asks you politely by which one of those you would like to be offed. Everything is nice and civil on paper, but in reality having to make such a choice is still scary as hell. And even if these guys did not look scary, there is another issue I would have to deal with: the issue of their compatibility with my own tactics and Roxanne in the vanguard. Ugh, this is turning into a real dilemma here! I know I said myself that I do not want any other guys in my Party besides me, but what if some of those beefcakes upstairs turned out to be a really great addition to have with us in the Labyrinths? Should I have just swallow my pride, close my eyes and choose someone from among them, taking one for the team? No, now that we have already went back downstairs it is already too late for that, so there is no point in thinking what could have been. I guess right now everything hinges on how the Dwarven girl is going to turn up, because if she also happens to be a no-go, then the future of my three-people Party that I have been dreaming of is going to look very bleak.

「Welcome back, master? How was it? Did any of the candidates looked promising to you?」

Roxanne greeted me with a smile and asked once we have come back to the guest room after that terrifying ordeal in the male slave's room upstairs. Ahh, after seeing those awful manly faces up there, the sight of her reminded me of a Goddess. . . no, I guess you could say that Roxanne is my Goddess, and there would be no exaggeration in me saying that, since she has always been saving me, in more ways than one. She is beautiful, she is kind, she always

listens to whatever I have to say without cutting in before I finish speaking, she is the most reliable help I could have ever asked for during our exploration of the Labyrinths, her boobs are big, she hugs onto me whenever we finish going at it before going to sleep, she wakes me up each day with deep kisses, her skin is soft and the list could go on and on and on without end, but for now, I think that my gratitude towards her can best be surmised with one, simple sentence.

「Roxanne.」

「Yes? What is it, master?」

「Thank you for always being here for me.」

「Y-Yes, of course, master.」

Roxanne did not seem to realize what I was thanking her for, but I do not care about that. What is really important here is the fact that I confirmed once and for all that I do not want male slaves in my Party at all. Ever.

「And about your question: choosing someone from among those male slaves would have been very difficult. . . for a variety of reasons.」

I threw my body on the sofa and then stroked Roxanne's doggy ears in order to calm myself down. For some reason, I felt very tired, but instead of a physical kind of exhaustion, it was more of a mental one. I guess being around those male slaves, even if it was for but a brief moment, must have done a real number on my fragile psyche, huh? But it does not matter anymore. Roxanne is back at my side, and her presence is all that I need in order to heal my wounded heart. And the softness of this sofa is a nice addition to that as well. Feeling better already, I took a sip of the herbal tea.

「Ah, master, that is. . .」

「Hmm? What is it, Roxanne? Is something wrong? Oh, did someone else drank from my teacup while I was away?」

「N-No, but. . .」

「Then there is no problem. Everything is exactly as it should be.」

As long as I am the only one drinking from the same cup as Roxanne, everything is a-okay.

Alan the Slave Merchant also returned back to the guest room a little while later.

「Just like you saw just now, those male slaves are the ones who would definitely be capable of holding on their own in the Labyrinth, making them a pretty good addition to the vanguard position, if I can say so myself.」

「Yes, I could definitely see that. By the way, can I ask about their price? Because we have yet to discuss that, if memory serves me correctly.」

「But of course. The value of the slaves who can be taken to the Labyrinths as Party members is naturally higher than that of the regular slaves. The cheaper ones usually cost up to one hundred and fifty thousand Nars, and the ones who are at their peak physical condition can go up to two hundred and fifty thousand Nars per slave.」

「Uh-huh, I see, I see.」

One hundred and fifty thousand to two hundred and fifty thousand for a male slave?! Is this guy for real? I would never pay so much for such criminal-looking mountains of muscle! And also, is it just me, or are slaves who are capable of being utilized as Party members in the Labyrinths are generally more expensive than the good-looking female ones? Should it not be the other way around? Well, I guess Roxanne is an exception to that rule, since she is both beautiful and can handle herself against the monsters of the Labyrinth thanks to her divine dodging abilities.

When it comes to the price of the slaves, I always thought that the price of the slaves meant purely for the physical labour should be determined by how hard they will work and how much they can earn, and in the case of female slaves, the price would be based on how good-looking they are, but I guess it is not all as simple as I thought it out to be.

As I was thinking about those things, I heard what sounded like a gentle knock on the room's door.

「Come in.」

Alan-san gave the order.

「Her preparations have been finished. She is ready to be presented to the customer.」

The one who walked through the door was an older lady who looked like she was one of the shop's employees. After she bowed respectfully to Alan-san, she looked at Roxanne and gave her a small nod of her head, and Roxanne also nodded back at her. Could it be that this is this older lady who was taking care of Roxanne while she was still living here, the same old lady whom Roxanne wanted to save from the Bandit attack?

「Go on then, bring her here.」

「As you wish, sir.」

When Alan-san gave the order, the older lady walked out through the door and brought another girl back with her. She was a short one, reaching only as high as the older lady's chest, so she must definitely still be a child. She is probably only around one hundred and fourty centimeters, perhaps even shorter.

「As per your request, Michio-sama. Here is the only Dwarf this Slave Shop has to offer.」

Now then, let me Identify her real quick. . .

Name: Sherry

Sex: Female

Age: 16 years old

Job: Explorer Lv.10

So her name is Sherry, huh? When I used Identify on her, it turned out that she is apparently sixteen years old, which would make her the same age as Roxanne. But she definitely does not look like a sixteen years old girl, which would basically make her a teenager. Maybe it is because of the specifics of the Dwarven race? But then again, even when it was written right there on the Identify screen that she is a Dwarf, I have to say that she looks totally unlike what I was expecting she could look like. To me, she looks just like a child, albeit a little bit more grown up (**TL Note: Oh yeah, let us see how much time it will take for his inner lolicon to start showing up, shall we?**) . If that is how young Dwarves look, then it might be entirely possible that I have seen more of them somewhere before, but I simply mistook them for regular children.

Chapter 1: Sherry, Part 12

Taking a closer look at her body, it does not appear to be all that muscular and sturdy, like you would have expected from a typical fantasy Dwarf. Rather, her body is like the opposite of that particular expectation. It is small, thin, and pretty-looking. For a moment there I even thought that my Identify might have committed an oopsie by stating that she was a Dwarf, because with how thin her ears are looking, I was ready to actually call her an Elf. I do not know what the standards of health and beauty are when it comes to Dwarves, but as far as I am concerned, it looks like this girl has the proportions that are pretty much accurate for a typical person of her height. But I do not mean it in an insulting way, as in trying to point out that she looks malnourished or underdeveloped for her age. She looks small and well-balanced in a positive sense of the word. She does not have all that much going on in the breasts department, but her overall style and figure are both good. Her hair is jet-black and fluffy, and her face gives off a pretty gentle impression, complimented by her lively, clear, big eyes and small, perky nose, finished by her mouth which is also small and somewhat tight-looking. I do not know why, but for some reason that specific type of beauty she is representing reminds me of Italian women. I do not know why I thought about them specifically, but that was literally the first thing that has popped into my head when I was trying to find something from my old world to compare her to. (**TL Note: Yeah? Then apologize to any Italian girls who might be reading this, or Italians in general!**) That is kinda strange, huh? Even though I am Japanese, which means that I should be primarily drawn towards a more Japanese-style of beauty, I still find an Italian style of beauty compelling and attractive. I wonder if it is like that for everyone or is it just my own peculiarity?

Anyway, all things considered, this Sherry girl can definitely be called a beautiful girl. Yes, that is right, even though she might look like a kid, a beautiful lady should still be called a beautiful lady regardless of the

circumstances. Now, if she manages to grow a bit more and takes a proper care of her hair, then I am sure that one day she will definitely be able to pass for a real celebrity lady. And while we are on the subject of her hair: they are thick and glossy all throughout her head, giving a slightly strange impression. They are also not long, reaching to about the length of her shoulders, and she has them tied to the sides at both left and right side of her head.

「Now then, Sherry. Come here and introduce yourself properly.」

Alan-san beacons the girl, who was standing at the door shyly, to come closer to us.

「Yes.」

She came over to us, stood upright and bowed her head respectfully. When she did that, the entire head of her black hair shook unnaturally, or rather it wobbled like a big pile of black pudding, as if it was trying to catch up to the rest, which was admittedly kind of cute in its own right, if only a tad bit disturbing.

「Good day to you, mister. My name is Sherry, a Dwarf and a Lv.10 Explorer. Thank you very much for considering me.」

When she finished her self-introduction, Sherry came closer to the Slave Merchant, who showed her with his hand to sit on the sofa in front of the one Roxanne and I were sitting on. Since she introduced herself as a Dwarf and an Explorer, there can be no doubt that these are her real race and Job, not that I needed that confirmation from her since I have my Identify Skill that essentially told me everything that I needed to know about her. I also confirmed that she is a very beautiful girl, but I cannot say that I feel as smitten with her like when I saw Roxanne for the first time when I came to this shop. I wonder why is that? Is it because I already have Roxanne with me? Or maybe because my mind sees this girl as a child and automatically switches itself into non-arousal mode whenever I look at her?

Now this is a dilemma. I wanted to create myself a harem of beautiful slave girls, but when I have someone as perfect as Roxanne, then should I really force myself to establish romantic relationships with other girls? But since

my relationship with Roxanne got to where it is now only after I have become her master, then maybe the same could happen with other girls as I added them to my Party/harem as the time goes on?

Then suddenly, I got reminded of how reality of the male-female relationships worked in my old world. Back there, the popular guys were actually the douchebags who always did everything in their power to ignore the girls who were clearly showing signs of being interested in them, and that cold shoulder treatment was exactly what was making those douches even more popular, because apparently all the girls love bad 「Bad Boys」 who do not care about them in the slightest, while the legitimately good guys who were trying to actively pursue the girls they liked and showed signs of being interested in them were almost always branded as creeps, perverts and degenerates, and due to those stigmas their already low popularity was getting even lower, plummeting straight into the negative zone. On the other hand, if two girls were into the same guy and they happened to get to know about each other. . . well, let me just say that in such a scenario all sorts of nasty things could happen, because if there is something women hate more than liars and cheating boyfriend sin this world, that is definitely other women who try to put their hands on something that belongs to them.

But. . . would something like that really happen if I started to see Sherry in a more romantic, less purely professional light? No, Roxanne is not someone who would cause harm to others over such a petty reason. . . or at least I think she is not. The again, you can never know for sure until things like that finally happen, so. . . urgh, damn it, all this thinging about this if's and maybe's is making my head hurt!

Okay, she is sitting right in front of me right now, so this is a good chance to have a proper look at her and reevaluate my initial impression of her. I can definitely say that this girl – Sherry – does not possess a typical sex appeal of a woman, but she is definitely a beautiful girl. Even though she appears to be the quiet and timid type, I can still tell what a nice girl she really is, especially after having my eyes brutally defiled by all of those male slaves in the room upstairs. It would not be an understatement to also say that she seems to possess some kind of mysterious charm to her.

I guess she is pretty enough in my book. Not the type of girl I am personally

into, but also definitely the one that I would not be embarrassed to be seen walking around in town. . . no! No Michio, stop this wicked train of thought at once! Why are you thinking about her in the categories of a girlfriend when you already have Roxanne who fulfills that role?! That is right, Roxanne is for the purpose of having fun with her during the night, while this girl would be focused primarily on the task of supporting Roxanne on the front lines during our expeditions into the Labyrinths. Of course, if a beautiful girl like Sherry did not have anything against it then that would have been an entirely different story. . . but let us not think about it, for now at least.

「Sherry, if you do not mind, would you answer a few of my questions?」

「Uhm. . . I, uhhhh . . .」

She looked at me, then at Alan-san, then once more at me and Alan-san, who nodded at her silently, communicating to her that it is fine for her to be talking with me.

「O-Okay, I will try to answer them to the best of my ability!」

「Great. Now, you mentioned that you are a Lv.10 Explorer, right? If that is the case, then does that mean that you do not have any problems with entering the Labyrinths?」

「Yes. And I will try to do my very best while inside!」

Chapter 1: Sherry, Part 13

「Oh really? Well, how nice of you to be so eager.」

I only asked her if she was comfortable with entering the Labyrinths as a kind of formality, but the level of eagerness she displayed with that one simple sentence has admittedly been quite admirable. There is no doubt that Roxanne and I will be able to hold our own against the monsters in there, but I wonder how Sherry herself is going to perform since she is only a Lv.10 Explorer, because when I look at her arms, which are currently placed on the table between us, they are pretty thin and unassuming. Also, even though she said that she id going to do her best, right now she had a pretty hesitant look on her face, as if she just remembered something unpleasant that she forgot to mention in the heat of the moment. So, are there some 「buts」 to her readiness to go to the Labyrinths, perhaps? Maybe she was only saying that she will eagerly go there to increase her own appeal in my eyes, but in reality she was scared after all?

「Uhm. . . 」

「Yes? What is it?」

「I, uhm. . . well. . . 」

Sherry was obviously gathering courage to tell me something, but just was not able to do it, so she looked back at Alan-san, as if she was waiting for him to encourage her. He simply closed his eyes and nodded quietly once again. She nodded back at him, took a few deep breathes, and. . .

「Mr. Costumer, the thing is. . . 」

「Go on, I am listening.」

「As I already said when I introduced myself, I am a Lv.10 Explorer.」

「That is right. And when I asked if you would be fine with going into the Labyrinths, you eagerly expressed your readiness to do so.」

Besides, I already knew that she was a Lv.10 Explorer from the appraisal I did on her with Identify.

「Right, I said that. But, you see. . . 」

Uh-huh, so there really is some kind of catch to it, huh? Well, might as well hear about it since she is willing to speak about it herself without any forceful prodding.

「Do you have some sort of problem with it?」

Maybe it is some kind of traumatic event from her past?

「It is just that. . . I was unable to become a Master Smith.」

Huh? Now that is curious.

「Before you continue, let me make sure that I understand what you said just now. You said that you were 「*unable to become a Master Smith*」? Why is that? Could you elaborate on that some more?」

「Yes, of course. Since Master Smith is a Job that is mutually exclusive to the Dwarven race, every Dwarf has a chance of obtaining that Job when they reach Lv.10 in the Explorer Job. However, not every Dwarf can have the aptitude to actually become one. Generally, it is believed that it can only happen to those Dwarves who are exceptionally talented at exploring the Labyrinths.」

So she does have a problem, and I think that I can more or less guess what is it going to be about, but I am going to ask her about it directly anyway.

「Hmm. . . so what you are trying to say is that you did not obtain the Job of a Master Smith when you acquired Lv.10 as an Explorer, is that right?」

「..... yes. That is right.」

Sherry's face darkened and she lowered it down when I guessed what was the reason of her being so troubled. A belief that if you are talented enough of a Dwarf, you can become a Master Smith when you reach Lv.10 as an Explorer, huh? What a curiously peculiar way of putting one of this world's game mechanics into words.

She is a Lv.10 Explorer, and yet she is not a Master Smith. In other words, something must have happened to prevent her from obtaining that Job when she reached the appropriate level for obtaining it, and that must have caused both her and everyone around her to deem her as not talented enough, resulting in her not having the Job of a Master Smith right now. But is that really a reason for thinking that you will not be able to do any good in the Labyrinths? Normally I would say that I do not mind it all that much, but since I came here explicitly because I wanted a Dwarven Master Smith to join my Party, this can prove to be quite a serious issue. . .

But is that really the case? Not being able to become a Master Smith because you do not have enough innate talent, I mean?

When I first came to this world, I was able to acquire the Job of a Thief almost instantly because I took some old, worn-out sandals from a barn where I have woken up, and shortly after I obtained the Job of a Hero by helping the villagers of Somara village deal with the Bandit attack which happened shortly after I left the barn. So, if someone like me could obtain Jobs in such random ways, then why would it be any different for anyone else? In the first place Master Smith already has a restriction placed upon it, the one that says that only Dwarves can become them, so adding another one to it, and the one saying that you also need to be talented at that, would be just plain stupid and unreasonable. Also, another issue that I see here, but it actually can be applied to my old world as well: how in the glaring hell do you measure talent?!

Maybe it is just that Master Smith has some other requirements for unlocking it other than simply reaching Lv.10 as an Explorer? Like maybe, well I do not know, having the value of your INT stat at eighty points or higher? No, that is probably not what this is about. Since she was able to talk about the Dwarves

and Master Smith Job in such a reasonably well-esteemed manner, I would hazard a guess that her INT stat must be pretty high. Then maybe it is about having your STR stat at eighty points or higher?

Whenever I use the Character Reset Bonus Skill in order to change my stat distribution, one Bonus Point can be used to increase the value of any given stat by one point, so theoretically the requirement of having a STR stat at eighty points or higher to unlock access to certain Jobs would not be all that far-fetched. For example, it would make more than enough sense if the conditions for unlocking the Master Smith Job were as follows: Have the STR stat of at least eighty points or higher and become a Lv.10 Explorer. But that is only my speculation, and nothing that has been firmly set in stone. Even if I wanted to ask Roxanne about it, it would not do me any good, since the inhabitants of this world do not know that Bonus Points even exist in the first place, and explaining to her that you can convert them to increase your stats would be too much work. But if my hypothesis turned out to be true after all, then it would serve as a nice explanation of Sherry's predicament, because if Dwarves really needed at least eighty points in the STR stat and a Lv.10 in the Job of an Explorer, then that would explain why they treated someone with STR below eighty as someone inferior and without innate talent.

I glanced at Sherry's face once more. It is definitely cute. It would be a real shame not to add someone as cute as her to my Party just because she does not have a Job that I am currently after. But if I were to nitpick a little bit, then I would have to say that her hair look like they are dirty, not to mention that the way she has them made is more than a little unappealing. She would definitely benefit from having them thoroughly washed and combed. Or maybe my impression of her is like that because Roxanne was practically perfect since the first moment the two of us met? From my first visit here, I always thought that she was too beautiful for her own good (even if back then I thought it was a trap that Alan-san set for me, but let us not talk about that anymore).

But you know, now that I think about it, it is a given that I would see the difference in the level of hygiene between Roxanne and Sherry.

Chapter 1: Sherry, Part 14

After all, ever since Roxanne became my slave, we wiped each other's bodies with wet warm towels, and recently we even began to take regular baths, now with the addition of soap! So if Roxanne was able to become such a beauty simply by taking proper care of her hygiene, just imagine what kind of cutie Sherry would become if the same could be done for her! But that is the talk for the possible future. Let me get back to the matter at hand for the time being.

「Would you mind if I asked you something in regards to that problem of yours?」

「N-No, not at all. Please, go ahead.」

「Then, why is it that you supposedly cannot become a Master Smith after you reach Lv.10 as Explorer? Is it absolutely impossible for you to acquire this Job now that you have already reached that level without obtaining it beforehand?」

If she knew that there are other ways of obtaining Jobs other than possessing the innate talent to do so, she would definitely not be so depressed about not being talented enough.

「In order to join the Master Smith's Guild you have to obtain the Master Smith Job before reaching Lv.10 as Explorer, otherwise you will not get accepted, but it is not like there are no precedents of allowing Job Changes past that point.」

That is what she said.

「I see.」

It is just as I have suspected. There must be another condition to unlock the Job of a Master Smith. It really would have been strange if something as vague as 「talent」 would be a legitimate requirement for unlocking a Job, so instead, the word talent is probably used in place of some obscure, unknown condition that has to be fulfilled, but if I could just figure out what that condition is, it should be possible to enable Sherry to become a Master Smith.

Of course, after thinking about it some more, that other requirement has to be something different than simply having eighty points put into STR, because that would have been too obvious and pretty much every Dwarf would be able to become Master Smith and we would not be in need of having this discussion and all this thinking. If I were to hazard a wild guess, then I would say that the conditions for unlocking the Job of a Master Smith are a little bit stricter than that, but even despite that, even if Sherry does not have it at this point, she should be able to get her hands on the Master Smith Job as long as she would be able to meet the mysterious other requirement. Of course, there is always a possibility that she will not be able to get it even if we do discover what that requirement is and she manages to fulfill it, so the question that I need to ask myself now is: how probable that possibility is? Should I estimate that an attempt at getting it will end in failure, or will it be a striking success?

Let me see: first thing's first, buying a Dwarven Master Smith slave is a very difficult endeavor, and the one in which Identify will not do me any good, since it is practically impossible to determine if a slave was a Master Smith or not, and there is also a risk of someone pretending to be a Master Smith while in reality they are not.

However, if I end up buying Sherry and she does not end up obtaining the Master Smith Job, it is going to be fine as well, because we will still fulfill our initial objective: obtaining another Party member who will fight alongside us in the Labyrinths, so this is the amount of potential risk that I am more than willing to take. If that would come to pass, she would fight together with Roxanne in the vanguard while I would have focused on using magic from the safety of the back row, and outside of the Labyrinths I would have her help with household chores if she could not do smithing. Besides, I cannot quite put my finger on it, but Sherry seems to have that unique appeal to her that makes me think that it would be a huge waste to allow her to pass

us by simply because she does not have a Job that I was searching for.

Initially I thought that maybe the requirements for unlocking the Master Smith Job will be to attain Lv.10 as an Explorer and have your STR stat at eighty points or higher, but maybe it is actually that you have to get those eighty points of STR specifically before reaching Lv.10 as an Explorer. If that was to be the case, then no matter how strong you got afterwards, i.e no matter how many points you would invest in increasing the value of your STR stat, you would never be able to become a Master Smith no matter how hard you tried. Looking at it from such an angle, I guess it could be argued that talent does play a role here: talent to get your STR stat to a desired value before reaching the threshold of the natural barrier that is reaching Lv.10 as an Explorer. But if all of that proved to be a wrong assumption and STR stat does not have anything to do with becoming a Master Smith, then there was still hope left for Sherry, even though she already reached Lv.10 as an explorer.

「Uhm, I know that it will probably not mean much, but back in my village, before I was made to be a slave, I was one of its strongest inhabitants! In terms of comparing myself to the other Dwarves, I also think that both my strength and height can be said to be well above average! I am also willing to enter the Labyrinths with you to earn money for my own upkeep, and I swear I will never do anything that would hinder your actions, Mr. Customer! So once again, thank you sincerely for considering me!」

Sherry bowed her head deeply before me. It was a touching gesture, but a part of me began to think that perhaps she was trying a little bit too hard to appeal to me. Is she doing that of her own accord, or perhaps she was commanded to do so by Alan-san? Either way, I began to feel suspicious, because no matter how you would look at it, it is quite unusual for a slave to be promoting herself like that to a potential customer.

My suspicions must have been written all over my face, because when Alan-san looked at me, he cleared his throat with an *Ekhem!* sound and said:

「Michio-sama, would you like to have a moment for yourself so that you could make your decision regarding Sherry's purchase?」

Yeah, he definitely read the subtle reactions from my face and tried to urge me to make a decision as fast as possible.

「Sure, why not?」

「Well then. . .」

When I expressed my willingness to consider whether to buy Sherry or not, Alan-san nodded at me, placed his hand on Sherry's shoulder and escorted her out of the room, leaving me alone with Roxanne so we could talk about what we would like to do next.

「*Sigh* You know what, Roxanne? I just do not understand why this Sherry girl was so proactive. . . no, proactive does not even begin to describe it. It would be way better to say that she was really aggressive in her attempts to try and appeal to me. I really do not get it.」

Now that there was just the two of us here, I could finally allow myself to talk openly without being careful with literally each and every word that would be leaving my mouth. What I meant by what I said to Roxanne was that I cannot understand why would Sherry go to such lengths to get on my good side, when all the other slaves offered by this shop displayed attitudes towards me that were vastly different from hers. The other female slaves from the time of my first visit here had a straight up bad attitude towards me or appeared to be utterly disinterested in my person, and the male ones from my trip upstairs today. . . well, I would not say that their attitude was bad, more like they did not have any attitude at all, just standing there all menacingly without saying as much as a word, and those criminal mug of their certainly did not help them to advertise themselves in any positive way.

If I was a kid in Sherry's position, I definitely would have done everything I could to improve my situation, so maybe she was doing it for exactly that reason?

Chapter 1: Sherry, Part 15

But even with all that said, that still does not make it clear to me why she would be so aggressive in her attempts to convince me to buy her.

「Master, if I may add something, then I would say that she probably did that because she thought that the conditions were favorable.」

「Conditions were. . . favorable? I do not know about you, but if someone were to approach me and said that they are going to be diving head first into the danger-filled places like the Labyrinths and then asked me to join them in that endeavor, it would have had the opposite effect on me.」

That is definitely not something that I would have been thrilled or overjoyed about.

「Obviously, that would normally be the case, but I think that it is precisely because she learned that we are going into the Labyrinths that she has been putting so much effort into promoting herself to us as a reliable companion.」

If that is indeed the case with her then I can say that I can definitely sympathize with her. When I first arrived in this world, the only way for me to make money as a total rookie was to either go to the Labyrinths, hunt monsters in there and sell the money obtained from their Drop Items. Ahh, those were the days that I do not remember all that fondly. Also. Depending on the person, they are going to perceive the degree of danger differently. Some may consider going to the Labyrinth by yourself to be the peak of danger, while some may consider going through it while taking orders from a leader they deem as incompetent to be infinitely more hazardous to their well-being.

「So if this girl was going through such lengths just to make sure that you

would buy her, master, then I think it is safe to say that she has been looking for someone like you from the start. Incidentally, that was my goal as well.]

Is that so? Because I think this is actually the first time when she talked about it so openly. So Roxanne back then and Sherry right now have at least one thing that they have in common: meeting me was like killing two birds with one stone to them, and frankly, knowing that I was the one whom they found the most suitable for their needs made me feel good about myself.

「Ah, of course, if master ever decides that you no longer feel the need for us to be going into the Labyrinths, then please allow me to continue loyally serving you by your side.]

As expected of Roxanne. So reliable, regardless of circumstances.

「Okay, so, time for the real talk now. Roxanne, from your perspective, does that Dwarven girl look like she is promising? Or is she only going to slow us down?」

I asked for her honest opinion. Since Alan-san was oh so nice to give Roxanne and I the time to consult each other on our opinion on Sherry without anyone else disturbing us, might as well milk that opportunity for all that it is worth. Now that he is not here we do not have to watch ourselves, so me can exchange our true, unbiased opinions, and there is nothing that he can do to influence that in any way, even if we ultimately decide not to buy Sherry.

「Well, let me think for a moment. . . I do not know all that much about Dwarves, but even though she claimed to have no talent whatsoever, then as long as she will be willing to work hard and improve and put in some actual effort, then I think I would be able to train her into a truly formidable ally in no time!」

「I-I see. . . that. . . that is good to hear.]

Although the way Roxanne got fired up thinking about whipping Sherry into a proper fighting shape does look a little bit scary. If it does end up happening, I hope she will not be putting her through any kind of hellish

training regiments. Also, her eagerness to help her learn the ropes of being a vanguard fighter sets my heart at ease for a wholly different reason: it looks like, for now at least, Roxanne does not have anything against our newest Party member being another girl (maybe because she does not see her as a rival due to how childish she looks because of her height?), so at the very least I can rest assured when I comes to that particular matter.

「Also. . . and forgive me if it sounds wicked, master, but while I do not think that in her current state she will not be able to play any kind of active role in our Party for quite some time, her price should be sufficiently low because of that, and just that fact alone should make her purchase a pretty decent choice.」

Oh? Well well well, would you look at that. I was somewhat worried that I was the only one here who was having wicked, materialistic thoughts, but apparently it was not like that at all.

「Eh? 「She will not be able to play any kind of active role in our Party」? What do you mean by that? I thought that since she is the same age as you, Roxanne, so I thought that this would be a good sign.」

「Normally that would be the case, but looking at her ears told me that she must be getting on in years, so before you make the final decision on whether to buy her or not, you would be wise to confirm her actual age, master.」

「Huh?」

Confirm her age? But at the moment when I used Identify on her earlier, it clearly showed that Sherry was sixteen years old, just like Roxanne, so by all accounts and purposes that should make her a very young person. So what was Roxanne trying to say by that? Does she mean that Dwarves have a generally short lifespan so I should take that under advisement?

「The ears of Dwarves are pretty thick from the moment they are born and they gradually get thinner as they age. To that note, I noticed that her ears are already pretty thin.」

「I see.」

Roxanne explained to me as I was twisting my head to the side in wonder. Come to think of it, Dwarves tend to be described like that in some works of fiction, are they not? Not to mention that it was actually Alan-san who explained to me that different races have different aging processes and thresholds, so for Dwarves it must be shown through the thinness and thickness of their ears. If it is like that here as well, then maybe I could just 「casually」 remark that she looks older than she really is and see how the slave merchant is going to react to that.

And speaking of the Slave Merchant, as soon as we finished talking, he returned to the room together with Sherry and the old lady who brought her here before. I do not know if it is just me, but his timing in doing so seemed too perfect to be coincidental. Was he somehow able to tell that the situation was turning bad for him? Or maybe he was actually eavesdropping on us the entire time?

When Roxanne saw the old lady, her face immediately brightened up and she started to wag her tail happily. She then turned towards me and asked:

「Master, would it be all right for me to leave my seat for a moment? That lady over there is the one that was taking care of me while I was here, so I would love to talk with her and thank her for everything she has done for me.」

「Sure, go right ahead and have a nice, long chat.」

「Yes! I definitely will!」

Roxanne bowed to me and then to Alan-san, and then she left the room together with the old lady. Alan-san sat on the sofa in front of me, waited until the door to the room closes with a silent click, and when he was sure the we were the only ones left in the room, he leaned forward and asked:

「So, how was the Dwarven girl? What to you think of her?」

「Well. . . she definitely was not bad, but I guess it will all depend on the price. Also, could you tell me how old Sherry is? Because even though she said so herself, I would still like to hear it from you.」

「I see. Very well, as you wish.」

Even if Alan-san was displeased with the current situation, he did not allow it to show on his face.

Chapter 1: Sherry, Part 16

「Sherry is a sixteen years old Dwarf who failed to become a Master Smith, but she has agreed to become a sex slave. Moreover, she is still a virgin, so there will be no risk of you catching any disease from her in the event that you decide to buy her.」

Now that Roxanne has left her seat, he can finally speak freely about such things, huh? Or maybe it is actually the other way around, and he arranged for the old lady to come here with him precisely because he wanted to use her as bait in order to draw Roxanne out of the room so that we could talk about those definitely sensitive topics? Well I will be damned, I really was not the only one having wicked thoughts after all! Moreover, it would seem that everyone else around me thought about them much more than I actually did!

「I see.」

「Michio-sama, with all due respect, I could not help but notice that you seem to be unaware of the peculiarities of other races, so allow me to give you a helping hand by explaining one of them related to the Dwarves, since that seems to be one of your greatest concerns in regards to Sherry's purchase. Although it is true that in Dwarven culture the thinning of their ears is associated with the process of aging, I assure you that there is no need for you to be concerned about that in Sherry's case. For you see, she is something of a peculiarity even among her own kinsmen, because she was already born with her ears this thin.」

Yep, this guy definitely overheard my conversation with Roxanne and that is why he is doing his best to sweep all of my concerns aside. Now, the question is how much of it is actually true, and how much of it is just lip service aimed at getting the negotiation back to the course that is more favorable for him.

「Michio-sama, since you are so concerned about Sherry's price, then if I were in your place I would have considered here a real bargain, since that curious feature of hers actually lowers her overall price for a bit.」

Then maybe it was actually good thing that he was listening in on our conversation? Because without that, I am sure that he would have definitely tried to set the price for her to be as high as possible. Man am I glad that I managed to buy Roxanne at a real bargain price, although it was the one that required the most legwork out of me when I was still not all that well versed in how this world and its Labyrinths worked.

「Let me get this straight, just to make sure that I understand it correctly: you are willing to lower Sherry's price even though no member of the races other than Dwarves would ever be concerned about such a minor detail like the shape of her ears?」

「Actually, it is the other way around: I am doing that exactly because for the members of other races, the shape of a Dwarf's ears is the only way to determine how old they are.」

「Hmm. . . I guess that makes sense.」

That argument was pretty understandable, since I could definitely agree that if I am to pay a large sum of money for a slave, then naturally I would prefer them to be a young, pretty gal and not someone who would just randomly keeled over and died from old age one day without any prior warnings. I mean seriously, if you are getting yourself slaves, what is even the point of them being old? They younger they are, the better. That way they could serve you for much longer, both with the household chores and in bed.

「Another point that might be of importance to you is the fact that since Sherry is a first-year slave, then the taxes that you will have to pay for her will be that much lower.」

「A first year slave? What is that?」

That is the first time I have ever heard such a term being used, so I asked Alan-san for an explanation.

「Usually masters, the people who own their own slaves, are required to pay ten thousand Nars per year for each slave that they own, while on the other hand, ordinary citizens living in regular households are taxed with thirty thousand Nars per year. If that difference could have been taken advantage of, then people surely would use it to commit tax evasion without a second thought. So, because of that those who are in their first year of serving as a slave after they lost their freedom are required to pay the same amount of tax money as the ordinary citizens, and Sherry's first-year tax has yet to be paid.」

So the amount of money you have to pay is thirty thousand Nars per year for the common citizens and ten thousand Nars per year for slaves, huh? Yeah, I can totally see that system being abused for the purposes of tax evasion, just like Alan-san said. When you become a slave the tax you have to pay is ten thousand Nars instead of thirty thousand Nars, so if you become a slave and then buy your freedom back soon after the taxation period ends, you will technically emerge from that situation twenty thousand Nars richer. So in order to prevent such system abuses from happening, it has been decreed that a slave who is in his or hers first year of servitude as a slave has to pay as much money as the ordinary citizen, thirty thousand Nars. I am technically classified as a Freeman who has to pay one hundred thousand Nars in tax per year for myself, so if I tried to use that trick, I could potentially save up to a whooping seventy thousand Nars in tax. However, as tempting as that method seems to be, there is one potential drawback that might hinder me from trying to go through with it: once I made myself into a slave, I might not be able to go back to being a Freeman, and that is something that I would rather not risk.

Incidentally, what was Roxanne's tax? She mentioned that she was sold into slavery by her relatives who could not afford to pay her share of the taxes, so when I was buying Roxanne, it must have been not her first year as a slave. In that case, maybe her tax was already included in the price that I had to pay for buying her?

「I understand.」

「I am glad to hear it. Now, because of Sherry's ears, unfortunately I am unable to sell her for the price that she is really worth. Normally, I would have charge about three hundred thousand Nars for someone like her, but

there is also a matter of the fact that it has not been all that long since we have started her training, so in light of that, what would you say for a price of two hundred seventy thousand Nars for her?」

And there it is: the price that Alan-san offered me for buying Sherry. It is already much better than what I had to pay for acquiring Roxanne, but it was still a bit high because he was trying to sell not a man, but a beautiful girl who is also a virgin. In Roxanne's case I was pretty desperate due to my circumstances at the time, but right now I am not all that desperate, so I think that in this particular case I might allow myself to be just a little bit greedy.

「Hmm. . . that price seems like it is still a little bit high. If possible, could you lower it just a bit more?」

「Then how about two hundred and sixty. . . no, two hundred and fifty Nars? That is already a very fair price, and as much as I can lower it to still call this transaction a profitable one.」

Two hundred and fifty thousand Nars, huh? That is a nice drop indeed, but let us see if we can get him to drop it down just a little bit lower.

「So much, huh?」

「Yes, that is my final offer.」

Okay, now that he has said that, pushing for any more of a discount will probably be pretty unreasonable. . . is what I would have said if it was not for the final ace up my sleeve!

「If I may add something, I remember that when I was buying Roxanne, she came with a set of clothes included. If the same could be done with Sherry here, then what would the final price for her purchase be?」

Chapter 1: Sherry, Part 17

「The clothes that that girl was wearing when you bought her? Ahh, you mean those clothes! That was an outfit that was supposed to be an imitation of the maid uniforms worn by the female servants working in the imperial palace in the Imperial City, and they are a very popular product, if I do say so myself. Most of the customers who decide to buy it always claim to be very pleased with it.」

It seems that the maid outfit that Roxanne was wearing has been designed after the ones worn by real maids, but it seems that it is mostly used for the purpose of cosplay rather than doing any kind of actual housework in it. I wonder if the nobles also have them or is it strictly reserved for the royal family at the Imperial Palace?

「So it is something like that, huh?」

「If you want the same outfit for Sherry, then I can include it for another four thousand Nars.」

「All right, that is fine with me.」

「Thank you for your purchase. As a special service for purchasing both Sherry and clothes for her, the total price is going to be 177,800 Nars.」

Since I bought more than one “item” the thirty percent discount worked nicely. I am so glad that I decided to keep it on before coming here. With that, I can definitely say that the negotiations have been successfully completed.

「Here you go.」

「Thank you very much. Doing business with you is always a pleasure.」

I handed 14 gold coins and 378 silver coins, the payment for Sherry, away to Alan-san. It is good that I managed to lower Sherry's price so much, because if I had to pay any more for her it would be really bad for my wallet, especially since we will have to buy equipment for her as well. When Alan-san finished counting the money, he ordered his servant to take it away at about the same time when Roxanne came back to the room.

「What did you decide about Sherry's purchase, master?」

「That she will be coming with us after all.」

「Oh, is that so? That's good.」

Is it just my imagination, or did Roxanne's face look like it got very dark and cloudy for a moment there? Am I simply seeing things because of my inner guilt at buying another girl for myself even though I already have someone as perfect as Roxanne? Or maybe it is because of my selfish desire for her to be a little bit jealous of the new slave? Well, maybe her dim face was really nothing more than my imagination playing tricks on me, because she was still wearing the same welcoming smile on her face that she always has.

Besides, it was Roxanne who said that we should buy her in the first place, so there is no point getting salty about it now, is there?

At least that is what I thought, but maybe she was just being considerate of our needs while being opposed to the idea herself? But wouldn't showing a bad attitude now that everything was said and done counterproductive? As long as we want to continue to enter the Labyrinths, it is absolutely necessary for us to enhance the strength of our Party, and for that, we are going to need more members. Also, there is something I have to say right now, just to avoid turning that matter into a potential problem later.

「I am terribly sorry to be pushing so much on your shoulders, Roxanne, but as her senior, would you mind looking after her and showing her the ropes on how we do things?」

「Yes! Please leave it to me, my master!」

Roxanne replied with a genuine smile on her face. Could it be a reaction to her being a senior who will have her very own junior? Whatever the case may be, I am glad that I convinced her to allow Sherry to become a part of my Party. Even after the discount, I still paid a lot of money for her, so it would be bad if she and Roxanne did not get along with each other.

「I'm sorry to have kept you waiting, Michio-sama. Sherry, go over to Michio-sama's side.」

The servant who went out with the money returned to the room, and he also brought Sherry with him. She timidly placed her hands in front of her and bowed her head to me.

「Thank you for purchasing me. I will be in your care from now on, so please take care of me.」

「Right back at you. Please take care of me too.」

「I'm Roxanne, Master Michio's **Number One Slave**. Let's get along with each other, shall we?」

It seems that Roxanne has climbed to the position of the Number One Slave before I even realized it. Or maybe she's calling herself that because she was the first slave that I ever bought? Yeah, that has to be it. In that case, she really is my Number One Slave.

「So you were Mr. Michio's slave after all? Because my initial impression was that you were his pretty young wife.」

Sherry was surprised at Roxanne's remark.

「His young wife?! N-No, not at all!」

Roxanne, you do not have to deny it so harshly like that. That hurts me pretty much, you know?

「I heard that you were also a slave here until not too long ago, but because you have such nice clothes and the color and luster of your hair and skin are so beautiful. . .」

「That is because master is a kind and wonderful person. Sherry, now that you are with us, you will never have to worry about food, clothing and shelter ever again.」

Then, Alan-san came to our side and said:

「We will finalize the contract making procedure now. Your Intelligence Cards, If I may. Also, Michio-sama, confirm Sherry's age for yourself if you wish.」

Sherry and I both lifted our left hands and summoned our Intelligence Cards, and the Slave Merchant began chanting and moving his hands over them. HE wants me to confirm for myself that despite having thin ears she is still young, huh? How shrewd of him. Alright, let's see what we have here:

Sherry

First-year Slave

Race: Dwarf

Sex: Female

Age: 16 years old

Owner: Kaga Michio

Job: Explorer Lv.10

Identify has already revealed that she is 16 years old, so I am not worried about her age in the slightest. Also, her ears are thin, but I do not give a damn about that. Rather, I am thankful for them being like that, because they made her so affordable to buy.

When I checked my own Intelligence Card I also saw that the amount of Slaves under the Owned Slaves tab now had Sherry added as well as Roxanne, meaning that it was now official that I have truly bought her.

I wondered if there was an upper limit on the number of slaves that I could own, but it looks like that info will always be shown on my Intelligence Cards no matter how many of them there will be, so I probably do not have to worry about that. Not now, at least.

「Okay, I am done confirming.」

「Good. Now, the clothes will take time to make. Please come to pick them up in ten days from now.」

After that, I was told the same things that I was told when I bought Roxanne.

Now that all the formalities were completed, the three of us left the Slave Shop. When we got out, I had Sherry join our Party so that I could take a look at all of her Jobs.

Explorer Lv.10, Villager Lv.3, Herbalist Lv.1

As I thought, she really did not unlock the Master Smith Job. Maybe it's because she has to reach Villager Lv.5, just like it was with Warrior, Swordsman and Merchant? Also, it is pretty admirable that she does not have Thief among her available Jobs.

Sherry has nothing but tunic and a pair of trousers. And since Roxanne also had only those clothes when I bought her, I wonder if this is a standard getup that Slave Shops give to the slaves who were bought by the clients?

「Let's stop by the Explorers Guild for a bit.」

「Understood.」

「R-Roger!」

On the way home, we stopped by the Vale Explorers Guild so that I could buy a Black Magic Crystal. I also bought it in the morning at the Quratar Explorers Guild and used it in Vale's Labyrinth instead of the Yellow Magic Crystal. If I knew I would be buying it again today, I would have bought two in the morning to save time. After all, after fusing the Black Magic Crystal that I found, I have not been able to find any more Magic Crystals in the

Labyrinth. I should have left it in my inventory, but my poor judgement got the better of me again.

「When we're done there, we will go straight to the Adventurer's Guild and return home.」

「Understood.」

「Huh? O-Okay. . . 」

It felt like Sherry was shocked a little but she still followed closely behind us.

「What's wrong, Sherry?」

「Uhm, Miss Roxanne?. Is there a fourth member of your Party who is an Adventurer, by any chance?」

「No, there isn't why do you ask?」

「Because of how master said that we will be going home.」

Following behind me, Roxanne and Sherry were already having a conversation.

It is the Adventurer's Skill, Field Walker, that allows Adventurers to teleport pretty much anywhere through the portal placed on the wall. Sherry also saw my Intelligence Card, so she knows I have Explorer set as my main Job. Did she think it was strange?

「Do not worry. Just follow us and you will understand everything soon enough.」

Roxanne chose to skip the explanation, despite Sherry's need for one. Is it because I told her to keep it a secret?

「Eh? Uhm. . . what?」

Sure enough, Sherry looked very confused when I put out the black portal of the Warp on the wall of Vale's Adventurer's Guild. I hope she likes surprises,

because there will be more of them coming her way soon enough.

Chapter 2: Intellectual Faction, Part 1

『Roxanne』

『Current Character Levels & Equipment』:

Jobs:

Beast Warrior Lv. 21

Equipment:

Scimitar

Leather Helmet

Leather Armor

Leather Gloves

Sandals

「All right, everyone ready? Roxanne?」

「Yes, master!」

「Sherry?」

「Y-Yes!」

「Good, let us go back home then.」

I did not want to stay in the Adventurer's Guild's building for too long to avoid attracting unnecessary attention to my newly-formed three-man Party, so I decided that it would be best for us to go back home right away without any needless dilly-dallying. While acting as natural as possible, I murmured the "incantation" for the "Fieldwalker" spell and created Warp's black portal on the wall and walked through it, emerging in the living room of our house in Quratar on the other side. Then after a few seconds, the one who emerged first was Sherry, who was looking even more confused than before, and the last one was Roxanne, who must have gently pushed her forward from the back. Well, given her situation as the new slave who does not know what she should expect from us, I guess it is perfectly natural for her to react in such a way. I know that letting her experience the Warp sensation empirically instead of explaining it all in details to her first because that would take too much time, but even so, maybe we should give her at least some kind of warning beforehand?

「Eh? Eeh? EEEhhhh?!!!」

Yup, looking at her and seeing how she is just looking around while being all bewildered, letting her know that we were going to use a Skill to teleport would have been a good idea, but for now I will refrain from dumping the explanations on her all at once, and offer them to her one at a time whenever it will be necessary.

「This is our home in the town of Quratar, which we are currently renting. For the time being, let us just sit down so that we can talk about what we should do next, okay?」

「Y-Yes, of course!」

「I think the first order of business would be to go and buy any daily necessities that Sherry might need, and maybe do some minor shopping for other things if we will have any time left after that.」

Roxanne and I were sitting at the table in the dining room, while Sherry continued to stand while keeping herself behind and slightly off to Roxanne's side.

「Yes, I do not think that shopping for things for Sherry is going to take all that long, so we can definitely do that once we are done.」

I cannot say that the presence of another person made things uncomfortable. . but it will definitely require some getting used to. Up until now, there were only the two of us here, so the chair in front of me at the other side of the table always belonged to Roxanne so that we could sit face to face whenever we were having a meal. Both of us sit in the middle of the table, which is wide enough for six people to be sitting there at one time, three people on each side. I have made sure to choose such a table specifically because one Party can have up to six Party Members, and since I plan on having that many slaves one day, I thought that it was going to be a good long-term investment.

「Well, it better not take long, because I still want to take a bath afterwards, so I will be depending on you to help me fill it again.」

This will also be a good occasion to see if our bath is going to be enough for more than two people, because if it turns out that it will not be enough, then we will have to order a new one to be made as soon as possible.

「Yes, of course. I am looking forward to it as well.」

I am glad that she ended up liking baths as much as I do, because now, even if the entire day ends up being draining and tiresome, we are at least going to have something to look forward to in the evenings.

Roxanne showed me a big smile and laughed. Dear God, her doggy ears are shaking in such a cute way whenever she is laughing. The only downside to it is that even if I wanted to pet her cute ears right now, I would not be able to do it because the table's surface effectively separates us from one another, making it impossible for me to reach to the other side without pancaking myself on the table itself.

「Uhm. master?」

「Yes? What is it, Sherry?」

「I know it might be rude of me to ask about such a thing, but. . . . could it be that you are capable of using multiple Jobs? Because if so, then that would be all sorts of amazing (**TL Note: Sherry, not you too!**) since I only heard of such abilities in myths and legends.」

Sherry asked me with a troubled look on her face. Oh my, how perceptive of her. Who would have thought that she will be able to deduce that much with only a small hint that I have unintentionally given her? She might be even smarter than she looks like. If she was able to figure that much out, than it is no surprise that she inquired about me having multiple Jobs, since Field Walker, a Spell that allows the user to travel whenever they want to in the world as long as they have been there before and have enough mana to do so, is a Spell that can be used only when you unlocked Adventurer as a Job, and I am not at that point in my dungeon-crawling career in this world just yet. Not to mention that in my Intelligence Card it is stated that my Job is an Explorer, so she must have add two plus two and concluded that since I am supposed to be an Explorer but am also capable of using “Field Walker”, then I have to be able to use multiple Jobs. Also, myths and legends, huh? This might be a topic worth investigating, but let us put that aside for now.

「Regretably, I do not have the Job of an Adventurer yet. What I used just now was a Movement Magic called Warp.」

「Movement Magic. Warp?」

「Yes, Movement Magic, Warp.」

Sherry parroted what I just said as if she could not believe it, so I repeated it for her.

「Is it really just Movement Magic? Not Space-Time Magic?」

「Space-Time Magic? No, I am pretty sure that Warp is just Movement Magic.」

I do not know where Sherry got the idea with the Space-Time Magic from, but in my Bonus Skills Menu, Warp was definitely classified as Movement Magic. If it was truly a Space-Time Magic, then I think it would make it

possible to operate and travel within all four dimensions of existence in accordance with the law of Lawrence's Transformation (TL Note: In physics, the Lorentz transformation or Lorentz-Fitzgerald transformation describes how, according to the theory of spacial relativity, different measurements of space and time by two observers can be converted into the measurements observed in either frame of reference. It is named after the Dutch physicist Hendrik Lorentz. It reflects the fact that observers moving at different velocities may measure different distances, elapsed times, and even different orderings of events.), but is Warp really capable of something like that? And if so, would it not mean that its classification as simply Movement Magic is wrong, and it really should be placed under Space-Time Magic category?

「Uhm, I can see that master looks confused, so allow to explain what I wanted to say in more detail. That fact is not all that well-known, but when you use Field Walker, not only space, but also time changes while you are using it. That is why Field Walker is classified as Space-Time Magic.」

「Are you talking about the time difference?」

「I do not know what a time difference is, but sometimes it is that when the origin point of Field Walker has been established in the morning and the one using it arrived at their destination in the evening, or in the dead of the night, meaning that Field Walker is a type of magic that not only moves its user through space, but also advances the time when used. Hence, Space-Time Magic.」

So, she was talking about the time difference after all.

Chapter 2: Intellectual Faction, Part 2

If you go to the same place every time, the time will shift by the same amount, so it seems to be understandable, but it does not seem like this restriction applies to Warp at all, same as how it can be used even in the houses that are made out of Shield Cement, which blocks the usage of Field Walker for some reason.

「I see. Well, for the time being, do not just stand there, come and sit at the bale with us.」

「Sit down with you? You mean, like. . . Uhm, Miss Roxanne? Should I sit on the floor?」

Initially Sherry wanted to direct that question at me, but halfway through she changed her mind and asked Roxanne about that in a whisper that I could still hear perfectly due to how close to each other we were sitting.

「No, Sherry, you do not have to do that. It is okay for you to sit on a chair at the table with us, just like master said.」

「On a chair? But. but I am a slave, so I do not think that this would be appropriate. . . 」

「It is okay. Whenever we are having meals, master likes it best when we all sit at the table and eat together.」

「Ehhh?! So I am allowed to eat the same things that master eats?」

「Yes, because that is master's wish.」

Again, even though you are whispering, you girls do realize that I can hear you, right?

「Uhm. . . well then. . . pardon me.」

Sherry bowed her head down to us, and then she took a chair that was next to Roxanne, pulled it back and sat on it, albeit still somewhat reluctantly. Well, I cannot say that I blame her, but the important thing is that she is finally willing to properly sit with us instead of insisting on sitting on the floor as if she was some kind of a lesser being. Okay then, now that Sherry is sitting at the table with us, I think we can resume the talk that we were having. What was it again. . . ? Oh yeah, about the time difference!

「So Sherry, are you familiar with the theory that the earth. that this planet is round?」

I guess I will ask her about that for the time being. If I am going to explain to her how exactly does time difference works, that is as good of a place to start as any.

The 「Earth is Round Theory」has been known in my old world for quite some time. It is the reason why the positions of the stars visible from the North and the South Poles do not overlap with each other, why there are changing lengths of the day, lunar eclipses and changing shapes of the moon throughout the month, and most importantly, it is the reason why we had local solar time and time zones on Earth. Since Sherry knew the difference between Movement Magic and Space-Time Magic, then she is obviously smart, or an intellectual type, to put it in other words. And if that is the case, then the best thing to do here would be to show her that I am also a smart person. Therefore, if I explain to her what the Spherical Earth Theory is all about, then I am sure that she would end up respecting me a little bit more. Having her as my second slave after buying her at a really good price already feels like quite a win, but earning some more points with her after boasting some of my own smarts is going to feel even better for my self-confidence. Then I will have the respect of not one, but two beautiful girls! And as an added bonus, it will also help to ease Sherry up into our lifestyle and the dynamic that is going on between me, the master and my slaves.

Of course, as much as I would like to say otherwise, this theory has not been created by me, but rather through the effort of the past Earth's scientists. So if nothing else, I feel like I should thank my predecessors for coming up with it so that I can use it now to win myself the trust of an absolutely cute girl.

「I know about the story of the great scholar of old who came up with it, but the person who told me that story must have taken me for a fool, because things he was telling me were so blatantly stupid that I have decided to dismiss everything he has told me as mere idiot's drivel.」

「Oh yeah? Well now you got me interested. What things did that person told you made you think that he was making a fool out of you?」

「Many things, but perhaps the most outrageous one was that since the world we live in is round, then all the people who live on the other side of it are falling out of it and into the sky because there is nothing that can make them continuously stick to the earth's surface.」

That. . . that is. . . that is honestly so stupid that I cannot say that I blame her for not believing a word that guy – whoever he was – said. Then again, that is about what you could expect from the people who do not know about the existence of the force of gravity. I guess humans in my old world were at that stage at one point as well, and some of them probably still are, what with all the flat earthers and the like going around spreading their wise words of wisdom on the internet.

「Alright, if you say that you had such mind-numbing experiences, then I guess it would be best to just drop this subject entirely in order to not add to your confusion anymore. The bottom line is, I have a Movement Magic called Warp that allows me and my Party members to travel between far-away places without losing any time, and if possible, I would like you to keep that knowledge to yourself and refrain from talking about it or mentioning it people other than Roxanne and I, okay?」

「U-Understood, master!」

Yeah, leaving the talk about time differences and round earth is the best possible thing to do here. Since she already had someone try to fill her head

with all sorts of dumb information and conspiracy theories and she remembers that and resents the guy who said it to her, then I do not even want to think how her opinion of me would have plummeted to the ground and below if I tried to talk to her about gravity and Higgs boson, she would have probablu just started asking questions like: 「Higgs boson? What is that? Is it tasty?」 (TL Note: **The Higgs boson is a hypothetical elementary particle predicted by the Standard Model (SM) of particle physics. It belongs to a class of particles known as bosons, characterized by an integer value of their spin quantum number. The Higgs field is a quantum field with a non-zero value that fills all of space, and explains why fundamental particles such as quarks and electrons have mass. The Higgs boson is an excitation of the Higgs field above its ground state.**) and that would do nothing but needlessly complicate the matters between us, making Sherry either look down on me for being the same kind of idiot how tried to fill her head with nonsense ore resent me for trying to sound like a smartass boasting about his knowledge. Even if what I would be telling her is true and I know it, I only know it because I come from a world where such knowledge is not a big deal, but for the inhabitants of this world, I imagine it would be pretty hard to accept something that defies all the logic and common sense that you knew throughout your entire life at face value. If you need any proof for that, just look how long it took us to recognize that it is actually the earth that is rotating around the sun instead of it being the other way around and stop persecuting everyone who advocated that theory as a heretic to be burned on the stake. So yeah, moving on to some other, safer subject, on the double!

「You mentioned that you have heard about the people being able to use multiple Jobs in myths and legends. Can you tell me more about that?」

「I can, but there is not really all that much to talk about, since according to myths and legends the ones capable of using multiple Jobs at once are mainly gods.」

Chapter 2: Intellectual Faction, Part 3

「Well, in that case, it is fine for you to think of me as something like that.」

「Eh?!! Really? But are Gods and other legendary and mythological creatures only fictional?!」

Oh, so Sherry does not believe in myths and legends and dismisses them as mere fiction? Right, so maybe it would be best to change the subject again to avoid any heated worldview debates? Yeah, let us do that.

「Roxanne, in regards to Sherry's equipment, is there anything else we should buy for her aside from clothing, basic equipment and a backpack?」

「Hmm, maybe an additional wooden washing tub so that each of could have their own?」

「Hm? Oh, right! Good idea. Then we will buy another wooden tub as well.」

Despite sounding surprised at first, Roxanne and I did all in our power to forcibly cut this problematic conversation then and there. As expected of her, she is always ready to follow me along with my ideas, no matter how out of left field they might be. And here I was thinking that it was too late for a saving throw and that I would have to engage Sherry in a general touchy discussion about whether or not Gods are real and are religions nothing more but scams run by the worst kind of con artists the earth has ever seen.

「Would that be all Sherry might need right from the get go?」

「Let me think . . . I think it would be a good choice to buy her her own Black Magic Crystal so that she could start collecting magical energy into it. As for

the clothes she is wearing, they are the ones provided by the Slave Shop so they should be good to last her at least for tomorrow, but I think we should go and buy her a new set of underwear.]

「Okay, then we should make the clothing store one of our first destinations once we will finish catching our breaths here.]

「Yes!]」

I think I know just the place where we might go to get Sherry some clothes: the Clothing Store that is selling all of those western-looking clothes where I bought clothing for Roxanne when we first came to Quratar, the one that is so close to the Quratar's Labyrinth.

「Oh, uhm. . . I do appreciate the gesture, but that will not be necessary, since neither my clothes nor underwear are ragged or dirty yet, so there is no need to buy me new ones just yet.]

「Nah, that will not be trouble at all. We would have to do it at some point anyway, so we might as well get it over with as soon as possible.]

Or rather, it is more about me wanting to see what kind of underwear is she going to pick for herself and how is it going to look on her than anything else.

「Oh, and by the way, do you have any weapon of choice, Sherry? Something you feel the most comfortable with using? Because we will have to take that into consideration when we will be picking equipment for you.]

「I do, actually. Since I am going to be fighting in the front lines in the Labyrinth then I would like to have a mallet or a hammer. I am also quite good with handling a spear, but due to its length it is not ideal for the vanguard fighters since you cannot swing it properly without accidentally hitting your allies in the process. With a hammer or mallet, that drawback can be swiftly eliminated.]

「I guess, but would you really be able to wield such weapons properly? I mean, mallets, hammers, warhammers, greathammers and the like are all heavy as hell, right?]」

「Do not worry, master. I might not look it, but I am actually pretty strong, so wielding such a heavy, two-handed weapon would not be a problem for me at all.」

Yeah, she is definitely right in that regard. Since the handle of the spear is pretty long, it might not be a best weapon to be swinging around in the narrow hallways of the Labyrinths. Unless...

「Since you said that you are skilled with a spear, then allow me to ask: how did you usually fought with it? Were you poking the monsters from behind your allies with it?」

「That is right. When you are using a spear from behind the safe distance given to you by your vanguard fighting comrades, you might not have as much momentum or the impact on the battlefield like they do, but the length of the spear helps you remain in control at all times and even save your allies if the ever find themselves in a pinch from a surprise attack to their flank. Some might say that this is not a greatest of the roles to fill, but I think such a supportive role can be pretty powerful in its own right.」

Certainly, when she puts it like that, attacking with a spear does not seem like a bad idea. However, just like Sherry said, such a strategy can only be pulled off when you have people who will be taking the damage and attacking the monsters in the vanguard position, and currently we do not have enough people for that. I got Sherry precisely because I did not want to fight on the front lines all the time so that I could focus on using my magic more, so going back to the vanguard just so that Sherry could utilize her spear-poking strategy would be more than a little pointless now. Also, just so that I could clearly know where we are standing with this:

「When it comes to hammers, have you ever fought any monsters with it before?」

「No, I have yet to use hammers in actual combat against real monsters, so it would be my first time doing so.」

So, she is a novice when it comes to hammers, huh? I doubt it is going to be a real detriment, but in that case, it might be a good idea to have her fight some

low-level monsters so that she could get into the swing (**TL Note: Get it? Swing, because you swing the hammer... all right, I am going to shut up now**) of things before moving on to the higher floor where she could truly go to the poundtown with them?

「In that case, would you like to try fighting the monsters in the Labyrinth with a hammer to get some practice?」

「Y-Yes, I would very much like to try doing that!」

「And what do you think, Roxanne? Would that be alright with you as well?」

「Yes, I do not see any problems with it. In fact, I would like you to try fighting with the hammer in the vanguard together with me as well. It took us some time to arrive at it, but master and I have developed our own trusty method of fighting monsters where I focus their attention on myself in the front lines with the combination of dodging and blocking their attacks while master supports me with his offensive spells from the back, and that is how our Party has been operating for a good while now. Once the three of us go to the Labyrinth together you shall see it with your own eyes, but just let me tell you that master's magic abilities are truly powerful and amazing, so if you could help make it possible for him to use them as much as possible, that would really be appreciated.」

Roxanne seems to have the same opinion as me, which made me happy. This means that we have double the persuasion power to convince Sherry to use a hammer for our first bout to the Labyrinth. But apparently, that was not what Sherry was the most interested in when Roxanne finished talking.

「Eh? What? So master can also use Attack Magic?」

「Yes, he most certainly can.」

「But... but how? How can such a thing be possible?」

Sherry looked at me, then at Roxanne, then back at me and at Roxanne once more. I was expecting her to be surprised when she eventually learned that I am capable of using Attack Magic, but her surprise and confusion were

actually much bigger than I anticipated.

「You can really use it?」

Chapter 2: Intellectual Faction, Part 4

「Yeah, I can use it. Oh, actually, I am capable of using several different types of magic.」

「Well, uh. . . 」

「This is something that would like other people not to know about, so once again, I want you to keep this information to yourself, okay?」

When I forbade her from telling about this to anyone, Sherry's face looked like she was extremely disappointed, but she did not oppose that rule, probably because she knew that this was the best possible way to not get too much unwanted attention to our names.

「Yes master, I understand. . . . s-so, it really has to be because of you being able to use multiple Jobs, right?」

「That is right.」

「.」

「.」

「.」

The moment of awkward silence just kept going without any of us saying a word. Could it be that. . . that Sherry is waiting for me to give her an actual, logical explanation of why am I capable of using multiple Jobs?

「Let just say that I am simply somehow able to do it and leave it at that,

okay?」

「Yes, let us just say that master is simply somehow able to do it and leave it at that.」

「Oh, ah... okay?」

Now that I bought Sherry, my second slave, we will finally be able to challenge the Labyrinth's eighth floors. But as for if there will ever come the day where I will talk to Sherry and Roxanne about my powers and why they need to stay a secret, I guess that remains to be seen.

「Now then, going back to the topic of weapons for a bit, we will go through with the following plan: I will go shopping for weapons and equipment for you and buy you a hammer so that you could test it out on the weaker monsters in the Labyrinth and get you accustomed to fighting with it, okay?」

I am putting it like that to her, but there is actually another reason why I would like her to try using a hammer in combat. Defeating a monster with a sword was a condition for acquiring the Swordmaster Job, and defeating a monster with bare hands was a condition needed for the acquisition of the Monk Job, so maybe, just maybe defeating a monster with a hammer is one of the conditions required for the Dwarves to obtain the Master Smith Job? After all, blacksmiths work with hammers all the time, so maybe that really is the case here?

「Okay, I see no problems with giving it a try.」

「Well, it is settled then. Oh and by the way, Sherry.」

There is this other thing that I wanted to ask her about.

「Yes?」

Sherry inquired with a slight cock of her head.

I wonder why she said that she would be fine with using a mallet and a hammer when she said she has never defeated a monster with those weapons. Does that mean that she killed other things with them? Things like... no,

stop it, Michio. I am sure that it was just her using a figure of speech without any deeper or hidden meanings to it. It is cool, it is fine. Everything is fine.

「You said that you are good with spears and that you would not mind fighting with a hammer, so that got me wondering: is there any specific reason for such a choice of your weaponry? Do all Dwarves fight mainly with spears and hammers, or is that purely the matter of your personal preference?」

「It is mainly my own preference, but actually, many of the Dwarves use them as their preferred weapons of choice as well. While we Dwarves are not as tall as other races, we are generally physically stronger than Humans or Elves, so many of us tend to gravitate towards heavier weaponry in order to make the best possible use of that racial perk of ours. For the record, I have also used other kinds of weapons besides spears and hammers, but those two I found to be the most compatible with me.」

The fact that she also knows how to handle other kinds of weapons is really reassuring, although if I want to have her reach Master Smith Job as soon as possible, we will not need her using other kinds of weapons. Mallets and hammers are literally all we need Sherry to use right now.

「Have you ever used a hammer before, Roxanne?」

I asked Roxanne out of curiosity as well, because throughout the time we have spent together, I have never seen her using anything other than the Wooden Shield and Scimitar I provided her with, and she never talked about using other kinds of weapons.

「I did not, because it is too heavy and clunky to use and it would only diminish my speed and the ability to dodge.」

Ahh, that is right. Every kind of weapon has the pros and cons of using it, and in case of hammers, it is how big and slow to use they are. Roxanne is all about her godly evasive abilities, so if she were to use such a heavy weapon, then her evasion, which is one of her strongest points, would have been severely crippled. So I guess she really can perform her godly dodges only with a one-handed weapon like a short or longsword, but then again, the

weapon that she is currently using, a Scimitar is not exactly a light weapon, and she can dodge with it just fine.

「Can you tell me what is the difference between a hammer and a mallet? I mean, I know that hammers are big and especially heavy, but what about mallets specifically? Do you have to hold them with both hands?」

「You do not necessarily have to do it with both hands. Mallets are designed in such a way that you can hold them with either one or two hands and I have seen people holding it in one hand along with a shield for protection, but personally I prefer holding it with two hands since it allows for more powerful blows.」

So Sherry does not need a shield because she prefers the more offensive approach, huh? Good to know and duly noted.

「Unfortunately, we do not have any extra equipment to spare at the moment and your purchase took a bite out of a big portion of our funds, so you will have to content yourself with cheaper ones for the time being, before we will be able to buy you something better. Is that okay with you?」

「Yes, of course it is okay, master. If that is what you have decided, then I have no reasons to be questioning your decisions.」

「Great, thank you for trusting me with this one. By the way, do you know about Empty Skill Slots and the equipment that may or may not have it?」

「Empty Skill Slots. ? Ah, you mean Skill Slots in general? Well of course I know about them.」

「Really? That is so good to hear!」

Could it be? Have I finally found someone who can explain to me what the deal with them is, exactly?!

「Right. So, you also know about them, master?」

「Well, yeah. The main reason why I wanted to buy myself a Dwarven slave was so that we could have our very own Master Smith, because during our

last trip to the Labyrinth we managed to obtain a Skill Crystal and we were looking for someone who could imbue our equipment with it.]

「I see, that makes sense. If you did not know about them, then you would not have asked for a Dwarf with Master Smith Job specifically. . .」

「Precisely. So, how did you learn about them, if I may ask? Is it something that all Dwarves know, or is it the kind of knowledge that you had to obtain on your own?」

Chapter 2: Intellectual Faction, Part 5

「Not exactly, but long ago there used to be people who advocated the following theory: They claimed that every piece of equipment in the world may contain something they called『Skill Slots』and that every attempt at fusing the Skill Crystal into a piece of equipment that does not have Skill Slots that the Skill Crystal could be fitted into would always result in a failure with one hundred percent of probability, or at least that is what their theory claims.」

「Were the ones who came up with this theory Dwarven scholars, or was it someone else who came up with it and they expanded on it further?」

「Since Dwarves are the only race capable of becoming Master Smiths, it was a subject researched purely by the dwarven scholars of old. They were the ones who came up with the theory and tried to prove it, without the help from anyone from the outside of the circle of the Dwarven race.」

「Same as the one who tried to tell you all of those foolish things in regards to the『Earth is round』theory?」

「Ah, no, thankfully it was a different type of scholars from that shady one with the『Earth is round and people on the other side of it will fall off it into the sky』drivel. They were the ones who devoted their whole lives to proving that what they were claiming was correct, but because the results of their research were less than conclusive, nowadays there are not that many common Dwarves who accept that theory, which makes the fact that you have heard about it that much more amazing.」

These Dwarven scholars of old must have been pretty brainy guys to have

figured that much out without even being able to see if the Skill Slots are there or not. Sadly, without any hard boiled evidence, even though their idea that if there is an Empty Skill Slot in the piece of equipment then you could fuse the Skill Crystal in there was the correct one, then of course no one would ever believe them. After all, taking people's words at face value is not the best thing to do, no matter the world you are in.

「Is that theory no good now?」

「Instead of saying tha it is no good, it would be more fitting to say that it is simply impossible to prove, since no one can see the actual Skill Slots.」

Well, I guess that much is a given if you do not possess the Indentity Skill like I do.

「Impossible to prove? Is there really no way to check it at all?」

Roxanne asked.

In theory, verification of that theory should be easy. If Skill Crystals can be fused to the same equipment many times, then all you would have to do would be to try fusing the Skill Crystal with a given piece of equipment over and over and over again. If the equipment does have an Empty Skill Slot in it, they should have seen some successful attempts after a number of fails, whereas if the equipment does not have an Empty Skill Slots in it, then the fusion would always fail, no matter how many times they would have tried. But because Skill Crystals are very rare items to begin with and the probability of failure is always high even if the Empty Skill Slots are really there, I can definitely see why they started claiming that the verification of that theory is impossible.

「However, if I had to say so myself, then I would have to say that nowadays there are more people who do not believe in this theory at all than those who believe in it.」

「People who deny it are in the vast majority? Why is that? Is that theory that universally hated?」

「If the fusion fails, the Skill Crystal will be lost and the equipment that you tried to infuse with it will be disassembled into its base components, but whether it will be all of the materials or just some of them is up to a complete coin toss. If you are lucky enough to have all the materials left after the failed fusion, you can simply try to remake the equipment that you lost, there is still a matter that nags most of the people: is the remade equipment going to be as good or the same quality as the one they initially wanted to infuse, or is it going to be worse? We have no way of definitely confirming or denying that, since, as I already said, no one is capable of seeing if the Skill Slots are actually there or not, and that in turn makes it impossible to determine whether or not the re-made equipment is identical to how it was before, or is it perhaps somewhat different? And of course, while there is nothing stopping us from attempting to fuse another Skill Crystal with the re-made equipment, those who believe in the Skill Slot theory argue that it is not in fact the same kind of equipment as it was before.」

So the equipment is going to be destroyed if its fusion fails? If that is true, then that would really make the verification process even more impossible than I initially thought. Without Identify to check if the Skill Crystal got properly embedded in the piece of equipment, pretty much everyone would not be able to tell the difference between a weapon or armor that has the Empty Skill Slot and the ones that do not, because they would all look the same to them appearance-wise even if you managed to put the disassembled equipment back together. Also. . .

「So does that mean that there is always a chance that not every material can remain after the disassembling process?」

「Yes. It is not something that occurs every time, but there is always a chance of that happening, even when performed by a Master Smith with the best Skills and tools available.」

「I see. . . What do you think about the Skill Slot theory itself, Sherry?」

「For me personally, the Skill Slot Theory seems to be a little too far-fetched. Instead of putting the blame for the failure of the fusion of the Skill Crystal with the equipment on the one performing the fusion it pins the fault on a number of factors that are not defined or grounded in reality, which enables

people to shirk the criticism and pass the blame for all the failures as they see fit, all for the sake of not claiming the responsibility for the failure themselves.]

So Sherry is disagreeing with the Skill Slot Theory then, I presume? Not surprising, since she looks like someone who would not believe just about anything that people would try to tell her without seeing concrete proof first. So unless someone gives her the clear-cut evidence that the Skill Slot Theory is real and that they really do exist, she is still going to dismiss it as something unproven. To be thinking even about such small details. . . As I thought, Sherry really is quite smart.

「I see. I am very glad to hear that you are aware of it.」

「Thank you master, and I am sorry if it sounds like I am mouthing off. It is just that I was always interested in all the things that surrounded me, so I always talked to the people around me asking for an explanation on how this and that works.」

Sherry bowed her head apologetically.

「There is no need for you to feel sorry. I do not think that the thirst for knowledge is a bad thing at all.」

Yeah, I think the exact opposite, actually. Since I am not all that good when it comes to intellectual stuff and Roxanne can be pretty. . . airheaded at times, having someone who is genuinely smart in our ranks is truly a blessing. Since it looks like Sherry knows a lot about a great number of things, she will definitely be useful to me, even if only for the purpose of explaining the things that I do not understand about this world to me. Also, even though Sherry is skeptical about the Skill Slot Theory, it seems like it is actually true, as it is evident by me using the Identify Skill to check if the items I am buying or finding in the Labyrinths come up with the Empty Skill Slots.

「I know, but. . . it is just that before I became a slave, my mom would always get angry whenever I did not know something, but on the contrary the people around me were always saying that trying to learn too much for your own good will do nothing but bring doom upon yourself and those around

you.]

Chapter 2: Intellectual Faction, Part 6

「Ah, yeah. I see how it is.」

Looks like in this world and its society it is actually dangerous to know too much or what goes beyond your social position, which admittedly kinda sucks, but it is not like there is anything that I can personally do about it, you know? And it probably holds even more true when it comes to slaves.

「Master also likes to experiment with a lot of things, so I think it is all right.」

「Is that. . . so?」

「It sure is!」

Uhm, Roxanne my dear, if you have any complaints about how I choose to do things, they why do you not tell me about it directly? Even though she was smiling and patting Sherry on the back the entire time, I could not help it but to think that there was something a little bit malicious behind that smile of hers.

「W-Well, we all have our fair share of secrets that we want to keep others from finding out, but I think that uncovering them little by little is the best approach here. Everything in moderation, you know?」

「Yes, of course!」

「You are absolutely right, master!」

「Also, it is important to be careful with what you want to talk about to other people, since we all have our things that we will tryt keep quiet about no

matter what, and we react differently to people who are overly chatty about their own secrets and problems, so just be mindful when discussing what you have learned with others. Oftentimes it might mean nothing to you, but it might be a huge deal to the person you will be speaking to at the moment.

「Okay, I understand. I will be sure to take that under advisement.」

It is not that I am against talking about myself or the many secrets that I have, but if the girls started digging too deep into them then things would definitely get problematic, especially since I possess some abilities that seem to be truly unique in this world, like the ability to use many kinds of Attack Magic, or the omission of the chants required for the casting of said spells, or the fact that I can change my own Jobs as well as the Jobs of them members of my Party. How am I going to explain all of those things to Roxanne, Sherry and any of the slaves that I might buy for myself in the future? I have not thought about it right now, so I am going to do the next best thing that could be done about this at this point: leave it for later and deal with that problem in the future when it will happen.

「By the way Sherry. Is your Item Box completely empty?」

「Yes, it is completely empty right now.」

「Okay.」

After confirming that Sherry had no items that she currently held in her in her own Item Box, I opened up the menus and chose Party Job Settings. If my guess is correct and one of the conditions needed for the acquisition of the Master Smith Job is having Explorer at Lv.10 or lower it would be bad if Sherry ended up leveling it up any higher by accident, so it would be best if I switched her current Job into something else, like. . .

「Villager Lv.3 huh? That is a bit low.」

「Eh?」

「Huh?!」

「Hmm?」

Did. . . Did I just said something weird?

「.」

「.」

Both Sherry and Roxanne are looking at me with their faces so grim and worried that I must have definitely upset them in some way. Perhaps I said that last bit about Sherry's Villager Lv.2 Job being low out loud? That would have explained those troubled looks of theirs. Although I know their Jobs and their levels because they are the members of my Party where I am the leader, they do not know that. However, if Sherry was the only one to react in such a way, I would have understood that, since I made that rude comment about her specifically, but for Roxanne to act in such a troubled manner as well? That is something that I do not understand, but something must be going on with her, because ever since this morning when we were discussing the matter of the will she was acting a bit strange, unlike her usual, obedient self, and also that she was acting a bit cold towards me ever since I bought Sherry. Quick, I have to change the subject to something more neutral, and fast!

「Uhm, so Sherry, have you heard anything of a Hero Job?」

「Ah, y-yes, I heard something about it, Supposedly it is the Job that belonged to the first emperor of the empire, or at least that is what the legends are saying.」

「So it is something that exists only in legends, huh?」

「Yes, but because there is no such thing as a Hero's Guild, then that Job does not actually exist and it is only something that was made up to justify why the first emperor was as strong as he was.」

So the Job of a Hero is as rare as I thought.

「So what would have happened if the people learned that this Job actually does exist? How they would have reacted to it?」

「Since it is a Job that was only held by one person before, the first emperor of this country, then if there ever was a person who claimed to have obtained it as well, they would have probably be charged with the accusations of plotting a rebellion against the current emperor and his government and swiftly executed to avoid raising any kind of unrest within the populace.」

Eh? Say what? A Hero, someone who is one of the most respected people in practically every RPG because of his power, achievements and his destiny of defeating the Demon Lord or whatever kind of evil is currently plaguing the world would be treated as the absolute worst kind of criminal and get killed simply for possessing a Job? What the fuck is wrong with that line of reasoning. . . no wait. Actually, now that I think about it, such a thing could really do happen. Yeah, given the information that Sherry provided me with just now, it is definitely something that could transpire. If the rumors say that the only person ever known to hold the Job of a Hero was this country's first emperor, then the authorities would probably think that anyone claiming to have that Job as well would be a fraud or someone looking to throw the empire into chaos by, let us say, claiming to be a long-lost descendant of the first emperor with the claims to the empire's throne. so if someone ever found out that I possess the Job of a Hero. . . ugh, I do not even want to think about what would happen to me then.

「Okay, now that we got all those things sorted out, I think it is high time for me to finally go and do some shopping, would you not agree?」

「Y-Yes! I almost forgot that this was what you were supposed to be doing! Forgive me for my forgetfulness, master!」

「Nah, it is fine. To tell you the truth, I almost forgot about it as well on only remembered it now. Now that we have all those things explained to one another, then I can go right now.」

「「Understood!」」

I do not know what else I could have said in order to get myself out of plunging head-first into another sticky subject, so I figured that a good old run-away strategy would be the most effective here. Roxanne probably understood what my intentions were, because she simply have me a

thoughtful look and an affirmative nod.

「Once I get back from the shopping, I will take care of preparing the bath, so I want Roxanne and Sherry to handle the preparations for dinner, okay?」

I said while preparing to cast Warp on the wall.

「Can you cook, Sherry?」

Chapter 2: Intellectual Faction, Part 7

「Yes, I can. While I cannot do anything too spectacular, I do know my way around the kitchen to some extent.」

「I will be counting on you as well then. Can I ask you and Roxanne to make one dish each?」

「Of course!」

「All right.」

With the confirmation that Sherry can also be helpful around the kitchen, I nodded at Roxanne and she happily nodded back at me, and then she patted Sherry on the back. It's great that she is so approving of her so far, because if she already accepted her as a member of our Party and as her fellow kitchen aid, then maybe she will also be open about letting her in on. . . our various other activities.

「Uhm, Miss Roxanne if I may ask. . . what was that talk about a bath just now? Did master meant “that” kind of bath when he said that he was going to prepare a “bath”?」

Now what that might be about? What does she mean by “that kind of bath”? I mean, I know that there were many different kinds of baths back in my old world, like saunas, hot springs, cold springs, milk baths and public baths, but are they here in this world as well?

「I do not know what you mean by “that kind of bath”, Sherry, but I can definitely tell you that I am going to prepare an ordinary bath.」

「I,I understand!」

「All right then. Roxanne, Sherry, I will be taking my leave and be on my way.」

I said, finishing my preparations of the Warp portal on the wall of the living room. Now that I will be running away to do some shopping, maybe my absence will help keep Sherry's mind off of asking all sorts of problematic questions that I would have trouble answering.

「I heard that only the members of the royalty and aristocracy can afford to take baths. Is master secretly someone important like that?」

I heard Sherry asking Roxanne such a question when I was with one leg through the Warp portal already.

「I do not know about royalty or aristocracy, but what I do know is that master is an amazing person.」

Oh, stop it Roxanne, you are going to make me blush! Besides, I am not all that great of a person. I am simply an enthusiast of taking baths with beautiful girls. That is all.

「Have a safe trip, master.」

「Yeah, I will. I am heading off then.」

Roxanne and Sherry bowed their heads to me, and then returned to their talk about baths. I knew that Roxanne ended up liking them as much as I do after all the times we played with each other during our soaks, but who would have thought that Sherry would have such a burning passion for baths herself? Maybe convincing her to join our soap play is actually going to be easier than I have initially thought it would be?

I warped to the Adventurer's Guild and then made my way to my first stop: Armor Shop. The first thing that I wanted to take care of was a small upgrade of my own set of equipment. Up until now I was using a set of Leather Armor, Leather Boots, Leather Gloves and Leather helmet that was made

form a simple, unprocessed leather. The things that I bought right now were a step above that, but only for my footwear and headwear, so now I had a set made out of Processed Leather Helmet, Leather, Armor, Leather Gloves and Processed Leather Boots. Of course, before picking any of them up I made absolutely sure that all of them came equipped with their own Empty Skill Slots. A while ago when I was discussing the matters of equipment with Roxanne she insisted that as a master and the leader of the Party I should have the best equipment possible on me, but I feel like only taking a better boots and helmet for now should be more than enough to take care of my defensive needs.

Now as, for the armor that Sherry is going to be using. . .

Just like when I bought Roxanne, Sherry did not have any shoes on her feet when she was passed on to me. She was barefoot. It would seem that this is one of the customs of how slaves are treated in this world. If Sherry's purchase was not such a last minute decision, then I would have prepared a pair of shoes or sandals beforehand so that I could give them to her as a kind of a welcoming gift. Now that I think about it, if I wanted to buy things for Sherry, then maybe I should have taken Roxanne with me as well so that we could turn it into a surprise gift for her? But then again, leaving her in our house all alone would have been a really dickish move, but if I took her with us to do shopping, then I am sure that it would have taken ages and then some to buy all of the things that we would want to buy because of Roxanne's habit to analyze and overthink every purchase that she is involved with. So yeah, I am here by myself, so I will simply have to do my very best to pick up something that is going to be both practical and affordable, so I guess I am going to be buying something made from leather or processed leather, just like I did for myself. For her hands, I think a pair of Leather Mittens should be more than enough, and as for the shoes. . . will Leather Sandals do the trick? Hmm, actually, maybe it would be more practical to give her my old Leather Boots instead of selling them or throwing them out? Yeah, let us do that. And while I am at it, I will also buy some new footwear for Roxanne as well.

(Man, shopping really does go by in a flash when I do it by myself, huh?)

That was the thought that was going through my head as I made my way to

the counter in the shop to pay for all the items that I have bought just now. After that was done, I simply went back home without making any more additional detours.

「Hey, I am back, sorry for the wait!」

「「Welcome home, Master!」」

「I finished shopping and brought some new equipment with me. Roxanne, these Processed Leather Boots are for you, and Sherry, you will be getting my old Leather Boots.」

「Thank you very much, master.」

I then took off the Leather Boots I was currently wearing and handed them off to Sherry while changing into the Processed Leather Shoes that I bought.

「You have my thanks as well, master. But. . . is it really okay for me to be wearing this kind of armored footwear?」

「Yes, because for as long as you will be coming to the Labyrinths with us, wearing such a protective gear is pretty much a necessity.」

「Yes! I will do my very best not to let you down, Miss Roxanne, master!」

Okay, that means that all of us are now properly equipped with new pieces of gear: I have a new Processed Leather Helmet and Processed Leather Boots, Roxanne has new Processed Leather Boots as well and Sherry is going to wear my old Leather Shoes and Leather Mittens. That way, everything we were wearing up until now is going to be of use without the need for us to throw it away or sell it for just a few measly coins that would not even come close to making the selling process worth it.

「Now, are you fine with wearing a Leather Jacket of the same kind that Roxanne is wearing, or would you prefer a Leather Armor instead?」

I took out the Leather Jacket that was placed in my Item Box and presented it to Sherry. Leather Jackets are more expensive than Leather Armor, but on the flipside Leather Armor should provide better protection, so if I were the one

to make the selection, I would definitely make Sherry wear Leather Armor, but ultimately it will be her decision to make.

「C-Certainly, since my chest is so small, I could wear the Leather Armor without anything getting in the way of it.」

Sherry turned her head down, and her face became very cloudy. Oh crap, oh fuck! No, Sherry, I did not mean it in such a way! Not sexual harassment! What I was aiming for here was definitely not sexual harassment! In case of women such as Roxanne, Leather Armor tends to fit too tightly, emphasizing her big boobs as a result.

Chapter 2: Intellectual Faction, Part 8

That is why saying that Leather Armor might be ideal for her was like saying that she has no boobs at all right to her face. But you know, it is not like Sherry's chest is nonexistent. I mean, when compared to Roxanne's huge knockers, of course they would be inferior, but they are not "mosquito bites" small, you know what I mean? The clothes she is currently wearing might be concealing them to some extent, but they are big enough for me to see that they are clearly there. To be honest, I am looking forward to seeing how they are going to look like once they will become "unpacked" from all the clothing when we will be taking a bath and playing around in bed, because if my estimations are right, then she should still be pretty sizeable, probably enough for them to fit perfectly into the palm of my hand.

「Please, do not be mad at me, Sherry. I did not want to belittle you or make fun of your body with what I said.」

「It is fine, really. I know they are not that small, but I just cannot help it to be a little self-conscious about them anyway.」

「It is perfectly okay, so do not worry about it, Sherry! Besides, when you boil it all down, breasts are nothing more but a decoration that does not do anything to help you fight against the monsters in the Labyrinths anyway!」

Roxanne said that to comfort Sherry, but with her boobs pretty much dangling in front of her and hitting her in the face, I think she might have achieved an effect opposite to what she was aiming for. Roxanne, no matter what you might say, it will not change the fact that your boobs are a very attractive decoration. My god, why is it always that erotic girls with bombshell bodies do not seem to realize how erotic they really are? Not

knowing how to respond to what Roxanne just said, I just handed the Leather Jacket To Sherry, who was giving me and Roxanne an increasingly cringy look. And honestly, I cannot blame her for that. For better or worse, Roxanne seems to be more than a little airheaded when it comes to sensible subjects, so she might have ended up teasing (or even roasting, depending on how you choose to look at it) Sherry for being small-chested without even noticing that herself, which is going to make any encouragement she might have wanted to give Sherry counterproductive, because she is simply going to think that she is patronizing her.

Now that Sherry has finished putting on her new equipment, I decided to make a quick additional run to the Weapon's Shop so that she could buy a weapon for herself. As soon as we entered it she stopped sulking and dragged me into the corner where the hammers and mallets were being sold.

「So this is where they are holding every blunt weapon they have available for purchase, huh?」

Hammers, morning stars, maces, clubs and the like were all gathered in this one place right next to one another. They all varied in sizes from small, medium and large to what I could only describe as extra and ultra large, and my guess is that each and every one of those weapons would weight at least a ton.

「They have a pretty wide selection of these, I have to give them that.」

「Yes, that they do indeed. And it looks like this right here is the cheapest club they have available right now.」

Sherry showed me the club that she was talking about

[Two-Handed Blunt Weapon: Club]

Wow, this thing is a club? To be honest, it looks more like a log of wood or a tree trunk with a handle attached to it rather than anything else. Something like that obviously could not be used for any kind of blacksmithing purposes, but I guess it would flatten just about anything that would have the misfortune of being hit by it without any issues. For the timebeing, let me

look for the one that comes with an Empty Skill Slot. . . ah, there it is!

「Sherry, the ones over here look like they are especially sturdy, so choose one of these.」

「Oh, you are right, they do look like they are slightly more durable than the others! Thank you for the suggestion.」

「Do not mention it.」

「As expected of master! Your eye when it comes to choosing equipment is as sharp as always!」

Roxanne praised me as well.

「They all look pretty reliable, but I think I am going to go with. . . this one right here!」

Sherry exclaimed, happily grabbing one of the clubs that was about as tall as she was with ease and raising it high into the air to inspect it.

「Yup, this looks like a pretty solid pick, and it is great that you chose that you are familiar with.」

「Thank you very much.」

Now then, if I want my Thirty Percent Discount to kick in, then I guess I should start looking for something that I could buy either for Roxanne or myself. We already have a Club, so maybe I could buy an upgrade to my Wand or Roxanne's Scimitar? Or maybe I should buy a spear for Sherry so that she could have a backup weapon in case that something happened to the club? And who knows, maybe I will be able to benefit off of it as well if there is a Job that requires slaying a number of monsters with a spear in order to become unlocked? Like A Lancer, or perhaps a Phalanx? Okay, for the time being, let me see what they have here in terms of spears. Identify!

[Copper Spear, Empty Skill Slot]

This here Copper Spear looks like it could be a pretty solid weapon for those

who have just begun their adventure with spearmanship, but on the downside, it only has one Empty Skill Slot available. Even though it is called a Copper Spear, the weapon itself is not entirely made out of copper, because it has a firm wooden handle. The thing that is made out of copper is probably the very tip of the spear.

While I was taking all the other spears in my hand to get a feel for them, Sherry approached me with the Club she has chosen in tow.

「So you have decided to go with this Club after all?」

「Yes, this one please.」

I received the Club from Sherry and handed it out to the shopkeeper along with the Copper Spear. The amount I had to pay for both those items was eight hundred and forty Nars, and the more expensive one of the two turned out to be the Copper Spear. Who would have thought?

「All right, that should take care of all the shopping I had planned for today. Now then, here you go, Sherry, your purchase.」

I said while handing Sherry the Club that she has chosen.

「A-are you really sure it is all right for me to hold onto it?」

It surprised me how surprised she was.

「Yeah, sure, I do not mind.」

「Yay!」

W-Why are her eyes shining like that? Is she that happy that I bought something for her, or perhaps because I bought exactly the thing that she wanted?

「Roxanne? Was. . . was giving this Club to her a bad choice, perhaps?」

「No, I believe that was not a wrong thing to do. I mean, normally, slaves are not allowed to be carrying any kind of weaponry on them unless they are not

in the Labyrinth.]

「Oh, so that is an actual rule?」

「Maybe not a rule, but rather a custom that has been established since ancient times. It is because of it that I always return my Scimitar to you whenever we are leaving the Labyrinth, remember?」

「Hmm. . . oh yeah, that really does happen each and every time, now that you mention it.」

I had a conversation like that with Roxanne in hushed whispers. I never really paid too much attention to it before because I got so used to seeing the Scimitar I have her on her hips at all times, but every morning before we set out and go into the Labyrinths I am giving Roxanne the Scimitar from my Item Box, and whenever we are done with exploring for the day, she always hands it back to me and I put it back to the Item Box. It just became such a routine to me after a while that I have literally stopped paying any kind of attention to it.

Chapter 2: Intellectual Faction, Part 9

Is that so? I would have never guessed that from Sherry's reaction just now. I thought that this ban on slaves carrying weapons with them is probably a countermeasure against the slaves killing innocent people, but both Roxanne and Sherry do not look like someone who could commit such an atrocity, but if that is what the law dictates, then there is nothing that we can do about it.

After that bit of shopping was done, we moved on to buy a pair of socks and pumpkin pants at the clothing shop and a backpack, a small wooden tub and a wooden toothpick at the general store. We also bought some ingredients for the meals in the following days, and then we were on the way back home, by which I mean that we went back to the Adventurer's Guild where I have created a Warp portal on the wall and went through it with absolute confidence, believing that we were not doing anything out of the ordinary. And when we were back home. . .

「Okay, I am going to take care of preparing the bath, so I would like you girls to take care of dinner like we agreed beforehand, okay?」

「Understood, master!」

「Should I not help you with that task, master?」

Sherry asked me.

「I appreciate the gesture, but I will be fine on my own. It might sound simple, but the process of filling the entire bathtub up is longer and more complicated than it might initially seem. Also, I do not want either of you to burn yourself with hot water by accident.」

Well, it would certainly be better if I could ask them to move the hot water into the bathtub for me, but as I just said, I really do not want to make them do it if there is any risk of them burning themselves by accident. Not to mention that as the tub gets filled, the overall temperature of the bathroom rises, making it more difficult to breathe and turning the simple act of filling the tub into quite an ordeal. As long as they can get in the bath with me when I will finish preparing it, it is going to be more than enough for me. And since I am the only member of my Party who can use magic, then I feel like this is my responsibility and mine alone.

Leaving Sherry with Roxanne as they were making the preparations to make dinner, I headed for the bathroom to get the process of filling it going right away. I will not lie: preparing a bath by using magic has turned out to be more of a hassle than I have initially expected it to be, but when I think about the incredible experience that is going to be waiting for me when I finally be done with preparing it, every fiber of my body is telling me that this is all going to be so worth it! And that is why I do not mind suffering for a bit myself now if it means that I will get to enjoy myself like never before later. That is how every good guy like me should aspire to be.

「Miss Roxanne, is that amount of food going to be correct? Is master really going to eat so much?」

Even though my Level has increased and I could fill more of the bathtub with a single MP bar, it was still running low at a very fast pace, so it was high time to go recover it before it drops to the critically low zone, and while I was making my way to the living room to prepare a Warp portal to the Labyrinth, my ears caught Sherry asking Roxanne such questions as they were in the kitchen in the middle of making dinner for us. Is there some sort of problem with the amount of food? Are Dwarves perhaps especially big eaters and no one informed me about it?

「Let me check real quick. hmm, this amount of food should be just right, but there is no need to hold yourself back, Sherry. If you want to add more of it, then feel free to do so.」

「Really? Master eats so much for a single meal?」

「Ah, so that is what it was about? In that case, do not worry. The meal we are making now is not just for master. It is for all three of us.」

「Eh? All three of us? Are we really allowed to eat the same thing that master is going to eat?」

Again with such issues? I do not want to sound overly rude, but this is starting to sound really pitiful.

「Yes, we are allowed to do it, because that is what master wishes.」

「But. but there is so much good meat in here! And also, when we were buying bread, I could not help but notice that we ended up taking only the loaves that were of the highest quality. I thought that since we are slaves that we are not going to get any, and that we would only eat the leftovers left after master's meal.」

What did Sherry say just now? She lowered her voice so much that I could not hear her words clearly, so with nothing better to do, I knocked on the wall a few times to interrupt them and get their attention.

「Roxanne, can I ask for the usual thing, please?」

「Ah, is it that time already? Then of course, master.」

Roxanne sprinted over to my side, and I handed the Leather Mittens and her Leather Shield to her, and placed the Leather Helmet directly onto her head. Of course, before I placed the helmet on her head, I did not forget to gently stroke her doggy ears.

「Master, thank you for giving us an opportunity to eat such a delicious meal.」

Sherry came and bowed to me as if it was something that I did. It should be the other way around, right? I should be the one thanking *you* for letting *me* eat delicious food, because how it turns out depends entirely on your cooking skills, you know? Also, since we are about to go recover my MP, then I might as well ask her this one thing that I wanted to bring up.

「By the way, Sherry, Roxanne and I are going to go to the Labyrinth for a little bit, and I was wondering if you would maybe like to go with us?」

「To the Labyrinth? Right now?」

「Yeah, because I have to replenish the reserves of my magic power so that I could finish filling the bathtub. If you decide to go with us, it is more than likely that you will not be fighting together with us this time, but you are more than welcome to watch us so that you could get yourself accustomed to our way of fighting. But if you do not want to go because you want to stay and keep an eye on the cooking, then that is perfectly fine with us as well. You do not have to come simply because I am telling you to. Just say the word, and we will respect your decision.」

For a moment Sherry looks as if she was deep in thought, and then she said:

「We have only just started to prepare the ingredients and did not put anything on fire just yet, so I think it should be fine for me to go together with you. Or rather, that I something that I want to do, so please, master, let me accompany you on your trip to the Labyrinth!」

「All right then, as you wish.」

Since Sherry decided that she is going to be coming along with us as well, I took out a pair of Leather Mittens and a Leather Helmet and gave them both to her. But when I was putting the helmet on her head and making adjustments to it. . .

「Hmm, how should I put it. . . somehow, this is truly amazing.」

「What is, master?」

「Oh, nothing. Just talking to myself, that's all.」

Sherry's hair is very thick. I bet that even if she was not wearing a Leather Helmet, then just her hair alone would be enough to absorb the impact of some of the blows aimed at her head.

「I was simply thinking that your hair is unusually thick for a girl.」

Yeah, hair like that is definitely strange, just like I thought when I first saw her back at the Slave Shop.

Chapter 2: Intellectual Faction, Part 10

「Oh? You were wondering about that, master? This is not just my own feature, but a peculiarity that all of the Dwarven women share.」

「Is that so?」

「Yes. Dwarven men have beards all over their faces, hence their characteristic looks that the entire race is famous for. On the other hand, Dwarven women do not have beards at all, but as a tradeoff the hair on our heads can grow quite long and it is somewhat rougher in comparison to the hair of the women of other races.」

「I see.」

Yeah, Sherry's hair were definitely rougher to the touch than Roxanne's hair, but not in a bad or unpleasant way. How should I say it. . . comparing their hair would be like comparing the fur of a dog with that of a cat. Technically they are both the same, but when you get down on it, each of the two has subtle differences to it that makes them both their own thing. For example, Roxanne's hair did not react in any kind of way when I placed the Leather Helmet on her head, but when I did the same to Sherry, moving the helmet around caused her hair in their entirety to move around. If I stuck a brush in it, I wonder if it would get stuck or rather slowly sank into it like any other normal brush would do?

「That being said, I always gather them to the side and try to cut it regularly, but they do not always want to listen to me, no matter how hard I try to stylize them the way I want to.」

That is most definitely a cute thing to say, but if I were in Sherry's boots I would have really tried to watch what I say. If her words just now were heard by someone bold or having trouble with hair loss, she would have become the number one enemy of all the hairless people around the world in an instant.

「All right, everyone ready? Then let us be on our way.」

I finished putting on my new equipment and Durandal as well, and then we were off to our MP Recovery destination: the fifth floor of the Vale's Labyrinth.

「Okay now. Roxanne, use your nose to guide us towards the groups of enemies that all consist of the enemies of the same type.」

「As you wish, master!」

We came here to the Vale Labyrinth's fifth floor because the monsters here are still weak enough for me to kill them with a single blow from Durandal, which makes it a perfect place to restore my MP and earn a somewhat good amount of EXP at the same time. While being here, we can slowly accustom Sherry to our way of fighting without throwing her into the deep waters of the seventh floors right off the bat. Also, there is one more benefit to us being here: no one can deny that being able to kill monsters with a single blow is pretty cool, right? And since it is cool, then I want to use that chance to show off as many of my good points to our newest Party member whenever I can. Being adored by a beautiful girl for your fighting prowess and incredible swordsmanship is the best thing ever after all, and now I have not only Roxanne, but also Sherry to impress and earn myself some brownie points with them.

「Ah. . . uhm, this place here is. . . ?」

「About that. We are currently on the fifth floor of the Labyrinth in Vale.」

「Master, a group of identical monsters should be right nearby in that direction.」

「Good. Lead the way then.」

「Roger.」

Roxanne points in the direction of where the monsters that I wanted her to track were supposed to be, all the while Sherry kept on looking confused, most likely because I have yet to tell her that unlike Field Walker, Warp also enables us to teleport ourselves directly into the Labyrinth's without having to go through their entrances each and every time.

「By the way, I have heard that some of the Wolfkin are capable of detecting monsters just by their smell alone. Are you capable of this feat, Miss Roxanne?」

「Yes. While it is not as perfect and accurate as I would have liked, I can detect nearby monsters just fine to be of use to master's needs.」

「Wow, really? That is amazing!!! (TL Note: Finally someone uses that word to describe someone other than the MC)」

Crap, looks like Roxanne was able to show off her own coolness before I was able to do it, so if I try to act all cool now, it might be seen as me just ripping her off. Well, there is nothing that can be done about it now, so I should just stop worrying about it and focus on the task at hand. . . but I cannot deny that it stings, even if just for a little bit.

「Here we are. The monsters you wanted me to find are straight ahead, master.」

Thanks to Roxanne's excellent sense of smell, locating the first group of monsters: Cheap Sheep only took us a short while. These will be perfect targets to fulfill both goals of our trip here.

「Oh, we really found them rather fast. So fast. You are so incredible, Miss Roxanne. . .」

「You ready to do this, Roxanne?」

「Ready whenever you are, master!」

「Then let us go!」

Now, Sherry, make sure to watch closely so that you could burn the image that you are about to see into your eyes and learn as much as you can from what you are about to see. Even though you are only a Lv.10 Explorer, now that you have the two of us, a duo of experienced Labyrinth dwellers, with you, there will be nothing for you to worry about. Sooner or later you would have probably decided to go to the Labyrinth on your own to make for a living, and it would have quickly showed you that going to the higher floors on your own would be impossible without reliable companions by your side, trust me on this one. I know what I am saying, because when I first started going to the Labyrinths myself, I was exactly like that. Before I met Roxanne, I thought that just because I have OP stats and weapon there will be nothing that I will be unable to handle by myself until I was proven wrong in the worst way possible. After that one Trap Room incident, I knew that going to the Labyrinths solo is going to be the death of me sooner or later, and that is what prompted me to start searching for Party members. That plus my fear of being I this new and strange world all alone. Before, I would have been afraid of fighting more than one enemy at a time, but now that I know that I have a reliable backup with me, I feel like groups of enemies will not be a problem no matter how many of them we are going to be facing. What I am trying to say is that I am grateful to Roxanne for going to the Labyrinths with me and risking her life in order to help me, and I want Sherry to see the power of the bond that has been forged between the two of us after hours upon hours upon hours of this dungeon crawling.

「Roxanne, I am going to take care of the ones on the left, so you make sure to deal with the ones on the right, okay?」

「On it, master!」

The two of us went towards the enemies side by side, breaking apart only when the Cheap Sheep were already withing the melee range of our weapons. The first Cheap Sheep that I have chosen to deal with charged towards me with its horns facing me, but I dodged it and brought Durandal's blade down on its neck, causing the Cheap Sheep who sheepishly thought that it can take me on to fall down

Sherry, behold my amazing way of controlling the sword with the absolute

minimum of the movements required for the first Cheap Sheep to be cut in half like a log of rotten wood and disappear with a puff of green smoke.

Cool. My appearance right now has to be so cool that it might actually be too cool for my own good! It is a good thing that we do not have mirrors in here, because I would have surely ended up falling for my own coolness if I saw it right now!

Chapter 2: Intellectual Faction, Part 11

At the same time on my right side, Roxanne was dodging the attacks of the other Cheap Sheep that engaged her in combat and she was alternating between dodges and counterattacks of her Scimitar. She was doing great, but because of the difference in the strength of our weapons, she could not have possibly hoped to defeat her opponent with a single strike as I did.

That is right. Are you watching me, Sherry? Are you registering my swift sword arts in all of their magnificence with your beautiful eyes? Behold my magnificence and be stunned speechless as the second Cheap Sheep that I was fighting got cleaved in half and disappeared into oblivion while leaving its Drop Item behind.

「Wow. I cannot believe this! That was so amazing!!!」

I know, right? My magnificent performance just now was so cool that it cannot be described as anything other than amazing, right? So come on, Sherry. Praise me more! Shower me with more compliments!

「How did you manage to avoid all of the monsters attacks like it was nothing like that?! Are you some kind of evasion genius, Miss Roxanne?!」



What the hell, Sherry?! You were supposed to be looking at me and the amazing display of my prowess with my sword, not at Roxanne and her godly dodging skills, goddamn it!!!

I mean, okay, to be perfectly fair, Roxanne's ability to dodge literally everything that comes her way is more than just a little amazing, so I guess there is no point in holding it against Sherry that she was so enraptured with Roxanne's movements that her eyes were glued to her the entire time. Because come on, this is Roxanne we are talking about here.

「I am happy to hear such wonderful words of praise, Sherry, but that was nothing all that special. Actually, with enough practice and training, I am sure that you could have done something like that as well. The exact process differs slightly from monster to monster, but as a general rule, once you observe the monsters for long enough to learn all of its patterns of movements and attacks, dodging all of them will be nothing more than just a matter of timing your dodges properly. In case of those Cheap Sheep we just fought, the right moment would be when they are moving their heads with a *fuuuu*, and that is a signal for you that you should be moving your body away with a *haaaaa* and then. . . 」

Even though she did not ask for it, Roxanne began giving Sherry a lecture in regards to how a perfect evasive manuevers should have been performed. I do not know why she keeps on being so enthusiastic about making everyone around her learn to do the same thing that she is doing, because I myself should have been a good indicator that not everyone has the aptitude to be as skillful of an artful dodger as she is, but apparently that did nothing to dissuade her from her goal of spreading the glory of the dodges even further. Personally, I stopped trying to mimic her way of evading enemies after a few tries because no matter how hard I tried, I could not replicate any of the movements and motions she was talking about, but who knows, maybe as a fellow girl, Sherry will be able to understand her instructions from beginning and use them to. . . uh-huh, okay, nevermind what I just said.

After listening to Roxanne's ramblings for a few minutes without any pause, Sherry looked at me with a look that was clearly saying: 「*I do not understand what in the hell is she going on about.*」. Sherry, look. I definitely

understand how you are feeling, but please, do not look to me for help with deciphering what Roxanne is saying, because I have no clue about it either!

「Okay, now that this group of monsters is done for, maybe we should get going and move on to the next one? The criteria are the same as before, by the way.」

「Ah, yes, right this way, master.」

Since it did not look like Roxanne was about to stop monologuing anytime soon, I decided that it would be better if I gave Sherry a helping hand that would drag her out from the barrage of explanations that she obviously did not want to interrupt thinking that it would be rude towards Roxanne.

However, her reaction explained to me the one thing that I was not all that sure about up until now: Roxanne's ability to perform such skillful dodges each and every time definitely is something that can be considered as abnormal. Up until now I always considered that everyone can do what Roxanne does if they have high enough combat and gymnastic prowess, but apparently that was not the case at all, which made me feel kind of glad, because that means that Roxanne is the odd one here, and not that something is clearly wrong with me. Good. That is very good to know indeed.

The looks that I exchanged with Sherry after that could have been translated as a following conversation:

「See? I have been partnered with someone like that all this time.」

「That must have been pretty rough, huh?」

Ahh, it is so good to know that on top of being an intellectual type, Sherry is also a person who sticks to the good old common sense in her daily life. A typically normal girl. My companion in normalcy.

「????????」

Roxanne looked at the both of us with a lot of question marks popping up above her head. Understandable, since she could not possibly grasp the gravity of the non-verbal conversation that we were having with each other

just now, but that is not really all that important right now. What really matters now is that Sherry and I have reached a universal understanding over this particular matter, meaning that our feelings have become one.

After that, we hunted for a few more groups of monsters until my MP has been fully recovered.

「Okay, that should be enough for now. Shall we go back home for the time being?」

「Yes, whenever you are ready, master.」

「Yes, let us!」

With the approval from both Sherry and Roxanne, there was little else for me to do but to summon a Warp portal on the wall in the entrance room of the Vale's Labyrinth's fifth floor so that we could all go straight back home.

「I will let you guys know when we will have to do it again, so please be ready should the need for that arises, okay?」

After informing the two of them that we might have to do it again, I wanted to go straight to the bathroom to resume the process of filling the bathtub, but I was stopped by Sherry, who obviously looked as if she wanted to ask me about something else, but was too shy to actually go through with it.

「Uhm. . . well. . . 」

「Yes? What is it, Sherry? If you want to ask me about something, then do not hesitate to do so.」

「T-Then. . . Is Warp the kind of Movement Magic that allows you to go straight inside of the Labyrinth from anywhere outside of it?!」

Oh my, how her attitude has changed in about a split second. She might be more level-leaded and reasonable than Roxanne is, but when it comes to the things that pick her curiosity, it looks like she can be just as hopeless as Roxanne is with the explanations of her dodging techniques. Right now, her eyes are both shining with the kind of light that only those belonging to the

intellectual faction can produce. However, since she is rather short, the impact of it was somewhat lessened, and she looked cute rather than anything else just now. If anyone else saw her just now, they would have definitely taken her for a curious kid, and not someone who is going to be coming along to the Labyrinths to defeat monsters with us.

「T-That's right. That is basically how it is.」

「Ehh? So you really can use magic without speaking the spells chants? But, how can such a thing even be possible?」

「How can such a thing be possible? W-Well, that is pretty mysterious, I will give you that.」

Speaking of which, now that I think about it, I have been only using magic without their chants (or while pretending to be doing so in order to fool everyone around me). I have been mainly doing that while in the Adventurer's Guild to make it look like I was using Field Walker while in reality I was casting Warp, but it was all thanks to my Chant Omission Bonus Skill.

Chapter 2: Intellectual Faction, Part 12

If I did not have that Bonus Skill equipped, it is more than likely that I would have to use chants to cast spells, same like all of the people around me.

「This is really bugging me after all. I just cannot think of any possible explanation for how such a thing as casting spells without using their chants first could be possible.」

「Master is simply capable of using magic without invoking their chants.」

「Is that so? Really?! That is it?」

「Y-Yeah, that is more or less how it is.」

I think that with Roxanne's gentle help, we managed to satiate Sherry's rather wild curiosity.

「It does not sound very convincing, if I were to be honest. . . but since even the person who uses the spells without their chants does not understand how he is able to do such a thing, then I guess there is nothing that we can do to pursue this matter further, is there?」

「I truly do not know why that is. Sorry that I cannot be of any help in this matter.」

Man am I glad that she understands that there is no reason to be dwelling on this subject any further if the person who uses the spells without their chants does not understand how exactly does it work. Sherry might be a smart person, but a truly intelligent one is able to understand and accept that there are just some things in this world that are simply not worth the trouble of

questioning and trying to uncover how they work. Even back on earth, the scientists were unable to determine how are humans able to breathe or move their limbs around without consciously controlling both of those processes, so asking me why I am able to use spells without having to use their chants would be pretty much the same as asking the fish how is it that they cannot drown even though they spend their entire lives submerged in the water without having to go to the surface to replenish their supply of air at regular intervals. Fish cannot drown in the sea because they cannot drown in the sea, and birds can fly in the sky because they can fly in the sky. These are the established truths of the world that no one dares to call into question because of how obvious these truths are.

For a few more minutes, Sherry continued to mumble things such as 「*But why?*」 or 「*How is it possible?*」 to herself. Looks like the scholarly types are all the same no matter the world you end up in. They all simply cannot help themselves to let go of a particular subject once their interest has been picked, but it does not matter all that much now. As long as she does not decide to pry her nose where it does not belong, I think it will be perfectly fine to allow her to have her own thoughts and dilemmas that she could ponder about in her free time as a kind of a mental exercise.

「By the way, I saw that you were able to defeat the monsters we you were fighting with just a single blow, so you must be pretty strong, master.」

「Well, something like that is a given after you aquire enough levels and naturally get stronger.」

So even though she noticed how amazing it was of me to be able to defeat the monsters on the fifth floor of Vale's Labyrinth with a single blow, she did not look all that impressed by it, or at least not as impressed as she was with Roxanne's ability to dodge every attack that was coming her way. Maybe it was because she deduced that since I needed to buy myself a second slave, I am not as strong as I would have liked, meaning strong enough to kill monsters effortlessly and make money in the Labyrinths with just Roxanne and myself? Then again, you probably did not need to be overly smart to deduce something like that, because a simple logic was enough to arrive at such a conclusion, and it was that conclusion that even made me consider buying a second slave so fast after obtaining my first slave.

「Uh-huh. May I ask what level you currently are?」

「Sure. Right now my Explorer level is thirty three.」

That being said, I think that the pace of my levelling-up has somewhat decreased, even if only for a little bit. It will probably get even more difficult to gain more levels as time goes on and my levels increase even further.

「Huh?!!」

When I answered Sherry's question, Roxanne seemed to be so shocked to learn what level I was right now that she let out a small shout.

「What is it, Roxanne? Did I say something to startle you?」

「N-No, it is not like that. I am simply surprised that master's level is so high! I thought that master was still at Explorer Lv.20!」

「Oh, yeah, I was, way back then.」

By the way, Roxanne should have also gone up more than ten levels since we last checked them together.

「Way back then, you say?」

「Yeah, because we are growing in strength regularly every day.」

「Growing in strength, you say?! Regularly, you say?!!」

That was the only possible way for me to explain it, because let us face it: if I were to openly tell her that we are gaining experience for our Jobs about hundred more times than the rest of the people around us, I think the pure shock of that information would be enough to knock her out cold on the spot, so for now, just the knowledge that she has also grown at the pace similar to mine should be more than enough for her.

But then . . .

「Gaining so much levels in your Job in such a relatively short time is already

impressive in and out of itself, but to be able to kill monsters from the fifth floor of the Labyrinths with but a single strike. . . no. Perhaps it is not a matter of levels, but perhaps the weapon that you are using? If that was the case then it would not be tha strange, since I did hear that there are amazing swords and other kinds of weapons in this world that would definitely enable their wielders to perform amazing feats like that.]

Drat, at this rate, Sherry is going to see through me completely. She really is too smart for her own good. Right now, she way eyeing my Durandal so intently as if it was a suspect in a murder case.

「Keep the matters of our levels and my sword a secret, okay? Now, if you will excuse me, I am going to continue preparing the bath.]

「「Y-Yes, of course!」」

For the time being, I chose to evacuate myself to the bathroom before Sherry could start grilling me about even more things that I either did not know about or did not wish to talk about at the moment. When I glanced back at her, she was still holding her hand against her chin and was nodding her head with a deadly serious look on her face.

For a good while I was able to continue filling the bathtub without being distracted by anything else. . .

「Master, master! We are terribly sorry to disturb you, but could we ask you to light this on fire for us?」

. . . . until Roxanne and Sherry came to the bathroom to request something of me. Thankfully it looked like it was not about a further pursuit of the matters that we discussed before like I was afraid of. But even if the did come here with that in mind, I would not be able to tell them anything other than what I already disclosed to them, because I literally do not know anything more myself. Instead, it looked like they wanted me to become a Firestarter, because Roxanne came closer to me and handed me something that looked like a tree branch that was split into multiple strands near one of its ends. Is this what is used to start small fires in this world, like the ones needed to cook something?

But. . . a fire, huh? Is fire not closely related to the process of smithing? Or rather, is a necessary component to get this process started in the first place?

「Sherry, have you ever started a fire by yourself?」

Since the topic of fire came up so naturally, I might as well ask her that.

Usually, blacksmithing requires fire in order to get the blacksmithing forge started, so I thought that fire might be one of the things needed in order to obtain the Master Smith Job, especially since in this world where there are no matches, gasoline or other modern substances used to lighting up a fire, setting it up by oneself might actually be considered to be quite an achievement without using magic like my Fireball. Would it not be nice if Sherry got it started all by herself and the *snap* Master Smith Job unlocked?

Chapter 2: Intellectual Faction, Part 13

「Yes, I have. Is there some sort of problem?」

「Nah, I was simply curious, that is all.」

However, she just affirmed that this lead was not the right one, but it was worth a shot anyway. I thought that maybe one of the conditions needed to obtain the Blacksmith Job would be to start a fire by yourself, but apparently I was mistaken.

In that case, maybe she should try melting some metal by placing it in a really hot flame? Yeah, that would definitely be more Master Smithy. . . Huh? Uhm, Roxanne, why are you looking at me with that incredibly disappointed expression on your face? Could. . . could it be that you are angry and jealous that I asked Sherry if she could light up a fire, but did not do the same with you? No, Roxanne, it is not what you are thinking! I am not playing favorites! This is all just a big misunderstanding, you hear me?! A misunderstanding!!! Hurry, water! I have to pour a crapton of water on that fire before it gets out of control!

「If Roxanne needs fire, I will always be happy to light one for you whenever you will need me to do it.」

Taking the split tree branch that Roxanne was holding in her hand, I lit it up and handed it over to her without a second of delay.

「Yes, of course, my master.」

Roxanne nodded with a smile that clearly had something malicious behind its

usual sweet appearance.

I do not know if that follow-up was an okay one or not, but as long as she understands that I will always be there for her whenever she needs me, then I guess that is all fine and good.

Also, I not know why, but somehow I am starting to feel really tired now, even though I have not been continuing my work of filling the bathtub for that long.

「Wow, you can really use Attack Magic, and without a chant at that!」

Ah, that was a nice reaction. Keep it up, Sherry. Your cute surprised face is going to be a nice healing agent after that little bit of yandere shenanigans from Roxanne.

After that, we went to the Labyrinth several times in order to fill the bathtub with enough water so that all three of us could take a bath. And by 「we」 I mean 「Roxanne and I」 because this time Sherry volunteered to stay behind so that she could watch the fire in the kitchen for us while the food was being cooked, which actually worked to our advantage, because with just the two of us, we could safely go to the seventh floor of the Labyrinth in Quratar without worrying about her getting hurt by accident.

「Why are you going to the Labyrinth so many times when you are preparing a bath?」

Sherry asked us that question at some point.

「Because the process of preparing a bath can be tiring and mentally draining, so this is a kind of a stress relief.」

But Roxanne gave a strange answer. Stress relief? Really? Just how hard does that girl think that preparing a bath is? Because I can definitely agree that it is tiring and takes a lot of time, but personally I would never have called it mentally draining to the point where I would feel that the only way for me to do something with the accumulated stress would be to go to the Labyrinth and kill the monsters in there. That would sim0ly be counterproductive and

needlessly risky. But. . . does that mean that Roxanne thought of it like that? Well, in that case, maybe I should have a talk with her about it sometime soon? But for the time being, let me correct what she just said to Sherry so as to avoid creating an even deeper misunderstanding.

「Actually, I have to go to the Labyrinths at regular intervals to recover MP if I want to avoid completely running out of it while filling the bathtub with water. Without it, I would not be able to fill even half of the bathtub.」

「Recover MP, you say? Does your sword have a MP Recovery Skill?」

「Not exactly. It has MP Absorption.」

「MP Absorption.」

Sherry muttered to herself as she continued to stare at Durandal as if she wanted to pierce through it with her eyes.

「Do you know something about MP Absorption Skill? And if so, could you tell me more about it?」

「Certainly. MP Absorption Skill is created by infusing a weapon with the Skill Crystals from two different monsters: Kobold Skill Crystal and Scissoresque Carnivorous Plant Skill Crystal. It is a very rare and valuable Skill to have.」

As expected of a Dwarf. It would seem that Sherry knows a lot about how Master Smith's Skills and the things that are related to it work, even though she is not a Master Smith herself. Yet.

「Do you know what kind of Skill does the Slow Rabbit's Skill Crystal have?」

「If memory serves me correctly, then Rabbit Skill Crystals that come from Slow Rabbits should give you the Skill 「Chant Delay」.」

「Well now, what do you know? That might actually be a pretty handy Skill to have. Thank you for the information, Sherry.」

All the info Sherry is giving us about Skills is great, especially since neither I nor Roxanne knew about something so specific, but there is a small problem with it: all that knowledge will be useless if we will not get more Skill Crystals. We know that technically they are classified as a rare drop, but I wonder if there is some way of increasing the drop odds of Skill Crystals specifically, and not rare items in general, or if there is some of checking what can be dropped from the enemy you are about to face, because that would certainly save us a lot of trouble if we could determine if it would even be profitable for us to engage in a particular battle or not.

「Please, do not think anything of it, master. It is my duty as your slave to serve you with advice to the best of my ability.」

「Yeah, I know, but I would feel bad if I did not thank you for it properly. Incidentally, since we are still on the topic of Skill Crystals and what they do, could you tell me in what way does the Skill 「Chant Delay」 differs from the other similar Skill, 「Chant Interruption」? Because, to be honest, they do not sound all that different to me, not going just by their names, at least.」TY

「「Chant Interruption」 is another Skill that is attached to Durandal, and I am pretty sure that it is not the same as 「Chant Delay」. So the question is: how are these two Skills differ from one another, and which one is the better one of the two?」

「「Chant Interruption」 is a Skill that causes the casting of any given Skill to be stopped midway, meaning that the caster has no choice but to start chanting from the beginning if they want to cast the Skill they wanted to use properly, while 「Chant Delay」 simply causes the Skill's chant to take longer than usual to complete.」

「So the 「Chant Delay」 means that the Skill is only delayed, and the 「Chant Interruption」 is basically a forced cancellation of it?」

I asked, still not really understanding the difference, even after Sherry explained it to me in so much detail.

「Then in that case, is 「Chant Interruption」 not a better option between the two?」

Roxanne cuts in, voicing one of my most crucial concerns in this matter. Looks like she still does not understand what the deal with those two is as well.

「Generally, that would have been the case, but that is not always the best solution. For instance, suppose that all six members of the Party would surround a monster that was about to use its Skill. In such a scenario, if all Party members were to continue hitting the monster with the weapons that have the effect of 「Chant Delay」 added onto them, it would have been possible for them to continue hitting the monster and delaying the activation of its Skill, delaying it so much that the monster would have been defeated before it could fully recite the chant for its Skill. Also, while they are in the middle of reciting the chants for their Skills, monsters are forced to stay completely still, causing them to be vulnerable to attacks without any way of defending themselves.」

Chapter 2: Intellectual Faction, Part 14

If the amount of chant delaying effects on attacks is going to be greater than the monster's casting speed, then the casting of its Skill is really never going to be completed. So it can be treated as a kind of a saturation attack.

And even if the damage done by each chant delaying attack is small, this drawback could always be offset by the sheer number of attacks, even if quantity over quality might be seen by some people as a cheap tactic, I say that as long as it gets the job done, everything goes.

「Come to think of it, the Skill-using monsters that we have fought thus far really could not move when they were using Skills.」

The Green Caterpillar and the Beep Sheep shared that characteristic. Also, both of these monster types were trying to unleash their Skills at us only when they were sure that there was enough distance between us as to not allow us to attack them during the chanting process.

「Then that would really mean that 「Chant Delay」 is a much better option between these two Skills, right?」

Pondering everything she just heard, Roxanne arrived at such a conclusion. Thinking about it that way, that would really be the case. If the monsters really cannot perform any other action for as long as the chanting process is ongoing, and we know that they cannot because we have seen this more than our fair share of times already, then keeping it locked indefinitely in the chanting action would be the best possible choice for making the combat infinitely easier, which translates into making our fights that much safer. On the other hand, since 「Chant Interruption」breaks the process of the Skill's

activation completely, then it does not mean that the monster that got interrupted is necessarily going to go back to chanting the Skill's incantation again. For all we know, when monsters will learn that we can interrupt their chants, they might as well opt for a normal attack instead of trying something that might as well end in failure for a second time. When compared to this, 「Chant Delay」that is going to prevent the Skill-using monster from making any other attacks because it is going to be locked in a still-ongoing action of casting the Skill is truly a more practical, more desirable option. If we keep delaying the monster's chanting, it might be possible to render it completely unavailable of doing anything other than continuing the chanting, like attacking, dodging or even walking. Yeah, the more I think about it, the stronger that Skill seems to be!

「Of course, not everything is as perfect with it as it might seem at first glance. Usually, there is more than one monster that a Party has to fight, especially on the higher floors of the Labyrinths, and oftentimes, monsters can simply choose to stop their incantations on their own. Not to mention that the decision to have all of the members of your Party equip the weapons with 「Chant Delay」Skill embedded into them is a kind of a big one, as well as the one that might turn out to be more harmful rather than helpful in the long run, because having the entire Party specialize in one specific aspect of combat or Skill limits the Party's options and eliminates of the greatest strengths that a Party can possibly have: diversity and versatility, and makes it more susceptible to random or unforeseen circumstances that no one had the means of predicting. All in all, using 「Chant Delay」is a good strategy to be used against the Floor Bosses on the lower floors of the Labyrinths, while on the higher floors, 「Chant Interruption」, which can force even a Floor Boss to stop chanting the Skill incantation and force it do start doing it all over again from the very beginning is extremely more valuable.

「I see. So while 「Chant Delay」can have its fair share of uses, 「Chant Interruption」is a lot more useful in the overall sense.」

Roxanne nodded her head, accepting that her initial assessment that put 「Chant Delay」above 「Chant Interruption」was too hastily made. Now that we have that difference sorted out for us, we can make some plans and adjustemnts to incorporate what we just learned into our overall set of

strategies. Since Labyrinths can be quite big and expansive, I think it is safe to state that we are still in the lower floors area of it, meaning that it should be safe for us to experiment around with the 「Chant Delay」Skill Crystal if we ever manage to get our hands on one of them. It also helps that so far, Floor Boss encounters only have one Floor Boss in them, but I do not know if that trend is going to stay the same or change the higher into the Labyrinths we will go.

「How can we create 「Chant Interruption」 Skill Crystal?」

「It can be done by fusing a monster Skill Crystal together with a Kobold Skill Crystal. In master's case, it would be a fusion of Slow Rabbit Skill Crystal and Kobold Skill Crystal that would result in the creation of 「Chant Interruption」Skill Crystal.」

「Oh, that is another thing that I wanted to ask you about. You mentioned the Kobold Skill Crystal before as well. Why is that? Does using this specific monster's Skill Crystal helps improving the resulting Skill Crystal in some way? If so, then I had no idea that such a bland, weak monster can actually be so useful.」

「Yes, you are actually right in stating that, master. Just as you have guessed, Kobold Skill Crystals are a little bit more special when compared to the other Skill Crystals, in a sense that when they are fused with them, they have the unique ability to strengthen the resulting Skill Crystal's effect, and in rarer cases they can even modify it to a certain extent.」

「So we cannot just fuse Slow Rabbit Skill Crystal with any other random Skill Crystal to get our hands on the 「Chant Interruption」chant interruption Skill Crystal?」

「Yes, that is right. In order to create that Skill Crystal, you need the Kobold Skill Crystal specifically.」

「And there are no exceptions?」

「No, I am afraid that there are no exceptions.」

「Well, in that case I guess it really was a stroke of luck that we managed to get our hands on that Slow Rabbit Skill Crystal this morning, right, Roxanne?」

「Oh yes, most definitely.」

We glanced at each other and exchanged nods and a thumbs up. I never would have expected that the Kobolds, monsters that are commonly referred to as the weakest ones among the bestiary of this world would have a surprisingly handy usage like that. I guess that makes sense of why some Adventurers go out of their way to hunt them despite their inability to provide any kind of decent Drop Items or EXP after being killed. I also thought of them as little more than the equivalent of annoying insects, but apparently there was much more to them than meets the eye, as was the case with many of the things that I have encountered during my stay here thus far.

「The question now is: is it really worth it to keep killing Kobolds and grind them and hope that one of them is going to drop its Skill Crystal sooner or later?」

「About that, master. That is most certainly a valid concern, but also the one that you do not have to worry about all that much, because there is a simple remedy for that, because the auctions organized by the Quratar's Merchants Guild are always a valid option to try.」

「Auctions organized by the Merchants Guild here in Quratar? What is usually auctioned there?」

「Skill Crystals and the equipment that comes together with Skills already imbued into it, among other things. But since you are living here, then I am sure that you already knew about it, so my words were more like a refresher rather than anything meaningful, right?」

「Yes, of course.」

Of course. that this is my first time hearing about something like that.

「. Did you know about that, Roxanne?」

「Uhm. . . not personally, but I am sure that I probably heard rumors about it somewhere before. . . . probably.」

In other words, Roxanne had no idea that something so convenient was being organized in this city.

Chapter 2: Intellectual Faction, Part 15

And if Roxanne did not know about it, that any smart person would be able to put two and two together, realizing that if she did not know about it, then there would be no way for me to know about it as well.....
... and that is exactly what Sherry did, because she was looking at Roxanne and myself with the eyes that were clearly saying something along the lines of 「Really now? Seriously?」.

「Uhm. I come from a country located far, far away to the east, so the customs we had there and the way things are working here in this country differ significantly in quite a few aspects, so I will gladly welcome any piece of knowledge that you would be willing to share with me.

「*Sigh. . . * Okay, I understand.」

Damn, there is no way that the good impression that I managed to score with her throughout the day did not take a real plummet towards the ground just now. But I cannot help it in any shape, way or form, because if I do not know something then I do not know something, even though I just lied that I did because I thought it was going to make me sound more cool in Sherry's eyes, which ended up backfiring horribly.

「So about those Kobold Skill Crystals. you think we would be able to buy them if we went to one of the auctions?」

「I guess so. but doing that now would be pointless, unless you have some connections with someone who has a Master Smith Job?」

You are my Master Smith connection, my dear Sherry. But for the time

being, it would be best for me to keep quiet about it in order to not make her even more suspicious of us than she already might be.

「I see. Thank you for your explanations, Sherry. They are really easy to understand even for someone like me. As you probably guessed, neither Roxanne nor I knew anything about it, so having someone like you around, someone who is smart and does not hesitate to share her knowledge with others is really quite useful to us.」

「No, you do not have to thank me, master. What I am telling you is not really anything that groundbreaking, just something that those who live in the empire consider to be common knowledge.」

「I know, but even so, we appreciate your help. It might sound a bit presumptuous coming from me, but do continue to support us in the future, all right?」

「Y-Yes, of course! Thank you very much for putting so much of your trust in me!」

Now that I finished complimenting Sherry, I went to the Labyrinth for another time. While in there, I made sure to praise Roxanne for how useful she was as a preventive method against her getting jealous that I praised Sherry more than her today. *Phew. . . * now that I have bought sherry and the ranks of my Party have grown, there is a lot more things that I have to consider and look out for now, huh? I never would have expected that sharing my life with just two more people is going to be so tiring not only on my body, but on my psyche as well. In any case, Roxanne was the first slave that I bought for myself, and the one who has supported me with everything that she could ever since our paths have become intertwined, so I have to make sure not to neglect her or make her feel sad in any way. What kind of master would I be if I allowed something like that to happen, a horrible one, that is who I would be.

After finishing another round of recovering MP in the Labyrinth, We came back home and I finished preparing the bath. As a finishing touch I have thrown some lemons into the water and that was it, so I left the bathroom.

「Thank you for your hard work today, master. The dinner is ready now.」

Roxanne informed me after handing me a towel so that I could wipe the sweat off of my forehead.

「Thank you. Let us go and eat now.」

When we arrived in the dining room, the dished were already lined up on the table. Judging from the position of the plates, Sherry seemed to have put her own right next to Roxanne's this time. And as for the dish before my eyes. . .

.....
「*Sniff* *Sniff* It smells incredible.」

「Thank you for your kind words, master. Since this is the first dish that I am preparing for you as your slave, I wanted it to be something that would represent the culinary culture of my race, and so, I have prepared a traditional Dwarven soup, Borscht. (TL Note: So, Borscht is considered to be a typical Dwarven cuisine, huh? Does that mean that Dwarves in general are going to be modeled after Russians, or other inhabitants of Central and Eastern Europe, since this is where Borscht originally comes from? I guess we shall see one day) I hope you will find it to your liking.」

Those were the words that Sherry greeted me with.

The soup that was in the pot that was on the table definitely looked like the genuine Borscht, or at least something that was very similar to it, but I wonder if it was really called Borscht, or was this another case of the game mechanics with the Brahim language translating the untranslatable words to their equivalents from my world that my mind would be able to comprehend without much issues? Anyway, let's check this thing out real quick before I have myself a seat. Red color? Check. The typical aroma of the beet boiled in hot water with various spices? Check. Yup, for all intents and purposes, this soup really looks like Borscht (TL Note: God damn, the urge to just start writing it as Barszcz as we call it in Poland is really strong in me right now), but I wonder how is it going to be taste wise. Also, this is going to be my first time tasing a cuisine other than that what I was eating at the Vale Pavilion and later the things that Roxanne and I were making together, so I

guess you could say that I was really curious to see for myself exactly what does the Dwarven cuisine have to offer in comparison to all those other dishes I have eaten. Will it taste better, or perhaps worse? Is it going to be more exotic, or perhaps something more along the lines of standards of your typical European cooking? That being said, I did not taste all that much cooking that was not purely Japanese when I was still there, so I really do not know what kind of sensations I should be expecting.

As I was thinking about how this Borscht was going to taste like, Roxanne sat down at the seat that was across from me at the other side of the table.

Hm?

「Roxanne, are you really fine sitting there?」

Now that Sherry has joined our ranks and all three of us are going to eat at the same dinner table every day, I really think that it would not hurt us to spread out a bit to ensure that we will be using the table in its entirety, since it was too big for just wo people anyway.

「Yes, master, I am fine with it. After all, this is the best seat possible.」

Is this about that whole 「I am my master's first slave, therefore the place in front of him belongs to me」schtick? I am not so sure, and I do not know if I want to be digging into it more than I should.

「All right, if you say so. Sherry, you sit down as well.」

「Eh? Are you serious, master? Am I really allowed to sit down and eat together with you?」

Again with this disbelief that she is allowed to eat at the same table as Roxanne and I? I do not know if this is the mentality of all the slaves or something that is being taught to them when they become the property of the Slave Shops, but I am not going to treat them as some sub-category of human beings.

「Sure you are. Unless you explicitly want to eat your meal while standing, in

which case, go right ahead. If that is what you want, I am not going to stop you.]

Chapter 2: Intellectual Faction, Part 16

「Sherry, I believe we have talked about this during the previous meal already, but master is not the kind of person who would ever order his slaves not to eat the same kind of food as him. He is a person who enjoys the company of others during his meals, so please, have a seat next to me and join us so that we could eat this meal together.」

Roxanne said so, finally causing Sherry to sit down. Was she really expecting me to order her not to eat the same kind of food we were going to eat just now and only make do with the leftovers while eating them off the floor? Now that really makes me wonder if this is a matter of preference, or perhaps something else entirely?

Well, whatever I guess. As long as Sherry will not complain and is going to obediently sit down to eat with us, there will be no causes for any kinds of interventions on my end.

Taking my mind off of such things, I took a healthy serving of Sherry's Borscht from the pot in the center of the table and poured it into my own plate. And as for that comes next, uhm. . .

According to what Roxanne has taught me about this world, distributing soup to all who are sitting at the dining table is one of the responsibilities of the head of the household, or in other words, the responsibility that falls onto my shoulders since I am both the leader of our Party and the master of both Sherry and Roxanne. While a bit atypical from the normal familial structure, I guess those are reasons enough for me to consider myself the head of the household, and I am sure that neither of the girls are going to raise any kinds of complaints against this. After all, Aside form that one argument we had

about the matter of my will and setting Roxanne free in the case of my untimely death, she never questioned any of my other decisions so far, and whenever we were going out into the town, she was always either walking right by my side or just half a step behind me, as if she was following some kind of slave etiquette. Is there even such a thing to begin with? I have no idea, so maybe I should try asking her about that some other time when we are not going to be occupied by other, more important matters. But let us get down to the soup distribution business. If I remember the other things that Roxanne was telling me about correctly, then after the head of the household pours the soup for himself, the next person who should receive the serving should be the one who was responsible for the making of the soup in the first place, which would mean that this next person should be Sherry.

SHIVER! ! ! *SHIVER! ! !*

「. !!!」

What the hell was that just now? This intense pressure and malicious air, as if someone was glaring at me with the evil intentions that could not have been more clear even if they tried. do not tell me.

Yes! Roxanne was the one who emanated this malicious air. She was still smiling of course, but the way she was keeping her eyes closed and the ever so slight way that the corners of her lips were trembling as if she was doing all within her power to stop herself from grimacing in displeasure. oh yeah, there is no mistaking it. She is definitely jealous! Jealous of me giving the serving of the soup to Sherry instead of her in the first place! Okay, all right, I get it, I get it! See, Roxanne, I am giving the first serving of the soup to you on the double, so please, stop glaring so much daggers at me already!

「H-Here you go, Roxanne.」

「Oh, You are giving me the first serving of the soup? That is so thoughtful of you. Thank you very much, master.」

Rather than me being thoughtful, it is more like I have been intimidated into doing so, but let us not dwell on that for too long, because that is simply not

worth it. I just anted to uphold the proper etiquette by giving Sherry, the chef who made the Borscht, the first serving of her own dish, that is it, nothing more to it. Besides, since this is supposed to be a Dwarven dish, she is probably the one who is looking forward to eating it the most. So now that Roxanne has been served her own portion, maybe I can finally give it to her as well?

「Here is your serving, Sherry.」

「Thank you very much, master.」

Finally, I managed to give Sherry the soup as well.

I wonder if this dish is going to be similar to the bread and stir-fried vegetables that Roxanne prepared for me when we first moved here, or is it going to be something altogether different, with its own unique taste to it?

「Well then, let us dig right in.」

I placed the spoon filled with Borscht in my mouth and swallowed it.

Mmm.

The first thing that comes into my mind is that it has a rustic flavor, but it is the good kind of rustic. The ingredients are all cut into large pieces, which really gives this soup a feel of a countryside dish to it. Although personally, I would not have minded it if she were to cut the veggies into smaller pieces to make them a little easier to swallow. But nevertheless. . . .

「It is delicious.」

「Thank you.」

And just like that, we all proceeded to eat the Borscht while enjoying it greatly.

「Ahh, that sure tasted great. By the way, there is something that I was wondering for a while now. Wolfkin have the unique Beast Warrior Job, and Dwarves have their Master Smith, which got me thinking: is there a specific

Job that only Humans can have?」

Sherry knows a lot, so she is definitely going to know the answer to that question. The person who ran the Vale Pavillion also said that his Job, the Innkeeper was a Job specific to his race, so it would be pretty strange if Humans did not have a Job that would be available to them and them alone. If it were to be like that, then it would definitely be unnatural and, well. . . kinda racist, if I were to be honest. Maybe Hero is a Job reserved only for humans. . . yeah, right, that would be too much of a preferential treatment now, would t not?

「!!!!!! Oh, uhm. . . that is. . . well. . . 」

「Eh?! S-So master really is interested in those kinds of things?!」

Both of them had a strange reaction. Did I say something weird without really meaning to?

「I mean, do not get me wrong, master! Being loved by you is definitely a good thing, and I. . . and I enjoy it immensely. . . . 」

「I. . . I think so as well. . . . and I have been prepared that for something like that to come up sooner or later. . . . 」

Okay, what are they saying now? I only asked them if Humans have a Human-specific Job, but as soon as I said that, they both started to freak out.

「Ladies? What are you going on about?」

「Human seem to be a race with an abnormally high, nigh-insatiable sex drive, so. . . . 」

Sherry began her explanations, but honestly, I do not know if I like where she is going with this.

Even animals have homosexuality, rape, non-reproductive sex, family killing, and infanticide, but they do all of these things because they are being driven by their instincts. Humans, on the other hand, are the only known race that can do all of those things simply to feel the pleasure coming from them.

Animals can live according to their instincts, but humans have evolved and adapted to use their brains to make decisions, rather than relying solely on their instincts. We became more flexible, but in the process of doing that, we lost the breaks on our desires.

「So. . . ?」

「So since that seems to be a defining feature of the Human race, their race-specific Job. . . is Sex Maniac.」

Human-specific Job. . . is a Sex Maniac? Because of their nigh-insatiable sex drive?

Yeah, that. . . that is definitely very human like.

Chapter 3: Never Give Up, Part 1

『Sherry』

『Current Character Levels & Equipment』:

Jobs:

Villager Lv.3

Equipment:

Mallet

Leather Helmet

Leather Armor

Leather Gloves

Sandals

News flash: So apparently, Humans are considered to be a race that has an enormous, near insatiable sexual appetite. That is what Roxanne and Sherry told me while their faces were all flushed and they nervously avoided looking me in the eyes.

As much as I think that such an opinion is unjust and even racist. . . I cannot say that it is not completely true, since I already had a lot of pent up desires that exploded when I bought Roxanne, and now that I also have Sherry, who also agreed to become my sex slave, by my side, there is no doubt in my mind that those desires are only going to grow stronger as time goes on and more and more slaves joins the ranks of my Party.

So yeah, even if I wanted to do something about it, I guess it simply cannot be helped. Certainly, there is absolutely nothing that can be done on my part to change the state of this matter at all. After all, that is what being human is all about.

「Okay, now we are all going to take a bath together. Once you take all of your clothes off, come on in.」

I declared as I started to undress myself without any kind of hesitation.

Yes, this is an essential part of who I am, or rather, what my race is, so trying to fight it would be like an attempt to be someone that I am not. So now that I have resolved myself, I have to do everything that I can to keep this momentum going without letting it die out, so I quickly got rid of my clothing and went to the bathroom a little bit earlier in order to give the girls some alone time.

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It is happening. Oh my God, it is finally happening! We are finally going to have a threesome bath! Now, when we typically talk about a man and a woman having a bath, you would imagine that the two of them are a couple, but the ones that I am going to be bathing with are not my girlfriends, but my slaves! It is a big shame that I will not be able to witness the glorious scene of Roxanne and Sherry undressing in one room right next to each other, but in the situation where this is going to be Sherry's first time doing something like that with us, I felt like it was necessary for me to be a little bit forceful and make it look like an order that she could not refuse, because otherwise she might have tried to escape from the entire thing, rendering all of the preparations that I went through for this particular event useless.

Right now, the role of convincing Sherry to take a bath with us falls onto Roxanne's shoulders, and all that I can do is to check if the temperature of the water is not too hot. Thankfully, once I dipped my hand in, it felt like it was just hot enough to make for an enjoyable soak, and not hot enough to burn us. All in all, I have to say that I have become pretty skilled when it comes to preparing baths.

「Is. . . is it really okay for me to be taking a bath together with master? I thought that only the members of the royal family and nobility are allowed to do it?」

「It is perfectly okay for you to be doing it Sherry, I assure you. Now, let us go in together.」

I heard the voices of Sherry and Roxanne behind me back. Okay, looks like everything seems to be going fine for the time being, which is great. Sherry is going to be bathing with me in just a few short moments! Oh, I just cannot wait! The suspense is killing my fragile male heart!

I set the lantern in the corner of the room and checked the temperature of the water again in order to keep myself occupied. Yeah, its pretty hot, but not hot enough to be in need of cooling it with cold water. Good, we are definitely in the clear here.

But maybe. . . just maybe, I should probably add just a tiny bit of it, just to be doubly, triply and quadruply sure that the temperature is going to be just right. We should still have some leftover water in the boiling tank, but it would be difficult to quickly increase the temperature after adding it in. On the other hand though, cooling it should be pretty easy, so the next time I will be preparing the bath, I think it should be fine to make the water even hotter than it is right now.

「Miss Roxanne, your breasts are so big!」

「That's is not true, Sherry. I think they are the normal size.」

「Maybe so, but they are definitely bigger than mine. There is no competition here at all. *Sigh* . . .」

As I kept the watch over the hot water, I heard the voices of the girls talking about such things behind my back. Oi mates, you do realize that I can hear you, right?! What do you think you are doing, talking about things like that when I am dying of anticipation here? Do you really want my heart to burst that much?! Ugh, I am so envious and I want to join them right this instant! It is not fair that they are the only ones who get to have fun like that while I am

left out on a loop, so hurry up and jump into the bath already! And while I am still at it, I better make sure to prepare the soap before I forget. . .

「Master, we are ready now. So if you will excuse us. . .」

Roxanne was the one to approach me first. Hoo boi, are her jugs getting bigger every time I get to see them , or is it just my horniness-fueled imagination playing tricks on me? Big, oh lawd, so big. . .

「Ahh, uhm, yes. . . excuse us. . .」

Sherry followed right after her, but much to my chagrin she was hiding her breasts beneath the bath towel and she kept her face down, but aside from that towel, she did not have anything on and was completely naked. Ahh, just like I thought. This beautiful scenery before my eyes is pure bliss, teal heaven, and true paradise!

「Sherry, in this household, it is one of our established customs that master is going to be the one who is going to wash us.」

「Ah. . . ! O-Okay!」

That is right, Sherry. Washing my slaves is one of the perks. . . or should I say, privileges of me being your master. Sherry's body is small and thin, but not child-like. Overall, I have to say that she looks pretty stylish, in a completely different sense from Roxanne, who is a man-killing bombshell all around. Even though she claimed that she has very small breasts, it was not true. They might not be the size of melons, but they are definitely there, and her soft skin looks positively dazzling in the light provided by the lantern.

「Alright, let us get in, and I will wash you two.」

However, no matter how privileged I may be as their master, it would definitely be rude of me to just continue to stand there and gawk at the two of them, so I entered the bathtub while taking some of the soap with me. Just like before, Roxanne was the first one to follow after me.

「Here you go, master.」

She said, standing in front of me with her two enormous boobs swaying left and right when she leaned forward towards me. Naturally, my eyes were glued to those marvelous mountains and the deep valley between them, and I could do nothing to get my sight away from them. They were simply too enrapturing for me to resist their temptation.

「As I thought, there really is no way for me to even come close to them.」

Sherry commented with a mournful voice. No no no Sherry, it is not like that at all. . . I said in my mind while still staring at Roxanne's milkers.

Chapter 3: Never Give Up, Part 2

When it comes to the sizes of their chests, Sherry obviously seems to be having an inferiority complex whenever she gazes at how stacked Roxanne is and it must hurt her to see how obsessed I seem to be with her boobs as well, and honestly, I cannot blame her for that, because I would have probably reacted in the same way if I saw a girl that I had a massive crush on hitting it off with other dudes who are not me. . . but when Roxanne herself is tempting me with these wonderful breasts of hers, it is really hard for me to resist their allure and the urge to grab them and sink my fingers into them while forgetting about everything else that is happening around me at this very moment. I want to apply the soap all over Roxanne's body and make her all shiny and slippery with it. So that is what I did. I moved my hands forward and started washing Roxanne up from top to bottom.

I washed her breasts, the places that I wanted to touch the most with the utmost care and attention to their every nook and cranny, first with one hand, and then with both of my hands to make sure that not even a speck of unwashed skin will remain on her. I am indulging in her body to my heart's content, slowly tracing the curves of her rich bulges.

As I thought, Roxanne's boobs are truly the best out of all the boobs in the world. Their incredible feeling of springiness, elasticity and weight feel like they are almost too much for me to handle. No matter if I choose to take care of the left one or right one, they both feel equally incredible. This is the best feeling in the entire world, period. I am positively sure that there is nothing that can top it off.

「They are the best. Absolutely amazing.」

「Thank you very much. . . master. . . 」

When I was finished, Roxanne was covered in foam practically everywhere on her body except for her head, back and tail.

「Okay Sherry, you are next.」

「Y-Yes, of course!」

Now that she was standing before me with nothing but a towel covering her, I could clearly see how petite her figure is. Just the difference in our height was so big that if she was not facing her head upwards, it was impossible for me to see exactly what kind of face she was making. But that did not change the fact that overall she was still thin, slim and incredibly pretty.

「Before I start, do you want to keep your hairbands on?」

「Ah, no, there is no need for that. I will take them off. I was simply keeping them on because I did not want to wash my hair just yet. . . because I thought that because of how long they are, they might get in the way of you and Miss Roxanne. . . 」

I see. She really has thought this through, huh? How nice of her to be so considerate of others, even in circumstances such as these. Not to mention that her chest is not as small as she claimed it to be, because while not on Roxanne's level, I could definitely see them jiggling under the bath towel just now.

「Thank you for your consideration, Sherry, but I do not really mind that, so the next time we will be taking a bath, do not feel inclined to wait until we are finished and go ahead with washing your hair. This bathtub should be large enough for all of us to be able to wash ourselves without getting in each other's way after all. Roxanne, can I ask you to make some more foam for us?」

「Of course, master. Here you go.」

With the additional foam that Roxanne quickly made for me, I got down on my knees in order to wash Sherry without having to bend over the entire time.

「Are you ready for this, Sherry? Can I start?」

「Y-Yes. P-Please. . . . do take care of me.」

「I will, I promise. Just try to relax a little, okay?」

In trusting herself to me, Sherry let go of the bath towel she was clutching onto and allowed me to take care of washing her chest for her. Placing my hands on her chest, I started from foaming up her collarbone and then gradually made my way up all around its area. That is right. There is no way that she did not get even a little bit excited from watching me wash Roxanne's body up starting from her breasts, which is why I think it is only going to be fair to her if I start the process of washing her from the very same spot: from her chest. That way, she will not be able to say that I purposefully avoided touching her boobs because of how small and unattractive they are. You might call it a shameless tactic, but in the current circumstances it is going to be the most effective one that is going to ensure that both of my slaves are going to feel like I am treating them equally without favoring one of them over the other.

「Umu. They are wonderful as well. What an amazing feeling.」

I cannot believe that Sherry was not confident in her breasts just because they are a little bit on the smaller side. In the terms of their feeling and elasticity, they can give Roxanne a run for her money without any problems. The only difference between them is that while Roxanne is so big that my fingers are sinking into the skin of her tits every time I am touching her, Sherry's feel like I could grasp them both firmly and enclose them in my hands if I wanted to. It is a different kind of irresistibility, but the one that is just as enticing all the same, as If I was holding a hamster or a small bird in my grasp (**TL Note: I have no idea how can boobs feel like a small bird or a hamster, but apparently the minds of our fellow Nipponjins are just build differently, so let us just put that under the yikes category and move on.**)

At the current moment, if someone were to walk up to me and ask me which do I prefer: the boobs that spill from between your fingers due to how big they are or boobs that are compact enough to fit in the palm of my hand, I would honestly have a pretty hard time answering that question.

「Ah... uhm... master? I... I am sorry... that my breasts are not as big as Miss Roxanne's...」

「You say that, but I do not think that yours are particularly small though?」

「I thought the same way when I was still living in my village, but when I was sold to be a slave and began living in the Slave Shop I could not help but notice there were many more women and girls whose chests were bigger from mine, and that they were able to find the people who were willing to buy them more easily.」

Even though I want to say something to make her feel better, I cannot really comment upon this matter in any way since I am also one of these people, in a sense that I also allowed looks and the size of the boobs to be the deciding factor in my decision to buy Roxanne as my first slave.

「That is okay, Sherry. You do not need to worry about that. To me, you are perfectly fine exactly the way you are now.」

「But Miss Roxanne is so big. . . .」

Ah-ha, so it is exactly as I thought. She has already been comparing herself to Roxanne in that regard, even though as a smart person she should already know that comparing herself to other girls and the sizes of their chests is pretty pointless from a biological point of view.

「Sherry, I want you to hear me out on what I am about to say, alright? Listen, it is true that Roxanne has pretty big breasts, but that is only because of her bodily proportions. She is pretty tall, so it is natural for her to have a bigger chest that would match her height. On the other hand, you are naturally shorter due to your race, so it is a given that your chest is going to be smaller in order to match your height. So you see, you do not have to worry about a thing.」

Chapter 3: Never Give Up, Part 3

「In fact, I think that the proportions that you currently have suit you just fine.」

It is just my rough estimation, but if I am not mistaken, Roxanne seems to be at least twenty centimeters taller than Sherry, so the differences if their figures and proportions were going to be a given. After all, If Sherry was as short as she is but had breasts as big as Roxanne has, it would not only mean that she would have problems with back and shoulder pains, but in the worst-case scenario even her breast milk might have ended up getting affected in a negative way. She might feel disappointed or defective because of how small her breasts are in comparison to Roxanne's, but the truth is that from a medical standpoint, or a standpoint of sherry's health, to be more precise, her current size is more than enough for her, since she is not exactly flat to the level of calling her breasts something as derogative as, for example, mosquito bites.

「Do you... really mean it?」

「Yeah, I really mean it, Sherry.」

「And my thoughts on this matter are exactly the same as master's, Sherry.」

「I... I... master, Miss Roxanne... thank you... thank you so very much. . . 」

「「You are welcome.」」

With Sherry's worries in regards to the size of her chest firmly soothed (or at least I want to believe that we managed to soothe them), I used another serving of the foam handed to me by Roxanne in order to cover Sherry's

entire body with it. I can always enjoy playing with her chest later, but for now, let me make sure that I am going to give her entire body a thorough wash-up.

「All right, I think that about covers it up. Did you enjoy me washing you, Sherry?」

「Y-Yes, thank you very much for it, master. It. . . being washed by you felt very good.」

「Okay Sherry, now that the both of us have been washed by master, let us return the favor and wash master instead!」

「Yes, of course, gladly. . . but how are we going to do that, exactly?」

「Just. . . like that!」

Roxanne exclaimed, hugging the left side of my body without any prior warning. Thanks to her doing that, my left arm is now sandwiched between her breasts, which was a very bold move of her. Explosive, even! I would never have guessed that my arm is going to fit so perfectly into the valley of her chest, but there it was, nestling between her tits so comfortably as if it was made for it. I thought that feeling the sensation of Roxanne's big bare boobs on my back was stimulating enough already, but this feeling of her mountains forming squeezing around the skin of my arm like a soft, fleshy wall was an all new kind of heavenly pleasure that I was allowed to experience.

And the best thing about it was that this pleasure was washing all over the left part of my body, while the right part has been taken by a different kind of pleasure, courtesy of Sherry, who tried to emulate what Roxanne was doing to me by embracing my other arm. Since she is not as big as Roxanne, the feeling is not as explosive as I would have liked, but because Sherry is slimmer than her, her embrace feels that much more risqué. I can definitely feel how her pointed, hardened nipples are moving up and down my arm, tickling me a little.

This. . . this sensation is incredible. This almost feels like it is too much to

bear for my brain right now! Since they have already chosen to do this for me, then I will have them wash my every nook and cranny, and do so thoroughly all the while watching their movements so that they will not waste too much of the precious soap. When I was still only fantasizing about this happening, I was convinced that it would be the best thing ever if they were to wash me from the front and from the back at the same time, but now that they are taking care of my left and right sides, I realize that this is also not that bad. In fact, it feels amazing! Having my body be washed by the two of them at once is the best feeling in the entire world, but I cannot allow my sense of reason to leave me. . . at least not yet when there is still something that I have to do.

「Roxanne, prepare a bit more soap, please? We already washed our hair yesterday so we do not have to do it again today, but we might as well wash Sherry's hair for her. I will take care of it, so in the meantime, I would like you to help her with her back, okay?」

「Of course, master.」

Due to Sherry's small size, her head perfectly positioned for us to take care of washing her hair without having her stand on the tip of her toes or without the need for us to be kneeling or leaning forward. All I have to do is to take the soap from Roxanne, make it a little more foamy and. . . voila, it is all ready to be applied to her hair, but since she was not kidding about her having a lot of them, then I am definitely going to need as much soap as I can get in order to wash all of it properly without leaving any patch or strand of it unattended.

While I was busy fighting with the mass of Sherry's hair, Roxanne turned around and approached her from behind so that she could fulfill my request of washing Sherry's back for her. . . . or at least I thought that was what she was going to do, but she walked past Sherry and came up behind me instead! It happened quite unexpectedly, but I guess I am going to have my fantasy of being washed from the front and the back at the same time fulfilled after all.

「Well then, master. . . I am going to start washing your back.」

「Oooohh. . . y-yeah, go right ahead.」

I could feel her soft, springy bulges on my back! I wanted her to help Sherry, but this works fine for me as well! The only thing that would make it better now would be if I could see everything that she was doing for me, but since she was behind my back I would have to twist my neck quite hard to do it, and I could not do that since I had my hands full with washing Sherry's hair. And speaking of her, due to the amount of the foam that was forming on her head she had no choice but to close her eyes to not allow any of the soapy foam to get in them by accident, so she was also unable to see what Roxanne was currently doing for me, and honestly, I think it is for the better. If she was able to see what was going on at my backside at the current moment, I think it would be very possible for her to faint on the spot. With each of Roxanne's movements, my frustration was only growing, so in order to somehow deal with it, I decided to the only sensible thing: distract myself from what was happening behind me by focusing all of my attention on scrubbing sherry's hair with the foam. Even though there is an awful lot of them, they are soft to the touch and feel much like the threads of silk in my fingers, and they are not even resisting my touch all that much. On second thought, let me add something more to their description so that I could convey how they feel more properly: they are smooth like silk and soft like cotton. There, that should do it quite nicely, would you not agree?

「This might sound a little weird, but you have nice hair, Sherry. They look like they are of an exceedingly good quality.」

「T-Thank you they much, master. I Always made sure to take proper care of them whenever that was possible.」

「I wonder if I could have the hair as thick and smooth as you, or is that impossible for humans?」

Maybe that is a characteristic that only the hair of the Dwarven women have? Whatever the case may be, my own dark and light hair are more than enough for the time being, but the thought of me having the same type of hair as Sherry was pretty entertaining in its own right.

Chapter 3: Never Give Up, Part 4

Now that the washing of Sherry's hair has been successfully completed, I decided it was high time for me to wash my own hair, but since I used almost all of the foam that Roxanne made for me for that purpose, I had to lather some more of it first, and then washed it. Now that all three of us have been covered with soap from the top to our bottoms.

「All right, let us jump into the water while it is still warm, shall we?」

「Right!」

「O-Okay!」

. it was high time to finally enter the bathtub so that we could wash it all off in one fell swoop. Now that Sherry's hair have become all wet, they got stuck onto her skin, which made for a pretty erotic display. Combined with her fair skin, she was really looking like the world's most beautiful porcelain doll. She looks so pretty that it is almost unreal.

The three of us entered the bathtub at last. Since Sherry's hair are so long and thick then I am sure that they must feel amazing, however. . . there is nothing in this world that can possibly beat the feeling of Roxanne's tail brushing against my nether regions while in the bathtub while she is hugging onto me.

「Ahhh. . . this is the best. . . 」

「Indeed it is, master.」

For a few long moments, we were just all sitting in the bathtub while snuggling together, enjoying the sensation of hot water wrapping itself all around us. Or rather, Roxanne and I were the ones who snuggled together, while Sherry was sitting some distance away from us, and we cannot have

that, since that is not the purpose of this group activity of ours.

「Come on Sherry, do not be a stranger. Come sit here together with us.」

「Ah! Y-Yes, of course, I'm coming! If, if you excuse me. . . 」

Sherry came closer to us very slowly and while covering herself with her hands. Even though we just touched each other all over literal moments ago, she must probably still feel a little bit embarrassed, hence her hesitation. Well, I guess it is fine for the time being, especially since she will definitely learn to be more relaxed around us after a few more baths just like the one we are having now.

Since we are already so close together like this, I normally would have made my move to get us to be even closer than this, because since I have two beautiful girls at my left and right side, it would be a criminal offense not to try doing anything at all. However, I remember that Roxanne was also shy like that when we were having our first bath together, so having the experience from that time in mind. But I also feel that this is such a waste. I have Roxanne's big breasts on the right of me and Sherry's moderate ones on my left, and they are both naked, and we are touching each other with our bare skins. A beautiful, naked woman in each of my arms. . . this is a situation that is the dream of all males around the world come true. This feeling of pure bliss that I am feeling right now. . . is that how Toyotomi Hideyoshi must have felt whenever he was showcasing his most beloved tea ceremony tools in his famous Golden Tea Room, or how Napoleon Bonaparte felt when the crown was placed upon his head as he was crowned The Emperor of the French, or how Hitler felt during the marriage he ordered for himself right before he killed himself. . . okay, that is enough of that! Bad example! Very, very bad example! What I wanted to say is that right now, I feel the happiest that I have ever been in my entire life, and I would never traded this feeling of happiness for anything else.

Later, when we finally got out of the bath and we all helped dry each other's bodies up, I left the bathroom ahead of the girls in order to prepare the other room that is going to be seeing some action tonight: the bedroom.

In the bathroom, I hesitated from doing anything too bold to them, but now it

is going to be different. However, I am still going to leave the room relatively dimly lit for Sherry's sake. It is going to be a pity that I will not be able to enjoy the sight of the girls in their full splendor with the proper lightning, but it is unavoidable if I do not want Sherry to be too scarred or embarrassed or to cause some kind of trauma in her. Other than that, everything seems to be perfectly ready, so it is up to me and the girls to see how this thing is going to go further.

「Now then, you two. Come on over here.」

「Yes, master.」

「As you command. uhm. . . . is it really okay for me to be wearing something so nice? Because I do not think a lowly slave like myself should be wearing pretty clothing such as this. . . .」

Sherry asked with a quiet voice as she hid herself behind Roxanne. Roxanne herself was wearing her light-pink negligee, so the other one that Sherry has on herself right now must be the other, white one that I bought for her back at that clothing store where we delivered Rabbit's Meat to the Male Clerk. . . . or maybe it is the other way around? I cannot really tell for sure, since the light is so dim that I can barely see anything a few meters ahead of me.

「It is alright. You look beautiful in it, and that is all that matters.」

「T-Thank you very much.」

「Roxanne, you had to borrow your other camisole to Sherry because I did not think about buying her her own nightgown. Sorry about that.」

「It is no problem at all, master. Because I am still number one!」

How nice of her to be so helpful to her junior in slavery. I think my opinion on both her and Sherry alike has improved a little bit. Okay, I think right now is about time for us to be continuing on with the scheduled program.

「Sherry, come closer to me, please.」

I gestured Sherry to come and sit at my side, and she did do, albeit after

taking her sweet time to do so.

「You know, looking at them now that you dried them all up, you sure have a lot of hair on your head, huh?」

I said nonchalantly while looking at her hair, which were still let down because she did not put her hairbands back on just yet.

「Yes, but honestly. . . I that soap that we were using was so amazing! It made all the dirt that was in my hair wash away as easily as if it was made out of water as well, my hair feel a lot lighter for some reason that I cannot quite explain. . . oh, and of course my skin is so smooth and soft right now that I simply cannot believe it!」

「It was a soap prepared by master, after all, so that much was to be expected.」

「Oh stop it Roxanne, I did not do that much, really. Anyway, I am glad that you liked it, Sherry.」

As I thought, sherry really is someone who looks even better when her natural beauty is properly taken care of, just like Roxanne. Both of them were like diamonds in the rough, just waiting for me to come along and help them uncover the hidden potential that they always had within them, but they did not have the means to let it come to the surface by itself.

「Sherry, listen to me now, okay? In this household, we have a certain rule when it comes to my relations with my slaves.」

「A certain. . . rule? What is that rule, master?」

「It is a rule that every day, we are giving each other a kiss before we go to sleep, and another kiss when we are waking up. So now I ask you. . . are you okay with that rule? Will you be able to uphold it?」

「Ah! I. . . well. . . a-alright, I think I will be able to do it.」

「Great. That is a very good thing to hear indeed.」

Okay, I managed to successfully explain the most important rule of this household to Sherry.

Chapter 3: Never Give Up, Part 5

Now that we covered everything that had to be covered and said everything that needed to be said, I do not think that I will be able to hold myself back anymore. My endurance, both mental and physical is at its utmost limits. So with all of that being said. . . I think it is finally time for me to dig in.

I slowly brought Sherry's face closer to mine. . . and kissed her. Her lips were soft and delicate, and I would have definitely savored their sweet flavor some more. . .

「. Ahhh!!!」

If it was not for the sound that I heard just now.



That was definitely a scream. Roxanne's scream. The one that sounded like a mixture of sadness and desperation. It is so dark here that I cannot see Roxanne's face clearly, but in this case, there was no need for me to see it at all, because the tone of her voice was telling me everything I needed to know, and to realize that I have fucked up, and I fucked up big time this time around.

「. . . Order. the order. . . . our order. . . . 」

Those were the words that Roxanne was now muttering to herself in a quiet, pained voice. And I understood perfectly why that was.

Up until now, when there were just the two of us, she has always been pretty particular about maintaining a certain order of things, by which I mean that she has always insisted that wherever we went, she always wanted me to go first and do things first, since as the head of the household and her master, I was higher than her on the ladder of social hierarchy. We kept that up without any issues, but now that Sherry has been added to our group, she started to show signs of being obsessed with being my number one slave, thinking that in whatever we were doing, she should be coming first before Sherry, because it was she, Roxanne, whom I have chosen as my first slave, not Sherry. And since she has convince herself that she is the number one slave that has to do everything first before Sherry, slave number two, as was shown to me today when she was insistent in a passive-aggressive way that she should be the first one to get the serving of the soup even though Sherry was the one who prepared and not giving her the first serving of her Borscht clearly went against the established customs that Roxanne herself was educating me about, and during the bath when I asked her to wash Sherry's back, but she instead went on to wash my own back, almost as if she was afraid that Sherry could snatch that task away from her. That is also why she thought that she was also going to be the first one when it comes to giving me the good night and good morning kisses, but I ignored that order and started kissing Sherry instead, violating Roxanne's expectations in the rudest way possible.

Terrible, this is absolutely terrible. To say that I have stepped on a huge landmine would be an understatement.

All that I cared about was to satisfy my own insatiable lust, and in doing so, I trampled all over Roxanne's pride and feelings while only caring about kissing Sherry while ignoring everything else that was happening around me. The only saving grace in this growing dumpster fire of a situation is that I have only tasted Sherry's lips so far and I did not straight up shoved my tongue inside of her mouth because it is her first time doing so and I wanted to be as delicate as possible here to avoid making her dislike the act of kissing and everything else that is associated with it. But. . . what am I going to do now? Is. . . is there even anything that I can do to salvage this situation, or is there nothing that could bail me out from facing the consequences of my own stupidity and horniness this time?

Think Michio, think! Think of something, anything! Do not dig your own grave even deeper, and try to come up with a solution that will allow you to not hurt Roxanne even more than you already did and save your own face, even if only a little bit of it!

Maybe. . . maybe this will help? I have no guarantee that what I am about to say is going to do me any good, but at the very least it is going to be better than staying silent and not saying anything at all, so I might just give it a shot and see where it takes me. If it works, then great, I am going to be saved. But if not. . . well, let me try it and see how this goes, and deal with the possible consequences later.

「This. . . this is just the rehearsal of our routine before going to bed, so of course it mean that I have to leave Roxanne, my first slave, for last, when it is not going to be just the rehearsal, but a real deal, right?」

This is it. The only thing that I could think of to save myself right now was this cheap excuse. But is this going to be enough to convince Roxanne? It better be, because otherwise the whole bedroom might actually end up becoming painted in the red color of my blood!!!

「.」

Come on, Roxanne! Say something, anything! Break this uncomfortable silence along with the stress and the feeling of suspense that are killing me right now!

「YES! Thank you so very much for remembering how important order is, master!」

Roxanne said that with a bright smile and an extremely happy voice, so it looks like the shit storm has been avoided.

(*S A F E ! ! ! ! !*)

But my fucking God, that was too much of a close call this time around! I was literally this close to having a death penalty executed on me, but I somehow managed to slip right past it. I slumped down on the bed feeling extremely exhausted, even though we are going to be working up quite a sweat real soon. Was. . . was that feeling of dread I was feeling before Roxanne spoke up the same kind of feeling that the inmates in the death row feel? If so, then I can only thank Roxanne for declaring me innocent, and clearing me up of the false charges that could have been the death of me if the execution here to be carried out instantly without even giving me a chance to defend myself.

「Master?」

「Y-Yes? What is it, Roxanne?」

「Since you have already shown Sherry what she is going to be doing every day from now on, can we move from the demonstration to our routine?」

Roxanne said while lying on top of me, pressing her giant tits against my chest. Well then, I guess I have no choice, do I not? Just like the order dictates, I have to take proper care of Roxanne first. If it is with her, then I am more than willing to work up a good sweat, plus. . . this is going to be my revenge on her after she almost made me go through a heart attacks just now.

I started my offensive on her by giving her a kiss myself instead of waiting for her to do it. She was surprised, but other than that, she was not resisting my advances in any way. Then, paying no mind to how shaken she initially was, I started to relentlessly suck on her lips. In order for this payback of mine to really count, I have to put in twice as much effort that I usually put into it, otherwise I will not feel satisfied at all!

With the flame of revenge burning in my chest, hotter than the flames of hell and brighter than the sun that shines in the sky, I had my way with Roxanne. I did not care that Sherry was watching us with dumb amazement while covering her mouth with her tiny hands. I had my sight set on the goal in front of me, and I was dead set on fulfilling it!

Chapter 3: Never Give Up, Part 6

After doing Roxanne as hard as I wanted, I let go of her, and she slumped onto the bed and rolled over to the side, completely exhausted out of all the energy that she still had moments ago before we started going at it. Even though it already left me feeling quite spent, I knew that it was no time to rest, because Sherry was already waiting for me with flushed cheeks and expectant eyes.

「Sherry, it is your turn now.」

「Yes. . . please. . . please treat me well. . . master. . . .」

Now that I have obtained permission from Sherry to do whatever I wanted, there was no need for me to hold back on her in any way, but since this was going to be her first time, I decided to be less rough on her than I was with Roxanne. There will be time for me to take her more roughly, but that time is not now.

Okay, here I go.

When I got my hands on Sherry, it was as if I had grasped a bottle of hot water, that is how elastic and pleasantly warm to the touch her body was. Could it be because Dwarves have a naturally high body temperature? As for the chest area, while Roxanne's boobs could be very well described as big and soft marshmallows, Sherry's were more like the elastic mounds of pudding. The slightest touch is enough to make the whole thing shake from the bottom of it to the very tips, which have become stiff and erect pretty quickly as a result. Well, if they are like that, then the only thing left to do is to dig in and have a taste of Sherry for myself. . . .

When I finished doing it with Sherry, I felt just as exhausted as Roxanne looked when her turn with me was over. But even though I was feeling pretty tired, but it was the good kind of tired, the one that made me feel like I have fulfilled the duty that I was supposed to do to the absolute best of my ability, but. . . . but I really do not feel like doing anything at all right now.

Threesomes are definitely amazing, but also tiring beyond belief.

While I was laying in bed basking in the afterglow of my intercourses with Sherry and Roxanne, a certain hunch has compelled me to perform a Character Reset, so I opened up my personal menu, performed it. . . and sure enough, I found a brand-new Job unlocked, waiting for me in the Jobs subsection to pick it up. While releasing a big sigh, I poked the window that displayed its information with my finger. Its description read as follows:

『Sex Maniac Lv.1』

Effects: Increase SPI (Medium), Increase INT (Medium), Increase MP (Small)

Skills: Enhanced VIT, Abstinence Attack

Sex Maniac Job, huh? I do not know if I should be happy, sad, or disappointed because of getting my hands on it. Well, I guess that settles it then, I am definitely human, a member of the race that is known far and wide for having a nearly insatiable sexual desire. But since I acquired that new Job only now, I wonder what are the exact conditions that have to be met in order to unlock it. Is it perhaps to have sex with more than one partner of the opposite gender throughout the course of a single night? Perhaps. Or maybe to have sex with multiple partners at the same time? Nah, that is definitely not it, since I did it with Sherry only after I finished doing Roxanne, not as the same time. In that case, maybe it has something to do with being more than a little rough with your partner during sex. but if that were the case then I should have gotten my hands on it a while back when I was so rough with her when we saw that this one guy on the seventh floor got done in by the Rapid Rabbit. . . so the 「Do it with more than one partner throughout the course of the night」 theory is the most probable one. I tried thinking about if for a while longer, but since nothing better was coming to my mind, I decided to stop pursuing this matter, since ultimately it does not

matter what the conditions for unlocking this Job were since I already got my hands on it, and the effects it grants are rather good: two medium increases to SPI and INT Stats and a small increase to MP, meaning that the spread is similar to what Roxanne has on her Beast Warrior Job, with the only difference being that Beast Warrior has one medium increase and two small increases, making it a bit inferior to Sex Maniac. Despite its awkward naming, I think it could definitely work if used as a Second Job aiming at increasing the effectiveness of my Attack Magic and the Wizard Job, since Sex Maniac grants bonuses to both INT and MP at once. . . but really, of all the Jobs, why does it had to be Sex Maniac that had those improvements? And what does that imply? That Sex Maniacs have a higher SPI, INT and MP than those who do not have that Job? Because if so, then that means that humanity as a whole is actually pretty scary.

And man, even though I kept saying that I should hold myself back for Sherry's sake because it was her first time, it looks like I might have overdid it just a little bit after all. Then again, even though I was more excited than usual, I guess doing it with two of them instead of just one probably helped to decrease the burden placed upon them by me being so forceful. Just thinking about what could have happened if Roxanne or Sherry were to receive all of by desire by themselves. . . this could have turned out badly for them, especially for Sherry. I already was quite rough with her, caressing her so relentlessly and meticulously, violently, rigorously and thoroughly from top to bottom, but since they were both here I could love them both equally, so I guess everything worked out pretty nicely in the end.

Ahh, it feels like even my eyelids are so tired that I am having difficulties with keeping hem open. In that case, let me just rest them for a little bit. . .

「It looks like master has fallen asleep.」

As I was quietly resting my eyes and thinking about stuff, I heard Roxanne's voice, whispering a comment like that to Sherry. She is convinced that I have fallen asleep, but the truth is that I am still awake, and can hear everything that she is saying.

「It would seem so.」

Sherry answered her as she moved my sweat-covered bangs to the side so that they would not get stuck to my forehead.

「I guess he must have exhausted himself completely. I cannot say that I blame him though. He was quite intense today, after all. With the both of us.」

Now that the girls are having such a nice heart-to heart, there is no way that I can possibly just open my eyes all of a sudden and be all like 「*surprise, I was not sleeping after all!*」 No, the most sensible thing to do here is going to be pretending that I am truly asleep so that they could talk some more without any reservations, thinking that this is just between the two of them. They were both pressing against my sides now, but it did not feel uncomfortable. Roxanne's nice, pillow-like breasts were serving as a rest spot for my head, and since Sherry's so small and petite, she was not heavy at all.

「Is. is it always so rough?」

「No, it is not always like that. I think that the main cause of master being so fired up today was the fact that you have joined us as his slave. I have to say, for a good while today, I was pretty unsure as to how the things were going to turn out, but in the end, I think everything has worked out rather well. And since master was able to show his affections towards both of us equally, so all in all, I think it is a good thing that we have met you and that you are here with us now.」

So in the end, I ended up making Roxanne feel anxious and uneasy, huh? Well, today may not have been a perfect day, but I am glad that in the end I made her feel loved and appreciated.

Chapter 3: Never Give Up, Part 7

I thanked Roxanne in my heart. I thanked her for loving me, and for her allowing me to love her like that.

「I . . . will I be all right, I wonder?」

「I think you are going to be fine. After all, even if he was kind of rough with you in the end, then master was doing his best to make sure that he would be going at a slower pace earlier specifically to make sure that you will not feel uncomfortable with us. Right? Because that is who he is: a kind and caring master, even if he himself claims otherwise.」

「Of course! Please, take care of me from now on! I might be inexperienced as a slave, but I hope to learn much under your and master's guidance. Miss Roxanne!」

「Yes, likewise. I hope you will take care of us as well, both in the Labyrinths and outside of them.」

Since the Sex Maniac Job has the Skill that increases my VIT by a medium amount then I wanted to test out if it also works as a sexual stamina enhancer, but now that the mood has gotten like that, I do not think it would be a good time to actually go and break to them that I am in fact not asleep at all. That would get the nice atmosphere all ruined, and the credit for that would be all on me.

「Let us get along from now on, okay? Both as master's slaves, and as friends.」

「Yes, let us do exactly that.」

With the friendly words of these two acting as my lullaby, I simply let go of

my consciousness and allowed myself to drift off towards the land of dreams.

When I woke up in the morning, I found myself hugging onto Roxanne like a dakimakura. Our legs were angled together, and my arms were wrapped tightly around her back. Seeing something like that first thing in the morning after waking up was great, but I am not gonna lie, I was expecting to wake up not next to one, but two beautiful girls, each one at one of my sides.

Unfortunately, it looks like it was not meant to be, at least not this time. Also. . . this must have felt great while I was sleeping, but now that I am fully awake, it would be good if I could move my hands and legs freely. . . but unfortunately I am not able to do that. The movements of all of my limbs is completely blocked off by Roxanne, almost as if she was subconsciously refusing to let go of me. But if I were to chose a plus of my current situation. . . it would be that my head is firmly pressed in between Roxanne's boobies, which is the best thing ever. Her back were all warm and pleasant, probably thanks to all of the hair that was growing there. When it comes to Sherry, I wonder if she would make for a good dakimakura to hug onto? I mean, she would not be able to compete with Roxanne since she was smaller and shorter than her, but maybe the elasticity and warmth of her breasts would make for a pleasurable experience? Well, no matter. Since I have already woken up and am conscious of what is happening around me, I might as well use as much time as I can to savor this great sensation by burrowing my face even deeper into Roxanne's cleavage. . . ahh, this is truly so hard to resist on an instinctual level. Even if I tried to resist their temptation, they would still pull me towards them, welcoming me to nestle myself comfortably in the warmth that they are radiating. . . ahhhhh, this is truly great! I want to stay like this forever!

「Nhhhh.」

Uh-huh, looks like Roxanne is waking up. So much for my fun with her Funbags I guess, but it was good while it lasted. Okay now, time to back up from between her titties so that she would not get startled and confused by seeing me burying myself into her first thing in the morning.

「Good morning, master. . . . *kiss*」

「Good morning, Roxanne. *kiss*」

She whispered me a soft and gentle greeting, and I responded in kind.

「Master. . . if you feel like my clothes are in the way. . . then should I take them off?」

「No, I do not think that is going to be necessary right now.」

I mean, it would be great if I could get some action this early in the morning, but that would definitely make me a pervert in Roxanne's and Sherry's eyes (**TL Note: Says the guy who unlocked a Sex Maniac Job by having a hardcore threesome**). And speaking of Sherry. . .

「*Yaaaawn* Ah, good morning, Miss Roxanne, master.」

I heard her voice coming from behind me. Looks like she is awake as well, so I freed myself from the embrace of Roxanne's arms and hugged her as well.

「Good morning to you as well, Sherry.」

After that simple greeting, I placed my lips on top of hers, initiating my very first good morning kiss with Sherry. As expected, her kissing technique is still more than a little awkward, and the way she moves her lips is still modest and relatively stiff, although I cannot say that she is not putting enough effort into this. It is quite the opposite, actually.

. But since this is only her second day of being my slave, then I firmly believe that she has a lot of room for growth in that regard and that with enough training, I should be able to turn her into a real kissing pro. On the flipside, Roxanne was a really quick learner and she was much more responsive and adaptive, but since I learned yesterday that comparing the two of them is something of a taboo subject, there is absolutely no way for me to bring it up openly while talking to the two of them. Besides, Sherry's inexperience has some unique charm to it, and you know what they say: variety is a spice of life. . . but too much spice can spoil the dish, and I was reminded of that when we were changing out of our night clothing into the regular ones when we were preparing for another foray into the Labyrinth. I

was helping Roxanne put on her clothes, and during the process of doing that, my lips ended up seeking hers almost subconsciously. I mean, I am a Human, a member of the race with nigh-insatiable sex drive, so things like that cannot be helped, right? When I have such a beautiful girl in front of me, I would be criminal not to give her another kiss, so I did give it to her, and she responded by sticking out her tongue, encouraging me to do the same. We entwined them together in a passionate dance coupled with the wet sounds of us sucking on our lips. This is what I call a proper way to wake up. And Since Roxanne herself told me that she enjoys it when I am showing her my affection in such a way, then I am confident that beginning from today, we can probably start doing such extended good morning kisses more often. And who knows, maybe one of these days I will try equipping the Sex Maniac Job to see if its Increase VIT Skills is going to have any kind of influence on my performance after all?

Of course, Sherry saw all of that and she visibly freaked out a little, but other than that, it did not look as if she was offended or seriously bothered by it, so it was probably her reaction to us going at it so intensely since the early morning.

It took us a bit longer than usual, but we were finally all dressed up and ready to hit the Labyrinth. It was then that I finally realized something that, in hindsight, I should have noticed quite a while ago already. As I continue to collect more Jobs to my name, a natural reaction is to want to test them all out in different kinds of builds in order to see which ones are going to be the most helpful to me, and how big their impact on my current fighting style is going to be. For the time being, I think I will go with my current build with the Alchemist Job so that I could grant Sherry some additional bit of protection from the Plating Skill. Sheesh, thinking about it now, this is quite an extravagant problem to have.

Chapter 3: Never Give Up, Part 8

As for the restrictions on my Jobs and their possible combination, there are a few of them. I cannot get rid of the Explorer Job because I absolutely need it because of its Party Formation Skill, and pretty much the same goes for the Hero and Mage Jobs: their Skills and bonuses are simply too good for me to pass up. Monk Job is. . . yeah, I better leave it on as well, just in case that either me, Roxanne or Sherry ever suffered some unexpected damage and needed express healing to get ourselves back on our feet. So in case that I would pick the Fifth Job Bonus Skill that allows me to have up to five Jobs equipped at once, I can choose between Alchemist, Cook and Sex Maniac depending on what my Party would need at the current moment. See, that is what I meant when I was saying that this is an extravagant problem to have: I have so many Jobs available and so many potential builds to try, but I simply do not have the time to test them all out, even if I keep telling to myself that I *will* test them all out later (**TL Note: Much like zoomers and their first world problems like: not having 24/7 internet access or that there is no kebab-serving joint in their neighborhood, huh?**) while other people who live in this world have no choice and have to make do in their daily lives while having only a single Job as the one that they have to use. . . . *sigh* I guess my desire as a human being really is nigh-insatiable, and not only the sexual one.

Just like I was planning, I am going to go with Alchemist as my Fifth Job for now in order to protect Sherry with Plating, but later I am definitely going to check out how the boosts from Sex Maniac are going to improve my performance. And by the way, if I were to remove Explorer as my First Job now, then the Party that I formed with Roxanne and Sherry would naturally end up getting disbanded and I would lose the access to my Item Box, but since Cook also has access to it, then maybe there actually would be a way for me to circumvent that demerit and experiment with the possible Job combinations some more.

「Okay, is everyone ready?」

「Yes, I am ready.」

「Ready whenever you are, master!」

「Okay, let us be off then.」

After receiving confirmation from both Sherry and Roxanne, we were ready to go to the Labyrinth. Since this is the early morning, then we are going to start with our usual routine of going to the Vale Labyrinth first.

「Master, this place is. . . 」

Roxanne asked me when we got out of the Warp portal.

「The first floor of the Veil Labyrinth, where we are going to be doing our warp-up exercise.」

「Warp-up. . . exercise?」

「Yeah. I want to see Sherry's fighting style with my own eyes and determine the exact extent of your fighting abilities, so while on this floor, I am going to be fighting with magic which I will use to weaken the opponents so that she could have an easier time finishing them off.」

As expected of Roxanne, she was able to tell that this was not the seventh floor by its smell alone, so I explained my motives to her as she was looking around suspiciously.

「That being said, can I ask you to keep the monsters in check so that it would be easier for Sherry to simply focus on attacking them?」

「I see. I understand, I will do my best to support her!」

「You heard that, Sherry? While we are on this floor of the Labyrinth, you will be in charge of dispatching the monsters while Roxanne and I will only weaken them for you. Think you are up to the task?」

「Y-Yes, I am going to do everything in my power to meet your expectations, master!」

「Great. Roxanne, can you locate the first group of enemies for us?」

「Already done that. The monsters are this way, master, Sherry!」

We went Ahead, and while we were making our way towards the first group of Needlewoods, I mad sufficient adjustments to my Stats and Skills so that I could use my magic to weaken the enemies instead of one-shotting them on the spot. That way, even though my Fireballs and Fire Storms were reaching their targets, I was certain that they would leave them at about half of their total HP, which was more than enough for Sherry to show us what she was really made of. All that is left for me to do now is to match my pace with that of Roxanne and Sherry, and cover their backs while they were dealing with the enemies on the front lines. The surviving monsters divided themselves so that one was heading towards Roxanne, and the other jumped at Sherry, but before its attack was able to hit her, she swung her club and hit the Needlewood right in its midsection, sending it flying backwards as if she just scored a homerun during the baseball game. Wow Sherry, what a tremendous blow that was! If I was to be hit by something like that, then I am pretty sure that most of the bones in my body would have ended up broken into tiny pieces.

Not to far away from Sherry, Roxanne was fighting with the other Needlewood while avoiding its wrathful strikes, which was like a piece of cake for her. When it comes to the enemies from the first floors of the Labyrinths, I would dare to hazard a guess that she was probably able to fight with them and avoid their attacks with her eyes closed. She was doing that until Sherry came to her from the side and delivered another powerful strike to the second Needlewood, taking advantage of how it wobbled forward when it missed its attack at Roxanne and the momentum sent it stumbling forward. I have to say, so far, these two make a pretty good team. If that is how Sherry handles the monsters from the first floor of the Labyrinth, then she probably will not have any difficulties with the enemies residing on the higher floors. Roxanne and Sherry. . . . with them acting as the vanguard of our Party, no monster will stand a chance against them.

「Still no luck, huh?」

I muttered to myself when I opened the Party Settings menu in order to check if killing these two monsters was enough for Sherry. Unfortunately, it was still not enough, and the Job of Master Smith continued to elude her. But if defeating a monster with a club or a hammer was still not enough, then what the condition we are missing here might be? Maybe one of the requirements is to have your Villager Job at Lv.5 as well?

「What is it, master? Did I do something wrong? Was my performance not to your liking?」

「N-No, not at all! You did great Sherry! What I said just now was not directed at you or anyone else in particular. It was just me thinking out loud, that is all. But I have to say, both of your attacks in that battle were pretty incredible. For the next few battles though, I would like to see how you fight with using different weapons, like spears, for example.」

Damn, once again I was talking to myself, and my careless comment got misinterpreted.

For the next few encounters, I had Sherry fight the monsters of the first floor while using weapons such as Copper Spear, Copper Sword and even her bare hands, but no matter how many enemies she managed to defeat with those different weapons, she still did not unlock any other Jobs. However, Swordsman and Monk are the Jobs that require Villager to be at Lv.5 before they could be acquired, so it is still going to be a bit more time before we are going to see Sherry getting her hands on them.

「Ow! Ugh. . . !」

Right now, Sherry was fighting the Needlewood with her bare hands, so it was taking her more time than when she was equipped with proper weaponry. And since the battle was starting to take a bit long, Sherry began to be hit by the Needlewood's attacks, even though most of those hits were due to mistimed dodges and near misses, but she ultimately managed to emerge victorious from that battle without Roxanne having to swoop in to save the day.

「Are you all right, Sherry?」

I asked her when the battle was over.

Chapter 3: Never Give Up, Part 9

「So, how do you feel about fighting the enemies on this floor? Think you will be able to handle them? Because if you think that they might be too difficult for you, be sure to tell me right away, okay?」

I asked all those questions to Sherry while I was healing the wounds she has sustained with the Monk's Skill: Medical Treatment and applying another plating to her in the place of the one that got removed from her when she was hit by the Needlewood's attacks.

「Y-Yes, I do not think fighting with the monsters in here is going to be a problem by the way master, is what you are using right now Recovery Magic?」

「That is right.」

「So you are using multiple Jobs after all. *mumble mumble*
mumble mumble ah, no. please, do not pay any attention to what I said just now! A-Anyway, at this level, I think that I will not be hit like I was just now more than once or twice!」

Sherry replied hurriedly when I finished healing her wounds. Just now, her curiosity at me being capable of using Healing Magic in addition to Attack Magic simply outweighed her sense of pain, right? That seems like a dangerous thing to do, but as long as she is not getting seriously hurt and claims that she will be capable of avoiding such attacks, then I guess everything is still all right to the point where I think that we can go to the higher floors with her, but it would also do me well to remain cautious and have just about enough MP saved up in case I would ever need to cast some more Medical Treatment on her.

「Sherry, mind if I borrow your club for a bit?」

「Ah, n-no, please, go right ahead, master!」

Sherry handed her Club over to me. Okay, now that I got my hands on it, let me try and narrow down the possibilities here. For the next few monster encounters, I am going to try defeating the enemies while using the Club myself. If I end up getting some new Jobs that way, then it will mean that it probably is not one of the conditions required for unlocking the Job of a Master Smith, but now it got me wondering what possible other Jobs could this method of dispatching the enemies unlock? Well, I guess we shall see in about a few more minutes. However.

「Damn. . . swinging this thing around is a lot harder than I thought it would be.」

Maybe it was because I was not used to fighting with such a large and heavy weapon, but swinging the Club around was a lot harder than using Durandal, or any other regular sword for that matter. 「Everybody says so when they first start using two-handed weapons, but the trick to using them more effectively is to utilize the centrifugal force instead of the strength of your own arms whenever you swing them. Since they have their center of gravity at their tips, you are going to feel the noticeable difference, because it is going to feel like the tip of the weapon, or in other words, the part of it that is going to come into contact with the enemy, is going to be hitting with a much greater weight behind it, thus amplifying the strength of the attack.

Once you learn how to do it, the rest is just going to be a matter of chaining such attacks effectively without expending too much of your stamina.」

Sherry gave me an extensive lesson on how to use two-handed weapons effectively. I guess what she said is definitely true. Each type of weapon has its own unique characteristics to take into consideration when attempting to use them, and it was wrong of me to think that I could just take the Club and swing it around like a normal one-handed sword and the rest would just naturally sort itself out. So taking her words to heart, I applied the information I learned onto my style of fighting with the Club, and a dozen more encounters later where I was killing the Needlewoods by smashing their

heads and ramming them into the walls, I opened up my Party Job Settings menu while being filled with tension to see if I got any new Jobs or if something changed in me, but. . . .

(So it was a bust this time as well, huh?)

Exactly. All those monsters killed by using nothing but a Club, and no new Jobs to show for it.

(This. . . . this is not going to be as easy as I had hope it would be, huh?)

Not allowing this minor setback to discourage me, I continued to defeat more enemies, this time by using a Copper Spear, but the ultimate result was much the same.

「Uhm, master? Why are you handing me these weapons? You should know that I prefer using a sword instead.」

Next, I wanted Roxanne to try killing the monsters with the club and a spear, but just from that reaction alone it was obvious that she did not like the idea of using them all that much.

「No, I do know that, but it is for the sake of experimenting and trying out something new, okay?」

But naturally, Roxanne did not obtain any new Jobs as well, just as you would have expected. I guess it just means that not every weapon has a Job that can be unlocked by using it in battle, or if they do have them, they might also have other conditions required for obtaining them that I have yet to discover.

In any event, even after we advanced to the higher floors and defeated the monsters there with different weapons, neither of us have obtained any new Jobs, Master Smith included.

「Any thoughts on using the Club, Roxanne?」

「It is definitely hard to use if you are not used fighting with a weapon like that. Not to mention that in order for it to be utilized effectively you need to

have enough strength in your arms to actually be able to swing it around continuously without tiring yourself out after a strike or two. From that angle, I prefer my Scimitar much more due to how fast, light and efficient it is.]

Roxanne commented as such after defeating another monster with Sherry's Club. So it would seem that Club is going to remain a Sherry-exclusive weapon, because I can say that I do not like fighting with it as well, but that is probably because I got too used to fighting with Durandal. It looked like a spear was much more up Roxanne's alley in comparison to the club, but since it is a poking weapon that is more suited for those in the back row to be supporting the rest of the team by stabbing the monsters in front of them from behind the safety of the distance or a shield, it was not compatible with her, since Roxanne stated herself that she would always wish to be place in the vanguard on the frontlines, where she could be the most useful, slashing our enemies to ribbons, and I shared that opinion of hers as well. I had more than enough chances to see how amazing Roxanne is, so I have no doubts that when she says that her place is in the vanguard, then that is truly where she belongs.

Currently we were on the third floor of Vale's Labyrinth, where I told Roxanne to look for the groups of monsters that consisted of something other than Kobolds. They are the weakest monsters in this world, so I have no doubts that Sherry would have no trouble at all with swiftly dispatching them. What I want to see right now, is to see how well is she going to do against the monsters with higher level than the ones on the first and second floors, but even here on the third one, Sherry seemed to be doing just fine, holding on her own even against the larger groups of enemies. Normally she looks all small and cute, but if I had to sup up her appearance whenever she was fighting, then I would have to say that she looked very dignified, or at least as dignified as you can look when you are swinging around a club that is almost twice your size. I have no idea if she is going to keep her pace up on the higher floors as well, but based on what I am seeing right now, it looks like she can fight as good as Roxanne and I, meaning that her biggest concern has just been alleviated: as long as she keeps fighting exactly the way she is fighting right now, there is no way for her to become a nuisance that would only slow the two of us down.

Chapter 3: Never Give Up, Part 10

Back where I came from, in the world of the Japanese rakugo plays, there was this one particular play where the play's hero who thought that he was better than those around him was actually inferior to them, and the other one, who thought himself to be inferior to others, was actually superior to those who constantly belittled him. This might be a strange metaphor that seemed to come out of nowhere, so allow me to provide a little bit more context here. All this time I am saying things like 「Sherry might actually be as good of a fighter as Roxanne and I」 and I constantly comment on how people other than me cannot dispatch monsters with one or two blows, but all this time, I am forgetting about one very important thing: that the inhabitants of this world are doing all of that with just their strength alone while having basic equipment without any Skills and only one Job that they have to rely on, while I was able to achieve everything that I was able to achieve thanks to my insane luck/perseverance that allowed me to reroll my initial Stats when starting this game enough times to roll literally the best outcome possible and to the OP Bonus Skills and Bonus Equipment that I managed to obtain from them. If not for all of those things, I would probably be unable to fight with a normal sword effectively, and most of the enemies that I look down on for being too weak to do anything against me would have probably obliterated me twenty times over if I tried to take them on with an ordinary Copper Sword and without the abilities to use Attack Magic and replenish my HP and MP with every one of Durandal's swings, so thinking about it that way, sherry might actually be a better fighter than me already, and with time she is only going to improve herself even further, because she is not relying on the godly equipment or Skills, but purely on the strength of her own two arms and nothing more beside it.

「Okay, we are going to be moving to the fourth floor now. Once again, guide us towards all the monsters that are not Kobolds, Roxanne.」

「Roger that, master!」

Roxanne nodded and guided us towards our first encounter on the fourth floor: a group of Minos. A part of me was worried if Sherry was going to be okay against them, since Minos are essentially a hulking mass of horned muscles, but she handled them just as well as the enemies on the previous three floors. Whereas Roxanne would dive right between them and dodge every last one of their attacks, Sherry was taking a slightly different approach: she was waiting for the enemies to come within the range of her Club, and then she would bash their heads in or swing towards their sides which would disrupt their movement, allowing her to go in for the finishing blow. The Minos collapsed to the ground and disappeared in a cloud of green smoke, leaving behind their Drop Item, which was simply described as Leather.

「Oh look, they dropped something. I wonder if this is the Minos rare drop?」

「This is one of the raw materials that can drop from certain monsters. It can be sold, but it can also be used in the process of creating equipment.」

「Is it the same kind of equipment as the one that our equipment is made of?」

I asked that because it got me genuinely interested in the possibility of using such raw materials to create our own equipment instead of having to buy new pieces of it all the time.

「Uhm. . . it is. . . perhaps?」

Unsure of how to answer, Roxanne gave a quick glance towards Sherry so that she could bail her out.

「Yes, it is! In fact, this kind of leather is exactly the same kind that is being used to make the Leather equipment that we are wearing right now.」

Hmm, is that so? Then perhaps. . .

「Have you ever picked up this kind of Leather before, Sherry?」

「No, I cannot say that I did. There were Minos in the Labyrinth that I used to

go to, but they appeared only on the higher floors of it.]

Ah-hah! Could this be a hint that I can use? Maybe that is what we have been missing this entire time? After all, Roxanne and I have obtained the Job of a Herbalist, centered around the creation of various medicines, when we picked up the Drop Item that got left behind by the Udowood, the Floor Boss of the first floor of Vale's Labyrinth, so maybe Sherry will obtain the Job of a Master Smith when she picks up one of the materials used to create equipment?

「All right... Sherry, then please pick it up.]

「Okay.]

Sherry got down on one knee and picked up the Leather from the ground. Now, I wonder if this is going to be enough? I glanced at Roxanne, who was looking at Sherry with gentle curiosity. It is a good thing that at this point she probably got so used to me making all sorts of 「experiments」 so she did not ask any questions at this point, taking whatever I was coming up with in stride. When Sherry's hand touched the Leather, I waited for a few seconds before opening the Party Job settings. but just as I have expected, there seemed to be no particular change and no new Jobs in Sherry's possession, meaning that it was another failure, because both Roxanne and I did not have to do anything else to obtain Herbalist Jobs other than picking up the item.

And by the way, all of the items that we have obtained from the marathon of slaying the monsters from the lower floors have been placed into my own Item Box. Even if both master and the slave were capable of using it, it would stand to reason that the slave should hand over all of the items that he or she gathered so that the master could place it in his Item Box, because no master would have allowed slaves to keep items in their own Item Boxes out of fear of getting deceived by them, or at least that is how Roxanne explained it to me when I asked her about it some time ago, and I have to say that this sounds like a fair precaution, because even without the Item Boxes, there would always be a risk that some of the slaves might have tried to cheat their masters by tucking some of the items they have obtained in the depths of their backpacks, but the need to hand over everything they have found to

their master's Item Box eliminates such a possibility. And in my case, me collecting all of the items into my own Item Box has one additional merit. Since Sherry also has the Job of an Explorer, she can also use her own Item Box, but if she tried to use it now, she would immediately notice that she would be unable to do so, because currently the Job that she has equipped is not an Explorer, but a Villager, but as long as she will not try to access the Item Box herself then everything should be fine. After Sherry picked up the Leather and handed it off to me I checked her Job Settings one more time to be doubly sure if there was a change in her Jobs or not, but the only thing that I have received was double the disappointment when it was confirmed that picking the Leather up did jack shit in getting new Jobs for her. Then again, it getting the Master Smith Job was as easy as picking up a random item off the ground, then people would not be saying that you need to be a talented Dwarf for that to happen.

「I wonder if we should keep this Leather for ourselves and save it for later so that we could try making some equipment out of it?」

I mumbled to myself hoping that nobody would hear me, but apparently I said it loud enough for Sherry to hear, because her expression immediately got darker, and she hanged her head down dejectedly.

「I am sorry, master. If only I was capable of becoming a Master Smith, then surely I could have.」

She apologized as if she just committed a crime against me or something. Sherry, it is not like that. That is not what I means, but apparently that is how she interpreted my words again.

Chapter 3: Never Give Up, Part 11

Of course, she would think like that. After all, she heard something that clearly pointed to me being dissatisfied with her lack of the Master Smith Job, even though I was only mumbling it to myself under my breath without any intention to be heard by others at all, and it hurts even more since Sherry seems to be thinking that I am going to be searching for other Master Smiths who would craft items and equipment for me, while in truth my plan is to have Sherry become a Master Smith so that she could be the one providing those services for us. I never wanted to taunt her with my words or anything. Once again, this just goes to show that as the leader of the Party and someone who has been put in charge of others, I should make sure to pick literally every word I say with the utmost care and carefulness.

「Do not worry about that, Sherry! Trust me, giving it your all while helping master explore the Labyrinths is more than enough, and no one is never going to demand more than that from you!」

「R-Right, I will make sure to always do my best.」

Ohhh, what a nice follow-up, Roxanne! Those words are bound to cheer Sherry back up! Man how glad I am that you are here!

「By the way, Sherry.」

「Yes, master?」

In order to make the atmosphere between the three of us lighter again, I decided to change the subject to something more pleasant to talk about.

「Earlier you mentioned that there are actually people who managed to become Master Smiths even after they have reached Explorer Lv.10.」

「Hmm. yes, I have indeed said that.」

「So I was just curious. . . . how exactly do they do that, because I thought the level requirement is something of an absolute that cannot be circumvented in any way?」

「Normally it is, but there is one alternative. The ones who want to become Master Smiths even after already achieving Lv.10 as Master Smiths have to use the services provided by the temple of Elen.」

「Temple of. Elen? What is that?」

「The Temple of Elen is not like any other Guild Temple that offers only a specific Job, but the place where you go to leave which Job you are going to end up with up in the hands of Fate. Rumors have it that it is not strictly randomized though, but rather that the blessing of the Temple of Elen is going to bestow upon you the Job that you are the most suited for.」

Roxanne explained that to me.

According to one of the general rules of this world, once you become a member of one Guild in order to obtain a Job that is associated with that Guild, you cannot change your Guild membership to another one, or at least doing so is not that simple, because while you can change your Job if you pray at the temple of the other Guild you wish to join, Roxanne told me that the process itself can be a rather pricey one. To put it all simply, if you become a Merchant associated with Merchant's Guild, you either stay a Merchant, or you can possibly pay a hefty sum of money in order to become, let us say. an Explorer associated with the Explorer's Guild as long as you pray for a Job Change in the Explorer's Guild's Temple. That is what I already knew after talking about it with Roxanne a while back, but hearing that there are actually temples that offer you a random Job Change was definitely a first for me. Then again, I guess that is one of the staples of the RPG and MMORPG genre of games: some temples have a lot of restrictions, some of them have less of them, or in the rare cases, there are even the ones that do not have any kind of restrictions placed upon the at all, but these are among the rarest of the rare ones.

「I see. Thank you for the explanation, Roxanne.」

「You are welcome, master.」

However, the most important question here, and the one that has yet to be answered, is what kind of 「random」 the Job Change at the Temple Of Elen is? Can it offer to randomly give you a new Job by selecting one from the pool of the ones that you have already unlocked, or is it actually that it can offer to give you an entirely random new Job, even if you do not meet the requirements for obtaining it in a normal way? Because If I had to guess, if getting a Job that you do not meet the requirements for is impossible in the normal temples, then why would this Temple of Elen be any different? Then again, maybe it is an exception to the rule, so it might be worth my time to imply about it a little bit more.

「Are there any legends or rumors about famous people from the empire who were using the services of the Temple of Elen?」

In this case, my fake backstory of being from a country far, far away to the east and thus not knowing much about the empire's history and customs can actually prove to be quite useful.

「There actually is. As luck would have it, the empire's first Emperor was the one who received his Hero Job from the Temple of Elen.」

Huh? Well now, would you look at that! Talk about a lucky coincidence! Since I already know that much, then maybe I should try inquiring about the persona of the first Emperor a bit more to see if I can learn something more about the Hero Job?

「Hmm. then, do the mythos that surround the first Emperor, are there any that mention him singlehandedly exterminating a band of Bandits?」

That was the situation in which I have obtained that Job when I was first spirited away into this world, so maybe it is going to have something to do with one of the legends describing the first Emperor's heroics, assuming that there will even be any that are going to match the criteria that I have just specified.

「There are. Supposedly, one of the first heroic deeds attributed to the first Emperor of this empire was that he has repelled a group of Bandits that have ambushed his Party after nightfall all by himself.」

Sherry continued to deliver the good news to me. The exact circumstances differ slightly from what I have been through, bit otherwise. . . bingo, I guess? Looks like the condition that has to be fulfilled in order to obtain the Job of a Hero is to singlehandedly exterminate a group of Bandits, or at least everything seems to be pointing towards it. But is that all there is to it? No, it cannot be. If the condition for obtaining a Job that is supposed to be so rare that there was only one person in the recorded history of the empire who managed to get it would be to simply dispatch a group of brigands, then the world would be literally breaming with Heroes, because that feature could be easily achieved by powerful Adventurers who would target a group of weak, low-level enough Bandits. Then maybe the condition is that you have to defeat a group of Bandits during your *first ever* battle? Nah, I am only thinking like that because that is how it was in my case, which might have been nothing more but a sheer coincidence. Besides, even if we assume that the First Emperor had encountered this Bandit night ambush situation at a relatively young age, the chances of that particular encounter being his first ever battle in the world that is filled with Labyrinths and monsters are pretty slim, and if he was not trained enough in combat at that time, he would have probably not survived that ambush, much less defeated all of the enemies by himself. No matter what the exact conditions are, it remains a fact that that battle with the Bandits was the trigger that gave the first Emperor his Hero Job, and since he got it at that time, then it means that he did not get it, an entirely new Job, when he went to pray at the Temple of Elen, but instead, that means that his visit to the temple simply assigned him a Job that he had already unlocked, much in the same way as my Party Job Settings work.

Chapter 3: Never Give Up, Part 12

So, even if we were to take Sherry, who does not have the Master Smith Job unlocked, to the Temple of Elen and she were to offer a prayer there, she would not get the Master Smith Job anyway, making such a trip one giant waste of our time, money and resources. I have to say, when I first heard her mention that temple I thought that this might be a good alternative route to killing monsters with random weapons while having various weapons equipped on her, but now I see that relying on the Temple of Elen to give Sherry what she wanted would not be a good idea either.

..... Wait, what she wanted?

「Sherry, if you do not mind me asking, would you be happy if you managed to become a Master Smith after all?」

Come to think of it, that is one of the things that I have never confirmed with her: does she want to get that Master Smith Job or not?

「N-No, I... I do not think so.」

Huh? Say what?

「You do not think so? Why is that? Is becoming a Master Smith not an aspiration of every Dwarf?」

I was wondering why she would say something like that, but Sherry simply hanged her head down and continued to stare at the tips of her boots in silence. And then, after a while of not saying anything...

「I guess... I guess I have simply given up on it.」

She said those words quietly, as if she was afraid of speaking them out loud.

Hey, what do you mean, you gave up? You cannot give up! You just cannot! You hear me, Sherry?! Never give up! Just look at me! Back on earth I was a worthless nobody who was so fed up with his own life that I wanted to kill myself without even trying to change anything for the better, and look at me now, I am here, living and giving it my all here in this new, strange and unfamiliar world, so if even a coward like could turn his shitty luck around, then a hard-working and smart person like Sherry should be able to achieve pretty much anything she is going to set her mind onto, so I am choosing to believe in you and that you are definitely going to become a Master Smith! So please, Sherry, whatever you do, do not let goof your dreams and aspiration and keep trying to make them come true!

「Now that I have become a slave, becoming a Master Smith would only end up causing a whole lot of unwanted problems, and I do not want to be a cause for concern for master and Miss Roxanne.」

Well, I guess that is technically true, but even so, I do not think that this should mean that she should put pursuing her own ambitions on the backburner simply because it would be more convenient for Roxanne and I. That being said, I can definitely see why she would think that a Master Smith who has become someone's slave might be perceived as troublesome. Master Smith's services are probably among one of the most valuable for Adventurers, since they are the only ones capable of fusing Skill Crystals with the equipment, but as a result, these services probably cost a ton of money, and they have no guarantee if that investment is going to be worth it, since the failure rate on the fusion process is also relatively high. But if you have a Master Smith as your slave, then the biggest concern you might have, the financial one, is swiftly eliminated. That is why if Sherry ever manages to finally obtain the Master Smith Job, it might be more beneficial for us to keep that fact a secret from everyone else around us in order to avoid any unnecessary attention, or perhaps even becoming a target of grudges of those jealous of how big of a jackpot I managed to land with Sherry's purchase.

Anyway, back to the matter at hand. When I mentioned becoming a Master Smith, Sherry looked quite dejected and dispirited. but I think that deep down in her heart she still wishes to become a full-fledged Master Smith, even if she is trying not to show it and says that she has given up on it.

In which case, I have to offer her some words of encouragement and as much positive reinforcement as I possibly can in order not to drive her any deeper into depression due to her situation than she already is.

「Do not worry, Sherry. No matter what happens, I am sure that everything is going to be all right and that things are going to work themselves out pretty soon.」

I realize that these words might sound pretty irresponsible, but this is the best that I can do for her at the current moment.

「Y-Yes, I guess you are right, master.」

Sherry did sound like my words managed to convince her, but probably only a little bit. Well, it does not matter. All that we have to do to improve her self-esteem is to find out the condition required for becoming a Master Smith and then make her into one, which should cause all of her problems to go away as if they were never there. And of course, I am not even considering the eventuality that we will not find a way to make her a Master Smith, because we would have a big problem if that was how the events would have turned out in the end, because her being a Dwarven Master Smith was the main reason why I have chosen her as my second slave to begin with.

「If master says that everything is going to be all right, then it definitely will, Sherry. So you do not have to worry about anything, and just continue to live they way you are doing it now.」

「O-Of course, Miss Roxanne! I will be sure to try and do exactly that!」

Roxanne offered Sherry some words of encouragement as well. But really now, Roxanne, just where is that unwavering faith in me of yours coming from? I honestly do not know. But she is absolutely right. Sherry is not alone anymore. She has me and Roxanne by her side, and she can be damn sure that we are going to do all in our power to help her out of her Master Smith pinch.

「All right then you two, since we are done with our warp-up, then I am going to be using magic to fight any enemies we might be encountering from now on. I will make sure to annihilate any monsters that might be coming our

way, so Sherry, I want you to focus on evasion and defense. Other than that, just make sure that you will listen to any instructions Roxanne might be giving you and be sure to cooperate with her well at all times.]

I declared my intention to switch onto using magic and gave instructions on how to act for both Sherry and Roxanne. Thankfully, it looks like even with just the Villager Lv.3 equipped as her main Job Sherry is not going to be brought down to critically low HP with just one or two blows so I will probably do not have to worry about her as much as I thought I would have to, but just to be on the safe side we should get more used to fighting as a team here on the lower floors of the Labyrinths before advancing onto the higher ones.

「I never entered a Labyrinth while having a Mage in a Party before, but from what I can see you seem to be even more powerful than what I have imagined and what the stories about magic users were telling, master. Your usage and expertise of the Attack Magic might be on par with that of an expert mage, or perhaps even better than that still.」

So that is Sherry's impression of my magic, huh? Well, I do not know if this is what can be called magic on a professional level, but it is certainly something that a Lv.32 Mage is capable of. If I were to remove Mage from the list of my active Jobs, then I would not be able to cast but a single Fireball, much less the more impressive and effective spells.

「Really? That is what you think, Sherry? Well well well, I have to say that your flattery makes me really happy.」

「This is not flattery, master. I am merely stating the fact. The stronger you are as a leader, the easier it will be for us in the vanguard, after all.」

Chapter 3: Never Give Up, Part 13

And Sherry bowed her head to me lightly, thanking me for being such a competent Party leader with a simple 「Thank you very much」, which made me feel all warm and fuzzy inside.

Based on all the encounters we had on the fourth floor, I can tell that Sherry is going to have no problems with fighting here, and I can only assume that the fifth, sixth and seventh floors will be no problem to her as well. However, the real problem, as well as the test of not only Sherry's, but also mine and Roxanne's skills is going to be waiting for us when we finally decide to leave the seventh floor and move on to the eighth floor, which is going to be a totally uncharted territory for us, and that is why today we have started all the way down from the first floor and slowly made our way up: so that I could see how Sherry was going to perform on the battlefield and how well she would be cooperating with Roxanne. Thankfully, there seemed to be no problems in that regard, because the girls not only became friends with each other extremely quickly, but they have also adapted to each other's fighting styles so well that now they could support each other with their eyes closed and instead focus on their friendly chatter, like the one they were having right now:

「Sherry, I know you might have some reservations, but trust me, it is really okay for you to be fighting a little bit closer to the wall.」

「Okay, I will try to do it during the next battle. By the way, Miss Roxanne, would it be better for me to swing my Club vertically instead of horizontally so that it would not get in your way as much.」

「You can keep fighting however you see fit, because it makes no difference to me. If I ever see that your Club is getting closer to me, I will simply evade it, that is all there is to it.」

See? If this is not a sign of a good cooperation, then I do not know what it can be. With that, I think that there is no need for us to be staying here at the fourth floor, so we can probably move up to the next floor.

「All right girls, if you have nothing against it, then we will be making our way to the fifth floor now. And remember: the higher the floor, the stronger the monsters, so do be careful at all times, okay?」

「「All right, master!」」

The fifth floor is the one where the number of enemies per encounter started to increase from two to three, so we agreed that the division will be such that Roxanne is going to be taking on two of the monsters, and Sherry is going to focus on the remaining one. Before I have obtained Sherry, this was the spot where the monsters began to get stronger to the point of me being forced to start using Durandal in order to swiftly dispatch them, but now that my Party consists of not just two members but three, I think I should be able to continue to rely on only using magic, which is already a huge improvement over our previous forays into the fifth floor and above. The strategy for handling multiple enemies is as I described above, but for the times when there was only one enemy present, Roxanne was focusing its attention on herself in the front so that Sherry could go for a surprise attack to its sides. Watching them go at it, I felt like it would be better if she was using the Copper Spear in such a situation, but for the time being a Club will have to make due, since there is no methods that would allow us to quickly switch between two or more weapons on the fly or in the middle of the battle. But all things considered, for most of the time I could relax a bit more than usual and just hang out a few meters away from the battles Roxanne and Sherry were waging, far enough not to draw any of the monster's aggro upon myself, but still close enough to either rush in with my sword or use magic to save the girls from a tight spot if they ever wound up getting themselves into one.

「Starting to get more into the flow of things on this floor as well?」

I asked when our current encounter has been swiftly finished.

「Yes, I think that our cooperation could still use some improvements, but at the pace that we are currently going with, we should be all right as long as we

continue to polish and improve our skills. Sherry, thank you for being such a quick learner, and I look forward to working with you from here on out as well.]

「And I look forward to working with and learning more things from you, Miss Roxanne!」

In terms of how practical it is, staying in the rear guard is a lot more comfortable than staying in the vanguard all the time, if only because that chance of being targeted by a monster is much, much smaller there. Those who stay in the vanguard have no choice but to get up close and personal with the enemies if they want to dispatch them quickly and protect the other members of the Party, and in the case of making a mistake or just an unfortunate slip-up, the members of the vanguard are the ones who are going to get hurt, or if they will be really unlucky, perhaps they could even die. But when you are in the rearguard, you do not really have to concern yourself with such things, because your Job is not to be all up in the monster's faces, but to support the rest of your team from the safety of the distance, making it much less stressful, but just as important of a position, because your actions might have a deciding impact on the well-being of your comrades. But overall, vanguard is a much harder position than the rearguard, even if both of these positions have their different sets of benefits and drawbacks. If I can just stay in the safety of the rearguard where I will not have to worry about getting myself killed during every battle, then I feel that even someone like me could easily make it all the way to the top floor of the Labyrinth and then clear it.

Buuut. . . . I feel like thinking about what is going to happen when we arrive at the last floors of the Labyrinths is still something that I should not be bothering myself with all that much for quite some time. For now, I should just allow the girls to do their thing in the vanguard, and once the monsters start getting stronger, I will also lend them my aid in the form of bombarding the enemies with a barrage of Attack Magic. Ahh, I see. Now I get it. That is exactly why Alan the Slave Merchant offered to show me the male slaves he had in his inventory for sale when I mentioned that I was looking specifically for someone to be serving in the vanguard.

Right now, Roxanne is standing in front of me, acting as both a sword that is

going to strike down my enemies, and a shield that will protect me from harm should the need for that ever arise. and I will never be able to thank her enough for it, will I?

「Roxanne. thank you.」

「Yes? You are. . . . welcome, master?」

「Oh, and by the way, Sherry, since I am going to be using a lot of magic from here on out, I just want to make sure. . . do you know what the types of magic are?」

Since Roxanne seemed to not know what I was grateful to her for, I left that matter alone and asked Sherry my next question.

「Hmm. I am not all that familiar with magic, but I do know that generally speaking there are three basic types of it: Area of Effect Magic, Single Target Magic and Defensive Magic.」

That seems about right. Storm-type spells are Area of Effect Magic, Ball is a Single Target Magic, and Wall-type spells are Defensive Magic. I wonder if those are all the types of magic that exist in this world, or is there also a fourth, unknown or lost type of magic that has yet to be discovered?

Chapter 3: Never Give Up, Part 14

「Ow. . . . khhhhh! ! ! !」

When we arrived on the fifth floor and had to fight against three Cheap Sheep at once, Sherry was once again attacked a few times across the duration of a single battle. It is a good thing that I expected something like that to happen, because otherwise I might have been pretty shocked at the difference in her performance with just one floor of a difference. Cheap Sheep are definitely trickier to fight than the Minos of the fourth floor and I myself had more than my fair share of trouble while dealing with them, so I could definitely emphasize with her struggle.

「Are you all right, Sherry?」

「Hnnh. . . Y-Yes, I am fine, master. I used to fight against the monsters on the eight floors of the Labyrinths before. . . so the enemies from the fifth floor. . . are going to be no problem for me at all.」

I immediately went up to Sherry and cured her wounds and used Plating on her when the battle was over, and then told her with a patient, but also decisive tone:

「That might be true, but you have to remember that your situation in the past and right now are drastically different from one another, because back then you had a different Party and probably a different equipment as well, so it would be better for you to not think about dungeon crawling in the Labyrinths of today with your past mindset. If you feel like the things are getting too difficult for you to handle, do not hesitate to inform me about it immediately, got it?」

「Master, I am grateful for your concern about my well-being, but I am all

right, trust me.]

No Sherry, it is not all right. You might think that you are doing fine, but that is only because you think that you still have your Explorer Lv.10 Job equipped, while in reality the one you have equipped right now is not Explorer Lv.10, but Villager. She managed to level it up from Villager Lv.3 to Villager Lv.4 just now and should be able to hit Lv.5 after a few more battles since when the levels are low they tend to go up a bit faster, but it does not change the fact that her Stats are still lower than those of a Lv.10 Explorer. I am partially to blame for this situation here, because I did not inform her that I changed her Job, but even if I did tell her that, it would not change a thing, because the main problem, her not shifting her attitude in battle to take on a safer approach to every encounter, would still persist. I want to tell her about the fact that as a Party leader I can change her Job without asking her for her permission to do so, but I think that doing so now would do more harm than good, so I have no choice but to wait until I see that she is trusting me a bit more.

「Roxanne, is it safe to continue onward?」

「I do not sense any monsters nearby for now, but if the need arises I can draw the attention of three of them to myself, so I think it should be fine for us to proceed fro the time being.」

I asked for Roxanne's opinion on whether we could continue our trek through the fifth floor, and once she informed me that we could safely go forward, I nodded back at her strongly. I still had my reservations about whether or not Sherry is going to be able to handle the monsters from the sixth and seventh floors with Villager as her main Job, but if Sherry herself is going to be hell-bent on continuing onwards, then I guess I have no choice but to respect her wishes and simply pay extra attention to her ever time we are going to be engaging groups of enemies from now on.

Like that, we moved on to the sixth floor of Vale's Labyrinth, where I decided that now might be a good time to test out the Skill of the Sex Maniac Job in practice, but since I was still afraid of letting Sherry fight without the protection of the Alchemist's Plating, I had to add myself a Sixth Job during the Character Reset in order t fit those two Jobs together along with the rest

of the ones that I absolutely needed. There, all set.

「Roxanne, Sherry. Continuing our talk from yesterday. do either of you know what exactly do the Skills of the Sex Maniac Job do?」

「I am sorry to disappoint you, master, but I have no idea. How about you, Sherry?」

I felt a little bad for Sherry, because ever since she became a member of my group we were just asking her about a lot of stuff that neither Roxanne or I had any knowledge of, but in times like these she was our only remaining option, since unlike the two of us, she was an intellectual, so maybe I should just make it a habit to ask her about any lore or Jobs related stuff from now on?

「I am afraid that I do not know anything about it either. The only things that I do hear about it is that due to its nature it is not a Job that can be discussed about openly in public, and humans tend to pass down the knowledge about it between themselves in a strictly verbal manner.」

But it looks like not even Sherry knows a whole lot about Sex Maniac Job, and honestly, I am not that surprised about it, considering the very nature of this Job and its method of acquisition. After all, only the biggest, most egotistic of braggards(**TL Note: or someone who thinks themselves a Gigachad**) would go around telling other people that they have slept with two or more girls at once, and while I believe that there are people like that out there, the majority belongs to the category that is going to be keeping such sensitive information to themselves so that others would not brand them as hopeless perverts.

Okay, let me see what does the Sex Maniac Job do once more, just for reference.

{Sex Maniac}

Effects: Increase SPI (Medium), Increase INT (Medium) Increase MP (Small)

Skills: Enhanced Vigor, Abstinence Attack

So yeah, these are all the Skills and effects that the Sex Maniac Job offers me. I presume that the Enhanced Vigor is a Passive Skill that should increase my overall vigor, sexual or otherwise, and Abstinence Attack must be an Active Skill. I was more than a little afraid that equipping that Job might have some unwanted side-effects like being overwhelmed by the desire to violate every female in your nearest proximity, but now that I have it as one of my set Jobs, I do not feel any such urges, which sets my heart at ease. Looks like I can use that Job without having to worry about doing something that I would not be able to undo later. I mean, let me be honest here, whenever I look at Roxanne and those enormous boobs of her, I always feel the urge to jump at her and to various naughty things to her even when I do not have Sex Maniac equipped, but since that is always the case I learned to control those urges to the point where I can stop myself from groping her up throughout the day and only let myself run wild when we are taking baths and go to bed afterwards. If I were unable to do at least that much, then surely, even without the Sex Maniac Job I would have ended up in prison for good if all I did was to act like constantly horny bastard. So with the level of self-restraint that I am currently exercising, I should still be okay and not end up on the wrong side of the law charged with sexual assault. And if I could not, then what other alternative would there be for me? My guesses are either castration, which is absolutely out of the question, or retreating myself to live an ascetic life of a hermit deep in the mountains, where no earthly temptation would be able to lead me astray from the path of righteousness. Well, that being said, people like that are probably quite rare in this world, because throughout the entire time I have spent in this world so far, I have never Identified another human being who would be labeled with that Job. But then again, if it is something that cannot be talked about openly, then maybe humans found a way to keep it hidden from others?

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Well, whatever the case might be, the most important thing right now is that neither Roxanne nor Sherry know anything that could be of use to me, so there is no point mulling over this subject anymore. I will simply have to test the Skills that Sex Maniac Job has to offer throughout the practical usage of them! And I think that I am going to start with abstinence attack.

Now, how is it going to work, I wondered as I instructed Sherry and Roxanne to fall back for a bit and then I ran forward to challenge a single Cheap Sheep Lv.6 that was about ready to challenge us.

(Here it goes. Abstinence Attack!)

I shouted that in my mind as I swung Durandal down onto the monster when it was withing my melee range. Durandal's edge made its way through the Cheap Sheep's body. and that was it, nothing else happened. I mean, something had to have happened, because I definitely felt the hit connect as well as the slight resistance of the monster's flesh when the attack continued to go through it thanks to the momentum and the power of gravity from my overhead slash. . . . but it did not look like that attack did any kind of noticeable damage to it. Like, at all.

Oi, what the hell, dude?! Why is this attack not working? Did I mess something up? I do not know. Maybe somehow this first attack turned out to be a fluke? Maybe it is going to work properly if I attack the Cheap Sheep again? At the very least, it should be worth a try.

(Abstinence. Attack!)

I tried repeating the attack with the Skill, this time by slashing the Cheap Sheep normally with it. . . . but once more, it did not work out.

(Damn it! Fuck! Abstinence Attack! Abstinence Attack, Abstinence Attack, Abstinence Attack!)

I tried the same thing over, and over, and over again, but the result was exactly the same each time. Could it be. could it be that Abstinence Attack is not an Active Skill? Because there is absolutely no way for an Active Skill to be literally weaker than a regular physical attack! No, wait, I definitely felt the sensation of the Skill activating itself, so it definitely is an Active Skill, but then why is it so weak? Hmm. hmmmmmm. maybe. maybe. no, no no no no no no, please, let it be not what I think it is! Abstinence Attack. Abstinence. A Skill granted by the Sex Maniac Job, so in this context, Abstinence attack can only mean one thing. that you can use that Skill to its full potential only if you maintain sexual abstinence!

WHO IN THEIR RIGHT MIND WOULD EVER WANT TO TORTURE THEMSELVES LIKE THAT JUST SO THEY COULD USE SUCH A WEAK-ASS ATTACK!!!!

I mean, let us be real right now! You want to tell me that if I want to be using that Skill, I would have to purposefully decline having sex with Roxanne and Sherry? Because if anyone thought that I would accept such a trade offer, then they can think again! There is no chance in hell I will ever willingly let go of something so awesome just so that I could use one Skill attack that is not guaranteed to be any stronger than the regular attack! What kind of sadist even designed it in such a way? Is this some kind of sick joke the developers of this game designed to make fun of the people who would use this game as the means to go on a sexual adventures spree?!

Now, instead of trying to use Abstinence Attack again, I slashed the Cheap Sheep with a regular attack, and it still did not fall. Seriously, in its current state, this skill really is much, much weaker than a normal attack, because if it was on par with it or just slightly weaker, this second attack should have finished the enemy off, but since it survived, it got the perfect opportunity to ram itself into me, which it did. The physical damage that I sustained from that attack was pretty negligible at my current level, but the mental shock from realizing how useless Abstinence Attack is to someone like me was far greater. I cannot believe that for a moment I was hoping that this Skill might

actually be something helpful, something that maybe could have allowed me to finish the enemies on the sixth floor off with one strike instead of two, but no, of course my hopes had to be brutally crushed before they were even allowed to blossom! Or maybe there is something that I am not seeing here? Some kind of hidden condition that has to be met in order for this Skill to work the way it should be working? Maybe I have to sacrifice something in addition to expending MP and chanting the Skill's name? Or perhaps it is a Skill meant for capturing the monsters while they are still alive?

Anyway, since here on the sixth floor the enemies start to be so tough that I need two strikes from Durandal instead of one in order to finish them off, then I think it is safe to assume that Abstinence Attack is a useless dud of a Skill that is not worth using in the slightest, so let me just forget that I have ever tried to use it and let us proceed forward. We have already wasted enough of our precious time with this stupid experiment. after I try testing it out on the other monsters on this floor, just to be absolutely sure.

The next opponent was a lone Needlewood, so I tried to use four consecutive Abstinence Attacks to see if it was going to make an difference, but the result was exactly the same as before, or perhaps even worse, because I do not know if it was just my imagination playing tricks on me or what, but I could have sworn that these four attacks that I have performed just now were even more pathetic than the ones I tried to use against the Cheap Sheep? Welp, I guess that settles it then. If neither Abstinence Attack nor the Enhanced END Skills are going to make the slaying of the monsters easier for me, then I really have no choice but to go and seal that joke of a Job away due to how wasteful and useless it is. Even if it has some hidden effects, like maybe. . . . well, I do not know, maybe increase in the amount of EXP obtained at the cost of the reduced attack power, it is far too late for me to be thinking about such "what ifs" and possibilities. That Job had its chance with me, and it ended up wasting that chance spectacularly.

「We are going to be staying here on the sixth floor for a while longer. When Sherry gets used to fighting the enemies here to such a degree that she will not be hit by them anymore, only then we are going to move on to the seventh floor, okay?」

「Okay.」

「Understood!」

Getting sherry accustomed to fighting the enemies of the sixth floor without getting hit by each and every one of their attacks too about an hour or so of our time, during which she slowly but surely improved both her dodges and the ability to predict what the enemy was going to do next. I guess that in the end, this is what really matters: the knowledge of the attacks patterns of the enemies and the readiness that it gives you, which makes all the difference between being attacked because you were not expecting the attack what suddenly came your way and being able to dodge it in time because you read all the telegraphed signs properly. Now, if only sherry could learn to do that a little quicker or after a fewer number of encounters, that would be pretty great, but I should probably not get my hopes up in regards to her being the same kind of dodging expert as Roxanne is. I have to accept that eventually some of the enemy's attacks are going to reach Sherry no matter how ready she is going to be for them, and simply have the Medical Treatment Skill ready to mend her wounds when the battle is over. For the time being, however, she is as ready as she can be, so there is no point in dilly-dallying here any longer.

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We are pressing onward to the seventh floor! And there:

「Here we are, the seventh floor. Sherry, this floor is our current hunting grounds, or to put it in other words, this is the last floor we cleared before I decided to add you to our Party. The monsters here are even stronger than the ones you encountered on the sixth floor, so I advise you to keep your guard up and remain cautious at all times.」

I gave Sherry a warning when we emerged from the Portal that brought us to the seventh floor of the Vale's Labyrinth.

「All right, I will be sure to do just that. . . . but, since I was doing okay even if I got hit by the monsters we were fighting on the lower floors earlier, so I think that it should be okay for us to proceed even further and at a faster pace than the one we are currently going with. I. . . I know that it might sound like I am being selfish, but I do not want to drag Miss Roxanne and Master down just because I am the newest member of master's Party.」

Yes, Sherry, I am perfectly aware of that. However, you say that you were doing “okay”, but that “okay” of yours was partially due to my Plating Skill that was reducing the damage that you were sustaining from the monster’s attacks, so I would hazard a guess that your own damage resistance is lower than what you might think it is.

「I see what you are getting at, Sherry, but I need you to remember that this is the Labyrinth, a truly dangerous place where we can be attacked at any time and we are putting our lives on the line with every encounter here, so because of that, I think it definitely will not hurt us to be that much more cautious, would you not agree? That is exactly the reason for why we have been taking things slowly by moving from the first floor upwards: to be safe and avoid

getting ourselves hurt. Also. . . . I have told this to Roxanne before, and now I am going to say exactly the same thing to you. No matter what happens, I do not want to lose you either, Sherry.]

「Is that so? I. . . thank you very much, master. I promise that I am going to be more careful with how I act from now on.]

「Great. As long as you understand that I am not saying all of this to impede you and stall our progress, that is all that matters to me.]

「Yes, of course!]

Nice, somehow I managed to sweet-talk her out of doing anything irresponsible that would only end up causing us the unnecessary amount of trouble. no, on second thought, scratch that. It is not that I sweet talked Sherry into being more careful. I really meant what I said to her. Now that she has become my slave, she is another one of my precious companions in this strange and unfamiliar world, and I really do not want to lose her, both as a potential asset to my Party and as a friend.

「I am glad that you are being so rationally cautious despite being so powerful, master. Sixth and seventh floors of the Labyrinths are said to be the ones where the mortality rate among Adventurers begins to go up in comparison to the lower floors due to how tricky and strong the Floor Bosses of these floors are. . . . ah, and there is also the talk about 「The Demon of the Seventh Floor」, so that makes me all the more at ease knowing that you think about the safety of the entire Party so much.]

「The Demon of the Seventh Floor」, huh? That is the first time I am hearing about such a thing, but just its name alone sounds so dangerous that I think steering clear of that thing, whatever it might be, will be the best possible course of action. That being said, I am a little bit curious about it though.

「Do you know something more about this「Demon of the Seventh Floor」? I mean, whatever it is, there has to be a reason as to why it is called like that, right?】

「I am not sure about the specifics, but the most common talks among the

people state that this is probably because the seventh floors of the Labyrinths are the ones around which all of the beginner-level Adventurers and Explorers start getting more comfortable with the exploration and fighting monsters, which in turn makes them significantly less cautious and wary because they are convinced that nothing on this floor will be able to threaten them since all the previous ones were manageable for them, and they think that the seventh floor is going to be the same, only to have a pretty rude awakening. It seems that it has become quite a common pitfall that more and more people are falling into these days.]

(Ah. !!!!)

「Supposedly, the majority of the people who are falling into this pitfall are the ones who were fighting their way up to the seventh floor without any issues only to become increasingly more frustrated at how big of a difficulty spike the seventh floor really is and how long it is taking them to get stronger while being here, so the common occurrence is them becoming obsessed with getting to the eighth floor as soon as possible, which causes them to become quite reckless in their pursuit of single-minded strength.」

「I see.」

So 「The Demon of the Seventh Floor」 is not a creature, but more of a concept, huh? Shit, this reminds me of that guy whom we met outside of the Rapid Rabbit Boss Room the other day. His story was exactly like the one Sherry talked about just now. He told us that he has already been on the seventh floor for two whole years now, so I guess it was to be expected that he would get impatient at some point and try to make a break for it because, as the guy himself said it 「he felt that fortune was on his side that day」. Fortune on his side? Yeah, right, on his side it was. So much in fact that he got killed in the battle with the Rapid Rabbit moments later. Maybe things would have turned out differently for him if only he had Party members or slaves with him, but unfortunately, he said that he was too poor to afford them, his daily earnings barely being enough for him to pay for the renting of the room and the food for himself. So in the end, it was exactly what Sherry said: the thing that doomed him was his own impatience and the obsessive desire to leave the seventh floor. I guess I should be happy that neither I nor Roxanne got seriously injured or worse when it was finally our turn to fight

the Rapid Rabbit, but we should keep it in mind that we absolutely cannot allow ourselves to become overconfident, because whatever happens to other people today might very well happen to us tomorrow. Sherry's words were a good cautionary tale, as well as a reminder that sometimes being hasty is not necessarily the right thing to do. At times, what really ends up being the right choice is a slow and steady approach where the rewards might not be as good, but at least we are going to be sure that we will not be losing our lives over some easily avoidable mistakes.

After that talk of ours, we ended up fighting the monsters on the seventh floor for a good while, moving forward at our usual pace without trying to force ourselves too much. It is also here that I made some additional observations in regards to Sherry's behavior on the battlefield. While it might not be a fair comparison due to how different the two of them are, I have no choice but to compare her to Roxanne, and the result of that comparison is that Sherry is much less confident in her movements, but even so, these movements of hers are still much better than my own, unrefined ones. I feel like it still might be a little risky, but I think that it is high time to stop babysitting her with Alchemist's Plating and switch from the 「Playing It Safe Mode」 to 「Active Leveling Mode」.

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However. it might be worth my while to keep Alchemist and its Plating for a while longer, but I definitely do not need Sex Maniac anymore, so I might as well get rid of it now. With the Sex Maniac removed in the process of Character Reset, I did not need to have Sixth Job for now, which means that I have some more Bonus Points that I can reallocate. Okay, now let me see what can I do to tweak my current build a little? Since we gained a new Party member, then maybe I should prioritize getting EXP faster for the time being? Yeah, that sounds like a reasonable thing to do, given my current goal and Sherry's eagerness to fight on the front lines.

Since Explorer Lv.33 is set as my First Job, them means thirty two Bonus Points, and then my original ninety nine Bonus Points are added to it. And now for the Skills that I am going to choose: One Tenth of Required EXP Value worth thirty one Bonus Points, EXP Gain Times Twenty worth sixty three Bonus Points, Crystal Growth Times Sixteen worth fifteen Bonus Points, Fifth Job worth fifteen Bonus Points, Chant Omission worth three Bonus Points and the rest of the Bonus Points that I had left have been allocated between MP Recovery Speed Increase, Identify, Job Settings along with Party Job Settings and Character Reset. Yeah, this setting should work particularly good for the purpose of raising Sherry's Villager level as fast as possible. Also, I feel like it is going to be a good decision on my part to put fewer points into Crystal Growth's speed of filling the Magic Stone with magic energy, because now that the purchase of Sherry and all of the daily necessities that she is going to need has been completed, we have no urgent need for having a large sum of money on us. As long as we are going to have enough money on us to be able to buy ingredients for making breakfasts and dinners, we are going to get by just fine.

「Master, the sun is about to set.」

Roxanne told me that sometime later while we finished another bout of combat with the monsters of the seventh floor.

「Really? Already? How did you know?」

I knew that we have already spent a lot of time in the Vale's Labyrinth today, but I never would have guessed that we actually took so long that the sun was about to set. And how was Roxanne able to tell that while being here anyway? Is it due to some kind of Skill of hers typical to the Wolfkin people, or perhaps it is something else entirely.

Rumble Rumble! *Rumble Rumble!*

. . . . ly? Ahh, now I see. It is not that Roxanne could tell that the sun was setting even though we have been inside of the Labyrinth the entire day, but she knew that because my stomach started rumbling pretty audibly without me even noticing it. I guess there is the truth in the old saying that you cannot deceive the internal clock that is your stomach, huh? Not to mention that it was pretty amazing how Roxanne's own internal clock managed to synchronize with my own, but I guess that should not be all that surprising, since the two of us eat our meals at exactly the same times, which is early in the morning and in the evening, so it would stand to reason that our stomach would start demanding their sustenance at about the same time as well. As far as I am aware, it does not look like watches have been invented in the world of this game just yet, so I wonder how exactly are other people able to tell the exact passage of time? Is there some kind of special training that can teach you how to do it, like maybe reading the trajectory of the sun or something of the similar sort? I wonder if Sherry can do that as well, but I do not think I would be able to master such an ability, even if I were to receive the most extensive of trainings with it, most likely because I have already grown too accustomed to living my life with a watch, be it analog or digital one, at my side, and I will be damned if a watch was

not useful when going through the maze-like structures of the Labyrinths for hours without stopping.

「I guess that is true. So. . . . wanna stop for today and head back home to grab a bite to eat?」

「Yes, let us do that.」

And that brings our exploration of the Vale's Labyrinth, which started early in the morning and lasted well until just now, to a close. Before we go back home though, let me just have a quick look at Sherry's Jobs one more time to see what Jobs she managed to unlock after all this time and levels she acquired:

Villager Lv.5, Explorer Lv.10, Herbalist Lv.1, Warrior Lv.1, Merchant Lv.1, Shrine Maiden Lv.1, Swordsman Lv.1, Monk Lv.1

I can see that the Villager Job managed to reach Lv.5 exactly as intended, but even though Monk and Swordsman Jobs were unlocked, Master Smith was still missing, which means that reaching Lv.5 as a Villager was not one of the conditions needed for its acquisition, which is a damn shame, if I am to be honest. But there was a silver lining to this situation as well, in the form of the Job that I did not recognize: Shrine Maiden Lv.1.

「Shrine Maiden, huh? I wonder what kind of Job is that, exactly?」

「.....!!!!！」

Oh crap, did I let that one slip out loud again?! I had to, because all of a sudden, Sherry's expression turned incredibly sad, and she looked as if a shadow had fallen over her pretty face. I must have said something that really got to her now. I quickly glanced at Roxanne to see if she was upset by what I said just now as well, but thankfully her expression remained as warm and bright as always, meaning that whatever offense I just committed, it was strictly limited to Sherry this time. Ugh, god damn it, why is this keep happening to me? Why do I have to keep mumbling things that no one else but me seems to understand like a dumb idiot? Saying them out loud is not going to help me in any way, and it will only make those around me think that I am a weirdo.

「Ah, uhm. . . . we are going to be getting back home now, but before we head home, we are going to make a quick stop to buy some bread for dinner, okay?」

「Okay.」

「Okay. . . . I guess. . . .」

With both of the girls expressing their agreement (although Sherry did that in an incredibly half-hearted manner) we left the Labyrinth of Vale and emerged back in the Quratar's Adventurer's guild. From there, we went to buy bread for breakfast, but the air between the three of us has been noticeably heavier than usual throughout the entire trip, and when we got back home and I was receiving the girl's equipment back from them

「Oh? Sherry, is it just me, or does something about your hair seems to be different than usual?」

When I took sherry's Leather Helmet off, I noticed that something was definitely different about them in comparison to yesterday. It is like they were somehow. . . softer? Or lighter, perhaps? Or like there is not as much of them as there was yesterday?」

「Let me see hmm, I think that they might have been a bit more voluminous yesterday?」

Roxanne reached out with her hand and touched Sherry's hair directly.

「You. you really think so, Miss Roxanne?」

「Yes. ah, I was right! They are so soft and fluffy to the touch!」

「Thank you very much.」

「Come and see for yourself, master. They are so soft that this is unbelievable!」

「Oh really? Then, is it all right for me to touch them as well?」

Not like this is anything new to me, since I already noticed that yesterday when I was washing Sherry's hair for her.

「Sure, go right ahead!」

「Well, do not mind if I do then.」

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Now that I had Sherry's consent to touch her hair, I reached out with my own hand and. . . Ah, no, wait, I almost made the same kind of blunder like I did yesterday, but no more! Before touching Sherry's hair, I gently stroked Roxanne's hair first. That is right, order in which I am doing these things is extremely important here, and if I want to avoid any unnecessary conflicts between the three of us I have to make sure not to repeat any careless mistakes like the one I made yesterday when I kissed Sherry before Roxanne.

「Ahh.」

See, Roxanne seems to be pretty delighted that I managed to do this properly this time, because she smiled happily when I put my hand on her head and started petting it. Such a cute reaction! And that smile of hers. . . ! Ahh, if only I knew that being careful would give me such magnificent rewards, I would have done that way sooner!

While stroking Roxanne's doggy ears with my right hand, I used my left to caress Sherry's head. Since she is so small, then stroking it is pretty easy because I do not even need to be stretching myself out to do it. And I have to say, Roxanne was right in what she said. In comparison to yesterday's Sherry's hair really did seem to be fluffier and softer to the touch than usual. Could it be that this is a difference that just a single bath and washing of the hair can bring?

「Wow, your hair really soft and fluffy, Sherry. This is such a nice sensation.」

「T-Thank you very much.」

But really now, if that is how soft her hair really are, then how much dust did she have in them? Or maybe. . . . maybe Sherry was actually one of those

people who have never washed their hair since they were born until yesterday? If that would be tha case, then that would be. . . . a pretty terrifying concept, I am not going to lie. And thinking about that made me all the more appreciative of how fluffy-wuffy and puffy Roxanne's doggy ears are. They are really good, and feel nice to the touch no matter when I am trying to pet them. Hooray for doggy ears, may they continue to reign supreme until the end of time! And just like that, I got to enjoy both Roxanne's fluffy ears and Sherry's fluffy hair before we get to eat breakfast, and since I am the girl's owner, then I get to enjoy this wondrous sensation whenever I want.

「By the way.」

I started the conversation during breakfast.

「…… there is such a Job as Shrine Maiden, right? What does it do?」

I had no idea that such a Job even existed, so I was genuinely curious if it was even remotely similar to the kind of shrine maidens that existed on earth, and now that we are back home and we do not need to hurry anywhere else or be on the lookout for being attacked by monsters, we might have some time to actually talk about this. or at least that was what I thought, but for some reason, Sherry looked like she got incredibly depressed as soon as the words 「Shrine Maiden」 left my mouth. I thought that if I give this subject some time then it would be safe to talk about it, but apparently that is such a sore subject for Sherry that simply hearing those words triggered such a negative reaction in her.

「Uhm, well if. . . if you do not want to talk about it, Sherry, then that is perfectly fine, I simply wanted to. . . .」

「Did. did you hear about my past from somewhere?」

Huh? Her past? What is she talking about?

「Eh? No no no no, it is nothing like that.」

「.....」

(Oh no. no, no, no no, no, no, no, no! No, God, please, no!)

Please, do not tell me that the deal with the Shrine Maiden Job is serious to such an extent! Have I done it again? Have I stepped on yet another landmine without meaning to?! Sherry, please, I beg you! Start talking! It does not matter what you are going to say, just go and say it! Right now, everything is going to be better than that dreadful silence!

「. I. when I failed to become a Master Smith. I tried to become a Shrine Maiden instead.」

Sherry explained that with a voice so quiet and trembling that I could barely make out what she was saying. She then raised her face up, but whenever Roxanne or I tried to establish eye contact with her, she tried to avoid us, as if she was embarrassed about the words that she barely managed to squeeze out of her throat.

I see. So that is how it is. I cannot say that with one hundred percent certainty, but I think I know what she was trying to say by that, or at least what her words were implying.

Based on her words, I can deduce that she did not have the Shrine Maiden Job before now, so that must mean that not only did she fail to become a Master Smith, but the same story must have happened when she wanted to become a Shrine Maiden as well. I cannot even imagine how big of a shock it must have been to her, but the closest equivalent that I am capable of thinking of would be like getting rejected by both your first and second-choice university once you have graduated high school. If that is really how it was for her, then I can definitely see it doing a real number on her confidence.

「W-Well, that might not mean much right now, but. . . . try not to beat yourself up over it too much, okay? I know how easy it is to remain pessimistic when life kicks you bellow the belt, but you cannot allow this pessimism to rule over you.」

Fuck, this is just like that previous time where I have inadvertently commented that her level as a Villager was not high enough. It seems like no matter what I say around Sherry or what I am trying to talk about with her,

literally everything is turning into a conversational landmine. no, not landmine, a conversational atomic bomb sooner or later.

「Yes, you are right master! I am going to work hard as an Explorer to make up for my many shortcomings, so please do not worry! I should be okay from now on!」

Sherry says so while raising her face even higher while the sad look in her eyes got blown away as if it was never there in the first place, replaced by the one filled with strong determination. Well, she is not an Explorer right now, but nevertheless, I appreciate her enthusiasm and readiness to continue giving it her best all the same. If she is really going to maintain such a positive attitude at all times, that would be great, because that would be one less thing for me to worry about.

「That is right! That is the spirit, Sherry! Never give up!」

「Yes, Miss Roxanne!」

Now that she decided that she will not allow her past failures to drag her down in the present, should I change her active Job to Shrine Maiden? Yeah, I think I can do that for a bit, even if only to see what Skills and Bonuses it has to offer. Party Job Settings ==> Sherry ==> Jobs ==> Shrine Maiden ==> Set. Okay, let me see what we are working with here.

『Shrine Maiden Lv.1』

Effects: Increase MP (Small), Increase INT (Tiny)

Skills: Group Medical Treatment

「Huh? The Skill of the Shrine Maiden Job.」

!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Chapter 3: Never Give Up, Part 19

(Fuck! I blurted that out loud again! Quickly! I have to find some way to cover my ass or else the situation is going to turn into an even more depressing shitfest than it already was!)

「..... do you girls know what that is?」

Fuck my life, that was too close for comfort once more! Seriously, what the hell is wrong with me and my constant habit of saying things out loud?! Is it an unwanted remnant of my previous life where I had no social life whatsoever which resulted in me often talking to myself out loud when there was no one around? Because of that, I was this close to stepping on another landmine again! And how many of them would that make just today? Three?!

Anyway, the Skill of the Shrine Maiden seems awfully familiar to me, and rightfully so, because it looks like it is similar to the Monk's Medical Treatment Skill, the only difference being that Monk's Medical Treatment works on one person only, and Shrine Maiden has 「Group」 in its name, which means that it is most probably an AoE Healing Magic, so instead of healing only one person, it is going to apply healing effects to all the people within a given radius. Or at least that is how I think it would work.

「To put it simply, Shrine Maiden Job's Skill is Recovery Magic.」

Yeah, that sounds about right. So my own guess was right on the money here.

「Since it is called a Shrine Maiden, then would it be all right to think about this Job as the Female equivalent of a Monk?」

If Shrine Maidens of this world follow the same kind of rules that the ones from old world did, then that would mean that a Shrine Maiden would be a

female-exclusive Job. And if they have the same attire in both worlds, then that would reinforce that assumption even further, since I have never seen a man who would go around in shrine maiden's outfit while claiming to be one (aside from perverts, but that is a whole other can of worms that I do not wish to open).

But wait a minute, speaking of the Monk Job. . . I have it, but Roxanne has that Job as well, even though she is a girl. And in Sherry's case, she has both Monk and Shrine Maiden Jobs, but that is probably because a monk is not a gender exclusive profession and it has nothing to do with the fact that one of the conditions for its acquisition is to defeat a monster while fighting bare-handed, which is its own special kind of madness that any ordinary Adventurer who has their wits about them would never dared to do.

「No, master. Actually, Shrine Maiden's male counterpart would be a Priest.」

Okay, a Priest then. So to sum up: Monks have Skills that grant HP Recovery to a single target, while Priests and Shrine Maidens have Skills that grant HP Recovery to multiple targets. Got it. Now, the question is: are there any differences or disadvantages to being a Priest or a Shrine Maiden? I mean, logically speaking, there have to be some, like high MP consumption or perhaps low values of the healing received per individual since they have to be distributed between everyone within range, because if these Jobs were all sunshine and rainbows without any noticeable downsides, then everyone would end up choosing these two and no one would even want to become a Monk. Well, even if these Jobs are better than Monk, for the time being none of us ended up in a situation where we would need a lot of healing in rapid succession, so the healing provided by Monk's Medical Treatment is more than enough to cover our healing needs.

「So, how can people become Priests and Shrine Maidens?」

「I. I really do not know. After all, I failed to become one.」

Well, duh. I felt awful for opening up Sherry's old wounds like that, but since I am curious to learn as much as I possibly can about this Job there is nothing I can do about it but to keep asking questions while hoping that she will be willing to answer them and will not end up hating me for being so inquisitive.

「Okay, then let us try it this way: was there anything in particular that you had to do when you were trying to become a Shrine Maiden?」

「Well, when I went to the Sacred Professions Guild, they had all of the candidates who wanted to become priests and Shrine Maidens sit beneath the waterfall located in the Guild's sanctuary.」

「A waterfall, you say?」

So, my initial guess about gaining a Job by means of the training under a waterfall was right after all, but instead of a Monk, it applied to Priests and Shrine Maidens.

「They told us that once we stay under the waterfall long enough, we are going to feel a flash of inspiration when our minds connect with the spirits within us. But even though I felt like I experienced something exactly like that, it was still not enough. . . 」

Sherry looked away from me when she stopped talking for a moment there. No Sherry, since you have obtained that Job, you were not mistaken and your method was certainly the correct one.

「It is all right, Sherry. I heard that over half of the applicants cannot become Shrine Maidens, so do not let that discourage you. Even if you did not manage to become one, that will not matter at all in the Labyrinth.」

「R-Right. . . 」

Roxanne comforted Sherry once more. It is good that she can have someone like her to cheer her up.

So from her words it seems that becoming a Priest or a Shrine Maiden requires you to unite with the spirit inside of you, which sounds like it would be quite difficult. I wonder if I would be able to pull that off? And if now, I then I would like Roxanne and Sherry to comfort me. In bed.

「However, that. . . Sacred Professions Guild or whatever should really work on informing their candidates better, because in order to become a Shrine

Maiden or Priest you have to be a Villager Lv.5 or above as well.]

「.....」

「..... Huh? What did you say, master?」

「W-Well, I mean. . . .」

Sherry was unable to become a Shrine Maiden even though she did the waterfall training because her Villager Level was insufficient, but once she gained enough levels she got that Job right away, because all of the conditions necessary for obtaining it, a flash of spiritual inspiration and high enough level, have been satisfied. If only she knew about that one additional restriction, then perhaps she could have avoided much of the tragedies that have befallen her in her life.

「Master. You may have not known this because you are an Explorer yourself, but only Explorers have Levels. Other Jobs do not have them.】

Sherry was keeping quiet without saying a word, so Roxanne looked at me seriously and then dropped the bomb on me.

「Eh? Wait, what? Really?」

「Yes.」

「As the explorer gains experience, the Item Box available to them will grow larger and larger. That is what we call their level. But other Jobs do not have that indicator. In truth, master, I cannot even imagine that you would even have a Level before becoming an Explorer.」

In my case, even when I was just a Villager, I was a Villager Lv.1. no, wait!

Come to think of it, I can only see the Levels of my Jobs when Using Identify or during Job settings and Character Reset, and those Bonus Skills cannot be used by others. The name of the First Job is also displayed on the Intelligence Card, but not the Job's level. Does. . . does that mean that the people of this world do not know that everything has a level?!

「I see. So that is how it was this entire time?」

「It is okay, master. Even if you don't know about a lot of things, that lack of common knowledge will not be a problem in the Labyrinths!」

「That's right! No problem at all!」

All this time, I have been going around like 「Level this」 and 「Level that」, so Roxanne was probably just playing along with my crazy antics.

I must have looked like such a fool up until now.

「Even if you don't know some things, you are still yourself, master!」

「Yeah, when you are too smart, it is a given that you may not be understood by others. In fact, the smartest minds are always guaranteed to be surrounded by the people who are not going to understand them!」

Is that supposed to be comforting?

「W-We should head out again. Let us go back to the seventh floor of the Labyrinth and explore it some more until evening.」

Looks like I really was a damn fool this entire time.

Chapter 4: Master Smith, Part 1

『Player Name: Kaga Michio』

『Current Character Levels & Equipment』:

Jobs:

Explorer Lv.34

Hero Lv.32

Mage Lv.33

Monk Lv.33

Alchemist Lv.6

Equipment:

Wand

Leather Helmet

Leather Armor

Leather Gloves

Leather shoes

As you all should already know by now, the enemy native to the seventh floor of the Vale's Labyrinth are Escape Goats, the bastards who tend to run away if not enough damage is being dealt to them fast enough, so naturally

the time when they can be fought is extremely short. That is why the best course of action when stumbling upon them is to surround them in such a way that would prevent them from escaping, and even if they do manage to break through your attempts at stopping them from doing that, everything is going to be fine as long as you kill them with magic before they manage to get too far away from the location of your Party, where chasing after them further is ineffective, because there is always a possibility that they might be leading you into a trap or a larger group of monsters that is just waiting for you beyond the corner. At first it was difficult to establish the proper strategy that would work most of the time, but after a few dozen tries we managed to come up with something that worked out pretty nicely for us, and most importantly, something that was not putting Sherry in any kind of unnecessary danger while she was fighting in the vanguard. Because of that, I began to wonder: should I keep Sherry's Job as a Villager, or should I switch it with something else, I mean, she already reached Villager Lv.5 and unlocked Monk and Swordsman Jobs, but Master Smith continued to elude her, so if there is no guarantee that she is going to get new Jobs by obtaining higher levels of the Villager one, then there really is no reason for her to be keeping it any longer. Then again, what if the condition that has to be satisfied is actually to have the Villager Job at Lv.10 instead of Lv.5?

Normally I would have switched her Job back to Explorer Lv.10 because that is the Job with the highest level for her, but I do not want to do it, since if she ends up gaining even one more level in it, turning it from Explorer Lv.10 to Explorer Lv.11, that might mean that her chances of gaining Master Smith Job will be gone forever. However, since Explorer Job has access to the Item Box, then she might find out that I changed her Jobs without asking her for permission first if she tried using it one day and she found out that she was unable to use it. One option that I could try is equipping her with the Shrine Maiden Job, the second one that she tried to obtain and failed in the same way she did with Master Smith. But if I wanted to do that, it would probably mean that we would have to go back to the first floor so that she would not get obliterated by the enemies here on the seventh floor, and that would be such a pain in the backside after we have already made it this far.

The biggest disadvantage of fighting on the seventh floor of the Vale's

Labyrinth is that when you happen to encounter a group of enemies that has Escape Goats mixed in with other monsters, there is always a possibility that when Escape Goats make a run for it after being dealt enough damage, they might attract other Escape Goats or other monsters towards the group that you are already fighting, making the resulting battle even longer and that much more difficult. Thankfully we did not have too many of such incidents, because now that Sherry is with us, she and Roxanne are taking care of all the opponents within their melee range while I am raining down magical punishment on any of them that try to attack them when their backs are turned towards them or if they try to flee for their lives. As long as Roxanne is in the vanguard to guide Sherry with her instructions and fight all of the monsters swiftly with the combination of her sword prowess and godly dodging skills, it feels as if nothing will be able to threaten us, and that feeling enabled me to approach every incoming battle with that much more confidence. On that account, I can proudly say that Sherry has finished her first day as the official battle member of our Party with a relative success.

Naturally, in order to celebrate that successful first day of hers we decided to have another bath, which of course led right into another night of fun bedroom activities. And since it was such a special occasion, I decided to equip my Sex Maniac Job in order to see if its Skill, Enhanced Vigor is going to work when applied to the sexual activities instead of purely battle-related ones. I know, I know, it was just today that I decided that this Job and its Skills were essentially useless and that I am going to be sealing that Job away, but that was in the Labyrinth, where the Sex Maniac's Active Skill: Abstinence Attack does indeed royally suck major ass. But the bedroom though. that might turn out to be an altogether different story. I mean come on, the Job is literally called Sex Maniac, so it would be pretty strange if it did not have some sex-related abilities that would serve as performance enhancers, right? Exactly. Therefore, I think that giving it a chance in different circumstances is the least thing that I can do. If I did not run at least one test with it too see if it actually works or not and later learned that it did indeed work and I missed out on all the additional fun that I could have thanks to it, I would have never forgiven myself as a man.

My expectations were originally pretty low. but when I actually tried it, I have to say that, as crazy as that might sound, I was really able to spot the

difference in my performance. Normally I would not be able to muster any strength to continue on and just lie down on the bed completely spent and breathing out ragged, exhausted breaths, but with Sex Maniac set as my First Job, its Enhanced Vigor Skill worked like a charm, and it turned out to be a hell of a lot effective, enabling me not only to do it with Roxanne and Sherry immediately one after the other, but I noticed that I did not feel as tired like I would usually feel after doing them both in quick succession, but I was also fired up and raring to have a go at it for another round, which I totally did, much to the girl's surprise.

As a result, Sherry was now lying on the bed, breathless and out cold. Yeah, looks like she is not going to be able to go another round even if she tried. It might still be a while for her to get used to this kind of thing, but since she is always doing her best no matter what, then with enough training I think it will be possible to make her last for three, or even four consecutive rounds. But for now, she has learned her rest, so I will just leave her be. And by the way, I think that the same logic can be applied to me. It is entirely possible that the Enhanced Vigor Skill might get stronger when the Sex Maniac Job is going to earn more levels. But in that case, I think that I should definitely start thinking about acquiring more female slaves in the future in order to not be too rough on both Roxanne and Sherry, who do not have this amazing Skill.

「Master, today you loved us so violently as well.」

As we were resting after our finished second round, Roxanne said that to me quietly while she still tried to catch her breath.

「Yeah. I guess I did, huh?」

「It. it was really amazing. master.」

Sherry slowly lifted herself up from the sheets and also commented on what we just did, which honestly surprised me. I thought that she is going to be out cold, sleeping, but apparently she managed to recover herself enough to at least remain conscious.

Chapter 4: Master Smith, Part 2

I guess it was her deep and slow breathing that got me thinking that she passed out, but apparently this girl is much more resilient than she looks. Nevertheless, I think it is going to be more tactful to not raise my voice too much, so I asked her a question with a quiet voice:

「So, what do you think, Sherry? About today as a whole, I mean?」

「Thanks to both master and Miss Roxanne's advice and guidance I was able to do a lot in just this one day, and I was also not dragging you two down. So . . . so I want to thank you for including me in your amazing Party.」

「I also think that you were as amazing as always, if not even more, master.」

Roxanne showered me with another praise. Oh stop it, you two, you are going to make me blush!

「Miss Roxanne is also amazing! Your movements are always so swift, and they way you are dodging each and every one of the monster's attacks is truly divine! And master as well, your magic is one of the reasons why I think we were able to achieve so much in such a short time! Before today, I only heard the stories of how powerful magic is, but now, after witnessing it for myself, I can definitely confirm with utmost certainty that magic is a truly useful tool that makes all of the battles way less difficult than they could have been! Forgive me for being so bold, but I honestly think that this Party is going to achieve a great deal of wondrous accomplishments in the future, and I promise that I am going to do my absolute best to be a part of those great achievements together with master and Miss Roxanne!」

In other words, Sherry seems to be positively thrilled about our performance today. And I have to say, that optimism of hers is pretty darn contagious.

「Yeah, likewise. I am looking forward to working with you and Roxanne, so let us do our very best from now on, shall we?」

「To be honest, before I decided to come to the Labyrinth with you, I did not know what I should be expecting, but I was preparing myself mentally for even the worst of eventualities, because I heard that it is not an uncommon practice for masters who own combat-oriented slaves to use them as meat shields and free laborers in the Labyrinths while they themselves remain in the safety of their houses, doing nothing to help them, so when I learned that this Party is nothing like these awful ones from the stories, my heart has been set at ease.」

「Yes, you will never have to worry about something like that happening, Sherry. Master is not a cowardly person like that. And even if he was, we still would not have to worry about a thing, because no matter how tough the enemy is, as long as we crush them before they manage to crush us, then everything is going to turn out all right in the end!」

She thought that since she was a slave, she might be treated as little more than a tool that is going to be used up for all its worth and then tossed aside when it would no longer be useful. As much as I want to say that there was nothing for her to worry about at all, Sherry was right to be worried about that. And also, I cannot agree with what Roxanne said just now about defeating the enemy before it defeats you. I know that she is biased when it comes to fighting because she has her godly dodging skills and she airheadedly thinks that this is something that just about anyone can learn as long as they continue to practice long and hard enough, but right now, she should have realized that this is not the case when she tried to teach that dodging of hers to me and Sherry and failed both times. She herself would have simply continued to avoid the enemy's attacks and drawing its attention so that I could defeat it with either my magic or my sword, but I am afraid that such a tactic might now be possible all the time. Somewhere down the line, we are bound to happen upon the enemy who is going to be so powerful that even Roxanne's dodging any my uber OP gear alone might now be enough to handle it, and I cannot help but wonder how are we going to deal with such a threat when it finally shows itself before us?

There are things that only Roxanne can do. There are things that only I can

do. There are things that only Sherry can do. So if we work together, there will be no adversary that we will not be able to overcome. Heh, look at me, thinking about such heavy and serious things while in a state of post-sex clarity. But with very minute now my consciousness is getting more and more hazy, so I think that it will not be long before I will drift off to sleep *Yaaaaawn!* Aaaanyway, from now on, all that I have to worry about is leaving the vanguard position to Roxanne and Sherry, and support them from the back with my magic to the best of my ability. Today was Sherry's first day of fighting with us for real and there were experiments with the Jobs to perform so I had no choice but to step up and defeat a number of enemies myself, but ideally I want to have the two of them capable of defeating all of the three monsters that can be in a group at once on the seventh floor without my help at all. And once we advance onto the seventh floor, where the number of maximum enemies per encounter is going to increase from three to four, I would want each of them to be able to handle two enemies at once. . . .

. but now that I think about it, is such an approach not reminiscent of the concerns that Sherry told us about just now? Because it might not be as cruel as ordering them to fight in the Labyrinths while I myself would be sitting on my ass in the safety of our home, but it is still a pretty selfish thing to do. So maybe I should still be helping them out in the vanguard on occasion so that they would not feel like they have been left alone? That might be a good thing to do, because it might lead into the deepening of the trust between us, and the more Sherry and Roxanne trust in me, the better. That is a no brainer, or at least I think so.

The next morning, we took Sherry to the seventh floor of the Labyrinth of Quratar with us. I only just bought Sherry and I do not have the need for getting the large amounts of money urgently, but it does not mean that we should be breaking our routine of fighting the enemies who drop items that we could sell for a good amount of Nars. As they say, money cannot buy you happiness, but they can certainly help in obtaining it and keeping it by your side. Besides, since Sherry was doing okay on the Seventh floor of the Labyrinth of Vale and was holding her own against the Escape Goats, then she should have no problems dealing with the Slow Rabbits here. And she really was fine, because she was slamming them to the sides left and right before they could even get close to her with the slow hopping.

Until recently, Roxanne and I have been coming to the seventh floor of Quratar's Labyrinth so that we could hunt down Slow Rabbits and sell their skins for profit, but now there is no need for us to do so, and we used that additional time to proceed further with our exploration of Vale's Labyrinth.

After hunting the Slow Rabbits and collecting their skins for a bit, we moved to the Labyrinth of Vale, where we proceeded straight toward the Boss Room of the seventh floor. Looks like we made much more progress and at a much faster rate than I thought. . . . or it is much more likely that I have consciously avoided coming back here, because I was refraining from moving to the eighth floor due to my lack of confidence and fear of having to fight up to four enemies at once.

The room where we have emerged was the small one next to the Boss Room's waiting room. As usual, there are only two doors: the ones leading forward, and the ones leading back.

Chapter 4: Master Smith, Part 3

Originally I was planning on stopping by in Quratar's shops for a little bit first to buy some more things for Sherry in the early afternoon, but I ultimately decided against it and continued through the Labyrinths as it was. We can always do the shopping later when we will finish our exploration for the day, but for now, let us put all of our attention into taking care of the Floor Boss, Rapid Rabbit. If we successfully clear the Floor Boss fight now, then we are going to be able to proceed to the eighth floor on today's evening or in the early morning tomorrow, so no matter how we choose to tackle it, it should all be good.

There were people waiting in front of the Boss Room, so that means that the previous Party that tried challenging it has to still be inside. So it is the same like everywhere else even here in the Labyrinth of Vale, where there were supposed to be only a scarce number of people. But I guess that makes sense. For the people of this world who have to challenge the Floor Bosses in bigger Parties, Floor Boss battles, which are supposed to be a grade above in terms of difficulty in comparison to the normal enemies on crawling around any given floor, will always take a long time. And that time is only going to grow even longer, because it is daytime now, and daytime automatically means more people than in the evening or night hours.

The Party that was now standing in front of the Boss Room's door consisted of six members. Initially, all that I wanted to do was to Identify them to see what Jobs each of them had, but then I noticed that all of them were looking at us with suspicious gazes that clearly telegraphed that they were up to no good. No, I should be more precise with my words. They were not looking at us, at my Party as a whole. Following their lines of sight, I saw that they were all focused on one, singular point. all of their ugly mugs are blatantly faced towards Roxanne! And they are not even trying to hide that all of their vulgar gazes are focus on Roxanne's rich chest! I know that her

boobs are out of this world, but just because they are so big does not give them any kind of right to be looking at her lie she was just a piece of meat to be consumed! Only I am allowed to do that as her master! They are simply oogling her right now, but those glints in their eyes and smirks on their faces were a clear enough indication that their thoughts were already much, much more ahead in their fantasies of what they would have done with her. These barsatrd... ! Since there is no one else but us right now, then maybe I should turn them all into nothing more but specks of rust in Durandal's blade? That would definitely teach them a lesson not to direct their swine-like eyes towards the girls that belongs to me and me alone! I mean, no one would hold it against me if I put them in their places, right? Because they are the ones who started by staring at my girl, and with my weapon and Stats, disposing of them should not present that much of a challenge.

Unfortunately, before I could have done anything with these scum, the battle in the Boss Room has ended, and the door opened themselves automatically, letting this garbage of a Party inside, but they entered only after stealing one last glance at Roxanne's breasts and smirking widely. They were also talking about something amongst themselves, but I was not able to hear what that was exactly, but maybe that was for the better. If I were able to hear them, I am pretty sure that I would have torn them to shreds right then and there.

「These trash. *Tch!*」

「Every last one of them. . . . they were all. . . . staring at Miss Roxanne. Every. Last. One of them.」

I clicked my tongue in disgust, while Sherry hanged her head down, looking pretty depressed. Well, makes sense since neither one of the guys who entered the Boss Room just now even bothered to look towards Sherry, because. . . let us face it, Sherry's boobs were infinitely smaller than Roxanne's. I guess I will have to comfort her about it later.

「The expressions on their faces. they were pretty nasty and unpleasant.」

Roxanne commented on the scum's behavior as well. Well, they were so blatantly obvious about what they were doing that it was virtually impossible

to miss where they were staring and what their intentions in doing so were. But the fact that she was aware that they were eyeing her down as if she was just an object with boobs attached to it made this whole situation that much more infuriating.

「W-Well. . . . I know it might be pretty hard to do, but try not to mind what just happened, okay? Scummy guys like that do exist after all, and as unfortunate as it is, there is pretty much nothing that we can do about it except ignoring them.」

Believe me, I am even more frustrated than you are, but as I just said. There is pretty much nothing we can do about behavior like that, or at least nothing that we can do that would not end up with us getting on the wrong side of the law.

「「Yes, master.」」

Since we have some time before it is going to be our turn to fight against the Floor Boss, I used that time to equip myself with Durandal and handed some Medicine Pills to Roxanne an Sherry respectively, just in case that they would end up needing emergency healing. Then, I have Sherry a Copper Spear.

「Sherry, I know you feel much better with a Club, but trust me, I think that a spear is going to be of much better use in this particular Floor Boss fight.」

「Okay. Uhm. are we. are we really going to challenge the Floor Boss like this?」

「Yes, that is the plan. Do any of you know what the Floor Boss of this floor is like, exactly?」

「The enemies on this floor were Escape Goats, so the Floor Boss should be Pan: a half-human, half-goat monster that primarily uses magic. Supposedly it is the strongest Floor Boss of all the lower floors of the Labyrinths, and its Area of Effect magic attacks are so powerful that I think even miss Roxanne is going to have difficulties dodging them. The Party that entered the Boss Room before us, as disgusting as they were, is probably testing their skills

against it. Also, when challenging Pan, it is a common practice to prepare equipment that has 「Chant Delay」 added onto it.」

I kept on nodding my head while Sherry was continuing her lecture. I see now. I have to say, it is pretty nice to be learning the information about the enemy we are about to face before we are actually going to fight it, and it is even nicer to have someone who actually has such information and is willing to share them with us. I cannot stress enough how useful that is.

Chapter 4: Master Smith, Part 4

It is the same as with detecting enemies via radar. Just because you used a radar to detect the position of the enemy, nowhere it is said that the enemy cannot use the very same trick to detect you as well. I came here to this world from my own world which is vastly different from this one, and because of that, my understanding of it is barely above the level of being able to differentiate right from left, much less understand the more nuanced details, so for someone like me, charging on ahead as if I was swimming in a sea of dark clouds was the only option available. But no more.

「Magnificent, Sherry. You sure know a lot about monsters. Whatever we would have done without you and your knowledge?」

「T-Thank you very much, master. Truly, I do not deserve such praises.」

Sherry said, visibly embarrassed.

「Oh, but I think you do deserve them more than you are giving yourself credit for, actually. If it is all right with you, then please, continue doing the good job that you are doing now.」

I think that from now on, whenever there will be something that I do not know about, I will be asking Sherry about it. And since she is the smartest one of our group, then I also think that entrusting her with the role of information gathering might not be such a bad idea either. After all, if there is someone who can do so efficiently and effectively, it is definitely her, since neither Roxanne nor I do not have the predispositions for that kind of a brainiac task. And as an added bonus, I might some more trust points with Sherry by entrusting her with such an important Job and claiming that she is the only one whom I can count on to do it.

「Yes, of course. Leave that to me!」

「Nice. However, you do not have to worry about anything for now. If the Floor Boss we are about to face, this 「Pan」 is exactly like you said he is, then my swords should be more than enough to defeat him with ease.」

「Because it has the『MP Absorption』Skill, so you will be able to drain him from all of his MP by continuously attacking him?」

「That as well, but the main reason for why I am so confident is that this weapon also has the『Chant Interruption』Skill.」

I said while showing Durandal off to Sherry.

「Huh? That sword also has『Chant Interruption』Skill embedded into it? I thought it only had『MP Absorption』, since you said that this is how you are replenishing your lost MP when you are filling the bathtub.」

「Because it does have 「MP Absorption」, but it also has 「Chant Interruption.」」

「.....」

When I told her that, Sherry gave me a look that could best be described as something between 「Seriously?!」 and 「*I can't even with this guy anymore*」, mixed with a little bit of fright and maybe even possibly disgust? I cannot say for sure, but that was the vibe that I was getting from her current gaze. Uh, Miss Sherry? Could you, maybe, just maybe stop looking at me like that? What are you going to do if you end up getting addicted to it or your face ends up getting permanately distorted with such an unappealing grimace?

「Is. is that bad?」

「Uhm. it is not that it is bad, but. . . . how do I put it? As someone who was aspiring to become a Master Smith, I do know that it is not impossible for a single weapon or a piece of equipment to have more than one Skill embedded into it, but it is just.」

「So it is that unusual, huh?」

「Not unusual, but extremely risky. You remember what happens when the process of infusing a weapon or a piece of equipment with a Skill fails, right?」

「Yes, I remember. The weapon or equipment gets disassembled into its base components, and the Skill Crystal used during the fusion process is lost.」

「Exactly. Now, with multiple Skills, it is even worse, because not only the risk of failure of the fusion remains the same, but when the fusion does fail and the thing that you wanted to infuse gets disassembled, then even if the fusion of the first Skill Crystal was a success, you are going to lose both Skill Crystals without any way of getting them back.」

So, what Sherry basically tries to say here is that if you get greedy with the number of Skills that you want to attach to your weapon or equipment, you are more than likely to regret it in the worst way possible. But since the probability of failure is already quite huge when infusing your gear with only one Skill Crystal, then you would either have to be incredibly brave or a very special kind of stupid to go and take an even bigger risk just so that you could maybe attach a second one to it.

Yeah, fusion of the Skill Crystals fails more often than not, and since I cannot allow myself to lose even a single piece of equipment, I would never took such an unnecessary risk unless I had some way of cheating out the odds in such a way that the fusion would end up a guaranteed success. But since I do not know of any such methods, my only option is to not engage in such gambles. The way I see it now, the only people who would be willing to gamble with their gear and resources like that have to be great eccentrics or complete and utter fools. That was probably the true meaning behind Sherry's gaze. Since she is someone who wanted to become a Master Smith, then I wonder if she is able to tell exactly how many Skills are embedded in a weapon simply by looking at it, or is she going to be able to do that only after aquiring some special Skill? Whichever one of the two it may be, it would be best if she obtained it later rather than sooner, when her trust in me is going to increase.

「Well. oh, would you look at that, the door opened. Then, shall we go?」

Now that the door to the Boss Room has oh-so conveniently opened themselves, I decided that it was no time like the present to make my escape to avoid Sherry's further questioning. Geez, I think this might actually be the first time when someone tried to escape *from* something *into* the Boss Room. Heh, talk about being a pioneer in unexpected things. Maybe I should patent that so that all the other people doing the same would have to pay me a percentage of their money to utilize such a strategy? Yeah, right, as if that was possible in this world where there is no such thing as a Patent Office.

「Understood. Lead the way, master.」

「Right.」

And we went through the now opened door right into the Boss Room. At the beginning it was difficult for me to see anything through the dense clouds of smoke, but when they finally dissipated, I could have a closer look at our surroundings.

「Uwah.」

What I saw there has indeed surprised me, but not in a positive way.

The entire Boss Room has been littered with equipment. Counting all of the swords, helmets, breastplates, gauntlet and legwear, there was probably more than twenty of them just lying around. And among all of those pieces of equipment left by the Adventurers and Explorers killed by the Floor Boss, there stood a tall, muscular man with a muscular upper body and the lower body covered by a beat-like fur.

A man? No, when I saw the pair of long horns protruding out of its head, I understood that this was not a man, but the Floor Boss itself.

Chapter 4: Master Smith, Part 5

Since it did not appear by emerging from the gathered clouds of green smoke, then my guess is that he must have annihilated the Party that entered the Boss Room before us. And as cruel as that may sound, I do not feel sorry for them. Serves them right for casting their lecherous gazes upon my Roxanne. Besides, they are not important at all right now. What is important is that the beast has noticed our presence and was staring at us with its creepy eyes, which were combining pretty nicely with its face, which was just as disturbing, looking like a mask made of human skin that has been put on a beastly head in a grotesque attempt to hide its real identity from the rest of the world.

I already know what it is, but just to be sure. . . . Identify!

『Pan Lv.7』

Yup, the name matches its appearance perfectly. Pan, a monster that is half-human, half-goat, with goat's legs and horns.

「Be careful, master. It is going to be coming at us any moment now.」

「Yeah, no need to tell me that twice.」

The Floor Boss is standing right before us, amidst the piles of equipment littering the floor. Its presence is truly imposing, and it does not look like he has sustained any serious injuries during the battle with the Party that entered this Boss Room before us, and that can only mean one thing: he annihilated those scummy guys without much difficulty, and now that we are here, we are definitely its next target.

This is just like what we have seen back on the seventh floor of the Labyrinth

of Quratar, when Roxanne and I entered the Boss Room and its Floor Boss, Rapid Rabbit was already there, waiting for us, with the equipment of the guy who just casually talked to us moments before tucked away in the corner of the chamber. Ugh, what a bunch of unpleasant memories. And for them to be flooding back to my mind now of all times. . . no, do not think about it now. The enemy is right in front of you, so focus on defeating it first and foremost, and worry about anything else later!

The previous Party has been wiped out, and that is a fact. That they were looking at Roxanne with perverted eyes is also irrelevant. They were probably thinking that they are going to defeat Pan with ease, and paid the ultimate price for their overconfidence as a result. This reminds me about what Sherry told us about 「The Demon of the Seventh Floor」: a phenomenon in which the people who traverse the Labyrinths get overly confident and lenient because of how easy the first few floors are to break through, which makes them loosen their guard up on the seventh floor as well, because they thinking that it will not be any different than what they were encountering on the lower floors, and now that attitude proved their undoing. A very fitting end for the ones who must have thought of themselves as all-powerful and invincible. Granted, I have no way of knowing how exactly did their battle went, but I imagine that they were unable to inflict any kind of wound onto Pan's body. My only hope now is that we are not going to end up in the same way as they did.

「Master, it is going to be attacking soon.」

「I see it. Roxanne, go to the front and prepare to intercept its attacks. Sherry, all of that equipment on the ground is going to get in our way, so I want you to push it as far to the sides as possible. Can you do that?」

「Of course!」

「All right then. attack!」

I issued the order for Roxanne and Sherry as fast as I could, and then we rushed forward to meet Pan in the middle of the Boss Room. This is where our battle with it starts. All distractions need to be cast aside, and eyes kept only on the goal in front of us: defeating the Floor Boss, and the prize:

advancing to the next floor.

Even though it presumably wiped the floor with the people from the previous Party, it would be strange if it was not even a little exhausted after fighting six people at once. Then again, what kind of damage could a band of leechers possibly hope to do to such a behemoth of an enemy, if all that could think about as soon as they saw them were Roxanne's boobs? Probably none, or minuscule at best. Oh do not get me wrong, I totally understand why would they find Roxanne's chest to be so captivating. After all, it is enormous, and the tight fit of her Leather Armor only serves to accentuate the curvature of her body even further. But even if she is like that, allowing your mind to be overwhelmed by perverted fantasies in the dungeon where even a moment's distraction can cause you your life, so if someone like me can hold himself from looking at Roxanne's boobs at Roxanne's boobs all the time while in the Labyrinth, then the other people should be able to make the bloody effort as well!

But even if that was indeed the case, Sherry called this beast 「the strongest monster of all the Floor Bosses on the lower floors of the Labyrinths」, so going against something like that while their minds were in horny mode was entirely their mistake. I have to learn from that mistake of theirs and proceed and fight it very carefully while keeping her words in mind.

The first order of business is to do something with all of the pieces of equipment that litter the floor of the entire Boss Room, since they will only impede our movements here if we will constantly be forced to jump around between them just to avoid tripping and falling on our butts, which is why I ordered Sherry to shove them all to the sides, where they are going to hinder us no longer.

While Roxanne was in front of Pan occupying its attention and sherry was moving around the room shoving the pieces of weapons and armor as far to the sides as possible with the tip and the handle of her Copper Spear. Good. Just imagine if any of those swords and other weapons ended up being sent flying into the air at high speed. While she was doing that, I carefully made my way to the side of the monster in order to ambush it. but then I saw that a red magic circle began glowing right under Pan's feet.

(Damn it! Taking out the big guns already?!)

According to Sherry's analysis, Pan's main way of attacking is 「*a powerful Area of Effect magic that might be too strong even for Miss Roxanne to evade without sustaining any damage*」. I was hoping that we will be able to keep it occupied with close range combat for so long that it would not even be able to whip out its trump card, but now that it has come to this, I absolutely cannot allow it to finish chanting up that spell. If you think that I am going to do the same kind of mistake that I did during the battle with the Beep Sheep, then think again! I immediately jumped towards Pan, ready to strike at its side with Durandal at any moment to interrupt his chanting, and I slashed it diagonally down from the upper right shoulder down to the left corner of its body while shouting 「Interrupt!」 in my mind. I do not know if an action like that is necessary for the Skill to take effect, but I am not taking any chances with it.

As a result of my attack, Pan stumbled forward and fell onto the floor. I expected it would maybe try to use a kick or something along those lines since it was a half-human, half beast after all, but it looked like that was not going to be the case. It. . . it looks like that is it. I think the battle is finished.

「One blow was all it took to defeat it, huh?」

As if to confirm my words, Pan's body exploded into clouds of green smoke and then dissipated shortly after.

「It would seem so.」

Roxanne commented while she got back to my side. I have to say, after Sherry hyped it up as the strongest Floor Boss of all the lower floors, I was certainly expecting something a bit more. challenging, I guess?

Chapter 4: Master Smith, Part 6

With the way how the things played out, the only thing that I am capable of saying is.

「Eh? Already down? Weak.」

Yeah, that is it. I was honestly expecting it to put up a little bit more fight than that. I mean seriously, one attack that interrupted its chanting process and it is done? This is probably the most disappointed that I have felt in quite a long while, if I am to be honest. Pan was supposed to be the strongest Floor Boss among all of the Floor Bosses of the lower floors, but the Rapid Rabbit from the seventh floor of Quratar's Labyrinth presented us with much more of a challenge than this guy here. Because I will be damned, but her really turned out to be quite a weakling.

Normally, even the Escape Goats, the regular enemies from the seventh floor, do not go down in just one blow, and need two of them in order to be dealt with. I do not really want to believe it, but as it stands, the Floor Boss that is feared all those who possess the information about him. is weaker than the regular enemy from his floor! I did not even think that something like that could be possible!

When the smoke from Pan's death finally cleared, the only thing that was left behind was his Drop Item, Goat's Meat. So even if it was a hybrid of a human and a goat, the game still treated him as a goat when it came to generating a Drop Item, huh? Well, I do not know if it is really a half-human, half-goat hybrid, but that is how it looks to me, and that is why I am calling it like that. In reality, it might be its own entirely separate thing, but I do not care about that. Right now, the most important thing to me is that the piece of Goat Meat that it dropped is rather big, so it is more than likely that it is going to be enough for all three of us as an ingredient for today's dinner.

「For something that was supposed to be the strongest of the lower floors Floor Bosses, it was really easy to beat. I thought it was going to last a little longer than it did, but I guess not. Its movements were also really simple and predictable, making it easy to block and dodge its attacks.」

「W-Well, I guess it might be thanks to that previous Party that went in here before us. They must have weakened the boss to some extent.」

「I think that it might be exactly as master said, because normally Pan definitely is not the kind of a Floor Boss that would go down with just a single blow.」

Sherry said while picking up the Goat Meat from the floor.

I also think that I might have been to harsh on the people from that previous Party, simply because their actions left me with the absolute worst kind of first impression possible. When we came into the Boss Room, Pan did not materialize in a cloud of smoke, but he was already waiting in there for us, just like Slow Rabbit did when he defeated that lone Explorer guy whose gear we took. This only happens when the Floor Boss defeats the Party that tried to challenge him, and upon killing all of the current challengers, the door to the Boss Room opens to let the next group of eager Adventurers and Explorers in, and that also has to mean that whatever damage he has sustained from the previous battle is not healed in between the groups of challengers who enter the Boss Room, but rather, all of the wounds that the Floor Boss has sustained and all of its lost HP carry over to the next encounter, meaning that whoever comes in next is going to have a much easier time in comparison to those who entered before them.

「I see. So that is why master was able to defeat is so easily? Well, if it means that this nasty Party has been obliterated, then so much the better. That is an outcome that I am willing to accept.」

Roxanne murmured with open hostility, and Sherry joined her while saying 「Divine Punishment on those who judge a woman by the size of her chest alone!」 Wow there girls, these guys are gone now, so I do not think there is any need to be so hostile towards them now. It is not like they are going to hear you and repent for their lecherousness in the afterlife, right?

(.)

Normally I would have told them to calm down, but for some weird reason they seemed to be more fired up than usual, which made them look kinda scary, so I decided to drop the subject entirely.

「What about the equipment of these guys, Sherry? You did place it near the walls like I instructed you to, right?」

「Of course, master. It is all over there.」

Sherry said, pointing towards the wall of the Boss Room. I walked up to the pile of gear and started examining the things that these guys left behind one by one, starting with what looked like a bunch of two-handed Copper Swords.

(Okay, let me see what do we have here. . . . Identify.)

{Two-Handed Copper Sword of Obstruction}

Skills: Chant Delay

A total of four Two-Handed Copper Swords of Obstruction, each one of them equipped with a 「Chant Delay」 Skill.

「So it is not that they just stormed in here unprepared, huh? They were prepared for the enemy they wanted to face, but in the end they all ended up dying anyway, huh?」

「You can tell if a weapon has a Skill embedded into it just by looking at them?!」

Sherry looked up at me with her eyes shining with that knowledge-hungry light of hers. Uh-huh, was that perhaps something that I should not have said? Is it something that people cannot normally do? Because I definitely did not want what I just said to sound as if I was bragging about it or anything. but on second thought, you know what? Screw it. Identify is one of my Bonus Skill, so allow me to take pride in at least that much!

「Yeah, that is right! I.」

「Ohhh, so you must have used Identify Weapon without chanting, right?!」

I confirmed Sherry's words, but before I could boast about it some more she arrived at her own conclusion, completely overshadowing me. I mean, she basically arrived at pretty much the same thing that I wanted to say, but still, how quickly she lost interest in it has cut me to the core. I wanted her to be amazed and tell me how amazing I am, but she denied me that simple pleasure. Damn it!

「As expected of master! You never stop to amaze me!」

Ahh, at least Roxanne remains my one and only surefire oasis of praise whenever I need it the most. but back to the subject at hand.

Usually, weapon appraisal is performed exclusively by the owners of the Weapon Shops, people who possess the Weapon Merchant Job, so I think it is best to assume that Identify Weapon is a Skill that they possess, so it would be perfectly reasonable that I should be capable of doing the exact same thing if I had the Weapon Merchant Job, so maybe that is what Sherry assumed. However, that assumption of hers is wrong, because I have not unlocked the Weapons Merchant Job yet, even though I have already bought and sold a fair share of weapons and armor. Maybe one of the requirements for obtaining it is to increase the level of my Merchant Job? And also, just for the record, what I did was Identify. Just your plain Identify. Not Identify Weapon, just Identify. But that got me thinking: if Weapon Merchants can have Identify Weapon Skill used for the purpose of appraising weapons, then I wonder if armor can only be appraised by Armor Merchants with the Identify Armor Skill? Not that it matters to me anyway, because my Identify allows me to appraise weapons, armor, and even people.

「Sherry, give me a little refresher here. 「Chant Delay」 does exactly what the name suggests: it delays the process of casting a Skill or a Spell, correct?」

「Yes, exactly. And weapons infused with that Skill are going to have exactly the same effect.」

Chapter 4: Master Smith, Part 7

「In that case, do you have any ideas why did the previous Party that tried challenging Pan ended up dying anyway, even though most of their Party members came equipped with the weaponry that had 「Chant Delay」on it?」

「Usually 「Chant Delay」should work without any issues, but maybe they simply were unable to delay Pan's magic attacks with just the four of them?」

「Five of them, it would seem.」

Sherry said while presenting me with another Two-Handed Copper Sword of Obstruction that she was holding in her hands. So, their Party had five people with weapons that had 「Chant Delay」added onto them, but it was still not enough to stop Pan from casting his magic, huh? Oh, and by the way, the last member of that Party must have been a Mage, Monk or Perhaps a Priest focused on Healing Magic, because the other weapon I found just lying around here was a Wand.

「Five people with 「Chant Delay」 were not enough to contain the Floor Boss's magic? I have to say, that it pretty terrifying.」

「Indeed it is, but it is not our problem right now. However well prepared these guys might have been, they were bad people, and bad people are always going to get what is coming to them.」

「You can say that again, Sherry. That is the price hot-headed morons pay for getting in over their heads.」

Aaaand the girls are still holding a grudge against the members of that Party. Come on now, you two. These guys are dead now, so there is no use in continuing to berate them like that since they already got what was coming to

them, but.

Pan was wounded to the point where all that it took to defeat him was a single blow from Durandal, which means that these guys had to be doing pretty well for the most of their battle. But in that case, what was the thing that sealed the deal for them? Was it some kind of accident during battle, or perhaps Pan was able to activate his AoE magic attacks continuously because the five of them were unable to delay it enough to stop him from finishing the chant?

「That just goes to show that even though information and strategy are very useful things to have in the Labyrinths, relying on them too much might be as bad as not relying on them enough, because one accident or misstep can still lead to failure all the same. That is why it is important to always steadily increase your own abilities so that you would not fail when the situation would call for you to act.」

「Yeah, I suppose.」

「I promise that I will always do my best, master!」

Sherry nodded with an ambiguous answer, while Roxanne gave me a passionate one.

「Now, I am simply wondering, but. . . . what happened to the bodies of those six guys? Because it was not that much time between them getting killed and us entering the Boss Room, but when we went inside there was already no one there.」

「That is because the corpses of those who are killed by monsters or die in the Labyrinth for any other reason are quickly getting digested by it.」

Sherry explained as she kept on bringing the other pieces of equipment to me so that I could appraise them. This time it was the gauntlets. If what she said about the digestion of the corpses was true, then that is truly terrifying, because not only there are no bodies left here in the room, but there are not even any traces of these guys being here, not even a singular bloodstain left on the floor or the walls. If it was not for their equipment that was littering

the floor of the Boss Room, I would have probably not even notice that someone was in the Boss Room before us.

「What about the equipment then? Why is it not getting digested along with those who were holding it?」

「Because unlike the bodies of Adventurers and Explorers, equipment and weapons are treated by the Labyrinths as the undigestable foreign bodies.」

「Really?」

「Yes. Moreover, just because it is undigestable, it does not mean that the Labyrinths are not going to try and consume those items anyway, only to spit them back up after a while.」

Speaking of which, the equipment of those who died in the Labyrinth gets turned into a treasure chest, so maybe that is how the Labyrinths are dealing with those foreign bodies that they are unable to digest? By spitting them back out towards the surface in the shape of mound-like earthen sacks that got dubbed as the treasure chests over time? Anyway, that is how it is: human bodies get eaten without leaving anything back while equipment gets vomited back up and then left for others to find while they are on their way through the Labyrinth's halls.

「That is right. It is precisely because they are foreign bodies to the Labyrinth that it takes so much time for it to process them into treasure chests, and that is also why they are so rare no matter which Labyrinth you go to.」

I see. So that is why we can claim any piece of equipment that has been left by the previous Party that failed to defeat the Floor Boss. It is because the Labyrinth needs way more time to process the equipment into treasure chests than it needs to process the bodies of Adventurers in order to continue to grow up that we can simply walk in, defeat the Floor Boss and claim all of the spoils present in the room before they get absorbed into the ground.

「That being said, it does not really feel right to be using the equipment of someone who died wearing it literal moments ago, so maybe we should just go and sell all of it?」

That previous Party did not have any useful pieces of armor aside from Leather Gloves and Leather Boots, but I think that since all of those Two-Handed Copper Swords of Obstruction have 「Chant Delay」 placed onto them, then we should be able to get ourselves some pretty nice money for them.

「Anything that belonged to a defeated Party belongs to the Party that kills the Floor Boss, so now that we defeated Pan, it is okay to not think about this equipment as the one who belonged to that awful previous Party and start think about it as our own. Once we get back home I will make sure to give all of them a thorough maintenance, so it should be okay for us to be using the pieces that seem useful and sell the ones that we will not need.」

As usual, Roxanne is such an equipment maintenance freak. Well, since she says that it should be all right for us to take all of it, then I guess that is how it really must be. Ne of the other pieces of equipment that remained after the annihilated Party was a single piece of Leather Armor, but right now we have no need for it, because all three of us already have their own pieces of armor that we are currently using. Sherry was the one who found and presented it to me, but no matter how hard I try to justify her using it my head, I just. . . . I cannot find any reasons in favor of it, not when I have Roxanne right next to me, who is also wearing exactly the same Leather armor to a much more. . . . bombastic effect.

「. ??? What is it, master? Is something troubling you?」

「N-No, not exactly. . . it is. . . it is just that I thought that we will have to sell this Leather Armor here, since we do not need another copy of the same one we already have, since no one of us is going to be using it. . . that is all.」

Yeah, that is all I am going to say about it. I do not want to say anything else, and I do not want to even think about it.

「Certainly, mine are small, but.」

However, Sherry, being a smart girl that she is, was able to catch onto what I was thinking by saying it like that, and was now staring at her own chest with a look of disappointment painted all over her face.

Chapter 4: Master Smith, Part 8

Girl, do you have to be so hung up on that particular thing?! Because right now you are just making it look like you are simply paranoid when it comes to the size of your tits!

Aside from all the equipment, upon closer inspection of our surroundings we have also found six Magic Crystals lying around: One Blue Magic Crystal, one Red Magic Crystal, one Purple Magic Crystal, and the last three of them Black. Looks like the three of the members of that Party did not even defeat enough monsters for their Magic Crystals to turn Red, or perhaps they sold the other Magic Crystals they had on them and just got themselves the new ones. I placed all of the items into my Item Box, and like that, we were finally ready to leave the Boss Room behind and advance to the eighth floor. However. . . .

「You know what? It is not like there is any need for us to do it, but since this was essentially not even half of the Floor Boss battle. . . . would either of you have something against us attempting this battle one more time, but properly this time? The three of us, fighting Pan from start to finish?」

「Personally, I do not think there are going to be any downsides to experiencing this Floor Boss battle fully. Moreover, that way we will be able to see how strong Pan really is, and getting more experienced with fighting against strong opponents is always a good thing.」

「Since I did not have the chance to properly participate in the battle against Pan this time, I would like to have another go at it as well so that I could get a hang of its attack patterns. That is, if that is okay with master as well.」

I guess it would have been better if I did not say anything, but now that I have opened my mouth, I guess I have to go through with what I said from

start to finish. Ah well, we already know what the Boss' weaknesses are, so we should be okay.

Unfortunately, the Boss Rooms are designed in such a way that once you clear them, the only way you can go is forward, not back, so after we got to the eighth floor, I used Dungeon Walker to move us back to the small room before the seventh floor's Boss Room's waiting room, because as much as I wanted to get us to the waiting room directly, it looks like that is impossible as well, at least with Dungeon Walker. I have a lingering suspicion that it could have been possible if I decided to use Warp to get us there, but since there is a possibility that other people might already be gathered there, it would be bad if they saw us doing something that technically should not be possible, so for our own safety, it would be better to do everything the 「normal」 way.

「Master, if I may, there is something that I would like to discuss with you.」

Roxanne pulled on my sleeve when we got out of the Dungeon Walker's portal.

「Sure thing, Roxanne. What is it?」

It must have been something serious, because Roxanne was looking me right in the eyes with a look of stern determination on her face.

「Since Pan is a type of monster whose magic attacks can be stopped by master's sword and its physical attacks are simplistic and easy to avoid, then. . . . would it be all right if I tried using my racial Skill during the next battle?」

By her racial Skill she must mean. . . . Beast Warrior's 「Beast Attack」? Since you have no choice but to remain completely stationary throughout the chanting process, I guess she really did not have any chance to actually use it, since I always asked her to take position at the front of the battle so that she could focus the monsters aggro on herself with her superb dodging skills.

「Hmm, let me see. . . . Sherry, can I entrust Pan's front to you? You should be okay since you wanted to get a hang of his attack patterns, right? Then for that next battle with it, you are going to be occupying its attention while

Roxanne will be using her Skill. Once Pan starts chanting spells of its own, simply leave it to me to take care of that, okay?」

「Roger that, master. I will do my best to meet your expectations!」

Sherry exclaimed while giving me an affirmative nod. But I have to wonder. is she really going to be all right, or was she only saying that so that I would not get disappointed with her?

「Okay, that is settled then. Roxanne, as soon as you get the chance to do so, feel free to go ahead and try using your Skill.」

「Yes, thank you very much!」

Now that I have given Roxanne my permission to try her Skill, she was in such a good mood that she actually started wagging her tail left and right. Wow, she must have really been dying to try it out. And in this particular situation, there was no reason whatsoever for me to forbid her from using 「Beast Attack」. If she has that Skill available and she is sure that she will be able to use it, then allowing her to use it was hands down the only option here. Who knows, once I see how that Skill of hers actually looks, maybe it will turn out that it is going to be a good one to be used in case of emergencies or the most dire of situations? We have nothing to lose here, and if it is to be Roxanne's trump card, then it will be better to have it tested in an actual battle that we know we can win instead of using it in desperation after being driven into a corner with no other alternatives. And since Pan is primarily using AoE magic attacks that take a good moment to fully chant, then we will not have any better chances to conduct a fully controlled test like that.

「Well then, let us be on our way.」

When we moved into the waiting room, it was conveniently empty, so with no one there to interrupt us, we went ahead and approached the door to the Boss Room, which opened on their own, inviting us to go inside.

This time, Sherry and I stood in front and Roxanne was in the back, and our plan was to surround Pan from three sides so that Sherry and I would keep on

distracting it with our attacks, giving Roxanne a chance to chant her Skill and use 「Beast Attack」. Sherry was the first one to attack him with her Club from the front, while I slashed him diagonally across the back with Durandal. And since it did not look like those two attacks of ours have inflicted any kind of major damage upon it, it would seem that our assumption about Pan here on the seventh floor must have been correct: it is not so weak as to be defeated with a single blow, so that previous Party truly must have been this close to defeating it before it killed all of them. While we were busy keeping Pan off of Roxanne, she began reciting the chant for her Skill.

「As a. warrior? As a warrior of X X beasts.」

(*Hmm?*)

「. unleash my X X power.」

(*Huh?*)

「Mortal Blow. Beast Attack! ! ! ! !」

Roxanne chanted. if we can even call that a chant, the incantation for her Skill and then swung her Scimitar down on Pan. Did it work? No, no, no, of course it did not work, since the chant was so poorly done that parts of it were not even properly translated, meaning that Roxanne must have botched them horribly. Her attack still connected with the enemy, but it did not look any different from her usual attacks, so it obviously did not work, no two ways about it.

「Hmm. it failed, huh? Brahim sure is a difficult language to use in the heat of battle.」

「Even if you failed now, it is still okay. What is important is for the words to be appearing in your mind on their own so that you could recite them naturally. So try one more time, but slowly, and try to speak each word loudly and clearly without worrying about the speed of your chanting. Sherry and I have you covered, so take as much time as you need!」

Chapter 4: Master Smith, Part 9

Taking advantage of Pan's attention being occupied by Sherry, I got to Roxanne's side and gave her as precise instructions about chanting as I possibly could. Just like I told her, the words for the chant itself should be appearing in her mind naturally and on their own, and she should be speaking them loudly and clearly. Now let us see if she understood what I was trying to tell her.

「As a warrior? of amaraha beasts, unleash. . . . X X. . . . X X X. . . . ah, wait, I think I know this one! It should be 「unleash my full power」. probably. I think so.」

Since most of what she said got properly translated to me, then I guess this time we have to be on the right track.

「Okay, that sounds great and all, but what does 「Amaraha」 mean, exactly?」

I think that one word is still something that she got wrong, because that does not sound like any word that I know of, which probably means that it still did not get translated properly. If it was a legitimate Brahmin language word, than the game's system would have swapped it for the Japanese equivalent of it so that I could fully understand what it meant, so if I want Roxanne's Skill to work, I think I have to help her correct her wording mistake. In the meantime, another red magic circle appeared under Pan's feet, so I slashed him again in order to interrupt his chant and allow Roxanne to continue figuring her own chant in peace.

「「Amaraha」. . . . no, I feel like that is not it. 「Amarama」? 「Araraha」? Ugly. . . . hideous. . . . unsightly. . . .」

「Ugly? Hideous? Unsightly? Uhm, Roxanne? Why are you throwing out

insults in the middle of the chant brainstorm?」

「Oh, I am sorry if you took it that way, master. It is just that the word that I am looking for sounds kind of like that, but at the same time, not quite.」

Same, but not quite? I am afraid that I completely lost track of what she was talking about, but it is true than when she began translating those words from Brahim, I was able to properly catch their meanings.

「The thing is, master, that in the context of the chant the words that I am looking for would have to mean something along the lines of 「unsightly Beast Warrior」, however, as far as I know there is no such thing as an 「unsightly Beast Warrior?」

Maybe it was translated that by chance? Or that was the closest thing to the original meaning in Brahim language? I though about it while jumping around Pan's lower body which I was slashing with my sword whenever he was summoning the magic circle and resuming the chanting process all over again, and then at one point, a certain thought occurred to me.

「Then. then maybe instead of 「unsightly」 the word that you are looking for is actually 「formidable」?」

「So like. 「Amuraha」?」

Roxanne repeated the word that I just spoke, but in Brahim language.

「Yes, formidable.」

「For. mi. dable. . . . ?」

And then slowly, syllable by syllable, she repeated the word I said in the common language.

「What does that mean?」

「It is an archaic way of describing someone who is powerful in the country where I am coming from.」

And also an obvious issue with translation, if you were to ask me. But since the magic circle under Pan's feet got activated again, I had no choice but to explain that to Roxanne in the middle of dealing with it. That is as far as the semantics go. But when it comes to translating the Brahim language into the one used here in the game's world and translating it into Japanese for me and the other way around, it was clear as day that the game's language interface cannot handle words with multiple or possible archaic meanings very well.

「How do you even know such archaic words, master?! Pretty much no one uses them anymore these days!」

Sherry shouted without taking her eyes off of Pan, focused entirely on blocking the physical attacks which he was raining down on her when he was not trying to recast its magic attacks. But Roxanne was definitely right about him: even though his magic attacks are said to be formidable, his physical attacks were rather easy to predict and learn, not to mention that they were pretty much all telegraphed by some sort of additional movement that allowed you to properly differentiate between what kind of attack was coming, giving you more than enough time to either dodge in the right direction or prepare an adequate counter. For an observant fighter, or the one skilled at dodging, these kinds of attacks were really not as severe as his initial impression would suggest. Now that he was simply trying to slam his fists into Sherry's Club, which she was now holding horizontally while in a defensive stance, this provided a great opportunity for Roxanne to fix up her chant and (hopefully) finish casting the Skill.

「W-Well.」

But when it comes to the question that Sherry shouted at me, I could not find any words that would make for an answer that would be convincing enough for someone as inquisitive as she was. My only saving grace here was that this time the words managed to be properly translated, because otherwise I probably would have to prepare a much more convincing excuse than that dismissive 「W-Well.」 of mine.

「As a. warrior? of formidable beasts, unleash my full power. Mortal Blow. Beast Attack!」

Taking my advices into account, Roxanne recited her modified chant, and then tried to unleash Beast Attack once more. However, since there was still some hesitation in her words, it looked like the resulting attack was a failure as well. Looks like the Skill will not be properly activated if even a small part of it is phrased like a question. She needs to have absolute conviction in the words that she is saying, or else she is just going to be failing over and over again. A red magic circle has appeared under Pan's feet once more, so I hurriedly slashed him with Durandal to stop him dead in his tracks.

「What is wrong, Miss Roxanne?!」

「The Skill does not want to work, probably because I am still making a mistake somewhere. And it does not help that Brahim is such a difficult language.」

「Well, you said it. It is Brahim, so it cannot really be helped.」

To me the mistake she makes is clear as day. She needs to stop saying the word warrior with a question mark at the end. In that case... yeah, maybe that is going to work. I do not know for sure, but it is definitely worth a try.

「Roxanne, try doing something like this: instead of saying warrior (senshi), try pronouncing it as warrior(mononofu) and try to make the chant rhyme.」

I suggested that to Roxanne while shaking Durandal at Pan, who was trying to prepare another magical attack. As for the exact meaning of what warrior (mononofu, or mononofu no yose to be exact) means, it is a makurakotoba (**TL Note: figures of speech used in Japanese waka poetry in which epithets are used in association with certain words**) describing a samurai similar to Chiyahaburu or Tarachine no Haha or other similar nonsense phrases present especially in *Ogura Hyakunin Isshu* (**TL Note: a classical Japanese anthology of one hundred Japanese waka by one hundred poets. *Hyakunin isshu* can be translated to “one hundred people, one poem [each]”; it can also refer to the card game of *uta-garuta*, which uses a deck composed of cards based on the *Ogura Hyakunin Isshu*.**)

「Warrior (mononofu)?」

「I think that the word master used means warrior (senshi), but the meaning he has in mind is probably really outdated.」

Sherry gave Roxanne another pointer.

Chapter 4: Master Smith, Part 10

Feel free to think whatever you want about the actuality of the words that I am using, but as long as you make Roxanne understand and say the chant for 「Beast Attack」 in a proper way, then I really will not give a damn about it.

「As a warrior (mononofu). yes, that might be it!」

Roxanne closed her eyes, took a couple of deep breaths and the began to redo the chant.

「*As a warrior born of formidable beasts, unleash my full power and grant it to me! Mortal Blow. . . . BEAST ATTACK! ! ! ! ! !*」

Roxanne shouted, and slammed the Scimitar into Pan's body with visibly more force than before, and twice as much speed. I do not think if describing it like that is going to be accurate, but. . . . but I think that for a moment there she was moving so fast that I had lost her from my sight for a split second. Could it really be that this Skill of hers made it possible for her to move so fast and hit so hard with just the momentum alone? And speaking of hitting hard. . . .

Instead of slashing through Pan in an instant, Roxanne's Scimitar dug itself into his guts, and moved forward after a few solid seconds of being embedded inside of him, after which the sheer impact of the blow the tore his side wide open send him tumbling into the nearby wall that he then bounced off of it, landing on the ground pretty hard.

「Ohhh!!! Just now, that was. !!!!!」

「YES! I did it, master! It was a success!!!!!!」

「Yeah. . . . yeah, you can say that again, Roxanne. That attack just now was

really something.]

「Amazing! You were so cool just now, Miss Roxanne!!!」

Sherry was absolutely right to be amazed. If nothing else, the attack that Roxanne executed just now certainly deserved to be called life threatening. If an ordinary human were to be hit by something like that, they would probably either dropped dead on the spot or be cleaved cleanly in half. Even looking at it from the outsider's perspective, the difference between 「Beast Attack」's and regular attack's power and speed was plain to see even with the eye of someone who has nothing to do with Labyrinths and adventuring on a daily basis.

So yeah. Roxanne called the successful execution of her 「Beast Attack」 a success, but I would go even further than that. It was a great success, no, a tremendous success.

In a last-ditch effort, Pan tried initiating his magic attack one last time, but as soon as I saw that the red magic circle formed under its body, I ran up to him, looked him in the eyes with a look that was saying 「Thanks for your hard work」 and I swung Durandal down on him, finally killing him. He immediately turned into a burst of green smoke and disappeared.

「Once again, Roxanne: that was a magnificent attack.」

「Thank you very much, master, but I would not have been able to do it without your and Sherry's help. You have my sincerest gratitude for helping me figure out the right chant for 「Beast Attack」 to work, and keeping Pan occupied long enough for me to be able to finish casting it.」

「Of course! Just say the word and I will gladly help you again, Miss Roxanne!」

「What she said, basically.」

Based on my observations, a single hit from 「Beast Attack」 does the damage that should be roughly equivalent to two regular strikes from Durandal, meaning that this Skill was something that could allow even a regular

weapon such as the Scimitar to deal damage similar to the one done by the weapon known as the Holy Sword. Roxanne is going to be fighting in the vanguard for the most time so she will probably not have all that many occasions to be actually using that Skill, but nevertheless, it is a good thing to know that she has something that powerful in her arsenal of available Skills.

「Miss Roxanne, I knew you were an amazing fighter, but that was an entirely different kind of amazing!」

「Thank you for your kind words, Sherry. You were also amazing, holding out against the strongest of the Floor Bosses of the lower floors all on your own.」

Roxanne shared her joy with Sherry, who then walked to the place where Pan disappeared and picked up his Drop Item: another huge piece of Goat Meat, and promptly handed it back to me. Coupled with that previous Goat Meat we obtained from our first battle with Pan, I think we now have more than enough meat to last us for a few days, so I think tomorrow will be a good occasion to prepare some Genghis Khan (**TL Note: also known as Jingisukan or Mongolian Barbecue. It is a Japanese-style grilled lamb meat dish popular mainly on Hokkaido and in China**)

「On another note, master. Your knowledge of the Brahim language is truly incredible. If it was not for your hints, I would have never thought of using archaic forms of modern words while preparing the Skill chant. I should have expected nothing less from you!」

「Nah, you are giving me way too much credit than I actually deserve. I just knew a few old words and I thought that they might just work, so I threw them your way to try them out.」

「You might say that, but trust me master, knowledge of the old words and expressions in Brahim language is kind of a huge deal.」

「Well, if you say so.」

I wonder if Sherry's opinion of me increased a little bit more thanks to that? Then again, I only know Brahim because I basically cannot see the distinction between Brahim and Japanese, my native language, so I feel like I

should not be just going around claiming to have mastered it to God knows how big of a degree if I want to stay out of trouble in regards to it, like I have been doing up until now.

「However, there is one thing that I do regret. Even though we have fought properly against Pan, who was supposed to be the strongest of the lower floors Floor Bosses, the battle still ended too quickly for my liking. I tried to do my best, but even so, I was still unable to fully grasp all of its attack patterns.」

So it is hopeless after all, huh? Instead of praising me some more for my knowledge of Brahim, Sherry was focused only on the fact that she was not able to study Pan's attack patterns and movements as thoroughly as she wanted. And with her complaining like that, we have finally proceeded to the eighth floor. From here on out, monsters are going to start showing up in groups of up to four of them, so we should make sure that we are going to be as careful as we possibly can be. For the time being, I think that the best course of action will be to continue having Roxanne and Sherry in the vanguard so that I could support them with my magic from the relative safety of the backlines. If such a setup worked nicely so far, then I do not see any need to change it anytime soon.

「Since we are on an entirely new floor, then let us do the usual thing where we kick things off by picking a fight with a smaller group of enemies first, okay?」

「Okay! *Sniff Sniff* *Sniff Sniff* Looks like there is a small group of Collagen Corals nearby.」

「Collagen Corals, huh?」

After I instructed Roxanne about what we are going to be doing, she used her sense of smell and immediately located the nearest group of enemies. The monsters native to the eighth floor of the Labyrinth in Vale seem to be Collagen Corals.

「Is there any way for us to gain knowledge about the monsters from specific floors of the Labyrinths?」

「There is a number of ways, actually. We can do that by asking the Explorer standing at the entrance to the Labyrinth, from the Explorer's Guild in Vale, and from the Explorer's Guild in Quratar.」

「Well, I know that much, but to be honest, I am not interested in getting to know about them in detail, or at least not yet. For the time being, I am going to be fully satisfied with knowing which monsters appear on which floors.」

Chapter 4: Master Smith, Part 11

Under a different set of circumstances, Sherry's advice would have been pretty useful, if not for its one, blatant weakness: if we really tried asking the Explorer at the entrance to the Labyrinth or in any of the Explorer's Guilds about the monsters inhabiting specific floors, the only thing they would have been able to tell us would be what types of monsters are there, and that kind of information gives us jack shit, to say it lightly.

What good would the information about the types of monsters be if they do not tell you what are their weaknesses, the attack patterns they are going to use and how to deal with them in the best way possible? For example, we have fought against Collagen Coral before so we already know that even if their levels are higher we can deal with them without any kind of trouble, but the same cannot be said about the monsters that we have never fought before. If we happened upon such monsters, we would have no choice but to go back to the good old strategy of hitting it until it dies to figure out where it is best to hit it and what its attack patterns actually are, so if possible, I would like to learn about such monsters first, and for that, Sherry would be an ideal source of information. assuming that she possesses the knowledge about most of the monsters that can be encountered in the Labyrinths of course.

「Haaaaa.」

「Sherry, in the future, can I ask you to gather all the information about the monsters from the Labyrinths that you possibly can for us?」

Instead of worrying about that myself I decided that it is going to be best if I pushed that problem onto Sherry, who sighed heavily and gave me a really tired look. But really Sherry, stop looking at me in such a disappointed way, or it will really become a habit and your face is going to stay permanently distorted like that! This is fine with you, right? You are not suddenly going to

say that you do not want to do this because this is too much work for just one person, right?

「. All right. I will take care of it.」

She nodded and agreed to my request, but her look when she was doing that was somewhat cold. At this point, it was hard for me to tell if she was doing that because she truly meant it, or just because she was trying to screw with me a little. Either way, when she was looking at me with such eyes, Sherry was well and truly scary.

「O-Okay, now our biggest issue to resolve should be: what are we going to do once four monsters start showing up?」

「Hmm, let me see. . . . we could split it in the following ways: three monsters for me and one for Sherry or two monsters for me, two for Sherry, or I could handle two of them at once while Sherry and master would take one each. Or if you want. . . .」

「Uhm. . . master? Miss Roxanne?」

All of a sudden, Sherry raised her hand, interrupting Roxanne mid-sentence.

「There is something that I would have liked to try. Is. . . is that all right with you?」

Ohh? Could it be that Sherry has come up with some kind of new way to deal with our current situation? Roxanne clearly had something ore to say, but if Sherry has an idea as well, then I am more than eager to hear her out.

「Of course, Sherry. What is it?」

「Normally, hammers and clubs are the kind of weapons that you are supposed to be swinging with all your strength at all times, and their biggest standout trait is that they can be used to attack multiple monsters at once due to how big they are. If I could learn how to utilize that tactic properly, then I am sure that I could take two monsters on at the same time, just like Miss Roxanne.」

That was something that I have legitimately had no idea about. I mean, I knew that hammers and clubs have a pretty long reach, but to think that they had such an awesome advantage? If what Sherry says is true and she could learn to utilize such a handy technique, then that would really solve all of my problems with how to divide the responsibility of fighting four monsters at once, because that way the only division we would ever need would be Roxanne against two monsters, Sherry against the other two and myself acting as a support at the rearguard, where I would be relatively safe from harm. It would literally be like killing two birds with one stone!

「I see. So, do you want to try practicing that right now?」

「I do, but the ideal situation to test this out would be when the monsters will be all crowded together, so I am going to try this when we will find a group of four monsters. If it is not a problem for master of course.」

「Of course it will not be a problem. If this is what you want, then that is going to be the setting we are going to go with for the time being. Roxanne? First guide us to the place with a few monsters as a warm-up on this floor, and after that, let us search for a group of four of them so that Sherry could test her idea.」

「On it, master!」

As expected of Roxanne, she is always so cooperative. Going along with my ideas is one thing, but I am so happy to see that she is ready and willing to help Sherry as well. Thank you, Roxanne. You truly are the best slave a guy could ask for. If Sherry manages to get a hang of the technique she was talking about fast enough, it is going to tremendously increase the flexibility of our Party.

When the first group of Collagen Corals appeared, I got rid of all of them pretty much effortlessly thanks to my magic. Even though the monsters here on the eighth floor take as much as five shots of it to be taken down, at my current level I do not feel like that is much at all. To be honest, the Lv.7 enemies on the seventh floor in Quratar's Labyrinth felt like they were tougher to beat than Lv.8 enemies here in Vale's Labyrinth, and just to remind you, they were the friggin Slow Rabbits! So even though we just

defeated what was universally referred to as the strongest monster of the lower floors, it does not mean that the regular monsters on the eighth floor got drastically stronger in comparison to their counterparts from the lower floors, which bodes really well for the future.

The next group of three enemies was also easily defeated by Roxanne and Sherry's combined efforts, and then finally a group that we happened upon after that was the one we were looking for: the one consisting of four monsters at the same time, three Collagen Corals and one Escape Goat. The presence of the Escape Goat is going to make this encounter that much more awkward, but at this point there is nothing that we can really do about it besides rolling with it.

「Roxanne, go and handle the right side, the one with the Collagen Coral and the Escape Goat! Sherry, you go and take out the other two!」

I gave the girls my instructions as I launched two Fire Storms towards the monsters. Even if I wanted to fire more of them, this is as much as I can do, because the third Fire Storm would likely drop the Escape Goats HP to such a level that it would have started to run away, and that is not what I want at all. I want all four of the enemies to stay together, exactly like they are now, so that Sherry could get some practice with her Club swinging.

Roxanne and Sherry engaged the monsters. Sherry swung her Club and hit the first Collagen Coral from the left, but when she wanted to continue the swinging motion so that the strike could be carried onto the second Collagen Coral, she was unable to do so, because the edge of her Club stopped soon after it came into contact with the second Collagen Coral's round body, and it used that chance to jump up to Sherry and ram itself into her.

Chapter 4: Master Smith, Part 12

「It looks like it is just how I was afraid it would be. I cannot swing the Club like I usually do.」

「Is it too difficult for you to do after all?」

In theory, Sherry said that it is possible to execute the swing of a hammer or a club in such a way that you could strike two monsters at once with one swing, but that was just that: a theory. The practice, however, was a whole other can of worms altogether. Just because she should be able to hit the two monsters with her Club because she has high enough STR to pull something like that off, it does not necessarily mean that she will be able to pull through with that. I think Sherry really should be able to do that, but she cannot focus her entire attention on the beginning of the swing alone.

「In order to execute the technique properly I have to continue the swing past the first monster and onto the second one, but by doing so I am losing the momentum, which means that the swing's full power cannot reach the second monster!」

Yes, that is exactly the problem here. Which is why she should take a different approach to it, mainly:

「With the next strike, try to do the following thing: instead of putting all of your strength into hitting the first monster, try just to graze it with the tip of your club instead! A direct impact will do nothing but absorb all of the energy put into executing it, leaving you with no momentum to hit the second strike properly!」

I shouted to Sherry as I hurriedly used 「Medical Treatment」 on her and then re-applied 「Plating」, after which I used the third Fire Storm, catching all four

enemies with it once more, Escape Goat included. As expected, now that it has been hit with another shot of Fire Storm and its HP dropped below a certain level, it was preparing to make an escape. Normally it would have been a bad thing, because without firing another shot of magic right after the previous one there would be almost no chance for us to get it due to the sheer distance it could cover in a matter of seconds, but in the current circumstances, this might actually be a big chance for us.

Since the group we are currently fighting is made out of four monsters, the Escape Goat does not have as much room to maneuver. Roxanne and Sherry manipulated the positioning of the enemies in such a way that the three Collagen Corals blocked one of its paths of escape, and Roxanne was standing near the other, meaning that if it wanted to try that route, it would have to go through her first, and I know that now that she had it right where she wanted, there was no way she would allow it to slip past her.

The goat tried to back up to the point where there were no monsters next to it and looked around, searching for other possible corridors where it could try to run. But it found no such thing. And even if it did, escaping through one of them would still take it some time, and time was the one thing that it needed, but did not have. Because Roxanne and Sherry are not the only people in here. I was here as well, and I was just about ready to fire another Fire Storm right at it.

(Fire Storm!)

This is going to be the fourth shot in total.

Things are going quite well so far, but a part of me cannot stop thinking how different the flow of battle would be if the monster group we are fighting right now consisted not of three Collagen Corals and one Escape Goat, but of four Escape Goats instead. If we had to deal with the four enemies that can run away after you whittle their HP down enough and they all started running at exactly the same time, then things would definitely get more than a little hectic. With our current line up being two members in the vanguard and one me in the rearguard, it is more than probable that at least one or two of the Escape Goats would be able to make a run for it, because I can only do so much with my magic that needs to be on cooldown for a couple of seconds

between each shot, and Roxanne and Sherry would not be able to reach the enemies that would be placed too far away from them to prevent them from escaping in time. In fact, I think that the battle with four Escape Goats could have ended in such a way even if there were four of us, unless the three members of the vanguard were able to either kill all of them fast enough or move fast enough to intercept them and cut off their escape routes like Roxanne and Sherry did just now.

Sherry shook the club again, attempting to hit the two monsters in front of her at once one more time. Even though she managed to hit the first Collagen Coral with a strike that was not as powerful as her previous one and the momentum did carry her towards hitting the second opponent, she ultimately missed the second Collagen Coral by only a few centimeters. That gap, however, along with the few seconds Sherry needed to recover herself from the strike and assume the battle stance again, was enough for that second Collagen Coral to attack her again.

「Kuh. !」

Since it has come to this, then I had no choice but to step in and take care of both the Collagen Corals and the Escape Goat that began to make its escape by using the gap in our defenses that appeared when Sherry was knocked back by Collagen Coral's attack. I have no time to re-apply 「Plating」 and heal her wounds, because right now, the more important thing is to put a swift end to this battle, which should be brought by my fifth Fire Storm.

(*Fire Storm!*)

There, that should be enough to kill all of the monsters at once.

Sparks fly in the air and erupt in a fiery explosion, causing all of the monsters present in battle to fall to the ground. I slaughtered all the monsters before Sherry was hit again by another one of Collagen Coral's attack.

「Haaaaa. I have to say, only grazing the enemies with my strikes is way tougher than I thought it was going to be.」

「It certainly is, is it not? But if doing it in such a way seems to be impossible

for you, then we can always try using a different method, or a different formation. So, what do you want to do, Sherry? I am going to leave that call up to you.]

I told her while I re-applied 「Plating」 and 「Medical Treatment」 onto her now that the battle was finally over.

「As tempting as that would be. . . . I would like to continue trying the way we are now for a little bit more. I feel like I am beginning to be getting the hang of it, so I should be able to nail it after a few more battles.]

「I see. Is that okay with you as well, Roxanne?」

「Yes, it should be fine for us to continue like we were up until now, and I see no trouble with it.]

「Okay, so continuing the way we were going so far it is then.]

When I looked at Roxanne for confirmation, she nodded in agreement. Or maybe not in agreement. Since this is Roxanne we are talking about, she is basically going to accept every plan that I will come up with, regardless of what it is and how dangerous or reckless it might be, and is not going to question it in any way whatsoever. That is how much she trusts me in the Labyrinths. I could sing her praises for much longer, but then that would take us an entire day or even more to take care of it, so I will better stop before that happens.

「By the way Roxanne, good job on blocking that Escape Goat's escape path. If not for your quick thinking and Sherry's immediate follow-up, it would have probably gotten away.]

「Thank you. I am just glad that I was able to be of use to you, master. However, I would also like to point out that if it was not for your magic, the Escape Goat would have probably escaped, so this battle's success if your success as well.]

Chapter 4: Master Smith, Part 13

Roxanne continued to shower me with some much-deserved praise, while Sherry stood a little bit more o the side where she continued to swing her Clun around while mumbling things like 「Like this.?」「Or this.?」「Or maybe that.?」「No, probably more like this.」「Or like that after all.」to herself. When I glanced towards her, it definitely looked like she was practicing the correct way of swinging her Club around, which kind of made her look like a baseball player practicing his swings before a game. She looks like she is beginning to figure something out, so maybe we should allow her to practice in peace for a while longer without getting in her way?

At first I thought that her training method is a little unusual for that kind of weapon, but thinking about it now, if she wants to be hitting two opponents with one swing, then of course she would have to practice swinging the Club from side to side. But this really reminded me of what I used to be seeing on tv, where baseball players, batters, to be specific, practiced their movements by swinging their bats from left to right and then right to left many times over. Also, while watching over Sherry's practice, I noticed one particular thing about her, mainly.

Is Sherry a left-handed batter? Huh? Was she always left-handed? Or is it simply that I have not paid enough attention to notice that particular detail about her? Because if she really is left-handed, then this changes everything about her self-imposed training regimen.

「Uhm, Sherry? Sorry for noticing that just now, but if you are a left-handed batter, then should the placement of your hands on the Club's handle not be reversed?」

If she is a left-handed person, then her left hand should be the one on the top,

instead of her right one in the way she is holding the Club now. That kind of grip, called a traditional grip, might work if all she would be swinging around was a sword, but clubs and other bat-like weapons are a little bit more specific if you want to utilize them effectively.

「Left-handed batter? Reversed?」

And she looked at me with puzzlement in her eyes, probably thinking that here I was, spouting some ridiculous nonsense again.

「With your current grip, the swing would be much smoother if you started it from the right and then moved to the left.」

While I was still back on earth practicing swordsmanship during my short kendo career, the instructor was always telling me that my right hand should be the one on top while I was gripping the sword in my hands, even though I myself am left-handed. I do not know why that was, and back then I did not need to understand, so I never really pursued that matter. In turn, in baseball it was the other way around: those whose domineering hand was the left one were always told that their left hands should be the ones they should be placing on top of the other one when gripping the baseball bat. Yeah, I do not understand why that is either.

「..... Something like this then?」

Sherry asked, swinging the bat from right to the left.

「Yeah, you got that right? And, what do you say? You can easily feel the difference, right?」

「..... Ah! It is true! It does feel easier to be swinging it that way!」

Sherry tried swinging the Club several more times while changing the grip on the handle. For a moment I also thought maybe I should teach her about the one-legged form and the importance of the positioning of her feet and the right stance whenever she swings, but I ultimately decided against it, because that thing would be useful only in baseball, and not in martial arts where the

gap between you and the opponent is often too big for it to be effective, and pendulum method is completely out of the question, because it would be too difficult for a novice to perform and teaching her that would simply take too much time.

「But then, does that not mean that when Sherry is swinging her Club in such a way it would be easy for the opponent to tell from which direction the attack would be coming from based on the way she is holding the Clubs handle?」

「I do not think we have to worry about that considering the fact that most of the monsters are not intelligent enough to properly recognize Adventurer's attack patterns.」

I had such a conversation with Roxanne while watching Sherry improved training regimen. She is waving her Club from the right with her right hand up and then waving from the left with her left hand up.

「I see. Sometimes it is harder to detect if you shake it the other way around, right?」

「Exactly. And if we ever happen to encounter human enemies or monsters that will be able to tell where are my attacks coming from, I can always try to mix it up in the middle of an attack in order to confuse them and throw them off balance.」

Yeah, just like Sherry says, that should be more than enough to do the trick. Besides, that would only be relevant only if we did happen upon monsters that would be intelligent enough to properly understand the difference between the attack coming at them from the different sides.

「Also, while what Roxanne says is definitely a downside, I think that this downside can be more than made up for by the sheer amount of damage that she is going to be dishing out.」

In any case, what is truly important here is trying it first. Sherry states that now that I have shown her that different method of swinging she is definitely going to nail it, but I should not get too excited before I see it with my own

eyes.

The next group of monsters we happened across consisted of only three enemies so we dealt with them quickly with my magic and the girls' physical attacks and moved on forward, where we then encountered another group of four monsters consisting of four Collagen Corals. Great, no Escape Goats this time, which means that the battle is going to be that much easier on us. As the opening act, I used tow Fire Storms to weaken the monsters sufficiently, clearing the way for Sherry to have another try at hitting two of them at once.

「I am going in, master!」

「Yeah, go for it!」

Sherry psyched herself up and I encouraged her further while also launching a third Fire Storm at the enemies, just to be sure that their HP is going to be low enough for Sherry to actually defeat them. All that is left for her to now is to go wild without worrying about any of the four enemies making a run for it.

Standing in front of the two monsters, Sherry assumed her stance and then swung her Club with enough force for the hit to still be a powerful one, but at the same time weak enough to only graze the first monster and allow the momentum to carry her strike onwards towards the second enemy.

.

. and this time the strike did manage to connect!

「. . . . ! ! ! ! !！」

「Ohhh.」

Now, while Sherry did say that since she is a Dwarf then her STR stat is quite high and that even among other dwarves she was considered to be a bit stronger than the rest of her peers, but here is a hot take after what I saw just now: I do not know if I should call that strike of hers just now overbearing or incredibly powerful. but Sherry's attack really did end sending those two Collagen Corals flying a fair distance away. So that is an attack

that only Dwarves, who are inherently much stronger than the members of other races, can do, huh?

Chapter 4: Master Smith, Part 14

Something that only they are capable of doing, that cannot be replicated by the members of any other race. Could this be the reason why Dwarves primarily use hammers, clubs, mallets and other types of two-handed weaponry? I feel that now that I have witnessed her in action, I understand that a little bit better.

Unfortunately, while that attack did end up knocking the Collagen Corals back, it failed to kill them, so I had to use another Fire Storm in order to keep damaging them, but I was not feeling bad about it, because Sherry managed to fulfill the goal that she set up for herself.

「Did you see that, master?! I did it! Thank to what you have shown me, I was able to properly maintain the optimal strength of the first hit and carry it over all the way to the second one! I did it!」

「Yes, you did. Great job, Sherry.」

「Thank you very much!」

「That was a magnificent strike, Sherry. I was amazed at how far you send these Collagen Corals flying.」

「To be honest, I was amazed by that as well. Thank you very much for your assistance and going along with my selfish wishes as well, Miss Roxanne.」

「Do not mention it.」

While Roxanne and I were complimenting Sherry, I used the fourth and then fifth Fire Storm to make the sure that all four of the Collagen Corals will fall down without fail. And after defeating the monsters, I had some thought occur to me while I was looking at how happy Sherry was about executing

her move properly. Dwarves. their great strength. talent. something that only they can do. something that can only be done in Labyrinths. hammers and two-handed weapons as their traditional weaponry

Could it be? Is it possible that I might be onto something with this line of reasoning? In order to confirm my suspicions, I opened the Party Job Settings while my heart began to beat noticeably louder, and scrolled all the way to Sherry and the list of her available Jobs:

Villager Lv.9, Explorer Lv.10, Herbalist Lv.1, Warrior Lv.1, Merchant Lv. 1, Shrine Maiden Lv.1, Swordsman Lv.1, Monk Lv.1, Farmer Lv.1, Master Smith Lv.1

Finally, there it is! Sherry has obtained the Master Smith Job! She said that she was one of the strongest people in her entire village, so in terms of pure brute strength, she should definitely have more than enough of it to be “talented” enough to explore the Labyrinths (I also noticed that she unlocked the Farmer’s Job, most likely due to her picking up herbs from the garden when she was preparing dinner yesterday), so the last thing that was needed for her to become a Master Smith and the thing that she was missing, the very last condition that she failed to fulfill for so long must have been this: to hit multiple targets with a single attack.

. But now that she has successfully executed that attack after I gave her baseball-based pointers, she finally managed to get her hands on what she always wanted. And now that she has that Job unlocked, this means that she can become a Master Smith like she always wanted. And I cannot wait to see her reaction when she finds out about that. This is going to be such a huge step forward, both for her as a person, and for us as a Party. Now that Sherry has become a Master Smith, we are finally going to be able to fuse any Skill Crystals we find or buy together with our weapons and armor. But now that things are going so well, it almost makes me afraid that something bad is going to happen to us, so let us hope that this is just a “what if” and nothing more.

「All right girl. How about we call it a day when it comes to exploration and go back home?」

「Already? Is it not a little bit too early for that?」

「Well, it might be, but there are a few more errands that I want to do, like visiting the Merchants Guild.」

「Understood.」

To tell you the truth, these “errands” that I wanted to do were little more than an excuse to stop exploring the Labyrinth earlier than usual today, because now that I feel so happy and uplifted for Sherry that she managed to obtain the Job she has always dreamed of, it would be exceptionally hard for me to do anything productive. That, and there is also a matter of my feeling that things were going a bit too smoothly for us lately. Or to put it in other words, the last few days felt as if we were under the influence of some super potent good luck magic, so it would be a huge waste to squander the effects of that magic simply because we do not know when to give up and call it a day. Now that we have achieved all of our (or mine) goals set up for today, leaving the Labyrinth and spending the rest of they day regenerating our strength seem like the most logical thing to do. Also, even though the three of us learned to cooperate each other better to the point where we should now be able to breeze through the monsters and Floor Bosses from the first seven floors of the Labyrinths, we must never forget that no matter how confident we might be feeling, we will never be truly safe as long as we continue to explore the Labyrinths halls. That lecherous Party that went to challenge Pan before was an all too good of an example of that. Their Party consisted of six people, the maximum allowed number of Party members and they all had weapons with 「Chant Delay」 imbued into them and they even managed to inflict so much damage onto the Floor Boss of the seventh floor that I was able to one-shot it with Durandal the first time we were fighting against it. and yet, they were the ones who ultimately wound up dead in that encounter, as it was evident by their equipment that was now placed safely in my Item Box. So if we do not want to end up exactly like them, then I say it would be best to quit for the time being while we are still ahead than to push our luck and end up getting ourselves into a real shit-show of a situation.

「So, you really are going to go visit the Merchant Guild, master?」

Sherry asked me. That is right, Sherry, it is my current objective, since it was

you who told me that Skill Crystals and equipment that already comes with Skills embedded into it can be bought at an auction in the Merchant's Guilds. We have all of the weapons with 「Chant Delay」 left behind by that previous Party after all, and if we are not going to be using their weapons, then we might as well go and sell all of them for some nice money, and maybe buy some Skill Crystals while we are at it. That being said. well, how should I put it.

Sherry has managed to finally become a Master Smith, but she has no way of knowing that just yet, which is why she behaves just like she normally does, not feeling the tension and the thrill at all. Well that was to be expected, since as a Party leader I am the only one who can check the Party Job Settings, but still. being the only person in my group who knows that we actually have a joyous cause for celebration is a kind of a bummer, I am not going to lie.

「That is right. Have you ever been to an auction before, Sherry?」

「No, I have not been to one or used one personally just yet. I also heard that even though the auctions are opened to anyone from the general public to participate, the people often do so by hiring a broker or other kinds of middlemen to attend the auctions for them.」

「A middleman or a broker, huh? I wonder why is that? Well, I guess we shall find out once we get there ourselves.」

Chapter 4: Master Smith, Part 15

Since that was it for today's exploration of the Labyrinths, the day was not even halfway through when we arrived back in the building of the Quratar Adventurer's Guild through the Warp portal. While we were there we asked for the directions that would point us to the exact location of the Quratar's branch of the Merchant's Guild, which, as it turned out, was located on the other side of the Quratar's Labyrinth and the Adventurer's Guild and the ward where our house was located. We are lucky that the center of Quratar is so big and houses pretty much all of the facilities necessary for proper adventuring and everything else related to it, because that way we have access to pretty much all that we need within just a short walk from the Adventurer's Guild.

「So this is the place, huh?」

I remarked when we have arrived in front of the Merchant's Guild's building.

「Yes, this is the headquarters of the Merchant's Guild's Quratar branch.」

Sherry confirmed that for me in a matter-of-factly fashion. I have to say, I expected the Merchant's Guild's building to be a big one and it certainly was, but in an altogether different sense than the one that belonged to Quratar's Explorer's Guild.

「I is quite big. . . . horizontally, I mean.」

「That is because building it in such a way was more efficient while keeping the place representative at the same time, as is expected of one of the two biggest guilds in Quratar.」

「Two biggest guilds?」

「Yes: the Explorer's Guild and the Merchant's Guild. While the Explorer's Guild can be said to be the source of Quratar's strength, the Merchant's Guild can definitely be called the source of Quratar's wealth.」

The source of Quratar's wealth, huh? Certainly, if the Merchant's Guild had enough money to own such an impressive building, then the amount of money they must have at their disposal has to be even more amazing.

「Master, since you decide to go in there, then may I give you a word of advice?」

「Sure, go right ahead.」

「Okay then. Please, do be careful while doing business in that place. I heard that it is practically impossible to haggle or outwit the brokers and the middleman of the Guild because they are all cooperating with one another. One of the Dwarves I knew tried it and failed spectacularly, and after that he complained about it to pretty much everyone at every opportunity he could find.」

Something like that actually happened to one of Sherry's acquaintances? That is sad to hear, but that is just how it is while dealing with merchants and other people who know their way around working with money. They will always look for a chance at maximizing their own profits while cutting their potential losses as much as possible.

「Really now, do you not just hate it when brokers try to take so much money out of you, even though we are the ones coming to their Guild with the intention of buying their items and selling them the ones that we possess? Because to me, it almost feels like a robbery or extortion in broad daylight!」

「There, there Sherry, there is no need to be getting all emotional about it here.」

I told Sherry to keep her cool, but essentially I agree with what she said, for the reasons stated above, and from her words, it would seem that participating in an auction is not as simple as I thought it would be. In that regard, this world has much more in common with my old one than one

might have expected. After all, earth has auction houses as well, and from the rumors that I heard about them, the competition for even the smallest or cheapest of the items they offer can be incredibly cutthroat, and in order to outwit and outmaneuver all the people who might want to get their hands on the same item that you want, you need to not only have absurdly large amounts of money, but you also have to know how to play them in the right way. There is only one constant, unchangeable thing that you can be pretty sure of, regardless of the world that you live in: as long as money moves around, people are going to be moving along with it as well, and since broker is also a type of occupation, then there is nothing strange about them doing everything in their power to maximize their gains from every transaction, because every businessman in the world is going to care first and foremost about their own self-interests, everyone else's be damned. You have to be a special kind of shrewd to be a broker, but it is the kind of shrewd that I can most definitely respect, to a certain degree at least, or until they will try to use their cunning tricks and honeyed words on me.

「All right, shall we get inside then?」

「Y-Yes, let us do that.」

「Of course, master.」

When we entered the main building after our arrival, there were several men and women in the lobby. Now, is it just my imagination, or did they really started eyeing us all over as soon as they saw us? Even for someone like me, who got used to being looked down upon throughout my life, this feeling of being sized up and labeled based on my appearance alone was pretty unpleasant. When we stopped to have a proper look around, a man soon walked up to us.

「Oho, now there is a face that I have never seen around here before. Is it your first time visiting Quratar's Merchant's Guild by any chance, sir?」

「It is, actually.」

I replied to his inquiry. Since this was really my first time here there is no point in lying, but nothing is stopping me from using 「Identify」 on him at the

same time. Let us see who this guy is and what are his Stats.

『Laurel』

Male, forty seven years old

Job: Sex Maniac Lv.35

Equipment:

Iron Sword of Landslide, Sacrificial Misanga

Oh, would you look at that, a human who has Sex Maniac set as his main Job and is not even trying to hide it. I think this is actually the first time I saw someone like that. Now that I think about it, if this man is one of the brokers working for the Merchant's Guild, then should he really have Sex Maniac as his main Job? What if somebody were to see it on his Intelligence Card and thought that this is awfully unprofessional of him? Then again, I guess there are not that many occasions when you have to present your Intelligence Cards to others in the first place, so he either found a way to hide it from others or he really just does not care about it at all. Anyway, if this information were all that I had to go by to make myself an opinion about this man, it would have to be such that someone who has Sex Maniac set as his main Job does not fit to be an employee of the Merchant's Guild at all. But I cannot make hasty judgements just yet. First, let me wait and see what this man actually has to say to me, because there is no way someone like him would just chat someone like me up without some kind of reason behind it.

「My name is Laurel, and I work here as a broker. If it is all right with you, sir, then could I ask for a moment of your time so we could talk?」

「I am not going to have anything against it as long as it is just going to be talking.」

「Of course. I will not hold it against you if you decline anything that I might offer you, sir. Now, if it is not too much trouble, then I would like you to accompany me to the upper floor.」

The broker pointed to the stairs leading to the Guild's first floor and I started following after him, but then.

「Wait a minute, please.」

I looked back at Roxanne and Sherry, who stayed behind on the ground floor without a single word of complaint. As much as I do not like the idea of leaving them alone here, I think that taking them with me to the room where this Laurel guy is heading might be just as bad, because if he sees Roxanne's big boobs and Sherry's cute, small figure, then who knows what he might try to do to them.

Chapter 4: Master Smith, Part 16

So, in that case, the best possible option here would be.

「Roxanne, Sherry. I will take care of things here, so I want the two of you to go to the western clothing store we have been to earlier and do some shopping there, since it is about time for the three of us to get new sets of clothes.」

「Are you sure, master?」

「Yes, I do not mind. We have some money to spare, so we might as well spend them on clothes and some other daily necessities.」

「All right, as you wish.」

Yes, that is what I wish right now. We would have to buy more clothes sooner rather than later, so this is as good of a chance as any to do so while keeping the girls safe from all those prying eyes at the same time.

After I saw the girls off with my eyes, I turned back and followed the Sex Maniac broker Laurel upstairs as he walked deeper and deeper into the Merchant's Guild building. As I was walking a step behind him at all times, I began to wonder if maybe I should have Durandal with me when I entered here. I know that the chances of me getting jumped in the middle of the Guild building, and in broad daylight at that are pretty unlikely, but you know what they say, right? Being too cautious of the danger that might be lurking behind every corner has never actually killed nobody.

A short while later, we have arrived at a thoroughly bleak-looking room with only a table and chairs in it. What is this, some kind of medieval conference room?

「I can see that you are wondering about this room's scarce décor, so allow me to explain. This room and all the other rooms here on the first floor are used as private spaces for the purpose of discussion and negotiation.」

「Is that so?」

The broker turned his back to me and walked to one of the chairs and sat on it.

「Yes, very much so. Please, sir, go and have a seat.」

Since I was invited to do so, I sat on a chair in front of Laurel, at the other side of the table. My current position is also good for one other reason: Laurel is sitting at the side of the table that is next to the windows – which are all made out of glass by the way, which shows just how much money the Merchants Guild has – while I am sitting in such a place that the entrance to the room is almost directly behind my back, so if he tries anything funny with me, I will be able to get out of the room and start running immediately, but that is all under the assumption that he wants to harm me in the first place. I am probably overthinking this way too much and he is just going to present me with some legitimate, honest business offers, but as I said, I am not going to take any kind of unnecessary risks.

「Now, before we start talking about anything related to your business here at the Merchant's Guild, would it be all right with you if we could talk about a few things unrelated to it?」

「I guess that depends on what kind of thing we would be talking about, but sure.」

「Then allow me to get straight to the point. Those two ladies that were with you. . . . have you been their owner for long?」

「And what makes you think that I am their owner? They might simply be the members of my Party.」

「Let me put it this way: when you are in the broker's line of business as long as I am, you learn to recognize things like that after nothing more than just a

glance at the customers who come here.]

If that is how he puts it, then I guess there is no use in trying to lie to him or convince him that he has judged me wrongly, because that would only serve to worsen my position in the business talks with him that are still ahead of us. So as much as I do not want to admit it like it is a no big deal, I have no choice but to be honest with him about it.

「Sounds reasonable enough. To answer your question then: I am their master for some time now, but it has not been too long since they became mine.]

「I see. You look like a fine young man who is at the height of his life right now, so I would assume that you and your slaves have gotten to know each other. . . . really close? There is no need to hide it; if I had a pair of female companions such as them I would have done so as well without a second thought. And that is why I would like to ask you. would you like to join the Guild made specifically for the like-minded people like yourself?]」

「Like-minded people. like myself?」

「Oh, I am sorry, was that too cryptic of a wording that I chose? Very well then, allow me to rephrase that in a more direct way: would you like to join a Guild made only for Humans who appreciate the pleasures of the flesh and do not shy away from reveling in them at every opportunity they can find while using the Job obtained by indulging themselves in said pleasures in order to traverse the treacherous halls of the Labyrinths in a much smoother way than others?」

Is. is this guy trying to recruit me to join the Sex Maniacs Guild? And more importantly, such a Guild legitimately exists here in this world?!

To be honest, that proposition of his made me feel nervous and a little bit lost. Then again, I guess that if it is a common knowledge that Humans in this world have something like Sex Maniac as their race-specific Job, then it would be not that hard to guess that someone who has come to the Guild together with two exceptionally beautiful girls, then he must be someone who already managed to unlock that Job for themselves, so I guess that takes care of the question of how did he figured out that I might be a Sex Maniac as

well. but to invite me to join his Guild simply because of that? Something smells fishy here, and I have to get to know what and why.

「Your Guild? You mean, like. Sex Maniacs Guild?」

Let me start with a simple, seemingly innocent question.

「Oh, so you know the name of the Job already. Could it be that I am actually talking to a comrade with the same Job that I have?」

The broker leaned back against his chair and smiled with delight while gazing up to the heavens. which looked quite strange because here in this room, it made him look as if he was looking at the ceiling.

This whole situation is strange as fuck, but it might also be a good opportunity. If I steer the conversation in the right direction, I might just be able to learn something new about the Sex Maniac Job and how its Skills work.

「No. I am afraid that have not obtained that Job yet, but I did hear some stories about it that managed to pique my interest.」

「Oh? Stories, you say? Like what, for example? Maybe I will be able to shed the light on some of the matters that you are interested in, so if you do have any questions, feel free to ask them, and I shall try to answer them to the best of my ability.」

So as long as I have questions about the Sex Maniac Job, he is willing to feed me the information himself? Not gonna lie, that is actually a pretty sweet deal.

「Since you offered yourself, then I am graciously going to take you up on that offer. So I heard that Sex Maniac Job has a Skill called 「Abstinence Attack」. Can you tell me something more about it? How exactly does it work and is it even a useful Skill?」

「You know that much already?」

Chapter 4: Master Smith, Part 17

He asked me with a slight tinge of astonishment mixed into his voice just now. Could it be that I have stepped head-first into another slimy subject?

「Is that something that I should not have known about?」

「Not exactly. It is just that the only people who know about that skill are the members of the Guild, so I was simply wondering how did you know about it since you said that you do not have the Sex Maniac Job yet and you do not belong to the Guild. Do you perhaps have an acquaintance who belongs to it and told you about it?」

「Well, you see, the thing is.」

So the existence of that Skill seems to be a secret, huh? Well, I cannot say that I blame the members of this so-called Sex Maniacs Guild for being so secretive about it. After all, since Humans are universally regarded as a race that possesses immense, near-insatiable sexual desire, I guess that has to mean that our standing in the hierarchy of all the races of this world is not all that great, probably to the point where others might be trying to look down on us as little more than deviants who can think of nothing but sex all the time. On the flipside though, I think that this prejudice against Humans might be exactly the thing that increases the bonds of camaraderie and the feeling of solidarity and internal unity among the members of that Guild.

「No, if you do not want to compromise the identity of the person who told you about it, that is perfectly fine. After all, there are people who have unlocked the Sex Maniac Job but did not join our Guild, and we respect their decision and choice to stay anonymous. Now, as for the 「Abstinence Attack」 Skill, allow me to share with you what I know and how I use it. As I already told you, Sex Maniac Skill is a Job that is to be used mainly in the bedroom

due to the bonus to the vigor and sexual stamina it provides, but it can also be pretty useful while exploring the Labyrinths, and it is all thanks to 「Abstinence Attack」. It is an Attack Skill that will enable you to deal serious amounts of damage even to the Floor Bosses, and I always end up using it a lot whenever I am going to the Labyrinths every ten days.]

「That seems like a pretty long time. Does it always have to be so long in order for it to be effective?」

「There is no specific time limit placed on that Skill, I was simply saying what turned out to be working the best for me after I ended up experimenting with various periods of sexual abstinence, but in the end, the major factor is always going to be how long you yourself are going to hold out, because every person has a different threshold of how long they can go on without sexual intercourse before they finally succumb to their urges. I said that in my case it is ten days, because even though I am married, my work as a broker and the trips to the Labyrinths tend to occupy most of my time and attention, so even though I would definitely like to do it with my wife more often, that is the compromise that I have reached with her in terms of connecting the satisfaction of our marital needs with my effectiveness in battle.」

The Sex Maniac broker explained to me. Assembling the pieces of the information he gave me, the following explanation can be put together: it would seem that 「Abstinence Attack」 is an attack that enhances your physical strength through the act of sexual abstinence, hence the name of the Skill, and it looks like abstinence from having sex is strictly necessary so that the Skill could work properly, but I wonder if there are any loopholes that could be exploited with that condition, because let us face it: I might not be married to Roxanne and Sherry, but there is no way that I would be able to go on without having sex with them for more than two, maybe three days.

「Ten days of abstinence in order to get a power boost substantial enough to inflict major damage even against the Floor Bosses? I am not going to lie, that does sound incredibly useful, but I do not know if I would be able to hold out for that long.」

「Hahahahahaha, seeing how attractive your female companions were, I

cannot say that I would blame you for it, sir, and you should not feel bad about it. The best part about this Skill is that you can control how powerful its boost is going to be by increasing the number of days spent in sexual abstinence, but if you only want to refrain from having sex for two or three days, nothing is stopping you from doing so aside from the fact that the increase in strength of 「Abstinence Attack」 is not going to be as big as it would be after ten or more days of abstinence.]

Since I expressed my interest in the 「Abstinence Attack」 Skill, the broker was giving me quite a lot of additional information about it. A few days of abstinence from having sex in exchange for a decent boost to your power, and after ten days the accumulated amount of it would be enough to do a lot of damage even to the Floor Boss in the Labyrinth. In other words, 「Abstinence Attack」 is an attack whose power changes depending on the period of your sexual abstinence.

The longer that abstinence is, the more attack power you are going to have, which would explain why 「Abstinence Attack」 has been so weak when I was trying to use it during our previous trip to the Labyrinth: it was because I attempted to use it the day after I received the Sex Maniac Job by having a threesome with Roxanne and Sherry, of the period of my sexual abstinence lasted for about a few hours. actually, no, it would be more fitting to say that there was no period of abstinence in my case, and as a result, the attack made with 「Abstinence Attack」 was weaker than the regular sword slash without any Skills.

In other words, if I wanted to make an effective usage of 「Abstinence Attack」 to fight regular monsters and floor bosses with it, I would not only have to refrain from having sex with Roxanne and Sherry, but I would also probably have to keep Sex Maniac as my main Job so that the effect of the accumulation of sexual energy that would later be turned into raw energy that would strengthen my attacks whenever that Skill would be involved could continue to be in effect, and that is a no-go for me, for obvious reasons. Even though the Enhanced Vigor Passive Skill is a nice thing to have for the purpose of boosting my stamina in the bedroom, that single effect alone is not worth locking myself from the ability to use the Item Box that Explorer gives me when it is set as my First Job.

That being said, I wonder how exactly does the 「Abstinence Attack」 work, exactly? Does it really accumulate the sexual energy stored throughout the periods of abstinence and then releases it all at once in a burst of strength, or is it something more along the lines of augmenting the senses of the user that have been dulled by abstinence to cause him to go on an adrenaline and primal instincts fueled rampage? Ohhh, I like the sound of that second possibility, but the first one, the one that I deemed to be the default one is not half-bad either. Initially I have dismissed that Skill as useless and guilty of wasting my precious Bonus Points, but now that someone took the time to actually explain to me what does it do and how does it work, I have to say that it sounds pretty awesome, as long as you manage to fulfill all of the conditions required for using it. Should that happen, you would have an amazing Skill at your disposal. An incredibly effective Skill. A Skill that might just end up saving you in a pinch if you used it during a difficult Floor Boss encounter.

However.

Chapter 4: Master Smith, Part 18

「Sorry to disappoint you. but I really do not think I am going to be able to join your guild.」

The ability to use one Attack Skill in exchange for not laying a single finger on Roxanne and Sherry for as long as ten days in order for it to be effective? That is too steep of a price for me, and the one that I am simply not ready to pay just yet. Just like this guy had said, I am at the prime time of my youth, and I want to use it for all it is worth, and what is the point of being young and having your sexual vigor enhanced if you cannot use it whenever you want?! Yeah, exactly. And that is why it is impossible for me. That is what I have decided, and I will not be changing my mind at this moment.

「It is exactly because I have such beautiful girls as my companions that I do not want to fail their expectations of me and continue to show them my affections whenever I can, which would be impossible if I decided to use both the Sex Maniac Job and the 「Abstinence Attack」. And besides, I think it is still a little bit too early for me to be making a decision about which Guild I would like to belong to. I am definitely going to give that matter some thought. but not right now, and most likely not in the near future. If this is supposed to be a decision that is going to be sticking with me for the rest of my life, then I want to make sure that I made the absolute best choice possible, and for that, I think I am going to need at least a few more years of gathering experiences.」

That, and there is also one particular matter that I was wondering about when it comes to 「Abstinence Attack」. If the power of that Skill increases the longer you are abstaining from engaging in sexual intercourse, then the immediate conjecture that you would have drawn is that it uses your stored up sexual energy to provide you with the boost to your attack whenever you use it, and if you have sex too often or you try to use that Skill the day after

「Abstinence Attack」 gets weaker when it does not have any energy coming from abstinence stored in it, and it gets stronger the longer your period of sexual abstinence is. If the only thing powering it up was the energy coming from your sexual desire, then the older guys, the ones who have naturally smaller libido than the young guys who are at the peak of their youth would

not be able to use that Skill, and this Laurel guy did not mention anything like that, which has to mean that as long as you have Sex Maniac and 「Abstinence Attack」 unlocked, you have to be able to use it even if you are about to transition from being a mature man into the realm of the elderly.

And that can only mean that it also uses your life force to some degree.
or it can be the other way around, by which I mean that the older you get, the more convenient it gets to be using 「Abstinence Attack」 because the elderly people naturally do not have a high libido, which makes it easier for them to continue living their lives in sexual abstinence because they no longer feel any attachment to anything sexual. Looking at the broker guy now, 「Identify」 told me that he is forty seven years old, which means that he is thirty years older than me, so I wonder what kind of difference there is between his libido and mine, but seeing how he said that he has no problems with having sex with his wife once every ten days and I would not be able to keep going without getting frisky with Roxanne and Sherry once every two or three days, then it has to be considerably smaller than my youthful one.

「So. . . . there you have it. I thank you for extending an invitation to join your Guild to me, but this is not a decision I will be able to make right now. Sorry.」

「Oh, please, do not fret about it. As I said to you downstairs, I will not mind if you decline to buy anything I might be offering to sell you today, and the offer to join the Sex Maniacs Guild falls under those words as well. So, since you have come here, then I assume that it is to participate in the auction? If I may ask, is sir going to be buying, or is sir perhaps interested in selling?」

When I gently refused his offer the Sex Maniac broker became more withdrawn, or perhaps he switched gears into his more professional demeanor. It seems that the invitation to the Sex Maniacs Guild he was trying to extend to me was purely coincidental then, which is good, because that is one less thing for me to freak out about.

「Since this is my first visit here, then let us say that I am interested in both of those things. But for the time being, I would like to first and foremost hear what you have to offer.」

「I see. If sir is interested in buying, then it would be better for you to do so while going through a broker like myself, since I can imagine that you are not the kind of person who has enough time to simply be sitting here in the Guild's building, waiting for the items you desire to be available for auction, correct?」

「That assessment of yours is correct, but as I said, today I have come here mainly to see how exactly do things work here, but eventually I would be interested in both buying and selling items, if at all possible of course.」

There does not seem to be a system that would tell you when things are going to exhibited and what kind of thing they are going to be, which seems like a major flaw to me. And since I have no way of knowing what will be available for auction and when, then I really cannot afford to be staying here in the Merchant's Guild all day in hopes of happening upon the right auction. But in that case, how to solve that particular problem? Do I just place an order through a middleman and leave everything up to him?

「In that case, let me tell you how things work her in regards to selling items. The final bidding price can vary greatly depending on the exact time of the year, but you can always work together with one of the brokers to find the best time to sell your desired items.」

So what he is saying is that as long as I do not know what items are going to be auctioned and when, I also have no way of knowing what the best time for selling is going to be, and that means that it is going to be that much more likely that I am going to get beaten by other customers in an auction. But no matter the case, there is one thing that is always going to remain unchanged.

Chapter 4: Master Smith, Part 19

The thing that the brokers will always want in on the sale to make as much money out of it as possible.

「I see.」

「If it is okay for me to ask, what would sir be interested in buying?」

「Kobold Skill Crystals, among other things, but as to what exactly, I guess it depends on what would actually be available and how much is it going to cost.」

「Kobold Skill Crystals, is it? Just give me a moment and I will check their current prices.」

Laurel the Sex Maniac broker took out what looked like a notepad from his pocket and started looking through its pages, which looked like they were made from a brownish, delicate material, which meant that they were most probably made out of papyrus instead of ordinary paper.

For the next minute or so, the only sound that could be heard in the room was the sound of the broker flipping through the notebook's pages.

「So? How is it?」

I asked while trying not to sound as impatient as I truly was. I mean seriously, how long does it take to check one simple thing written in a notebook?!

「One Kobold Skill Crystal has been sold yesterday for five thousand two hundred Nars, and before that, the other has been sold for five thousand four hundred Nars. On the twenty eighth day of the spring, one was sold for five

thousand two hundred Nars as well. and two days before that, there was also one that got sold for five thousand two hundred Nars.]

I have no way of knowing if this price, five thousand two hundred Nars, is a fair price for a single Skill Crystal, but if that is the established market price for them, then there is nothing I can do about it besides accepting it. Or rather, if his words and notes in that notebook of his are anything to go by, then it would seem that people have been buying Skill Crystals at that exact price for quite some time now, and it would actually make a lot of sense, since it is a common knowledge that the fusion of the Skill Crystals usually fails, and it had to be one of the factors in elevating the price of the successfully fused Skill Crystals.

「Is that so? So that is how much they cost.」

「Now, if you were to request me as your personal broker, I would charge a fee of five hundred Nars. And although the usual custom is that broker ask for their payment to be made in advance, I would be okay with the payment being delayed, seeing as I am going into the Labyrinths myself.」

「I see. So that is how it is.」

Those who enter the Labyrinths are always at risk of losing their lives, so if the broker were to die while in the Labyrinth I would not be able to get my broker's fee back, so that is why he would be fine with me paying him later.

「When placing an order, all of the bidders are requested to decide on a maximum bidding price in advance, and the end result is going to be revealed here in the Merchant's Guild at a later date. You should also know that since you would be competing with other bidders, not many items will be able to be sold for less than the specified price.」

Laurel the Sex Maniac finished his explanations with a slight smirk on his face. Sherry did warn me that the brokers are cooperating with one another before we entered the Guild building, but now that he has told me that to my face, I see how brilliantly simple of a system that actually is.

What they do is basically something like that: they tell their buddies what the

highest bid is going to be, and then they are going to compete with each other until that highest bid is reached. That knowledge can certainly be helpful when selling items through a broker, but on the other hand, if I decided to go through with the idea of selling items on my own, that would only be a chance for them to drive a harder bargain. And the best thing about it is that no one can really do anything to stop them from doing so, because it seems highly unlikely that the Merchant's Guild would be doing anything to cut these proceedings down when they are gaining so much money from it. Also, if all of the sellers are brokers working for the same Merchant's Guild, they can just split the profits from the sold items equally between all of them. But even if they do not do that, they are still going to be helping each other when the time for an auction comes, just as long as there is a promise of money to be made from the transactions planned during that auction. It also works the other way around. When the customer who is not a broker or a middleman is the one trying to sell their items, they are probably going to do everything in their power to drop the price of such items and then buy them at a price that is way below the maximum price set by the seller.

I think that now I more or less understand how exactly does their system work. And I also realize that as long as that system is effective, beating the brokers at an auction is going to be practically impossible.

「All right, I understand what you are saying, but it looks like now is a really bad time for it.」

「Then how about selling? What do you want to sell here today, sir?」

「Five Copper Swords of Obstruction that I obtained from the Labyrinth today.」

「Five? In that case I regret to inform you that this number is pretty unfortunate.」

The brokers face became a little distorted. What, what is wrong with the amount that I just specified? Some kinda bad number? Or is it perhaps that now is not a good time to be selling weapons in batches of five in general?

「Unfortunate? In what sense is it unfortunate?」

「The Copper Swords of Obstruction are usually sold in sets of six almost exclusively to the Parties wanting to challenge the Floor Bosses on the lower floors of the Labyrinths, and when they are sold in such a way, they tend to be sold for a much higher price. I mean, I could buy them off sir's hands if you would really insist on it, but in the off chance that sir would be willing to postpone the selling of the swords until you could obtain a sixth one to complete the entire set, then I would have no qualms about paying the highest possible price for them.」

Then the broker made a face as if he was pondering something pretty intensely. Maybe he is performing various calculations in his head right now? And on a side note, I wonder if brokers and middleman of the Merchant's Guild have access to the 「Calculate」 Skill?

「Is the set of full six of them really selling at a way higher price than for five or less of them? How big of a difference are we talking here, exactly?」

「The full set of Six Copper Swords of Obstruction usually goes for one hundred thousand Nars. As for the set of five, my guess is that they could probably be sold for about fifteen thousand Nars each, thirty thousand at best if the winning bid at the auction ends up being especially high. Also, if you decide to sell these five swords individually and not all at once, then the resulting price of each consecutive sword that you sell would very likely be lower than the last one's.」

「Is that so? So that is how it is, huh?」

If I remember correctly, the broker's share for winning at the auction is half the price, right? Even though I perfectly understand why it has to be like that, it is still a pretty big amount. Damn, it is exactly like what Sherry said. That is too little chance for making a reasonable profit and too much formalities and trouble to be dealing with.

「So, what would you like to do, sir? Are you going to hire me as your personal broker?」

Yeah, this guy is absolutely no good for me.

「No, I do not think I am going to do that. Instead, I am going to look for another one first. Sorry for taking so much of your time.」

Chapter 4: Master Smith, Part 20

I shook my head and stood up from the chair on the edge of which I was sitting. If I want to participate in the auctions, then getting myself acquainted with a broker is going to be a necessity, but if I have to pick someone in the ends, then I do not want it to be this guy right here. For a broker, he was too willing to show me all of the cards in his hand way too readily even though this was the first time we met each other. If I have to settle in for someone, then at the very least I would like it to be someone who is not going to share all of his deepest secrets with me five minutes after saying hello to me.

Also, not that I think about it clearly, there is no way for this guy to have a 「Calculate」 Skill, because that is something that only those with the Job of a Merchant possess, and it was not on the list of Sex Maniac's Skills when I unlocked it. So if possible, I would like to find myself a middleman who has a Merchant Job, but there is also a matter of the auctions themselves: whether or not my Thirty Percent Discount would work on the items bought at the auctions or not, because if it worked, then even if the max amount of Nars I could get for a single Two-Handed Copper Sword of Obstruction would be just fifteen thousand Nars per sword, then with the additional thirty percent I would still get a total of one hundred and seventeen thousand Nars total.

「Of course, that is your right to do so, but will you be able to find another broker?」

「I do not know, but I am sure that I am eventually going to find another one for myself as long as I work hard enough for it.」

It might take me significantly more time than if I were to accept Laurel's offer right here and now, but if liking for a bit longer will be able to guarantee me that I am going to receive the best prices possible for my items and my broker will not be someone who runs his mouth all too happily at

every possible occasion, that that is going to be well worth it.

I left the Merchant's Guild and went to a nearby clothing store, where Roxanne and Sherry were waiting for me. When I walked through the store's door, I immediately noticed them as they were picking clothes and looking like they had a good time talking to one another. It was beautiful to see that they are such good friends.

「Sorry it took so long. Did I keep you waiting?」

「No, not at all. Do not worry about that, master.」

(Ahh, of course. How could I ever forget?)

Of course the two of them did not wait for long. After all, since Sherry went Shopping together with Roxanne, who has a penchant for looking at every item she wanted to buy until she examined it thoroughly, there was no way for their shopping trip to end as quickly as I have hoped it would end. Even now it looked like they were still in the middle of choosing the clothes that they wanted to buy, so I could only sigh in such a way that they would not hear me. As much as I do not like it, I guess it is something that simply cannot be helped.

「I see. That is good. Did you manage to find some decent clothes that you would want to buy?」

「We did, but we are having trouble deciding which ones to choose as the final ones. Master, between these clothes here, which do you think are better?」

Roxanne came to me with two pieces of clothing, one on each of her arms. So at the very least she managed to narrow down the possible choices to just two options? Wow, I see she is making actual progress! Okay, so let me see what we are working with here.

「. Hmm, both of these clothes look nice, but it is hard for me to make a definitive choice, since you would look beautiful no matter what you would be wearing, Roxanne.」

「Ah, thank you, master. In that case. in that case I will chose something that is going to be pleasant for master to touch. Is. is that all right with you?」

「Yes, of course.」

Looks like I am going to have no choice but to stay with them until they will finish picking up the clothes again, but since it cannot be helped, all I can do is to put up with it again and hope that it will not take much longer.

「How about you, Sherry? Have you finished choosing what you want to buy for yourself as well?」

「Ah, yes, I have already made my choice. Is. . . . is something like that going to be okay with master?」

「Let me see. are you sure you this is what you want to go with? Because you could pick something a little more extravagant and I would have nothing against it, you know?」

I asked Sherry when she presented me with the clothes that she has chosen for herself. In the end, she chose something that looked similar to the clothes that she was wearing right now, probably because she wanted something she could feel the most comfortable in. When I touched the tunic she was holding myself, it was very smooth to the touch, and it reminded me of an extremely thin, tanned pelt. Not to mention that the size-wise it looked like something that might have been taken from a children's section, and looking around the shop to check on that specifically, I noticed that there was as much "children's" clothing on the shelves as there was adult clothing, which makes me think that the existence of Dwarves in this world must have been a blessing for the children's clothing industry, because without it, the number of children's clothing for sale would have probably been significantly smaller in comparison to what I see here now.

「Yes, I am absolutely certain that this is what I want to go with.」

「All right. If you are certain that this is what you want to go with, then that is what we are going to buy.」

「Thank you. Well, the clothes that the slaves are wearing are also master's belongings, so your word is the final one in this matter. If you think that these clothes would suit me the best, than I am going to place my full trust in your judgement.」

Sherry muttered the last part of her sentence really quietly, so I could not clearly hear what she was saying, but. . . . I mean of course I realize that the clothes that I am buying for them are technically my belongings as well because I am the one paying for them with my money. . . . but what was that supposed to entail? That I could wear their clothes whenever a fancy would strike me and then would not be able to object? I waited for a moment to see if maybe Sherry was going to elaborate on that a bit more, but she did not say anything else, so I also decided not to pursue the subject any further.

After buying the clothes and then the ingredients for dinner, the three of us went back home. Once the preparations were all complete, I made Sherry sit right in front of me across the table. I know that Roxanne might get angry about it, but right now it is a necessity, because there is something that I have to talk about with Sherry in regards to her finally becoming a Master Smith. Now that she has finally unlocked that Job, it means that she is going to have new Skills that we will have to try out and new responsibilities associated with them.

「Is something wrong, master? Because you are staring at me quite intensely. . . .」

「Yeah, well, it is nothing. Do not pay it any mind.」

「Y-Yes, as you wish.」

(.)

Chapter 4: Master Smith, Part 21

It is great that Sherry can now be a Master Smith. . . . but how am I going to explain that to her? Right now, that is my biggest point of concern. I have to inform her that she managed to obtain the Job that she was unable to get on her own before, but how can I do that if I did not even tell her or Roxanne that I have the ability to see all of the Jobs that they have unlocked and also have the ability to change their Jobs without them even realizing it? No, now is not the time for me to be worrying about such things. If I want to utilize Sherry's services as a Master Smith, I have no other choice but to inform her about it right now. Because if I do not do it right now, then when? If I keep dialing it back because of all of my worries, I will never inform her. I have to give it to her straight without trying to be deceitful or roundabout about it, because the last thing I want right now is for her to think that I was trying to deceive her.

Steeling myself, I inhaled deeply and then exhaled, and declared after a brief pause while looking her straight in the eyes:

「Sherry. Starting from today, you are a Master Smith.」

「..... Huh?」

When she heard those sudden words coming from me, Sherry literally froze in place with her mouth wide open.

「It is understandable for you to be surprised, I get it. After all, you tried so hard to obtain that Job before, but no matter how hard you were trying, things were never going as you were expecting them to go, causing you to fail over and over again.」

「Ah.」

「Were you not the one who told me that you have already given up on trying to obtain the Master Smith Job? That you thought that you just could not become one, so you simply stopped trying? But now, you do not have to hold yourself back with those excuses anymore, right? You can finally be who you always wanted to be.」

「W-Well, I, uhh.」

Sherry was so confused by my words that she did not know how she should respond to me, and I cannot say that I blame her for it. After all, my words just now probably took her entire world and flipped it on its head in a single second.

「Remember what I told you before: that you can definitely become a Master Smith if you try hard to achieve that dream of yours. And remember. Remember the passion and drive towards becoming the Master Smith that you felt in the past! Because those feelings of yours are still there, right? They did not disappear, right?!」

「T-That might be true. but even so.」

「I know it might be hard for you after all this time, but try a little bit harder. Just for a little more.」

Then, I opened my Item Box and took out a Copper Sword and a Skill Crystal out of it.

「These are. ?」

「Like I said, Sherry. You are already a Master Smith, so do what a Master Smith does and fuse those two together for me.」

「B-But.」

I really wish there was another way of going about it here, but at present I have no choice but to be a bit forceful and capitalize on the momentum here to snap her out of her shock.

「Do your best, do your best, do your best, do your very best, and if you do

not succeed, then just keep doing your best some more until you finally succeed!」

「N-No.」

「You can do it. It is just a matter of your feelings.」

「But.」

「No buts. Everything is going to be all right. You are among the people who understand you, and will not ridicule or condemn you if you fail. Now come on, and let us do it.」

I feel like I did a sufficiently good job with cheering Sherry on, so even if she is still confused about the whole thing, then I should at least be able to convince her to do as I say right now.

「Now come on and repeat after me: 「Skill Crystal Fusion」. Do not be shy and repeat after Michio: 「Skill Crystal Fusion」.」

I continuously repeated that sentence until she began repeating it after me, exactly like I told her to do.

「「Skill Crystal Fusion」?」

Roxanne also tried repeating it after me, probably thinking that this was going to help. No, no, no, Roxanne my dear, even if you keep repeating it countless times, it will not do anything because you are neither a Dwarf nor a Master Smith. However, I do have to admit that her appearance when she was trying so hard and was tilting her head in puzzlement looked hella cute.

However, even though I thought that Roxanne will not be able to do anything to help here, then apparently I was mistaken, because it was not my forceful momentum that pushed her to try; when she saw Roxanne trying her best, Sherry became slightly more motivated to try saying the words I was trying to make her repeat as well

「「S-Skill Crystal Fusion」.」

It was done with a quiet and fearful voice, but Sherry finally managed to mutter the Skill's name.

And as soon as she finished saying it, her eyes became wide open with disbelief and surprise.

Just now, I quickly opened the Party Job Settings menu and switched Sherry's Job to Master Smith Lv.1, so what was going to happen if she were to recite the Skill's name in such a state? If my assumption was correct, then a chant for the 「Skill Crystal Fusion」 Skill should have revealed itself to her in her head, and apparently that is exactly what happened, because Sherry looked at her own hands, then at me, and then back at her hands like she was unable to comprehend what just happened now.

「See? So how about getting a bit more fired up now?」

I clenched my fist and stroke a gutsy victory pose.

「But why. how? I do not understand. . . .」

「I told you, right? That as long as you get serious and work towards it, then you will definitely be able to change. As long as you get serious, everything around you will be able to change. Now, fuse these two for me, please.」

I presented Sherry with a Copper Sword and Rabbit Skill Crystal once more. It would have probably been better to wait for a bit before making her attempt her very first fusion, but in this case, I feel like the better approach is to strike the iron while it is still hot.

「Would. would that really be okay?」

「As long as you are okay with it.」

This is one of the Copper Swords in my possession that has an empty Skill Slot. If my hypothesis about it is correct, then the fusion of this sword with the Rabbit Skill Crystal should be a one hundred percent success. And if it ends up failing anyway, it will only mean that my hypothesis was wrong, and Sherry will not be the one to blame for it. But there is one possibility that I

did not prepare for, unfortunately: the possibility that when the fusion will fail, the weapon and the Skill Crystal will be gone, broken down into their base materials. I have prepared no countermeasure against that (not that I myself know of any) but there is no time to be thinking about it now. I have to believe in Sherry's success.

「W-Well, before I do that, would it be okay for me to check the chant for the Skill first?」

As expected of a really smart person. Can she remain calm no matter what kind of situation she is being thrown into?

「Sure, go right ahead.」

Chapter 4: Master Smith, Part 22

「Yes! *XX the God's will, born of the shadow of heaven and earth.*」

Sherry slowly uttered the chant for the Skill.

「Think you will be able to pull that off?.」

「Yes, or at least I think so.」

「By the way, what was that word at the beginning? Because I could not hear it all that well.」

I asked to know what was the word that was not translated in my head.

「Did I mess something up? I thought that I articulated the word 「Celebrate」 pretty clearly.」

「「Celebrate」, huh?」

「*Celebrate the God's will, born of the shadow of heaven and earth.* Yes, that is it.」

Sherry confirmed the chant again.

Now that she knows the right words to say, everything is going to be left in her hands. Whatever comes next, it is an unknown territory for me, so I will not be able to help her or give her instructions other from the ones that I have already given her.

Gazing at me once more, Sherry seemed to have made her decision.

Nodding silently, she held the Copper Sword and the Skill Crystal in her

hands, Copper Sword in the right, and Rabbit Skill Crystal in the left. Next, she placed the hand with the Skill Crystal over the sword, and continued to hold it centimeters above it.

「*Celebrate the God's will, born of the shadow of heaven and earth. 「Skill Crystal Fusion」!*」

Sherry chanted the 「Skill Crystal Fusion」 chant for real this time. For a brief moment, her hand that held the Copper Sword shone with a bright, white light, and then it faded away. The thing that remained was a sword, so I looked at it and used 「Identify」 on it.

『Two-handed Copper Sword of Obstruction』

Two-handed Weapon

<Skill: 「Chant Delay」

There it is. Two-handed Copper Sword of Obstruction with 「Chant Delay」 Skill. So the fusion process was a success!

Instead of getting dismantled, the ordinary Copper Sword became Two-Handed Copper Sword of Obstruction, and 「Chant Delay」 replaced the empty Skill Slot. In that case, I guess it means that the hypothesis that the fusion of the Skill Crystals with equipment is a surefire way to a guaranteed successful fusion is probably a correct one.

「Well done, Sherry. I knew you could do it.」

Taking the finished product from her, I examined it in my hands. It looked exactly the same as the other Two-handed Copper Sword of Obstruction that we took from the Party that Pan slew before us on the seventh floor of Vale's Labyrinth.

「Have I. have I succeeded, master?」

「Oh yeah, you have succeeded, there is no doubt about it.」

「Yes, you definitely did it, Sherry!」

Following after my example, Roxanne also congratulated Sherry.

「「Congratulations on your first successful fusion, Sherry.」」

「.....rry.」

However, there was something strange going on with Sherry, because she did not look happy at all. Instead, she was crying while lying down on the table.

「W-What?」

「.....sorry.」

「W-What's wrong, Sherry?!」

「I am sorry! I am sorry for succeeding! I am sorry for not giving up on becoming a Master Smith! I am sorry for being born such a failure!」

Instead of being happy, she just continued to apologize. And refused to look me or Roxanne in the eyes when we were trying to reach out to her.

Ah. I see what is going on here.

Is she also suffering from MP deficit? Because her behavior is very much the same as mine whenever I was running low on MP.

When you run low on MP or ended up using it all completely, you enter a state where your head is filled with nothing more but negative thoughts. So apparently, even though she became a Master Smith capable of performing fusion, since that Job starts at Lv.1 it probably means that it does not have all that much MP, and because of that the MP cost of fusion ended up draining Sherry out of her MP completely.

I handed the sword to Roxanne and moved to the other side of the table, and procured the MP Recovery Medicine from my Item Box. I ended up buying a few of those just in case, but I never would have thought that I would be forced to use it in such a way.

「It is okay, Sherry. You are great. You are amazing. Now here, take this

medicine, and you will feel better right away.]

「No, it is fine, there is no need to be using your precious items on someone like me, really, just leave me like I am now! I am sorry for being the cause of item wasting! I am sorry! I am so, so very sorry!」

Sherry shook her head while trying to convince me not to waste the MP Recovery Medicine on her. Is she in a state where her condition was so bad that she will not even accept medicine?! Good God, I hope she is not going to try to kill herself if this goes on, but in order to not find out about that, I have to make her take the medicine, even if I have to feed it to her by force!

「Sherry, believe me! Your successful fusion was amazing! I would have never been able to do something amazing like that, not even in a million years!」

「That's not the case, because a living failure like myself could never be successful at anything!」

Was she now stuck in a mental loop where she literally perceives everything related to her in a negative light?

「Uhm. Sherry, I also think that your successful fusion of the Skill Crystal and that sword was quite amazing.」

While having Roxanne act as a distraction, I poured the contents of the MP Recovery Medicine's bottle into my mouth.

The condition that Sherry has causes an unbelievable amount of mental damage, so it should be dealt with as quickly as possible.

I hold Sherry down and turn her towards me. Her small, pale reddish lips are so pretty.

I stuck my mouth to hers and then pried it open with my tongue as I inserted it inside of her while her own tongue entwined around mine and clung onto me as if it was clinging for dear life.

This is the first time where I have seen her being so passionate. Initially she

was resisting for a bit, but gradually she loosened up and entrusted herself to me. I also moved my tongue and entwined it around hers and allowed them to dance around each other until she has sufficiently calmed down.

After securing the safe passage, I poured the liquid medicine directly into Sherry's mouth. After that, I pulled out my tongue and held her lips sealed until I made sure that she swallowed it all. Only when I was sure that she did that did I decide let go of her.

「Well, how about now? Feeling better?」

「Yes, much better. Uhm, I I am sorry for how I acted just now.」

「You don't have to apologize. It is okay, really. Trust me, if there is anyone who knows what you just been through, it is definitely me.」

I placed my hand on her fluffy hair and stroked her head.

Now that she managed to calm down, Sherry took a deep breath.

「That reminds me. There was an old superstition about how those who have just became Master Smiths should not attempt to fuse items right from the get-go, because for most of them the weight of failure is so great that it pushes them into committing suicide.」

Should have told us about such a crucial detail earlier, damn it! But now I know. That no matter if the fusion was a success or failure, the loss of MP might push the young Dwarves into committing suicide. So, if Sherry was all alone with no one to stop her, it would be more than likely that she would have died today.

「For the time being I am just glad that we managed to calm you down without you hurting yourself, so do not worry about it for now.」

「Yes, of course.」

Sherry took a slow and deep breath to calm herself for good. What matters the most now is the fact that she knows that she became a Master Smith, or in other words, that she was just as talented as everyone else to do so.

Chapter 4: Master Smith, Part 23

「Uhm. So, master says that Sherry became a Master Smith?」

I thought that the ordeal was over, but then another bullet came flying straight towards me from an unexpected place. And the one who fired it was Roxanne.

「Yeah, that is right.」

「But why. . . . ?」

I do know why. But I cannot tell you that just yet.

「The method of how she did that is a secret, but as you could see for yourself she definitely is one now, there is no doubt about it.」

「Is that so?」

「Yes, that is so.」

「I see. Well, since master is so amazing, then it must have something to do with that.」

Roxanne bowed down to me with respect. Ahh, Roxanne, always ready to believe whatever I tell her, no matter how big of a pile of bullshit it is going to be.

「You as well, Sherry. Since you could do that now even though you could not earlier, then it must mean that you are even more amazing than you think!」

Maybe it was because she was still a bit overwhelmed, but Sherry did not

pursue that matter herself all that much. Instead, she looked at me with rather glossy eyes.

Did she just accept me a little bit more? If so, then that would be great. After all, the journey of a thousand miles starts with but a single step, and doing all that is in my power to build up trust between me and my slaves is one of my responsibilities as a master.

「When Sherry became a Master Smith, it felt as if my attack power went up.」

Suddenly, Roxanne said something strange.

「Huh?」

「Because I became a Master Smith, I can now give the benefits to the other members. Of the Party that I belong to. Finally.」

I checked Roxanne's stats, and she was right. And the same was true for Sherry.

「The Beast Warrior does not increase the attack power of the entire Party, so if Sherry can do that, it just show how amazing Job Master Smith is.」

「Okay, but what that does even mean, exactly?」

I asked Sherry.

「When the Master Smith is in the Party, the attack power of the other Party members increases. This is a fact that has been known for a long time.」

「Is that so?」

「Yes.」

「Really?」

「Yes.」

When I checked with Roxanne, she nodded her head vigorously.

「Did you not know that, master?」

And when I turned back around to face Sherry, I saw that she was looking at me with incredibly cold eyes that were saying 「I cannot even be with this guy anymore」.

Sherry, please, stop looking at me with such eyes! Even though she was still respecting me, it felt as though I have lost quite a number of points with her for some reason. Or maybe this is just my imagination. no, her gaze is still a cold one, even though I closed my eyes and opened them again, hoping that her facial expression was going to change to a warmer one.

「So if a Master Smith is in the Party, he or she is going to grant the effect of increased strength to the entire Party?」

Did that Job really have such a Skill? Well, I never really checked what it was going and what Skills does it have, so now might actually be as good of a time to check that as any, so I opened the Party Job Settings, scrolled over to Sherry and inspected the effects of the Master Smith Job:

『Master Smith Lv.1』

Effects: Increased STR (Medium), Increased STA (Small), Increased DEX (Small)

Skills: Weapon Creation, Armor Creation, Skill Crystal Fusion, Item Box Operation

The only effect that a Master Smith has is Increased STR (Medium). The higher your strength, the higher your attack power. In other words, increase in attack power may mean an increase in the STR Stat, but other than that, there was no mention of anything that would even remotely sound like a Party wide increase to STR.

Now, let me compare that to Roxanne's Beast Warrior

『Beast Warrior Lv.23』

Effects: Increased AGI (Medium), Increased STA (Small), Increased

DEX (Small)

Skills: Beast Attack

Beast Warrior has no effects or Skill that would increase the STR of the user whatsoever. But just to be on the safe side, let us confirm that with the actual owner of that Job.

「Roxanne?」

「Yes? What is it, master?」

I highly doubt that Beast Warriors possess some kind of hidden Skills, but since I can never be too sure about that, it is always worth it to check out all of the possibilities before jumping to conclusions too soon.

「Do correct me if I am wrong about that, but Beast Warriors do not have any Skills that increase their strength, right?」

「Yes. As unfortunate as it is, we do not possess any such abilities.」

「But in exchange for that, you are supposedly able to move around the battlefield more swiftly, am I understanding it right?」

It should be like that, since Beast Warriors do not have any Skills that increase their STR, but they do have a one that increases their AGI by a medium amount.

「I. I am not sure if I follow, master. Could you say it in a clearer, more understandable manner?」

「What master probably wanted to say was that if there are Beast Warriors in the Party, then does that mean that all of the Party members will be able to move faster as well, but this is just a hypothesis and there is no reliable way of proving or disproving it.」

Sherry explained what I meant to Roxanne. Well, that was not exactly what I wanted to ask, but if such an explanation helps her understand it better, then I have no reasons to clear that up.

「Oh, I see.」

「So Sherry, how exactly do you confirm that your strength has increased after obtaining the Master Smith Job?」

「The process itself is relatively simple, because all you need to do is to see how many Skills you are going to need in order to defeat certain monsters on certain floors of the Labyrinth.」

「I see, so that is how it is.」

So it would seem that even though this world is not all that technologically advanced, they still have something that can be called scientific verification, even if it is done for only a little bit, and as a result of it, the people of this world seem to be absolutely certain that having a Master Smith in your Party is going to increase the overall attack power of all the Party members.

「Yes. That is the reliable method that the great scholars of old came up with, and the one that they have been using since ancient times.」

The great scholars of old, you say? I do not know who exactly these “great scholars of old” guys were, but they sure seemed to be a bunch of pretty smart guys.

「Are there any other Jobs that increase the strength of the entire Party besides Master Smith? Like. let me see. like Swordsman, for example?」

「You understand well things well, master. It is said that Swordsman is one of the Jobs that increase the strength of the user and his Party as well.」

Yeah, that is because the effect of the Swordsman Job is Increased STR (Small). So technically, if you would have both a Master Smith and a Swordsman in your Party, that would mean that you would receive not one, but two increases to your STR, one medium and one small.

In other words, the effects of some of the Jobs can also be given to all of the Party members, not just one, and they can stack multiplicatively with one

another.

I have confirmed that my magical attack power dropped when I removed the Hero Job from the list of my active Jobs, so there is no doubt that Jobs with similar effects are going to have a similar impact on me depending on whether I have them equipped or not.

In addition to that, there are also Jobs that affect the whole Party, and those might be the ones that we should be focusing on obtaining.

「Did you know that the Jobs could affect the Stats of the Party members, master? Where exactly did you learn about that, I wonder?」

Sherry, please stop looking at me with such cold eyes. What if they stay that way and you will be stuck with that condescending glare for the rest of your life?!

Chapter 5: Genghis Khan, Part 1

『Sherry』

『Current Character Levels & Equipment』:

Jobs:

Blacksmith Lv.3

Equipment:

Club

Backpack

Leather Helmet

Leather Jacket

Leather Gloves

Leather Boots

I do not believe that I have mentioned this before, but in the off chance that I did, allow me to reiterate: Sex Maniac is a truly terrifying Job.

I have to admit that I might have vastly underestimated the power that 「Enhanced Vigor」 Skill is giving me, because whenever I have it equipped I feel like I could go for having my fun with Roxanne and Sherry in the bed practically every day, so the energizing effect of 「Enhanced Vigor」 is really making me more energetic than I have ever been before. Not only that, but the more I use it, the stronger its effects seem to be getting. Back when I did

not have the Sex Maniac Job unlocked, the maximum I could do was one round of sex with Roxanne after which both of us felt so spent that we did not really have the energy left for anything else than falling asleep in each other's arms, but now that I have Sex Maniac Job and 「Enhanced Vigor」 Skill, it is not a problem for me to be going for two or three rounds without ever feeling tired or needing a prolonged period of time to "reload" myself. Today was the first time ever when I noticed that I could go three times in a row, which got me so pumped that that last third time I made sure to down on the two of them especially hard, and now that it was all over, I kissed the exhausted Sherry and Roxanne, exactly in that order. Normally that would have made

Roxanne sad since I ignored the order and went for a kiss with the second slave first instead of giving it to Roxanne, the self-proclaimed Number One Slave first, but today there were good reasons for her not being angry about it. For once, she was too tired to really notice and/or care about such detail, and secondly, because the kisses I was giving her when it was finally her turn were especially long, hot and passionate so that we could both taste each other for everything we were worth. It was only after I finished reveling in the taste of her sweet mouth that I was finally able to lay down on the bed to catch a breath myself. I laid on my back and wrapped my arms around Roxanne's warm body again, hugging her tightly. Ahhh, the feeling of Roxanne's warm and soft skin pressing against mine is the absolute best sensation that I can never get tired off no matter how many times I get to experience it.

As I was breathing slowly and calming myself down after all of that strenuous physical activity I just went through, Sherry came back to the bed on trembling legs after changing into her nightgown. She talked to Roxanne in whispers for a bit and then came to lie down at my other side.

「You were amazing as always, both of you. After something like that, there is no way that I am not going to have a good night's sleep.」

「I am glad to hear that. Knowing that master is going to have a good night's sleep thanks to us is the best news to fall asleep to., since it is going to be the same for me.」

I really hope that Roxanne truly meant what she said just now, and she was

not simply trying to make me feel better.

While I was still living on earth, I remember that I read in one magazine that when having sex with a woman, foreplay and afterplay are just as important as the main dish and only the one who has mastered the art of both of those things can ever hope to be able to properly please his woman to a degree that will guarantee that she will never want to leave you for other guys. That is why I am always placing such an emphasis on kissing in the morning and after sex before going to sleep as well as making sure that I hug Roxanne throughout the entire night until the moment when I will wake up the next morning. As long as I keep doing those things to Roxanne and Sherry, I hope they will stay by my side and allow me to continue doing even more pleasurable things to them.

「Is that so? That is good to know. Also, congratulations on pulling through today with flying colors, Sherry. All of your hard work paid off magnificently today, but how are you feeling? I hope that you are not too exhausted after all that fighting in the Labyrinth?」

「Yes, today was definitely a lot of hard work. but to be honest, I do not really hate it.」

She does not really hate the hard work that she went through today, huh? Well, if that is what Sherry herself is saying, then I see no other problems with it. After all, not disliking something is basically the same as liking something, am I right? Yeah, it's equal to that. Most definitely equal, without a shadow of a doubt.

「Is that so? Fufufu, that is definitely good to hear, Sherry.」

「Y-Yes, that is right, Miss Roxanne. Now that I learned how to hit more than one opponent at a time properly, that ability is surely going to become very useful in our fights against the monsters of the Labyrinths together. A-Also, master really surprised me today. I. . . . I never would have expected that he is going to be able to do it that many times with both of us without resting even once.」

Due to Sherry's sudden compliment, I felt a little embarrassed, but also

pleasantly satisfied. It is sooo good to hear that she is appreciating what I am doing to the two of them. It makes me want to try even harder than before in order to meet their expectations of me.

「Oh, that is definitely right. I was not aware that master could be *that amazing as well*. But I am even more amazed by the fact that you finally managed to become the Master Smith like you always wanted, Sherry.」

「Took the words right out of my mouth. To be honest, I still cannot believe it as well.」

「Ehh. Really? Well, even though you might feel like that, it remains a fact that you were able to fuse that Rabbit Skill Crystal with that Copper sword, so that should be enough of a proof for you.」

「You are right, master. It is just that. it still feels like a dream, to be honest, but I should not doubt myself like that.」

So she still cannot fully believe it, despite all of the evidence that she saw today? Well, I cannot say that I blame her, since she has spend the bigger part of her current life believing that she should just give up on becoming a Master Smith despite the small hope that she might be able to succeed hidden somewhere deep down in her heart.

「And. and I know I should not worry about it too much if there is no good reason to, but I just cannot rid my mind of the thought that the Skill Crystal Fusion fails so often, and that this successful one might have been nothing but a fluke caused by beginners luck, and I cannot stop worrying about what is going to happen when the next fusion I perform, or the next one after that, or any other future fusions that I am going to attempt are going to end up in failure.」

「So it is still eating away at you so much?」

「Yes, and I am ashamed for that, and I can only express my deepest apologies. But. . . it is just that I have heard so much horrible stories.」

So Sherry is still lacking in the confidence department? I just hope that this lack of confidence of hers is not going to evolve to become a much bigger problem somewhere down the line.

「I see. You do not have to speak about it if you do not want to, but do you know what exactly happens to Master Smiths who amass too many failures to their names?」

If I learn some more about the punishments that Master Smith Slaves are subjected to, then maybe I will be able to come up with countermeasures against them.

Chapter 5: Genghis Khan, Part 2

「I do not mind, master. If. . . . if the Master Smiths who became slaves continue to fail their attempted fusions and waste the materials and equipment provided to them by their masters, they can be kicked out of the Party they belong to, face severe corporal punishment, or they can even be resold if the master thinks that their attempts at fusing items cost him too much of his money and resources. These punishments are not all of the ones that failed Master Smiths can be subjected to, but they are definitely the most popular ones.」

So they are even subjected to corporal punishment? Well, I cannot say that I am surprised, since that would be pretty fitting for the times and the overall setting of this world, but still. even if it would be fitting, I would never have resulted to using something as barbaric as that against Sherry.

「It is all right, Sherry, you can rest assured that as your master, master will never do any of those awful things to you, even if one of your fusions would end up in a failure.」

「R-Really?」

「Yes, really.」

「See, Sherry, this just goes to show how great of a person master really is.」

Who, me?

「Y-Yes, that is definitely amazing off him. . . if not a bit concerning as well. But that. . . that is something that I am most definitely thankful for.」

As I was lying on the bed without the slightest intention (or strength left) to move, Roxanne must have assumed that I have already fallen asleep, because

she lifted her head from the pillow and talked with Sherry over my body. As for that bit about me being amazing because of my refusal to use corporal punishment, or any form of punishment for that matter, on Sherry if she ended up failing the fusion of equipment with Skill Crystals, I really do not think that this should be something that I should be praised for, since such a mindset is not anything all that peculiar, but rather commonplace for anyone born in the twenty first century. But if both Sherry and Roxanne say that such a mindset is something praiseworthy, then who am I to deny them their praises. Moreover, it was wonderful to see the two of them interact with each other in such a wholesome way. Normally they are spending the entire day with me around and since they are always focusing on fulfilling my orders before anything else, they do not really get all that many chances for them to be talking with each other without any reservations. I mean, today they had a nice chance to have a pretty long girl-on-girl talk while I was in the Merchant's Guild and they were sent to the clothing store to do some shopping, but I wonder if such an amount of interaction and conversation was nearly enough for them, since as far as I know, girls in their teenage years are all pretty chatty. That, and as far as I am concerned, it is always better to have nice, long chats and get along with one another rather than be leaving everything in the air without speaking your mind clearly, leaving the other party with no other option but to start assuming what were your motives and intentions behind every word or sentence you have spoken, and unlike men, women will never run out of topics to talk about because they will always have various stories and gossip to share among themselves.

Since it would be pretty rude to intrude upon Sherry's and Roxanne's girl time with my male presence, I decided that now might be as good of a moment as any to drift off into sleep, since everything indicated that the girls would be talking for a good while longer.

When I woke up in the morning, I was hugging onto Roxanne, exactly as I intended. I never talked about this before, but she makes for an excellent hugging pillow, not only because her boobs are so pillow soft and elastic, just like the rest of her body, that your face might start sinking into them if you bury your head between them, but also because the hair growing on her back are extremely smooth and pleasant to the touch. Oh, and her hugs are so

blissfully calming that I feel like I could stay the way that I currently am forever without moving an inch, and both my body and soul would have been completely fine with that. And the best thing about my current situation is that Roxanne's soft goodness was enveloping only one half of my body, because the other one has been occupied by Sherry. Her limbs are thinner than Roxanne's and she does not have hair on her back, but when it comes to the body heat then she can easily rival Roxanne hands down. However, one point of concern that I have in regards to her current position is how unnaturally bent her body looked, by which I mean that she looked as if someone took half of her body and twisted it, but since she did not look as if she was hurt or uncomfortable, then that probably means that she did not hurt any of her muscles, even if she ended up sleeping like that throughout the entire night.

As I began moving around, Roxanne opened her eyes and lifted herself up in the sheets so that she could give me my desired good morning kiss after she checked up on me and noticed that I am no longer asleep. Even though it should still be pretty early outside and I Was sure that I was the one who has woken up first today, it looks like I was wrong, and Roxanne was the one who actually woken up first. I do not know how exactly is she doing that, but she seems to always wake up before me. Is it because of my order for her to always give me a good morning kiss? Because if so, then that is truly some serious dedication on her part. Or maybe she is simply someone was is very easy to wake up? Either way, I am pretty sure that it is one of the two.

「Good morning, master.」

「Good morning, Roxanne」

We greeted each other after our night of a very pleasurable sleep, and then we kissed each other and I got to enjoy the softness of her lips and the rich elasticity of her chest at the same time once more. We tangled our tongues together and allowed them to dance in our mouths. Roxanne was moving her own in an especially aggressive manner today, so I had to put an effort to keep up with her right from the get-go while making absolutely sure that not even a single drop of her saliva is going to be wasted and that I will experience everything her mouth and tongue have to offer to their absolute fullest.

「 hnnnngh. . . . good morning, master, Miss Roxanne.」

It would seem that Sherry has awakened from her sleep as well. Freeing myself from Roxanne's embrace for a bit, I made sure to hug her so that she would not feel left out of the fun. Now that she has barely woken up, her small and delicate figure were giving off a truly ephemeral impression. I had a feeling that if I tried to hug her even tighter than how I was already doing it then she would break in half like a dried-up branch of a tree, though of course I was sincerely hoping that no such thing would ever happen to her. Still, in her case, rather than acting as my hugging pillow, I would have very much like it if she could lie next to my side again, because if I could feel her warmth on my skin again, then there would be nothing else that I would need to be a truly happy man.

Then, Sherry also gave me a good morning kiss, honoring the agreement that she was to be doing that to me just like Roxanne was doing. Her tongue awkwardly crawled into my mouth and needed a minute or two to properly get her going, but once that happened, then she was also seeking the pleasure of kissing in a more aggressive fashion than yesterday. Could this be the aftereffect of what I have done to her yesterday? Is she acting bolder than usual because of the mouth-to-mouth medicine I was forced to give her? Because if so, then I should have done that sooner.

Chapter 5: Genghis Khan, Part 3

As I continued to move it around in her mouth, she also continued to entwine it around my tongue. Even when I was repeatedly inserting and removing it from her mouth in order to maximize the pleasure that we both felt, she was eagerly welcoming me back every time without a single word of complaint, so I continued to move around in Sherry's mouth, squeezing it in every way possible.

「Good morning, Sherry.」

After tasting Sherry's mouth to the fullest, I let go of her.

When it comes to the plans for today, I think it is finally time for us to explore the eighth floors of the Labyrinths for real, starting with the Labyrinth of Quratar, so once we got out of the bed and finished getting dressed and preparing our equipment, we made our way to Quratar Labyrinth's seventh floor so that Sherry could practice fighting against that Floor Boss first.

「The Floor Boss we are about to fight is called Rapid Rabbit. You might think that since the regular monsters on this floor are Slow Rabbits then this guy is going to be as easy to defeat as they were, but you would make a great mistake by thinking that. Rapid Rabbit is actually a really fast and, as a result of that, incredibly annoying Floor Boss to be dealing with. In fact, its speed is enough for it to avoid most of the magic attacks and Skill attacks, so you should not rely on those methods of attack to much, master. The battle with it is going to be a long and rather slow one, so be sure to prepare yourself for that, okay?」

Sherry gave us the information about Rapid Rabbit and how we should fight, which would be pretty useful. if it was not for the fact that we

have already fought against it a few times, so both Roxanne and I were well aware of how we should proceed with it. But as I already said, since this is the Floor Boss of the seventh floor and it is a little special, I thought that it might be a good idea to have Sherry experience the battle with it at least once. That is one thing. The other is that since I set her Job to be Master Smith Lv.1, it is going to be better to start from the seventh than to jump right into the eighth floor right from the get-go.

「Thank you for the information, Sherry. Now that you have shared it with us, we should be fine no matter what kind of dirty tricks this Rapid Rabbit tries to use against us.」

「Yes, definitely. However, I think I am going to go with a spear for this battle, since the attacks with a Club might be too slow, and therefore easy for the Boss to avoid.」

Once we confirmed the plan for how we were going to proceed for now, we left the room we have Warped into and proceeded to go towards the Boss Room's waiting room. We looked inside to see if there was anyone there, but luckily there was no one inside. As expected since it was still so early. Honestly, it would have been way stranger if someone was already here this early in the morning.

「Since there is nobody in the waiting room just yet, then let us hunt some more Slow Rabbits around here first.」

「How many Rabbit Furs are we aiming for?」

「Let us aim for. . . . about one hundred pieces or so. Once we obtain them, we are going to take them and sell them in the clothing store in the Imperial City.」

「Roger that, master! I promise to crush as many Slow Rabbits as possible!」

Roxanne answered while getting herself fired up. Now that it has been decided that we will hunt some Slow Rabbits, Sherry is definitely going to obtain a few levels for her Master Smith Job and it is going to be easy to watch over her so that she is not going to get hurt too much. It would be too

much of a hassle to go back to the first floor and start over from there once more and going onto the eighth floor would be too scary, but the seventh floor, the one we have spent the most time on thus far, should be just right for the purposes of levelling up. Also, since Roxanne handed the white negligee over to Sherry, it would be good to go and have her buy herself another one so that she could have some variety to it, and while we are at it, we might as well get Sherry a second one as well, and collecting one hundred Rabbit Furs should be enough to cover the cost of such a purchase, and it is also going to be worth it to see Sherry's reaction when she sees the Imperial City for the first time.

「Sherry, since you have just became a Master Smith, make sure not overdo it and take things easy for a bit, you hear me?」

「Okay, master. I will be sure to be careful.」

「I do not think that that Slow Rabbits here on the seventh floor are going to pose any kind of danger to you, but just to be on the safe side, be sure to tell me right away if you would like to make a stop an rest for a bit or go down to the lower floors if it proves too difficult for you after all.」

「Thank you for your consideration, master, but I think that I am going to be okay here on this floor, just as long as I remain careful and cautious.」

If what Sherry told me yesterday when we were discussing Job's effects is real, then those effects should work for all of the Party members, and not just the person who owns the Job. Therefore her 「Increase STR (Medium)」 and 「Increase DEX (Small)」 should also work on Roxanne and myself, but that should also mean that the effects of my Hero Job, a moderate increase to all of the Stats: HP, MP, STR, STA, INT, SPI, DEX and AGI should also work on Roxanne and Sherry, making them that much stronger, or in Sherry's case, making her defense to be not as paper-thin as it would have been without them. However, since I could defeat a Slow Rabbit even when I only had Villager Lv.1 for a Job and only the Copper Sword for a weapon, then Sherry should be able to pull her own weight against them as well, even though the ones here on the seventh floor are Lv.7 and not Lv.1. With that pseudo-strategy meeting in the Floor Boss's waiting room over, we went back and hunted Slow Rabbits for a while with the intention of obtaining one hundred

Rabbit Furs for ourselves. During that short time and across a span of just a few encounters, Sherry's level as a Master Smith got increased from Lv.1 to Lv.2, so it might be entirely possible for her to reach Master Smith Lv.2 during the morning hours of our exploration alone. Although I think that she was gaining levels somewhat slower in comparison to when she was still just a Villager, which is admittedly pretty strange since we do not go back to the first floor to slowly made our way up, instead choosing the option that should be giving her a pretty generous amount of EXP right from the start. Maybe this is one of the traits that is specific only to the race-specific Jobs, the trait that they take more time to gain EXP needed to Level Up than regular Jobs?

Out of all the Jobs that I currently have available for myself, I noticed that the one that accumulated EXP at the slowest rate out of all of them was the Hero Job, most likely because that was the Job that is granting me the most beneficial effects, so if we assume that this is indeed the rule that applies to all of the Jobs, then it would stand to reason that a race-specific Job like Master Smith, which has the second highest number of effects that it grants to the user after the Hero's Job, would take longer to gain levels in comparison to the Jobs that only had one or two beneficial effects on them. Well, in that case, maybe expecting that Sherry would increase the level of her Master Smith Job to Lv.3 today would be asking a bit too much off her?

「How are you holding up, Sherry? Think you can handle the attacks of the monsters here?」

「Yes, master. I can deal with them without any problems.」

Chapter 5: Genghis Khan, Part 4

「Compared to yesterday, are the battles today harder for you?」

「Yes, they are definitely harder than the ones yesterday when I was an Explorer.」

Well, yeah, there is no reason for the battles today to be easier than the ones you were engaging in yesterday, because yesterday you were not Explorer Lv.10 as you think you were, but rather Villager Lv.3 who increased her level to Villager Lv.5.

「Do you think you will be able to take on the Floor Boss like that?」

「Yes, I will do my best.」

As much as I want to say something along the lines of 「*That's the spirit, Sherry!*」 or 「*You are so brave, Sherry!*」 but when faced with Rapid Rabbit, 「the best」 of a character who has their Job only on Lv.2 might not be good enough. Maybe this is too dangerous to allow Sherry to fight the Floor Boss of the seventh floor while being a Master Smith? Maybe I should switch her Job back to Explorer just for the course of the Boss battle? If this was a test or an exam, then I could have allowed Sherry to try tackling the challenge that was to come at us exactly as she was right now, but this is not a test, and what we are doing now is not a drill. This is the Labyrinth, the real deal. If she goes to challenge the Rapid Rabbit unprepared or too weak to pull her own weight, then the only thing that is going to await her is going to be certain death. Especially since Rapid Rabbit is deceptively fast, and that speed of his makes it possible for him to attack its targets numerous times in a row without them being able to react to its assault fast enough.

「Okay then, here is how we are going to proceed: we will go challenge the

Floor Boss now, but just to be on the safe side I am going to set Sherry's Job back to Explorer Lv.10 so as to eliminate the risk of you fighting under too big of a handicap, all right?」

「Turn my Job back to Explorer? You can do something like that, master?!」

「Of course.」

I opened the Party Job Settings, scrolled down to the list of Sherry's Jobs and switched Master Smith Lv.2 for Explorer Lv.10. Up until now I have kept her Job as a Villager so that she would not gain too much EXP as an Explorer, because judging by the amount of battles we went through and the EXP we obtained, she would have definitely achieved Lv.11 or Lv.12 as an Explorer, and until I was sure what the conditions for obtaining Master Smith Job were such a development was something that I absolutely could not allow to happen. But now that Sherry got access to Master Smith, that is a concern that I no longer have to worry about. Another issue I had to take into account was her being aware of how many levels as an Explorer she had, which she could have checked by looking at the size of her own Item Box. If at any point in time she caught wind of the fact that she was unable to operate her own Item Box despite believing that she has been an Explorer all this time, I would have to deal with a whole lot of complicated explanations and a possible loss of trust in me as her master and the leader of our Party, but since I do not have to worry about her getting too many levels in Explorer's Job anymore, I guess it means that I can allow her to level it up normally as she would any other Job now.

After coming back to the waiting room in front of the Boss Room, I switched my weapon from Wand to Durandal and walked right into the Boss Room after Roxanne and Sherry finished their own preparations as well.

As soon as we walked through the door, Rapid Rabbit showed itself after emerging from the gathered clouds of green smoke that filled the room. I have no idea how Sherry is going to react to it, but since Roxanne and I have fought against this guy before, we know that as long as you keep up with its speed and not let it go on the offensive, then the victory is going to be easily achievable, and in my case, the key to breezing through this encounter is the Skill of my Hero's Job, 「Overwhelming」. Sherry was saying that we should

not rely on magic and Skills too much to defeat this guy, but at the current moment I have no other, reliable way of defeating this guy. Well, maybe it could be done if I tried using nothing but AoE magic against it so that it would have nowhere left to run even with its supreme movement speed, but since I have not tried that method before I do not know if it is going to be successful or not.

Either way, now that the battle has begun, Rapid Rabbit started by darting towards Sherry at top speed, and in response, she simply picked up her spear and waited until it came closer to her. and then she thrust the blade of the spear forward in an attempt to pierce it through, but the Rapid Rabbit dodged her attack by jumping to the side at the last possible second. When Sherry tried making a thrust towards it for the second time it dodged it again by bouncing diagonally once, and after it finished evading Sherry's spear it turned around and charged towards her again, taking advantage of her stumbling forward after the thrusting attack she just made. I knew it. Since this battle is a big difficulty spike in comparison to the ordinary Slow Rabbits of this floor, replacing her Master Smith Lv.2 with Explorer Lv.10 was the correct thing to do after all.

When the red monster noticed that its attempts at attacking Sherry did not result in her immediate death, it decided to change its strategy, and instead of targeting Sherry, it went towards me this time, so I made sure to greet it with a barrage of slashes with 「Overwhelming」, which ended up blowing it away, but not killing it with a single blow as I had hope. Looks like I will still need to grow stronger in order to defeat this guy with just one strike. I just hope that it will not take too much time, or that the enemies we will be fighting in the future will not be so tanky that even my Durandal will not be able to swiftly deal with all of them.

The next time the Rapid Rabbit closed in on us to attack, it chose Roxanne as its primary target, but as usual, she was able to avoid all of its attempts at biting into her throat by swiftly dodging out of the harm's way. For me, it was amazing how she was able to pull something like that off and be faster than Rapid Rabbit with just her own agility alone, while I needed to slow the Rapid Rabbit with 「Overwhelming」 if I even wanted to think about dodging its attacks.

Roxanne blocked another of its attempts at attacking her with her shield, and then slashed it with her Scimitar, sending it flying backwards just like I did before, and Sherry was right there to follow that attack up with a thrust of her spear, causing the rabbit to fly even farther back diagonally before it could even touch the ground.

「I did it!」

「Yeah, you sure did, Sherry. That was amazing!」

「I was not sure if that attack was going to pay off, but now that it did I am really glad that I decided to try it out.」

Certainly, no matter how powerful you might be, under normal circumstances no one is going to be able to change the direction they are heading towards after being sent flying, so Sherry's decision to attack the Rapid Rabbit while it was still in the air was a pretty smart one. If we keep attacking it while it is in the air where it is at its most vulnerable, we should be able to take it down effortlessly. That is the strength of the attacks made with the long weapon like the spear, and combined with Sherry's quick thinking it is going to bring our Party the victory.

When it finally recovered from the shock of being sent flying, the Rapid Rabbit started running again, coming towards me once more. Oh yeah, that is right, come at me, monster. And once you do. . . .

Chapter 5: Genghis Khan, Part 5

「CHEST.....!!!!！」

..... I am going to slam my Durandal right into you when you try jumping at me again. The Rapid Rabbit got sent flying backwards, but this time it did not get up. Instead, it remained on the ground, where it disappeared in a puff of green smoke. If two of my attacks while using 「Overwhelming」 were enough to bring it down, then maybe all I need to be able to defeat it with just one 「Overwhelming」-infused attacks just a few more levels for my Jobs so that my STR stat would increase even further? I just hope that the day when I will be able to do that will come sooner rather than later. In my case, it would not hurt me to become even stronger than I already am as fast as possible.

「Master, if I may ask. that thing that you shouted before dealing the decisive blow to the Rapid Rabbit. this 「CHEST.....!!!!！」.... was that the name of a Skill that you possess? Because I do not remember ever hearing about such a Skill.」

Sherry asked me that questing while she went to the place where the Rapid Rabbit fell, picked up the Rabbit Meat that it left behind and brought it back to me.

「Oh, that? No, no,no, it was nothing like that. It was simply something that I have screamed during the heat of the moment to psych myself up. It is not the name of a Skill.」

「But. but it must have been a Skill, because after you shouted it you moved so fast that I was unable to follow your movements with my eyes!」

「It is a Skill called「Overwhelming」. Have you ever heard of it?」

「Hmm. . . . no, I cannot say that I do. But it just goes to show that you truly have amazing Skills at your disposal, master.」

Now it felt like Sherry has given me an honest compliment that came straight from her soul. My time as her master might have been short thus far, but I can say one thing with absolute confidence: I have never been happier than I am right now, and seeing Sherry looking at me with such genuine respect instead of those ice-cold intellectual eyes of hers is bringing me an unspeakable amount of pleasure, and it is a feeling that is probably not going to be beaten by anything else in the world.

Oh boy, this is bad. I think I might actually get addicted to it if I see any more of it!

「This is not something that I would like to share with other people, so please, whatever you do, make sure you keep that information confidential, okay?」

I am saying that practically every time when I reveal some of my secrets to the girls, so I am sure that they are used to it by now and that they would not go around talking about those things with anyone else even if I did not tell them to do so. However, there is one thing that got me incredibly curious: Sherry said that she knew about the Hero Job and she also knew various legends about this country's first Emperor, who was the only known individual to wield the Hero's Job. But if she knew about all of those things, then why did she say that she did not know what kind of Skill

「Overwhelming」 is? Could it be that it is something that the first Emperor was not using? Or maybe that Skill is something that he did not even know he had because he never had to use its incantation? Because it would not be all that strange if he had a weapon or a piece of equipment that granted him 「Chant Omission」.

「Of course, master. And while we are at it, I have to say that Miss Roxanne, who was able to sent the rapid Rabbit flying without using any Skills to do so, was even more amazing!」

Sherry's respectful eyes turned towards Roxanne while she showered her in praises as well. Is it just me, or is she respecting her more than me for being able to go toe to toe against Rapid Rabbit without any tricks or gimmicks?

Well, since I really cannot do anything without my OP weapon and Skills, then this should not be surprising that Sherry would be more captivated by someone who could move like a dodging demigod with just her physical abilities alone. Yeah, it cannot be helped, and I am not salty about it at all, not in the slightest.

I want her to look up to me more!

After defeating the Floor Boss of the seventh floor we could finally proceed to the eighth floor of the Labyrinth of Quratar and begin its exploration in earnest.

「Sherry, do you know what monsters are inhabiting the eighth floor here?」

「Uhm. . . . I do not know. And to be honest, I do not even know where we are right now.」

「What do you mean you do not know where we are? We are obviously still in the Labyrinth of Quratar.」

「Ahhh, so this is still the Labyrinth of Quratar?」

「Yeah, that is what I have said just now.」

Did Sherry though we have suddenly changed places or what?

「I see. I thought that we might have been someplace else, in a place that has a similar floor and monster layout as the Labyrinth in Quratar, but it is good to know that we are still in Quratar's Labyrinth.」

「Yeah, that is for certain, but why would you even think that we are actually someplace else?」

「Because we never paid even a single entrance fee at the Quratar Labyrinth's entrance. Oh, could it be because of master's Space-Time Magic? Because that would have been a nice explanation for why we did not have to pay even a single coin for entering the Labyrinth here despite being here a few times already.」

Sherry mumbled that to herself. Well, certainly. There is a rule that states that you have to pay a certain amount of Nars every time you want to enter the Labyrinth of Quratar, but we did not need to pay any money for entering at all, and it is all because of my Warp and the ability to teleport ourselves straight inside of the Labyrinth proper that it gives us. But it was precisely because of that why Sherry thought that we were no longer in Quratar's Labyrinth, but in some different place altogether. If she noticed that by herself without me or Roxanne dropping her any hints, then that has to mean that she really is a genius.

「Do you think that it is bad that we are not paying for entering the Labyrinth like the rest of the people who are using it?」

「No, I do not think like that at all. The only time when we would be legally obliged to pay the entrance fee to the Labyrinth of Quratar is when we would be walking into it through its main gate, but there are no rules that state that we have to pay for being allowed to explore the Labyrinth once already inside of it. As long as we are not using the main entrance to come here, not paying the money for it is the smart thing to do. Or at least that is how I see it.」

So Sherry does not have any objections against us not paying the money for entering the Labyrinth here in Quratar, and moreover, she seems to be encouraging us to keep doing so just as long as we would not need to be entering through its main gate. Good, this is very good indeed.

「As expected of master. You are always so forward-thinking.」

Roxanne also praises me for my ingenuity, but to tell you the truth, I only thought about using Warp to get inside of the Labyrinth without paying because she was the one who initially suggested it.

「So, now that we have that out of the way, what can you tell us about the monsters here on the eighth floor of Quratar's Labyrinth, Sherry?」

「Ah, yes, of course. If I remember correctly, then the monsters in here should mainly be Needlewoods.」

Chapter 5: Genghis Khan, Part 6

「Ah, yes, of course. The monsters native to the eighth floor here are Needlewoods, so we should have no problems in dealing with them since we have already fought them in the Vale Labyrinth. As for their special characteristics, they can occasionally use Water Magic, and are extremely resistant to it as a result, so nom matter what you do, make sure that you are not using water magic against them, master.」

Sherry gave me some more information about the Needlewoods. Do not use Water Magic because they are highly resistant to it, huh? Duly noted. That being said.

「Needlewoods can use magic as well? I have never seen any of them using it, not even once.」

「It is because the Labyrinth of Vale is a low-level one. As a general rule of thumb, only monsters with mid to high levels are capable of using magic, while the low-leveled ones cannot do it. It is also unlikely for the monsters that have Lv.1 or Lv.2 to be using it, since they are supposed to be the ones on which most of the beginning Adventurers and Explorers tend to accumulate battle experience.」

「Is that so?」

「Yes. As I said, monsters basically tend to be using magic and Skills mostly when they begin appearing in the upper floors of the Labyrinths, but when it comes to Needlewoods specifically, they are widely know to be a type of monster that is not that smart, using simple physical attacks as their primary method of attack, but since we are on the eighth floor, then I think there is a chance that we are going to occasionally see some of them casting magic, so make sure to be on the lookout for the signs of them preparing to cast it,」

okay?」

Yeah, since this is the eighth floor in the Labyrinth of Quratar, then it should be obvious that the Needlewoods in here are going to be different from the Needlewoods I have encountered on the first floor of Vale's Labyrinth. The ones over there were all Lv.1 and they were really only using physical attacks like tackling and smacking their branches around, but the ones here in Quratar are going to be Lv.8. Sherry said that the higher the floor, the more Skills and magic monsters are going to be using. I just hope that neither I nor Roxanne or Sherry are ever going to find ourselves at the receiving end of their magic and Skills. Well, as long as we kill all of them fast enough, there should be nothing for us to worry about.

「All right. Thank you for another bit of useful information, Sherry.」

「Thank you, master.」

「Please, do continue to support us with the precious information now, and in the future as well. In the meantime. Roxanne, as usual, please guide us to a place where there are going to be as few of the enemies as possible.」

「Understood, master. It shall be done as you wish.」

Since there is a possibility that the enemies here are going to be using magic, then should I switch back to Durandal so that I could prevent them from using it? Then again, right now I do not know how often they are going to be using it and how powerful is it going to be, so maybe now that we begin the exploration of the eight floor it would be better to wait for a few encounters and then decide based on the outcome of these battles? Yeah, that sounds like a reasonable thing to do. As for Sherry, I think I am going to leave her at Explorer Lv.10, because with Master Smith Lv.2 there is too big of a possibility that she might end up getting herself one-shotted if some of the enemies turn up to be using AoE magic attacks.

We then proceeded to hunt monsters on the eighth floor, but, much to my relief, so far none of the Lv.8 Needlewoods we have encountered have used magic. The only one who sometimes had to resort to it was I, and only when the situation was absolutely calling for it.

After a while when Sherry's Explorer Job has reached Lv.11, I decided that this might be a good moment to switch it back to Master Smith. I had a feeling that if I allowed her to keep fighting as an Explorer she should have eventually reached Lv.12, but I decided against allowing her to do that, because raising your level with one Job too much is not good, because it can be quite troublesome if you get too caught up in it and neglect increasing the levels of your other Jobs.

The first time ever where I saw a Needlewood use magic was when we had encountered our very first group of enemies that consisted of nothing but Needlewoods Lv.8. It happened right after I hit them up with the Fire Storm and was waiting for it to go off cooldown. Three of the four Needlewoods came up to the front while the last one of them went to the back, hiding behind the living wall that the others have made for it. Initially I thought that they have chosen such a formation because since they were plant-based monsters that attacked mainly with their branches in wide swings, a group of four simply did not have enough space for all of them to be performing their attacks effectively because the Labyrinth's corridors were simply too small, but my gut feeling was telling me that something was about to go down and that we should prepare ourselves for it.

「Roxanne, take care of the two of them, and Sherry, you go for the other one!」

By now, I have already launched three Fire Storms at the Needlewoods. And now that Roxanne and Sherry rushed in to confront the three Needlewoods in the front, I also launched a fourth one.

「Master, here it comes!」

As soon as I activated the fourth Fire Storm, Roxanne's warning reached my ears. And in the very next moment, a blue magic circle has appeared under the feet of the Needlewood that was taking cover behind its buddies. Eventually, it managed to finish the chant, and a ball of water was formed above its head. Is this something similar to my Water Ball?

Unfortunately, I had very little time to ponder about that some more, because that Needlewood fired the spell at us almost immediately after it was done

forming it, and I have to admit that the damn thing was pretty fast.

It has been shot quickly and went forward in a straight line. My impression was that it is somewhat slower in comparison to the magic that I am firing whenever I am, using it, but at the same time it felt completely different to be on the receiving end of the magic that someone was shooting at you, as opposed to actually being the one raining down magic spells at your opponents one after the other. It has that feeling of. intimidation, like. like you know that you have to dodge it or else something really bad is going to happen to you. Even now, I can feel that my legs are slightly trembling, or that it is somewhat harder for me to move due to the uncertainty of who this Water Ball is going to target.

As it turns out, that someone was Roxanne. And just as I expected it of her, she avoided that fast Water Ball by doing something so simple as twisting her body ever so slightly to the side, causing the spell to fly right past her without even a single droplet of water landing on her. Instead, the only thing that this magic attack managed to hit with a loud splash was the wall behind her. Heh, I knew that Roxanne was a real goddess of dodging, but I thought that she would only be able to do that with regular physical attacks. Who would have thought that magic is going to not pose any kind of threat to her whatsoever as well? If I was the one who was targeted by that Water Ball, I probably would not have been able to dodge it at all due to how fast it was in my eyes. But anyway, after regaining my composure after seeing yet another instance of Roxanne's magnificent dodging abilities, I readied my wand and launched the fifth Fire Storm at the Needlewoods. The sparks that it generated flew right to where all four of them were and then engulfed them in a magnificent fiery explosion that caused all of them to fall over and die.

Chapter 5: Genghis Khan, Part 7

「That is our Roxanne for you, dodging magic like it is nothing.」

「Thank you for your kind words, master, but that really was nothing all that praiseworthy. Since that attack has been shot at me from behind the other three Needlewoods, it had to travel through such distance that my eyes had more than enough time to adjust to the speed at which it has been flying, so avoiding that was really not that big of a problem.」

No, no, no Roxanne, you are giving yourself far too little credit! I mean, dodging magic? There is no way in hell that any regular person would have been capable of pulling something like that off! I would have never been able to do it even if you gave me an extensive tutorial. And besides, the distance that this Water Ball travelled was not all that great either, certainly not big enough to warrant Roxanne saying that it travelled long enough from her eyes to get accustomed to its speed when it was actually in the blink of an eye, so in my case, the only options for me would be to either tank it head on or try slashing through it with Durandal, the biggest question being which of these two options would be less harmful for me.

「Oh, I-I see.」

Therefore, that is the only thing that I can reply to her with.

「Also, that monster was not really trying to hit me for the purpose of damaging me.」

「It. . . . it did not?」

「Yes, judging by the way it fired that spell, it was more for the purpose of forcing me to change my position so that they could gain more control of the

battlefield.]

Really? That is what it was? Because it sure as hell did not look like that to me.

In the meantime, Sherry picked up the Drop Items and handed it over to me. I tried to silently ask her with my eyes if what Roxanne was saying was true or not, and she just nodded her head, confirming it.

「So she is right after all?」

「Right about what after all?」

Roxanne asked, looking puzzled

「N-Nothing. . . . 」

「I was right about thinking that Needlewood's branches are one of the items needed for blacksmithing purposes, so it might be a good idea to hold onto some of them instead of selling them all right off the bat.」

Sherry saved my ass with her explanation on branches. Nice follow-up, Sherry!

I have defeated the four Needlewoods, so there are now four branches left in the places where they fell down and became the puffs of green smoke. Is that so? I have never heard of any blacksmithing item needing a branch in order to be created.

「Is that so?」

I asked, because I genuinely had no idea about it at all.

「Yes. They are too thin to be used reliably as a fire-starting material because they burn up too quickly, but they still have their fair share of uses in the smithing industry.」

「Oh yeah? What are they used for then?」

「Branches are mainly used together with other materials when making metal equipment such as swords and armor.」

「So they are necessary if you want to make items and equipment that are made out of metal, huh? Well, I guess it is perfectly natural. But if that is the case, then I wonder if.

Do you also need a furnace if you want to make equipment made out of metal?」「No, that would be too costly of a purchase, so thankfully it is not required. Actually, when it comes to smithing, there is no need for any kind of specialized equipment or tools at all. Everything is carried out just by using Skills, and that is it.」

So all you have to do is worry about preparing the right items, and the Skills are going to take care of the rest. As expected of a game with Skills in it. Such a user-friendly system. If only we had something so convenient in my old world, then maybe life would have been even easier than it already was.

「Okay, so if we are finished here, then how about we go and move to the eighth floor of the Labyrinth of Vale?」

My Item Box is already stuffed with quite an astonishing amount of branches, and I have seen Needlewoods using magic, so for the time being, I guess there is no reason for us to be staying here in Quratar's Labyrinth for much longer.

「We could do that, but it is going to be morning soon, master.」

Roxanne gave me an advice.

It is already so late, huh? Well, I guess it should have been expected, since we have spent quite a long while watching over Sherry until She became Master Smith Lv.2, and apparently that took us even more time than I have initially expected.

「Okay, in that case we are going to stay here for just a while longer.」

After that, we continued to fight against the monsters on the eighth floor of Quratar's Labyrinth. For a number of next encounters, we did not come across many more Needlewoods that would be using magic, but when we did, I managed to notice something about them, mainly the fact that they could be using their magic attacks not only when they were hiding behind the wall that their buddies were making out of themselves for them. We faced two groups made out of two Needlewoods and two Slow Rabbits in a row, and every time the Needlewoods were attempting to cast their magic at us even though they were standing in the middle of the corridor, not hiding behind other monsters or natural terrain obstacles.

「Here it comes again, master!」

Roxanne issued me another warning when she saw that a blue magic circle has begun to form under the feet of one of the two Needlewoods.

And, exactly as expected, that was exactly what happened. A blue magic circle appeared under the Needlewood's feet, a Water Ball formed itself above its head, and in the next moment it has been launched forward.

But this time, the target of that spell. is me!

「Guh. ! ! ! ! !」

Oh shit, oh fuck, oh shit, oh fuck this is bad! I am going to die soon! I cannot avoid that spell! It is impossible for me to avoid something so fast! Very impossible! Absolutely impossible!

I knew that I had to avoid that Water Ball if I did not want to be definitively done for, but my legs have been firmly stuck in the ground because of my indecisiveness whether to try and duck to the left, or whether to try and duck to the right.

Avoiding it was the obvious thing to do, but since I lack the reflexes needed to dodge, I could not even afford to perform such a simple action like that.

I just cannot do it, even if my life depends on it.

That is why I decided to do the next best thing that came to my mind: tank the hit head-on after casting 「Plating」 on myself in a hurry. Thanks to me using it, the damage done to me when the Needlewood's Water Ball hit me is not going to be enough to outright kill me with one shot, but the damage I took was still quite intense, to the point where it felt as if my legs were going to snap themselves in half the moment the spell blasted me right in the middle of my chest. Another saving grace here was the fact that since the thing that hit me was Water Ball, then it was quite literally a ordinary water shaped into a ball and propelled forward, so it did not do much else aside from making me wet from top to bottom. If instead of that I would have been hit with a Fire Ball, then I think I would not be able to remain as calm and composed as I was now, because let us be honest, who in their right mind would remain perfectly calm after being set on fire? No one, that is who.

After the initial shock has passed, I smacked the Needlewoods with the fifth serving of Fire Storm.

Chapter 5: Genghis Khan, Part 8

However, even though I managed to kill every last one of the Needlewoods, including the one who casted the spell that hit me, the water from its Water Ball did not disappear. Back on the second floor of the Vale Labyrinth, when I got hit wit the 「Thread Spit」 Skill of the Green Caterpillar, the thread itself disappeared when the monster that used it got defeated, but this time the water from the Needlewood's Water Ball attack did not disappear, so that goes to show that my hypothesis that I came up with when testing Water Wall spell for the first time: since water from the Water Magic is just that, an ordinary water, it does not disappear when the caster of the spell is slain, hence why the water from Water Ball remained on me right now. Also, I mentioned that I was soaked from top to bottom, right? Right. So, because of that it kinda looked as if I had just pissed my pants, so I really hope that we are not going to run into any other Explorers or Adventurers in the near future. Thankfully the natural light in the Labyrinths is pretty dim, so that is my only salvation here: even if we did happen upon someone, I should be fine just as long as I do not come too close to them and they are not going to notice my soaked clothing.

Luckily for me, we did not run into any other people, most likely due to how early it still was outside, and all of my clothes managed to dry up before we started to backtrack towards the safe room to leave the Labyrinth (with just a little help from my Fire Magic). Before using Warp to crate a portal for us, I had Roxanne and Sherry pass all of the equipment and Magic Crystals to me.

The Magic Crystals are going to be worth a lot of money, so I would never risk doing something as irresponsible as leaving them in my backpack where they could easily get stolen, so I placed them in the Item Box along with the rest of the equipment that the girls handed off to me.

「It looks like my clothes have finally managed to dry for real. Good. Walking

around in wet pants for much longer would have been straight up unbearable.]

「The phenomena caused by magical power seem to disappear whenever the source of the magic power that created them in the first place disappear as well. That is the common belief, but it is not entirely true, because even if the magical power disappears, the things created by it will not disappear completely. For example, the bodies of monsters in the Labyrinth come to life due to its magical power, but when they die they leave their Drop Items behind because a part of them is not made entirely of magical power alone, but with the materials gained from the material world as well.」

Sherry explained to me, but to be honest, I do not really understand it.

「Hmm.」

「Ah. !」

Sherry let out a silent scream as she saw me as I was about to place one of the Magic Crystals into the Item Box.

「What is it, Sherry? Is something wrong?」

「Oh, i-it is nothing serious, it is just that I was surprised at master's Magic Crystal. Did it already change its color from Purple Magic Crystal to Blue Magic Crystal?!」

So that is what that was about? Sherry was surprised at how fast my Magic Crystals changed their colors, but to me it was nothing to be excited about, since I have already gotten used to the speed of their magic power accumulation increased by my 「Crystal Acceleration」Bonus Skill. And since my Purple Magic Crystal has turned into Blue Magic Crystal, then it must mean that it has accumulated more than one thousand units of magical power.

「Here, master, I have the purple one.」

Roxanne hands over the Purple Magic Crystal to me. This is the one that I used for the purpose of testing quite a while ago and gave it to Roxanne

afterwards. So she has been using it ever since then, and now it has turned purple, huh? As for the Magic Crystal that I have given to Sherry, it has already tuned into Red Magic Crystal.

「Huh? Did we not have one Purple Magic Crystal and two Black Magic Crystals before? Then, how could this be that they have changed colors so fast?」

「R-Right? Sometimes I wonder about that myself, actually.」

「When it comes to master, things like that tend to happen around him all the time, so it would be best if you just accept it.」

Ooooh, what a nice follow-up, Roxanne!

Sherry still looked as if she was a little suspicious of that answer, but thankfully she did not look at me with those cold eyes of hers that I dislike so much.

After going back home from the Labyrinth and eating breakfast, our next stop was the Imperial City.

「Haaaa. ! So this is the Imperial City?! It is even bigger than what I have imagined!」

When we left the walls of the Adventurer's Guild's building and got out onto the streets of the Imperial City, Sherry was looking around at all of the buildings that surrounded us, clearly unable to hide her ever rising excitement. Yeah, when I came here for the first time I was amazed at how big the city and all of its buildings were as well, especially since no one warned me what I should be expecting, so I made sure not to tell anything to Sherry either, because I wanted her to have a similar surprise, and now I can see that my decision has definitely paid off.

「Is this your first time visiting the Imperial City, Sherry?」

I asked her while we were walking down the street.

「Yes, it is!」

I thought as much. Since she said that she originally hailed from a Dwarven village I had her figured for a country bumpkin, and now she has only confirmed it with her words.

「Well, when Roxanne and I came here for the first time our reactions were more or less the same, so we definitely can understand how you are feeling.」

「Yes, seeing the capital in all its grandeur was definitely quite a shock.」

Roxanne nodded vigorously when she turned her face back towards me and Sherry.

「But if we do not have any particular business to attend to here, there is not really any reason for us to be coming here, so we usually tend to stay in the vicinity of Quratar with the occasional trips to the town of Vale.」

「Is that so?」

I never actually thought about it before, but it would seem that this world does not have a developed tourism industry just yet, and people look like they are not at all interested in visiting new places or travelling to the lands that they have never seen before. Most of the common people would have probably never came to visit the Imperial City just to have a gander at the sights it has to offer, only coming here if they had some business to attend to here, just like Roxanne said. It is an entirely different story when you are an Adventurer who has access to the 「Field Walker」Skill. They can go pretty much everywhere in the world they want, provided that they have been to that place before at least once and they have enough MP to last them throughout the entire journey from one teleportation portal to the next.

However. . . ,

Ordinary people do not have access to 「Field Walker」so if they want to go anywhere, they have to do so through the conventional means of transportation. But if that is the case, then does that mean that the commoners to not have the adventurous spirits at all?

「..... I used to want to come here in the past, but I never got the chance to do so.」

Sherry muttered that in a small, barely audible voice.

「Hm? I am sorry, what was that? I did not hear you all that well.」

「Oh, n-no, it is nothing. Do not worry about it, master.」

Chapter 5: Genghis Khan, Part 9

「No, no, no, let me hear about that. Was there something that you wanted to do here in the Imperial City, but were unable to do so because of your becoming a slave?」

I was curious about Sherry's aspirations and plans form before we met each other, so I asked her about it. I wonder if the thing that she wanted to do here was something she could only have done in the past and lost the opportunity to do so now, or is it something that we will be able to help her with?

「Uhm, so. . . . the thing is, that. . . . here in the Imperial City. . . . it has the largest library in the entire empire, so. . . . so before I was a slave, I. . . . I used to dream about visiting it one day.」

「A library, huh?」

So all this time, she wanted to go to the library housed here in the Imperial City? As expected of a member of an intellectual faction, her thirst for knowledge is a truly admirable thing.

「Before you became a slave, did you have any books at your old home?」

「It was quite a while ago. . . . but I do remember that we have at least ten of them. However, because it was a Dwarven household they were only the books about blacksmithing and other things related to the smithing industry and the process of item creation.」

Unfortunately, I am not able to determine if ten books in the house is a lot of them or not. All that I know is that apparently genuine paper is a rare and precious resource in this world, so normal people probably could not afford to have as many books as they wanted to have. But if Sherry says that they

had ten books in her old home, then does that mean that she was actually a rich lady from a rich household, or someone similar to that? But. . . but if that would be the case. then I really do not understand how she became a slave in the first place. She said that visiting the library was a dream of hers from the past, but that is the only hint she has given me. I wonder if she has fallen from grace, or did her family perhaps went bankrupt and that's why they had to sell their own daughter? For the time being those are only my own speculations that have no ground in reality whatsoever, so the smart thing to do here might actually be to not delve too deeply into that subject, at least not until she was going to be willing to talk about that herself.

「You had a house with books in it? That is amazing!」

Since Roxanne has no idea about Sherry's past either, her reaction was obvious and natural. But who would have thought that this would be the detail that she would be the most amazed by?

「Thank you, Miss Roxanne, but that is a story of a past long gone. When he was still alive, my grandfather was a pretty influential person in our Dwarven community so he sometimes used his connections to get things such as books for his house.」

「I see. Did you become as smart as you are now by reading all of the books he had at his disposal?」

Even though I want to know more about Sherry's past and how she was back then it would be wiser to start steering the conversation away from such heavy topics, because continuing to talk about them too much is only going to do us more harm than good. Things like that should only be talked about when the person themselves feels ready to do so, not simply because I wanted to satiate my own curiosity.

「I did, because back then I used to stay home most of the time after. the obvious thing happened.」

「And your idea that you wanted to become a Master Smith came from those books?」

「They certainly were part of my reasons for wanting to become one, yes. And when I became an Explorer, I thought that I might try entering the Labyrinth and giving my all to exploring its depths.」

So right now we have two possible scenarios regarding Sherry that do not rule each other out: one is that she was actually a wealthy rich lady, and the other one pertaining to the fact that there was a period in her life where she has become this world's version of a hikkikomori. That would also explain why her level as a Villager was so low: because she never got a chance to properly gain enough EXP to level it up.

「In other words, you liked books ever since you were little, and that caused you to want to visit the Library of the Imperial City?」

「Yes.」

「And what about now? Do you still want to do it?」

I am afraid that our house in Quratar is missing heavily in the books department, because we do not have a single one of those in there. unless you would count a poorly-made booklet that contains the written maps of all the known floors of the Labyrinth of Quratar as a proper book. In that case, we would have one whole book, and at the end of the day, one book is certainly better than no books at all.

「Uhm. now that I have become a slave, I do not know if I am allowed to have such selfish wishes.」

「So you do not want to go to the library simply because you became my slave?」

「It is not that I do not want to do it, but because I have become a slave, there are some things that I simply cannot do now, no matter how bad I would want to do them.」

Is it really like that? Because if it is truly so, then if she cannot go there at all, what was the point of her dreaming about going there in the first place? Is it one of those 「unobtainable dreams are the best kind」 or 「even if you cannot

have something, no one can forbid you from dreaming about them.] kind of scenarios? Is that what we are dealing with here?

「Okay, but. what exactly is the problem here, because I am not seeing it so far. Is the library the kind of institution that slaves are prohibited from entering?」

「No, it is nothing of the sort. The library is equally accessable to anyone who pays the money for entering it, but cost wise it is pretty expensive.」

「Pretty expensive, you say? How expensive are we talking about, exactly?」

「There is a normal admission fee that needs to be paid by every person who wishes to go inside, and there is also a deposit fee. You can get the deposit back when you leave on the condition that you will not damage any books that you have come into contact with, but the cost of admission fee and the deposit is one gold coin per person.」

Ahh, so that might actually be the library's way of countering the possibility of the valuable books getting damaged or stolen. In that case, I guess the admission fee and a deposit are both justified. If you implement something like that, you automatically decrease the possibility of thieves or any weird people going to the library, because the costs of deposit and admission fees are going to be too great for the regular masses to afford without sacrificing the finances that could be spent on something else and much more essential, like food or clothing. And even if something like theft happened or the books somehow got damaged or even destroyed, then the cost of the deposit can be used to more than make up for the loss that happened.

「I see now. So that is how it is. Well, in that case, maybe we could go to the library sometime if that is what you truly want, Sherry.」

「. huh?」

Chapter 5: Genghis Khan, Part 10

「No, I mean, look at it this way. You are in charge of supplying us the information about the monsters that we can encounter in the Labyrinths, but even you cannot know every little piece of information in the world. And what do you so if you do not know something? You go and search so that you can fill the blanks and holes in your knowledge. That is exactly what the libraries were made for.」

The agreement that Sherry and I have both agreed on is that whenever I am going to have some questions about monsters, Labyrinths, or anything related to the life here in the empire, she is going to be my go-to in search of answers, so knowing as many things as possible is going to greatly benefit her, and it is going to be an even better development for me, since I will not have to learn how to read and write the languages of this world myself. At the beginning of my life together with Roxanne I tried to learn how to write the letters of this world's main language, but that attempt did not end up too well, mostly because Roxanne is. not exactly a good teacher, to put it mildly.

At the very least I will not have to worry about being the only one in this world who cannot read and write, because as I already learned and confirmed it with Sherry and Roxanne, very few people can actually read and write, most likely because the literacy percentage in this medieval setting has been set to be quite low, most likely because people probably think that knowing how to write and read will not be of that big of a benefit to them. Either way, in my case, whenever there will be something that I will have to read or write, I can always ask Roxanne to do it for me.

Back when I was still going to school in my old world, the only language I was good at was Japanese, my mother tongue. As for English, I was not all that good at it and I could never bother myself to learn it better in middle

school and throughout what little of high school that I attended, which left my understanding of it at a pretty basic level, maybe even less than that. And now, the story pretty much repeats itself, but this time with Brahim. Oh man, how I envy Schliemann (**TL Note: Heinrich Schliemann, a German archeologist who came up with the Schliemann Language Learning Method**) and how fast and easy it was for him to learn any language he wanted.

「Th-Thank you very much.」

「You are welcome. By the way, can you read Brahim, Sherry?」

「Yes, I can. I learned how to speak Brahim during my stay at the Slave Shop, and the letters used in Brahim writing are the same as the words of the Brahim language, so I know both how to speak and write in it.」

「I see.」

I guess the old saying that you can use French, English and German languages, both spoken and written as long as you know the letters of the Latin alphabet can also be applied to the Brahim language here as well. The only problem that leaves now is the pronunciation. I wonder how is it with Brahim? Is it also similar, or maybe slightly different after all?

「You learned Brahim at the Slave Shop? That is surprising. I thought that since you said that you had books at home, you learned Brahim by reading those and speaking the words you found in them.」

「I probably would have done that if these books were written in Brahim, but that was not the case. Since I was living in a Dwarven household and the books were all about smithing and smithing-related subjects, they were all written in Dwarven language as well.」

「You are amazing, Sherry! When I was learning how to read and write, I had to do it letter by letter.」

「While we are still relatively on the subject, is there anywhere you would like to go, Roxanne?」

I asked her while we were walking side by side.

「No, not especially.」

「I see. Okay then.」

「Oh, uhm..... if I said that I wanted to go somewhere in particular, would master take me there?」

Roxanne looked into my eyes.

「That is right. Wherever you want to go, I will take you there.」

「Uhm. The place where I want to go is wherever master wants to go. So please, wherever we end up going, just take me there with you, and I will need nothing else to be happy.」

What is this? How can she be so cute all the time?! Unable to resist the urge, I stroked Roxanne's doggy ears. She is absolutely the best after all. No one else can even begin to compare to her when it comes to her sheer cuteness factor!

「I understand. Thank you.」

「Yes, of course.」

「I-I also want to go with master wherever he goes!」

Sherry also called out to me like that, which made me feel somewhat bad for her, because that way it probably looks like I forced her to say it thanks to my interaction with Roxanne just now, which caused her to not want to be inferior to her in that regard.

After that, we made our way to the clothing store where we did that Rabbit Meat commission for the Male Clerk, and also where I bought the negligees that are now being used by Roxanne and Sherry.

「Okay, now I want you to go and pick two pieces of clothing each for yourselves.」

「Of course, master. Thank you.」

Once I gave Roxanne my instructions and left her together with Sherry so that they could pick their clothes in peace, I went towards the counter in order to sell the Rabbit Fur first. I was hoping that by the time I will finish selling them and return to the girl's side with the payment for the furs in hand, but once again I have been thoroughly disappointed. When I walked back to Roxanne, not only was she not done with making her choice, but it looked like she has not even started for good, taking a long and thorough look at each and every one of the camisoles and negligees that were placed on the tables before her. She then picked them all up, spread them on the tables and gave them another long and intense look when they were all spread out like that, until her eyes stopped on a light-red negligee, the very same one that she already has back home.

「Master, is that one going to be all right with you?」

「Yes, as long as it is the one that you have chosen, I do not see why I would have anything against it.」

When Roxanne asked me if it was fine if she took the red negligee and I gave her a go-ahead, she smiled at me happily. And by the way, if memory serves me correctly it was Roxanne herself who stated that the negligee of this color was the one that she liked out of all of the ones available here when we were shopping for them the last time. In that sense, it was Roxanne herself, not I, who picked that negligee for her, but if she wants to believe that I was the one who did that for her, then who am I to correct her? I will just keep quiet and allow her to believe whatever she wants to believe.

「Yes, thank you. Sherry, you are going to be fine with the white one as well, right?」

「Yes. As long as we keep them separated by their colors, we will not mistake them with the others, so it is fine by me.」

Oh, that. honestly, they dealt with it faster than I was expecting them to this time. Which does not change the fact that they still ended up taking their sweet time. In the end, Roxanne decided to take the light-red negligee

and Sherry went along with the white one. Unfortunately, it does not look like there were any negligees that were children-sized, so sherry had to compromise by taking the smallest adult-sized negligee possible that the store had to sell. But even when we took that into consideration, it still looked a little loose when she tried it on, and the lower half of it made it look like she was wearing a normal skirt.

Chapter 5: Genghis Khan, Part 11

However, since this is supposed to be a nightgown worn only during the night hours, this should not be too much of a problem.

When we finished our visit to the clothing store, we made our way towards our next destination: Quratar Merchant's Guild. As I stopped by the entrance, a man different from the one I saw yesterday walked up to me and began chatting me up.

「Good day to you, sir. What is your business with the Merchant's Guild today?」

「I would like to inquire about the auctions for a little bit, if it is not a problem of course.」

「The name is Luke, and I am one of the brokers who acts as a middleman for those eager to participate in the auctions. If it is all right with you, sir, I will gladly hear and answer any questions that you might have.」

[Luke Acid],

Male, 28 years old

Job: Armor Merchant Lv.2

Equipment & Accessories: Sacrificial Misanga

Oh, quite conveniently for us, this guy is an Armor Merchant. Could it be that his level is low because he is still so young?

As for the Armor Merchant Job itself, I do not have it personally, and judging by its name it is rather obvious that it is acquired through the means of

buying and selling armor for yourself. Who knows, as long as I keep doing that and increase the level of my Merchant Job, maybe one day I will get my hands on it as well?

「I see. All right then, I will hear what you have to say to me.」

「Wonderful. Then please, follow me.」

I followed after the man, and he took me to the room similar to the one where I had talked to the other broker yesterday. He sat at one side of the table in the back of the room, so I took a seat at the other side, with Roxanne and Sherry sitting at the either side of me.

「If I may ask this of you, sir, then what is your name?」

「Michio. Kaga Michio.」

「Michio-sama then. Forgive me if it sound too direct, but it would seem that you have been here yesterday inquiring about the auctions, but were unable to secure a suitable deal for yourself. Is that right?」

For someone who was meeting me for the first time, this guy has a surprising amount of information about my visit here yesterday. Could it be that I was spied on? Or maybe Laurent the Sex Maniac, the broker whose offer I have refused yesterday told all of his colleagues and cohorts how our meeting went? Yeah, that sounds like a more probable option.

「Yes, you are right about that.」

「I see. Very well then. You wanted to know about the auctions, correct? Then allow me to give you a brief rundown of how they function here. On the left side of the guild building, there is a waiting room that was made specifically for those who are participating in the auctions. If you have made the appointment earlier, then you are allowed to use it at your own leisure, and it is also the place where the results of each auction are going to be posted for all those who are interested in seeing them to see. Alternatively, if you have your personal contracted broker and do not wish to mingle with the rest of the auctioneers, you can always schedule a meeting with your broker

so that he or she could relay the news of the auction's results to you personally. That is how the auctions generally work here.]

These are some pretty rigid rules. But now I fully see what Sherry meant by saying that all of the brokers cooperate and have a strong bond of solidarity with one another. Talking to the people who come visit the Merchants Guild is always an occasion for the acquisition of new customers, so I guess it can be called a kind of a concession between them, since the chances of acquiring new clients are shared equally between all of them, since if one broker fails to win a customer over, like it was with me and Laurel yesterday, there is always a chance that another broker might achieve what the other failed to do. On the other hand, if the customers were allowed to freely talk to whoever they wanted, it would have lead to competition over getting the customers, which could have directly lead to the reduction of overall fees, and that in turn would mean that the Merchant's Guild would not make as much of a profit as they could have made otherwise.

「Before we begin, let me ask you this: is the reason because I was approached by brokers yesterday, and today as well, because I was standing around looking all absent-minded, which prompted you to think that I am going to make an easy target for manipulation of myself?」

「No, no, no, that is not the case at all.」

「Good. Also, yesterday I talked with a man named Laurel, but I found the offer he presented me with to be lacking, so we did not strike a deal. Is that okay, or is it going to be a factor in my talks with you today as well?」

「No, of course not. If you did not make a deal with him, then that means that it was he who failed to appeal to a potential customer, so you have nothing to worry about.」

I thought that my refusal to accept Laurel's proposal yesterday might end up in considerably racking up the difficulty of finding out a potential replacement for him, but thankfully it does not look like it is going to be as difficult as I have initially thought. Well then, let me see what this guy will have to offer, and if I do not like it, I will simply refuse him just like I did with the other guy yesterday.

「Okay, in that case, I see no problems in talking with you.」

「Wonderful. Now, if I am to begin my explanation about auctions in more detail, can you please tell me which kind of auctions interests you the most, sir?」

「Both buying and selling auctions, since I know nothing about either of them.」

「When it comes to buying, it is possible for you to take care of everything by yourself, but in the most cases, potential clients tend to go about it by cooperating with a broker and middleman like myself, or Laurel, whom you had met yesterday. And that brings us to another important question: what kind of goods do you want to buy, sir?」

Since I displayed interest in buying things through auctions, Luke the Broker jumped at the opportunity that would allow his to earn some money off of me, as expected.

Even a complete beginner should know that if you know next to nothing about things like that, then managing and keeping an eye on the auctions is going to be impossible for a complete layman, and that is why brokers and middleman existed in the first place. With their assistance, the process of taking part in an auction is not going to be as puzzlingly perilous as it would have normally been.

「Kobold Skill Crystal.」

Just like with Laurel yesterday, I decided to be open about what I needed. Lying about it now would not help me in the slightest.

「Kobold Skill Crystals? I see. The day before yesterday, one of them was sold for five thousand two hundred Nars, and two days ago another one was sold for five thousand four hundred Nars. As for the bidding of the current auctions, it would seem that its current price once again averages at around five thousand two hundred Nars. I am not going to lie, the price is already expensive, but if you want to obtain it during the current auction and be willing to invest a sum bigger than that, I could arrange to enter you as

another bidder with the same price as the one from the day before yesterday: five thousand four hundred Nars.]

Luke the Broker replied without even looking at any kind of memos. Just from that action alone, I could say that he is an excellent middleman, or at the very least a better one than Laurel the Sex Maniac. If he would really arrange it for me to become a bidder in the current auction and I managed to win it, that would snatch me the Kobold Skill Crystal that Sherry could infuse into a weapon in the same manner as she did with the Rabbit Skill Crystal and the Copper Sword.

Chapter 5: Genghis Khan, Part 12

What is also important here is that the information that Luke told me just now were cross-checking themselves with the prices stated by Laurel, and since I remember the amounts of Nars that he stated, I also know that Luke was not lying about them in an attempt to set me up. Five thousand two hundred Nars, that is the current price of the Kobold Skill Crystal.

「Okay, enough about buying for now. Let us assume that now is not the best time for buying and move on to the selling.」

「As you wish, sir. What would you be interested in selling?」

「A set of six Copper Swords of Obstruction.」

「Oh, was the young lady here responsible for making them?」

The broker looked at Sherry with a glint of curiosity in his eyes. So he is able to tell that she is a Dwarf, and not just a young or young-looking human. I thought that it will not be all that obvious, since she does not look all that different from humans except for her short stature and thick hair, but apparently these characteristics were enough of a giveaway.

「That is right. Her name is Sherry.」

Since he was already able to tell who Sherry was there was no reason for me to hide her, so I simply introduced Sherry to him. I thought that Sherry was going to do that herself, but throughout this entire exchange she remained silent, so I had to do it for her. Did she not know how to greet people properly? No, since she received her education at the Slave Shop that cannot be the case. Maybe she thought that she should not be speaking herself when I was in the room since she is my slave then?

「I see. Moving on, in case of the process of selling items via an auction, there are two option you have available for you: sell the item that you want to get rid off immediately, or leave it to me to inform you when will be the best time to sell a particular item, a service that I will charge a small fee for.」

「Can you really do that for me?」

That is one of the things that I did not talk about with Laurel yesterday. Is it going to be advantageous for me to leave the decision for the time of the selling to a broker, or should I stick to deciding that for myself? If I do leave it to him, then I will not be able to do anything with the items until the time is going to be right. Also, what would bring me more money, a weapon with 「Chant Delay」or perhaps the one with 「Chant Interruption」? However, if I end up being beaten in an auction, none of these things are going to matter and I will lose the advantage that I could have gotten otherwise. Also, I should not be expecting the items to be bought at the same rate and price as the one present when the middleman puts the items on sale.

「I most definitely can, but do bear in mind that it will not always be possible to determine the most opportune moment to sell every item, so if you want to sell something in a hurry, you should not wait and go for the immediate sell option.」

「Go for the immediate sell if I am in a hurry, huh?」

I guess that makes sense, since keeping an item on me and waiting for the moment where I will be able to sell it for a really good price might not always be possible. If I want to strengthen the equipment of all the members of my Party as soon as possible, then I am going to need as much money as I can get, as fast as I can get, so an early selling of the set of six 「Copper Swords of Obstruction」would definitely be a good investment. Even if it would mean selling for not as much money as I have originally intended, selling them early would still be better than not selling them at all because I waited for a good business opportunity that never came my way or holding onto them and letting them collect dust in my Item Box.

「As you probably know, 「Copper Swords of Obstruction」are weapons that are often used in the lower levels of the Labyrinths as a countermeasure

against the Skills used by the Floor Bosses on the lower floors. If you want to sell a set of full six pieces of them, then you can be sure that the demand for them is going to be high, because there are always going to be the people who will be in need of them, like freshly made Explorers and Adventurers or the Knight trainees.]

「The Knights? I thought that the Merchants Guild did not have such connections?」

「But now you know that us brokers have our ways of establishing our connections, which makes me wonder if it would not be a better idea to sell the swords that you are offering right away? Because I would be more than willing to buy them off of your hands.」

If what this broker is saying is true and he would really have connections to the Knights who would be willing to buy 「Copper Swords of Obstruction」 right away, then there would really be no need to go through the process of handing them off for an auction if he had someone who would be willing to pay for them right away. But there was also one additional development that this offer of his was proving: that he is aware that normally the Merchants Guild has no connections to the Knights, and that the one he mentioned was most likely his personal one, since he used the words 「*us brokers have our ways of establishing such connections*」 instead of 「*The Guild has ways of establishing such connections*」. And by presenting me with such a relatively risk-free offer, it was his way of appealing to me and showing his honesty. After all, if he is someone who can establish a trade connection with the Knights without the Merchants Guild officially having one, then that only serves to prove how much of an excellent broker he is.

I glanced at Roxanne and Sherry, but neither of them looked like they had any particular objections towards the idea of going along with the offer that this guy was extending.

「So, if I was willing to sell the 「Copper Swords of Obstruction」 to you, then for how much would you be willing to buy them?」

「Let me think. hmm, if you were selling them alone, then I would offer fifteen thousand Nars per sword, but since you are offering to sell a full

set of six swords, then the price has to be increased accordingly. How does. one hundred thousand Nars for all six of them sound?」

So he is offering the same price as the broker from yesterday. That would mean that he wold be paying around sixteen thousand six hundred Nars per sword. Could it be that this is their usual market price when you sell 「Copper Swords of Obstruction」 as a set? That is definitely not a bad deal, but I wonder if I could elevate it just a little bit higher?

「How about giving me eighteen thousand Nars per sword, one hundred and eight thousand Nars for a full set?」

「I am afraid that I cannot pay that much for them.」

Figures. But it is okay, not all hope for a bigger profit is lost just yet. Let me try lowering the price for a bit more.

「If eighteen thousand per sword is too much, then how about seventeen thousand five hundred?」

「Better than your initial offer, sir, but if I am to buy those swords odd of you in bulk, then the best I can do is seventeen thousand Nars per sword.」

So that is going to be his final offer, huh? Not too much of an improvement over the initial one, but I guess one hundred and two thousand Nars is always better than one hundred thousand Nars. I really wanted to try haggling some more, but I guess it cannot be helped. I take what I managed to get for myself and be happy that I managed to get it in the first place. The last thing that I want to do is to get

needlessly greedy with a broker whom I just met.

Chapter 5: Genghis Khan, Part 13

「Okay, seventeen thousand Nars per sword is fine with me.」

「Thank you for your understanding, sir. Do you have the swords with you right now, or do you need time in order to go and bring them here?」

「I have them here with me. They are in my Item Box.」

「Then, if it is all right with you, I would like to call for a Weapons Merchant so that he could appraise them and confirm their legitimacy. I would have done that myself, but unfortunately, I am an Armor Merchant, not a Weapons Merchant, so I can only appraise armor instead of weapons. Oh, and please, do not worry about the appraisal fee. Since your decision to sell the swords in your possession right away was a spontaneous one, then allow me to take care of the costs.」

With that said, Luke the Broker stood up and left the room, leaving me alone in it with Sherry and Roxanne.

「The decision to sell these swords was a truly spontaneous one, but I trust that neither of you have any issues with that, right?」

「Yes, of course.」

「Worry not, master. Since I am your slave, everything I make belongs to you, and you are free to do whatever you see fit with those items.」

「Well, thank you very much Sherry, but without you and your Master Smith Job it would have been impossible to make those six 「Copper Swords of Obstruction」 and sell them at such a high price now, so I am going to give the credit where the credit is due.」

While Luke the Broker was still not back with the Weapons Merchant, I materialized my Item Box and took out all six 「Copper Swords of Obstruction」 out of it. It would have been more than a little annoying if I had to do it all in front of him while pretending that I was using the proper chant, you know?

After a while more of absence, the broker finally returned to the room, and he brought the Weapons Merchant with him, exactly like he promised he would do, and something was telling me that there is a strong possibility that this Weapons Merchant might be a middleman as well. I placed all of the swords on the table and he fiddled with them for a moment before he declared:

「Those are six copies of the 「Copper Swords of Obstruction」, without a shadow of a doubt.」

Well duh, of course they are. Who do you take me for, a counterfeiter who was looking forward to making an attempt at getting some quick cash?

As soon as he was done confirming the authenticity of the weapons on the table, the Weapons Merchant left the room, leaving us alone with the broker again.

「Now that there is no doubt as to the authenticity of the swords that sir is offering, I can proudly say that the deal has been made. Here is your payment: one hundred and two thousand Nars for the six 「Copper Swords of Obstruction」, and a special bonus of thirty thousand six hundred Nars to commemorate the beginning of, hopefully, a very fruitful partnership for the both of us. As for my personal payment for this transaction, it is going to be two thousand six hundred Nars, leaving you with one hundred and thirty thousand Nars total.」

One hundred and thirty thousand Nars for the six 「Copper Swords of Obstruction」? Hell yeah! Let's! ! ! Fucking! ! ! GOOOO! ! !

Luke the Broker then opened his own Item Box and placed all of the swords that he got from me there. Next, he procured a number of gold and silver coins, my payment for this transaction, and placed them on the table in front of me. It was a total amount of thirteen gold coins and twenty six silver coins.

Man, 「Thirty Percent Discount」 is a wonderful Skill to have. With it around, things that would normally be classified as a fraud, stealing or robbery pass on as something completely normal, and no one even bats an eye or dares to question it! The only regret that I have in regards to that Skill is that it works only on the final, summed-up price of all six products, and not for all of the six swords separately. If I could do it like that, then I am sure that I would have been able to milk Luke the Broker out of an even bigger sum of money, and he would simply accept as the most obvious thing under the sun.

「Thank you very much, it is a pleasure to be doing business with you. Also, in the near future, if you happened to have any information about Skill Crystals available for purchase at affordable prices, I would be very interested in buying them from you. Would that be possible?」

I took the money from him and placed them in the safety of my Item Box. While doing so, I tried to inquire bout the possibility of striking any more possible deals with him in the future. This man, Luke Acid, seems like a truly excellent middleman, and if I could strike such a good deal with him even though he technically is just an Armor Merchant, then I think there will be no harm in continuing to buy and sell items from him, especially if my 「Thirty Percent Discount」continues to yield me such wonderful results.

My ability to appraise items and equipment with 「Identify」is going to give me an overwhelming advantage, because it will make it all too easy to find equipment with Empty Skill Slots, and that in turn will allow Sherry to create items and equipment with Skills embedded into them without the risk of failing the fusion, which is going to give birth to the best possible loop of creating and selling things to Luke the Broker at thirty percent increased prices! And I will be able to use that system any time when it will look like the possibility of winning an auction is going to be too low, which does not change the fact that I should still use both selling and buying auctions, just so that I could see for myself how both of them work.

One other merit to my current situation will also be that if I decide to buy things from auctions through the use of the middleman, I will not be having peoples attention fixed directly on myself, and since Luke is the mind of merchant who seems to be having his own share of secret business endeavors, then I can probably rest assured that he is not going to go around announcing

to everyone that he and I have become business partners. On the flipside, I also cannot allow the fact that a skilled merchant like him found his way to me get into my head. I have to keep it cool and hold my hand as close to my chest as possible, only revealing the cards in it when it will be absolutely necessary. And while we are on the subject of buying and selling, I should also make sure not to sale too many items with Skills in them at once and in a short amount of time. I should be selling them little by little once in a while to ensure that the market prices of the items that I will be selling do not plummet and collapse, because that would only make things more difficult for the both of us.

「Did you. use a Skill Crystal you obtained on your own to make these swords?」

「That is right.」

Luke the Broker was looking at mine and Sherry's faces with a mixture of curiosity and slight alertness. I wonder why is that? Did Sherry said something wrong just now, or said something that she should not have said?

「If you managed to do that, then I am sure that you must be pretty experienced and have good skills as a Master Smith.」

He shook his head with a smile. Wait a minute. did he said「Swords」? Not 「Sword」, but 「Swords」, as in, plural? Is. is it just me, or does this guy think that Sherry was the one who made all six of these 「Copper Swords of Obstruction」by herself? I mean, if she did fuse all six of them on her own, then I guess it would really be a testament to how Skilled as a Master Smith she was.

Chapter 5: Genghis Khan, Part 14

And if that is the case, then I see no need in correcting his thinking by saying that she only made one of them. If he wants to think that Sherry is so amazing that she created six 「Copper Swords of Obstruction」, then so be it. Is that what he meant when he was saying that Sherry must be pretty skilled and experienced? Or maybe he was deceived by how thin her ears are, because of the general understanding that the thinner the Dwarf's ears, the older they actually are? That is another misunderstanding of his, and a pretty big one at that, but it is also the one that I cannot hold against him, because if I was not Sherry's owner and looked it up at her Intelligence Card or had my 「Identify」 Skill, I would have also thought the same and it would have never even crossed my mind that she is actually one year younger than me.

「Of course Sherry is skilled. She and I are both good with our hands.」

That is another thing that I will not bother to correct him about, because that little lie might actually be pretty advantageous for us in its own right.

「I see. Well, let me give you a bit of advice when it comes to smithing and item fusion: There are people who buy cheap Skill Crystals and fuse them together with equipment to make weapons and armors with Skills in them in order to sell them at an elevated price and in large quantities, so if you are planning to do the same, I would not recommend it all that much. It would be bad for the business as a whole, not to mention incredibly reckless, and even if it would give you a lot of profit in the short term, then the long-term consequences of such an act would be pretty catastrophic for the market.」

I already know that, but there is no harm in asking for a little more detailed clarification, so . . .

「Why would that be so bad?」

「Because normally people tend to buy certain things only when they need them, and when they do not need them, they do not buy them. Usually, the number of people that need certain items is always going to be bigger than the amount of the item that they need, which makes it possible for those in possession of said items, or those who deal in buying and selling them to increase or decrease the price of that item accordingly when they are being put on an auction. But when many people try to sell large quantities of items simply because they used cheap materials to make a lot of them in hopes of quickly gaining a fortune for themselves, what they end up achieving is the effect opposite to the one that they have intended. Over the years of my work as broker I have seen many who have attempted to do that, but very few who have actually succeeded.」

So that is it. What he meant to say is that when there are many competitors who try to manipulate the prices by bringing too much of a certain item onto the market, it ends up screwing up demand and supply, causing those who thought they are going to make huge money on it go through nothing more but huge disappointment. After all, for everyone else but me, the process of fusing equipment and Skill Crystals together is a huge gamble where the odds are stacked against you at all times. Just one successful fusion is normally a cause for celebration, and two successful fusions in a row would probably mean that whoever achieved that could make a lot of money with just those two fused items alone.

However, that is the purely idealistic version of how things would go, because as we are all well aware, the reality is not as kind to the people as they would wish it to be, because when you use auctions and go through them with the help of a middleman, you have to be aware that a part of the fortune you would make by selling the items the Master Smiths have created would have to go to the broker himself because they do not run charities, and this is their way of making money. I think that many Master Smiths fail to realize that because if they manage to succeed with the fusion of the items, they become blinded by the prospect of how much money they could earn, and then they have their sweet dreams shattered when they do not earn as much money as they have initially thought they would earn.

「Sherry, if you do not mind me asking, does being a skilled Master Smith has

any effect on the success rate of fusing Skill Crystals with equipment, or is it just a superstition?」

「I cannot say with absolute certainty, but the belief that the success rate of Skill Crystal fusion is going to be greater if the Master Smith performing the fusion is a skilled one is certainly quite popular these days.」

When I asked her about it, that was Sherry's opinion on the matter, but I have to remember that hers might be a somewhat biased one, because she only learned that she became a Master Smith recently, and moreover, I kind of forced her into making her first fusion, and she was pretty desperate to become a Master Smith even though she herself claimed that it was not the case at all.

However, that information actually works in my favor, because I know with absolute certainty that it a load of horse crap.

The success rate of the fusion does not depend on the level of the Master Smith, or how skilled he or she is. The success rate of Skill Crystal fusion depends only on one factor, and one factor alone: whether the piece of equipment that you want to infuse has Empty Skill Slots or not. If it has, the fusion will be successful, and if it does not have them, the fusion is going to end up in failure.

「Do not worry, Sherry. I am not going to force you to do anything that you do not want to do.」

For the time being, I decided to reassure Sherry that I am not going to behave like a slave driver that would force her to fuse items against her will.

「I see. Thank you for being so kind to me, master.」

「If that was what you were worrying about, then you can rest assured. My goal is not to try to make a quick fortune or to destabilize the market. I am simply trying to equip my Party members and myself with the best gear possible so that we could make the exploration of the Labyrinths that much easier for ourselves.」

I explained to Luke the broker what my objective here was.

「In that case it would be my pleasure to continue doing business with you as a broker. Let me just tell you that: since there will be a lot of competitors during the auctions, it might not always be possible for you to buy things at extremely low prices. Is that all right with you?」

So it seems that will not have any issues with being my personal broker from now on. He also knows that I have one hundred and thirty thousand Nars on me right now, so there is no way he would pull out from doing business with someone who has that much money on them.

「Basically, if the prices end up being a little cheaper than the regular market price, I would have no problems with it, and I will leave all the decisions related to the process of buying and selling to your judgement. Also, can you tell me if you have Scissor-esque Carnivorous Plant Skill Crystal available for sale?」

「For the 「MP Absorption」 Skill?」

Sherry checked in with me, and I nodded affirmatively, confirming my intentions. Having more than one weapon that would allow us to regenerate MP is definitely going to be useful, and for that, we would need Scissor-esque Carnivorous Plant Skill Crystal.

「If possible, I would also like to get some more Rabbit Skill Crystals to create more weapons with 「Chant Interruption」 for us. Once I get my hands on those, I would then like to aim for the Kobold Skill Crystals.」

If I reduce the number of situations where I use Durandal to fight, it would enable me to get more Bonus Points into increasing the value of EXP obtained from monsters, allowing us for large gains of it, we should be aiming for that in the first place.

Chapter 5: Genghis Khan, Part 15

And since we can use the eighth floor and its Needlewoods as our new farming spot, 「Chant Interruption」Skill will be immensely useful to us.

「I see. Is there anything else we would need?」

I asked Sherry to be sure that we got everything we would need on the list.

「I think it would be a good idea to make a 「Sacrificial Misanga」by fusing a Green Caterpillar's Skill Crystal with a regular Misanga.」

「Sacrificial Misanga」, huh? Luke the Broker was wearing something that was named exactly like that. If its name is anything to go by, then I am guessing that it is going to be something related blocking, or perhaps even negating an attack that is going to be targeted towards the one who is wearing it?

「In that case, please add Green Caterpillar Skill Crystal to the list of the items I would like to get from auctions. As long as my Party members feel like it is going to be something necessary for us to obtain, I do not mind getting it, even if it is going to be a little bit on the expensive side.」

「Understood. The fee for purchasing Skill Crystals is five hundred Nars. If there will ever be a time where you are going to have some more questions and I will not be in the anywhere in the Guild's main hall, then just go to the waiting room and ask one of the staff members there to call Luke the Armor Merchant for you.」

「Understood. I will make sure to do just that if the need ever arises.」

I assured him as I handed the five silver coins off to him.

「Well then, I guess that concludes our business today. Thank you for your patronage, Michio-sama, and I hope for our partnership to be a fruitful one.」

When our business was over, Luke the Armor Merchant bowed down to me and left the room, leaving only the echo of his final words behind him.

「That man is weird.」

That was what Sherry said to me as soon as we left the Merchant's Guild and got far away from it to be absolutely sure that nobody could eavesdrop on our conversation.

「Strange? What do you mean, strange?」

「I mean, it was awfully nice of him to give you a bonus to commemorate the beginning of your partnership, but still . . . why did he give you such an odd number as one hundred and thirty- two thousand Nars? No matter how hard I try to find any semblance of reason behind it, I fail to see it. I just do not know what that man was thinking by offering you such an amount of money.」

「Ahhh, I see. So that is what you have been worried about.」

For someone without the knowledge of the Skills that I have at my disposal, such an uneven number is undoubtedly doing to sound strange, and it is only natural that Sherry would get suspicious of someone who offered me such a strange price seemingly out of nowhere.

「I knew it. Broker and middlemen are all a shady bunch that should not be trusted at all.」

I realized that Sherry was somewhat distrustful of the brokers and middleman from the Merchants Guild, but that comment of hers just now only solidified that belief for me.

「Yes, you did tell me that yesterday before we got here, and thanks to that, I was able to avoid the pitfall that Laurel was trying to lure me in. Thank you for that, Sherry.」

「Please think nothing of it, master. It is a slave's duty to ensure that no harm comes to their master, no matter if it is a physical or financial one.」

「Yeah, but still, I feel like thanks were in order, and that is why I have extended them to you. Let us keep being careful in our dealings with the Merchants Guild from now on.」

「Yes, of course!」

「I agree with both master and Sherry of course, but I also think that this man must have given master such a good price because he was able to see how amazing of a person master truly is.」

Roxanne, it is nice to know that this is how you feel, but it definitely would not hurt you to be just a little bit more distrustful of others, especially if they are brokers and middlemen whose Job is to make money out of other people trying to make money for themselves, you know?

「Sherry, you mentioned that item in our conversation with Luke before, but what kind of item is 「Sacrificial Misanga」, exactly?」

I asked Sherry because I felt genuinely interested in the subject of that item.

「It is an accessory whose purpose is to sometimes absorb the attack that the enemy directs towards its wearer.」

「Sometimes? Not always?」

Does that mean that the effect of absorbing the attack targeted at the wearer has only a certain percentage chance of activating, or are there some other restrictions added to it as well?

「Well, basically, there are rumors that state that 「Sacrificial Misanga's」 effect has a higher probability of being activated if the attack that is supposed to be absorbed is a really strong one, but the strength of the person wearing it also seems to be one of the factors for it. From what I have heard, more often than not it seems to be working for the people who are fighting against strong monsters at the upper floors of the Labyrinths, whereas it almost never

activates on the lower floors of the Labyrinths where the enemies are all relatively weak, or at least that is how the story goes.]

「I see, so that is how it works.」

Then, are there really no other conditions to it after all? Like, for example, that the effect of absorbing the attack only activates if the attack that hits you shaves off more than half of your HP, or that it only works for the attacks that would leave you with 1 HP or the one that would have outright killed you? And does the effect work for just a single attack, or perhaps for an entire series of attacks that would have normally reduced your HP to zero?

Well, whatever the case with that might be, as long as you figure out exactly how to proc its effect, then it is going to be a really handy piece of equipment.

「So, what happens when the effect of 「Sacrificial Misanga」 gets successfully activated?」

「The item itself is going to be destroyed, but in exchange, it completely nullifies the attack, eliminating even the things such as the feelings of shock or pain that would normally be there when you suffer a direct hit. The downside is that it only works once, so people who have to go into close quarters combat tend to not rely on it very often, but it is the most useful for those who into the Labyrinths only occasionally or those who use magic from the backline as a last resort for when they might get hit by the monster that broke through the vanguard's defenses.」

Well, since it gets destroyed after absorbing only one attack, then I can definitely see why regular physical fighters be reluctant to be using it, since when you fight with monsters it is common for them to be using more than just one attack, not to mention that knowing that your final line of defense against being killed is only going to last for one hit before disappearing without a trace is pretty damn scary in its own right. I guess I technically could have Sherry make that item and then we could run some experiments to see what are the exact condition for the activation of that item's Skill, but since its effect only works once and then the misanga gets destroyed.

「Sherry, if you were to make this item, then would you say that it would be good for Roxanne, since she is fighting on the front lines, but is so good at dodging that she rarely gets hit by any attacks?」

「No, I think that you would be the one who would benefit the most from wearing it, master.」

「I can totally see why you would think like that, but cannot help it but feel that such a good effect that it has would be wasted on me if I am to be staying in the backline. In my opinion, you or Roxanne, the Party members who are always on the frontlines, would be much better off with it.」

Chapter 5: Genghis Khan, Part 16

「And I heard more than one tale of how wearing a「Sacrificial Misanga」helped save the life of many a Party Leader who thought that they are not going to be needing it, only to realize after the fact how lucky they were to have it. So I insist that if we ever end up making one, you should be the one to wear it, master.」

Roxanne insisted on me wearing the「Sacrificial Misanga」as well.

「I understand. If you ever make one of them, I will be sure to wear it on me during the trips to the Labyrinths.」

「Uhm. okay, I will try to do my very best when that time will come.」

「Of course you will, and I have no doubts that you are going to succeed with flying colors. I have absolute faith in your abilities, Sherry.」

「T-Thank you very much, but I really do not think that being a skillful Master Smith has anything to do with increasing the success rate of the「Skill Crystal Fusion」.」

Yeah, that is what I think as well, but I cannot just blurt it out of the blue like that. So instead. . .

「Is that so? Why is that?」

That is what I wanted to ask, but Roxanne has beaten me to the punch.

「Generally, it is said that the better the Master Smith, the higher the success rate of the item fusions that he or she performs, but a great old scholar once said that there is actually no correlation between those two things

whatsoever.]

「Oh, is that so? I did not know that!」

Roxanne and Sherry then proceeded to have such a conversation. While we are already on the subject, then I wonder if these 「Scholars of Old」 that Sherry is talking so much about had any grounds to base their claims and theories on, or were they simply trying to pass whatever came to their minds as scientific theories without having any way of proving if what they were claiming was actually right or not? Because if they did not have anything to prove that their claims had any base in reality, then they were simply trying to scam and deceive the people while making themselves look smart and that is something that I absolutely do not approve.

「Is 「Sacrificial Misanga」 a good item to wear not only when going against tougher enemies on the higher floors of the Labyrinths, but during the hunt for Skill Crystals and materials from monsters as well?」

「It is not strictly bad, but I would not go and say that it is the best thing that you can possibly wear either. Not to mention that in and out of themselves misangas are quite cheap, so Armor and Accessory stores will not even buy them if you tried selling it to them, and aside from their Skill, they offer next to no defensive value whatsoever.」

「But in that case, would it not be quite wasteful if it broke and you lost it, and then you would be forced to go hunt for another Skill Crystal for the purpose of fusion if you wanted to keep wearing it?」

「Of course it would be wasteful, and that is precisely why most of the people who managed to get their hands on one of them tend to never use them exactly because of the fear of losing such a helpful item to a random monster attack.」

Sherry said that the moment when 「Sacrificial Misanga's」 Skill activates and gets expended, the whole item is going to be destroyed. That is why I was wondering if that Skill, let us call it 「Sacrifice」 for the time being, would do the same to all pieces of equipment it would be attached to. Because if so, then even if the effect itself might be useful when fighting hard battles

against tough opponents, it would still be a huge waste to simply go and carelessly attach it any of our valuable pieces of equipment.

「Are misangas hard to create? Because right now, everything I have heard about it makes me think that there is an awful lot of hassle involved with practically every aspect of that accessory.」

「That is the first impression that most of the people are getting, but in actuality, misangas themselves are quite easy to make since in order to create it all you have to do is to combine a number of simple threads together, and they are usually one of the first few items that every Master Smith is taught to make at the practice table.」

「A practice table, huh? If you had one of these, would you like to try making a misanga as well, Sherry?」

「Thank you very much for the suggestion, master, however, I believe that doing this would be counterproductive and only lead to a waste of our precious money and resources. As I said, misangas cannot be sold at Armor or Accessory Stores, and I think that they would not sell well even at a General Store. Looking from a perspective of someone who just became a Master Smith, if you would keep buying threads from the Merchants Guild, you would quickly go into the red money-wise. That is why a common practice among freshly-made Master Smiths is to go into the Labyrinth in order to fight against the Green Caterpillars and collect their Silk Threads, which they can then use to try and create two misangas a day, one in the morning, and one in the evening once enough treads have been gathered.」

Only two misangas a day, one in the morning and one in the evening, huh? Well, seeing how just one item fusion consumed so much of Sherry's MP that she must have lost all of it at once, I can definitely see how that would be a problem for the Dwarves who just became Master Smiths, but had no reliable way of replenishing their MP and had to result to waiting until it recovers naturally. But such a strategy also had one major plus to it: while they were in the Labyrinths collecting Silk Threads from Green Caterpillars, they definitely are able to increase the levels of their Master Smith Jobs, in only by one or two. Training combined with item gathering. . . . talk about killing two birds with one stone.

「Okay, so now that I sold all of the 「Copper Swords of Obstruction」 in our possession, it would be a good idea to get ourselves some new ones as a replacement. Would you be able to make them, Sherry?」

「I am sorry, master, but I think that currently it would be impossible because I am just getting started as a Master Smith. At the current moment the best course of action for me would be to start my training as a Master Smith from making misangas, and then gradually move on into making more complex and difficult things.」

「Is that so? Well, I guess it really would be impossible to go and ask a novice to suddenly start making things that are way out of their league, huh?」

「I am truly sorry, and I hope that soon I will master the art of forging and fusing enough to be of real help to you, master.」

Sigh So it is just like I was afraid it would be. Just because Sherry managed to become a Master Smith, it does not necessarily mean that she will be able to do anything right from the get-go. Right now she should have her Master Smith Job at Lv.2, so I guess the only thing there is to do right now is to allow her to gain more EXP so that both the level of that Job and her maximum amount of MP both increase to such a degree where she will no longer drain herself out of MP completely after performing just a single fusion. And since I have a Bonus Skill that gives me twenty times more EXP than usual, the process of Sherry's growth is not going to take as long as it normally would.

「Do not worry. You have already helped me greatly by learning Skill Crystal Fusion. Should we go to the Weapon Store and buy ourselves a sword or two?」

On our way back home from the Merchants Guild we stopped by the Weapon Shop to look at the swords they were offering there.

We are here because I needed a replacement sword for when I shift my build more towards using magic. Whenever that happens, I cannot just go around using Durandal all the time, because that would be a dead giveaway for other people that I am not an ordinary Mage.

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But at the same time, I need something that would be more than just a weapon for show, because a Wand cannot be used as a physical weapon during the times of emergency. That is why I also need to have a sword for myself, just in case I ever needed to protect myself when a monster would run into my melee range, where using magic would no longer be an option. Now, the question is: what kind of sword should I take? Should I go with an ordinary Copper Sword on the assumption that I will rarely use it? Or maybe something better than that, something that I would be using more often? Anyway, it is a good thing that I have 「Identify」 and that it works on weapons and items as well as humans, because without it I would have probably choose something that does not have any Empty Skill Slots, rendering the potential fusions of these weapons with Skill Crystals completely useless.

Looking at all the swords in the store's offer, the thing right above the Copper Sword in terms of Quality was the Iron Sword. Getting something like that for myself should be reasonable enough, right? The Iron Sword also has variants that have either one or two Empty Skill Slots whereas the Copper Swords only have a single Empty Skill Slot, however, none of the weapons that are being put on display here seem to have actual Skills embedded into them. I briefly looked at the Scimitars as well, but they also had only a single Empty Skill Slot. This is a little letdown, but still well within what I was expecting. After all, it would be a dream come true if I could find a good weapon with Skills already in it in an ordinary Weapon Shop, and as we are all well aware, dreams do not often come true when we want them to. I just have to move on and keep searching for something that might end up being a good enough substitute for Durandal.

The type of Sword that is a tier above the Iron Sword is a Steel Sword. When it comes to them, they had up to three Empty Skill Slots, which was a pleasant surprise. There was also a thing called Damascus Steel Sword, but

since it is being displayed on the wall behind the counter where the Shop owner is, so it is probably not for sale and is intended to only serve a purely decorative purpose. Maybe it is the finest piece of weaponry that the owner has available, and that is why he wanted to gloat to everyone about it?

Looking at it from a distance, I did not see any Empty Skill Slots in it at all, so I stopped carrying about it immediately, because I do not need anything that is both more expensive than anything else that the store has to offer and does not have Empty Skill Slots which would enable it to become even more stronger with the Skill Crystal Fusion.

Maybe I should just stick to buying myself an Iron Sword, which seemed like a good balance of price and the Skill Slots it offered? It is the type of weapon that is neither low or high tier, so if I end up infusing it with Skills, I should still be able to sell it for a good price without having too many regrets about it. I would also need to buy a spare sword to fuse and sell in case I ever end up finding another Skill Crystal as a Drop Item from the monsters roaming about in the Labyrinths

In the end, I ended up buying one Copper Sword and one Iron Sword for myself. Both of them have Empty Skill Slots, of course. The Iron Sword has two Empty Skill Slots in it while the Copper Sword has a regular one Skill Slot. Also, it occurred to me only after I finalized the purchase of these swords, but. but maybe I should have gone and buy two pieces of the same type of sword instead of two different ones, because buying two of the same swords would have allowed me to save up that much space in my Item Box. The way Item Box works, as long as you have multiple copies of the same item, you can place more than one copy of it into one item slot, but Copper Sword and Iron Sword are going to occupy two separate spaces since they are not the same. This is an oopsie on my part, but in hindsight it is not all that bad of an oopsie because a solution to the problem of taken space in the Item Box is quite simple here: if I am not going to be using the Copper Sword in favor of the Iron Sword, I can always leave the Copper Sword physically at home instead of keeping it in the Item Box.

「Sherry, am I right in thinking that in terms of the material hierarchy, a sword made out of steel is a cut above a sword made out of iron?」

It was hard for me to ask that of Sherry while we were still inside of the Weapons Shop because I did not want the owner to overhear us and think that I am a total amateur who does not know even the basic things like that, so I waited for it only after we left.

「Yes, when we talk about the order of the weapons, or rather the strength of the materials that have been used to make them it would be copper ==> iron ==> steel.」

「Okay, I understand that. However, why is steel considered stronger than iron since steel is technically made from iron?」

「Eh?」

Sherry stopped and looked at me as if I was some kind of braindead idiot.

「Ehhh?」

Oh my fuck, do not tell me that I have done it again! If that is indeed the case, then I sure as hell am glad that I did not mention any of that back in the Weapon Shop.

「Uhm. . . . let me confirm if I understand this correctly, master. You are asking if steel can be made from iron?」

「Well. . . . yeah, that is basically what I wanted to ask. Is it not the case here?」

「. Generally speaking, not only steel and iron, but all metals and materials similar to them are made through the process of processing the items obtained from the monsters from the Labyrinths.」

「Is. is that so?」

I thought that Sherry was going to look at me with those cold eyes of hers again, but this time it did not happen, thank god for that. Right now, due to how short she was she was looking up at me with gentle eyes.

「If I remember correctly, one of the great scholars of old wrote in some of his

notes that he would attempt to create steel by the means of using iron instead of monster materials. However, just because he wrote that he was going to attempt it does not mean that he has actually succeeded, and even if he did, the equipment and methods he might have used to do so are now considered to be a lost technology.]

「In other words, you do not know how to do it?」

「No, master. I really do not know how to do it, and even if I knew, I am sure that a feat like that would be something way beyond my current abilities as a newbie Master Smith.」

Even if it is lost now, if the technology allowing for the creation of steel by using iron exists out there somewhere, then it probably means that steel can be created by using iron. And that is good news. Very good indeed.

「It is okay, Sherry, you do not have to beat yourself up over it. The most important thing for me right now is knowing that steel can possibly be made from iron, and at the current moment I do not need anything else. But since we are already on the subject, then I would also like to know a few more things: is Damascus Steel similar to normal steel, or is it better from it?」

「Supposedly, since it is harder and more flexible than ordinary steel while maintaining the sharpness to its edge.」

「Now, since it is better, then can Damascus Steel also be made by using iron as the base component for it?」

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「Maybe it could, but currently this is nothing but a speculation.」

So Sherry does not know for sure, and at the current moment I do not have any means to confirm or deny that possibility. On to the next question then.

「Can Damascus Steel be dropped by a monster as its Drop Item?」

「Yes, it can. Damascus Steel is an item dropped by a monster called Rem Gollem.」

「Good. Damascus Steel is better than ordinary steel, but is there something that tops Damascus Steel in terms of value and durability?」

「That is right. Tha material that is a grade above Damascus Steel in a same way that Damascus Steel tops steel is called Orichalcum.」

Orichalcum? I feel like I have heard that name somewhere before, but I absolutely cannot remember where. Maybe is some RPG game, perhaps?

「Do you know about Orichalcum, master?」

Sherry asked, most likely because of the facial expression that I had when she mentioned Orichalcum.

「No, that is the first time I am hearing about it, but the name itself got me interested. Do you know how to make it?」

「No, and as of yet, I cannot even begin to imagine myself creating a high-grade material such as that.」

I guess I should have expected that, since back on earth Orichalcum was

depicted mostly as a legendary metal that was supposed to be tougher than all ordinary metals known to mankind. I just feel glad that it did not turn out that the thing that is a grade above Damascus Steel is actually Depleted Uranium, because then we would have a problem. oh, wait a minute. what if, what if Depleted Uranium was actually Orichalcum all along?!

「I see.」

Okay, let us not go to such places with my thought trains. Orichalcum is Orichalcum, and definitely not Depleted Uranium, and that is final, end of story.

「However, I did not see anything that would look like Orichalcum Sword back there in the Weapon Shop. It was filled only with Copper Swords, Iron Swords and Steel Swords. Are weapons made out of Orichalcum something that you cannot obtain from Weapon Shops, or through ordinary means?」

「When it comes to the Orichalcum-class weapons, I think it is quite possible the shopkeepers might be selling them only to the people whom they have close relationships with, or perhaps they sell them only through the auctions, and not in their shops directly. If the word got around that they are keeping such rare and valuable weapons in their stores, then the amount of break-ins and robberies in those establishments would simply skyrocket.」

Yeah, Sherry was absolutely right. If these weapons really are much more valuable than the regular ones, then of course it would make much more sense to sell them all at auctions where the prices can often get pretty ridiculous if you were to happen upon a bidder who would decide that he needs to have that particular item at all costs.

So that is how valuable Orichalcum and the weapons made out of it are for the people of this world? I am not going to lie, this makes me want to have one of these for myself, just so that I could see for myself how amazing they really are.

Afterwards, we went to the Labyrinth of Vale, but not to make any progress in our exploration, but simply so that we could go to its second floor to hunt ourselves some Green Caterpillars and collect their Drop Items: Silk Threads.

With a sizeable amount of them on us, we went back home, where I intended to have Sherry create us a Misanga before dinner.

「All right Sherry, here are all of the Silk Threads we have collected today. Think you will be able to make a Misanga out of them without any problems?」

「Yes, master, that should be more than enough. Well then, allow me to get to work on it!」

I handed all of the Silk Threads off to Sherry, and she accepted them eagerly. Next, she placed one bundle of Silk Threads in her left hand, and another one in her right hand and proceeded to chant the incantation for the 「Armor Creation」spell. When she was done, the threads in her hands began to shine with a brilliant, yet somewhat violent light which was reminiscent of the one that shined when she created a 「Copper Sword of Obstruction」. That was her cue to clasp her hands together, which caused the two base items in her hands to merge into a singular new item.

「I see now. So this is how accessories are made? I guess the process really is the same for all types of items, just like you said.」

「Ohhh, this is the first time where I have seen people actually make equipment. It looks every bit as amazing as I have imagined.」

So Roxanne also felt amazed when she saw Sherry make equipment, huh? Well, I can definitely say that I understand how she feels.

Eventually, the light in Sherry's hands finally subsided, revealing the final product of Sherry's latest fusion:

{Misanga}

Accessory

Skills: None

Effects: None

Yes, what remained in Sherry's hands now was a freshly created Misanga. As expected, even though it has been fused with a Skill, it had no Skills or effects because there was no Skill Crystals involved in the fusion process. Also, looking at Sherry now, it does not look like is experiencing any of the effects of the MP deficit, so that probably means that the fusion of ordinary items without any Skills added into them does not consume as much MP as the fusion of items with Skills in them does. But maybe I should ask her, just to be absolutely sure:

「How are you feeling, Sherry? No negative thought plaguing your head all of a sudden?」

「No, master, I feel fine. The fusion of equipment without any Skills added onto them does not cost as much MP as the fusion of items with Skills in them, so as long as you will want me to fuse ordinary items, I should be able to make a few of them instead of just one.」

「Okay, that is great to know, but tell me now: can the item and equipment fusion fail even when making simple equipment like the Misanga that you just created?」

「I should be fine as long as I will keep making simple things in order to gain more experience as a Master Smith, but if I suddenly tried to make something much more difficult, then the probability of failure would be much higher than usual. You also need to remember that even if you have the necessary tools and resources for making a successful fusion, there is always a chance that the fusion might randomly fail, and there is nothing you can do about it.」

Sherry answered. So as long as she keeps making normal items that are not too difficult to make she should be okay. Also, after our bit of exploration for Silk Threads her level as a Master Smith has increased to Lv.5, so even if she had to make something with a Skill in it, her MP should not get totally depleted with only a single fusion.

「Oh really?」

I muttered to myself while receiving the Misanga from Sherry's hands. Although it was created through a Skill, it looked like a perfectly ordinary

braided bracelet with nothing strange or abnormal about it. It is just a simple accessory that can be wrapped around your wrist or ankle.

「There is also a saying, or I guess a superstition would be the more appropriate word here, among the Master Smiths community. A superstition that states that if a Master Smith manages to create a 「Sacrificial Misanga」 as their first item ever fused, then that means that they are definitely going to have successful business as Master Smiths.」

「Is that so? Well, would it not be nice if that turned out to be true?」

「It most certainly would, but I would not hold my breath counting on it. That story is nothing more but a myth that is supposed to encourage the young Master Smiths to commit to their craft without the fear of failure.」

「A myth, huh? Well, you can never know for sure. Personally, I like to believe that every myth has a bit of truth mixed in with it.」

Of course it is a myth. Creating items with Skill in them has nothing to do with skill, luck, fate or any other similar thing.

Chapter 5: Genghis Khan, Part 19

All that matters with it is whether or not you have Skill Crystals and a weapon, armor or accessory with an Empty Skill Slot where that Skill Crystal can then be placed. Unfortunately, since the Misanga created by Sherry just now was made with plain ordinary Silk Thread, it meant that it did not come together with any Empty Skill Slots, not even one. In other words, no matter how hard I would have wanted it, it cannot be made into a 「Sacrificial Misanga」.

Also, is it just me, or is that myth one hell of an unfair one? I mean, what the hell man? A Master Smith who manages to create a 「Sacrificial Misanga」 is going to be a successful one and the one that does not manage to create it as their first fusion is not going to be a successful one? If that is not hellishly biased and RNG based, then I do not know what is, because it all depends on whether or not a Master Smith manages to obtain a piece of equipment with an empty Skill Slot in it or not. If he or she got lucky and got their hands on such an item, then hooray for them, they are going to be locked on a surefire express towards success according to the people and their myth. But if they did not have so much luck as to get their hands on something with Empty Skill Slots, they are going to end up the same way that Sherry did: being called a failure, a loser and being made an outcast.

However, Sherry proved that she is not a loser. Since she managed to become a Master Smith in the end, it should be enough of a proof to anyone who has ever doubted her that she is not a failure. There is absolutely no way that someone as cute as her could ever be a failure. She is and will be an amazing Master Smith, there are no doubts in my mind about that.

「It does not matter whether you are a skilled Master Smith or not. In practice that has nothing to do with the success rate of the Skill Crystal Fusion, and the same rule applies to the odds of creating a 「Sacrificial Misanga」. Your

own skills have nothing to do with it, all that it boils down to is blind luck, nothing more.]

That is right. Now that I have cracked the code with how does the fusion process work, Sherry will no longer have to worry herself with the odds of her fusions succeeding or failing, because as long as she follows my guidance, all of her fusions are going to have a one hundred percent success rate. The only unknown factor we have to be concerned about is the probability of creating the equipment that is going to have Empty Skill Slots in it. If I could just figure out how to make it so that each and every one of the items created by Sherry came up with Empty Skill Slots, then that combined with her hundred percent fusion success rate would have to make her one of the best Master Smiths in the empire, if not the best, most reliable Master Smiths in the entire world.

The best Master Smith, huh? Would that not be a thing to behold: being able to stick it to the ones who mocked and ridiculed you through nothing more but your honest work and its results, unlike all those other Master Smiths out there. Maybe thinking that if they can get an item with Empty Skill Slots through fusion is a way for the Master Smiths to psyche themselves up, because thinking like that makes them think that they are among the very few ones who are better than all the others? It might also be possible that different Master Smiths might have different odds of obtaining Empty Skill Slots on the equipment that they are making, but for the time being I should not worry myself with that.

「I see. Well, this is the first piece of equipment that you have made since you officially became a Master Smith, so I am going to be wearing this Misanga with pride, Sherry.]

「Are. are you sure about this, master? I mean, this is just an ordinary Misanga, without any Skills or additional effects, so it is literally not going to do anything to improve your defenses.]

「Maybe, but what of it? Does that make it useless, or something that you do not want me to wear?]」

「No, I. uhm, n-no, of course not. If you want to wear it even though

it does nothing special, then. then that makes me very happy, master. Thank you so very much.]

Sherry bowed her head down to me as if I had done something monumental or worthy of praise, while in truth I felt like I did no such thing.

Even though Sherry told me that the thing with being a skilled Master Smith having effect on your probability of successful fusion was nothing but a myth and I know it to be true. . . . it still makes me just a little bit curious, because the way I see it, it is kinda like with ghost stories. Even though you know that there are no ghosts and that they are not real, a part of you is still getting worried and frightened whenever you hear about them, and tells you that it would be good for you to avoid being alone near pitch-black spaces. . . . but instead of worrying about that, we should be focusing on two other things right now: getting more Skill Crystals for Sherry's future fusion, and before that, pray that she is going to create a Misanga that is actually going to have an Empty Skill Slot on it. Only when that happens will the things be able to truly kick off, enabling Sherry to start turning her dream of being a legitimate Master Smith into a reality. I just hope that from now it is going to be a smooth sailing for her, and that reality is not going to make her go through any more brutal reality checks like it did with me. I would absolutely hate it to see her dreams get shattered when they are so pure and genuine.

I took the Misanga created by Sherry and wrapped it neatly around my right ankle. Just hard enough for it not to fall off when I would move around a lot, but also just light enough for it not to feel uncomfortable and then tied it with a simple butterfly knot for the ease of taking it off in the evenings or during baths. That way, replacing it if it gets damaged is going to be easy as pie, and maybe I could even add some more decorations to it whenever I felt like it.

With that matter out of our way, we could finally proceed to making dinner, which is going to be a Genghis Khan hot pot. That is right, you heard it correctly. Not just your any other ordinary hot pot, but a Genghis Khan hot pot.

A Genghis Khan hot pot without any special tare sauce to pour on it, but a Genghis Khan hot pot nonetheless.

A Genghis Khan hot pot without regular barbequed lamb meat, but with a Goat Meat obtained from our battles with Pan on the seventh floor of the Vale's Labyrinth.

Overall, this is going to be a truly unorthodox Genghis Khan hot pot, but since this world does not have all the necessary ingredients needed in order to cook its modern-day iteration, but I have no choice other than to somehow deal with this conundrum by substituting the ingredients from earth with what we have available here.

Beginning the preparation process, I prepared a simple, disposable wooden stand and a pair of two iron plates. I placed one of the iron plates on top of the wood, put four moderately sized stones into the corners of that plate and then placed another iron plate on top of those stones, and filled the rest of the empty space between the two iron plates with charcoal. With that, my makeshift grill has been assembled. All that is left to do now is to light up the charcoal with a little bit of fire (I would not dare to use Fireball for it in fear of burning down the entire kitchen) and I slowly grilled all of the Goat Meat and selected vegetables on the upper plate until the meat was dripping juices and the vegetables were getting soft on the inside and crispy on the outside.

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Yeah. no matter how I look at it, this looks an awful lot like teppanyaki! ! ! How could I have messed up even something that is so simple to prepare. no. No, this is not teppanyaki. Since I am the only one in here who knows the actual difference between teppanyaki and Genghis Khan, that means that I am the one who has the right to decide what this dish is and how is it going to be called. And so, I hereby declare that this dish is a Genghis Khan hot pot! And to those who might be complaining that it is not a genuine Genghis Khan hot pot, at the very least I used the fish sauce to make the Goat Meat look similar to twice-cooked pork, one of the staple dishes that tend to be utilized in hot pots, so there you have it, Genghis Khan with my own twist added onto it!

Now that I have explained why this is a Genghis Khan hot pot even if some parts of it are clearly unorthodox, it was time to start making the finishing touches so that it could finally be served, so I used the leftover gravy in order to season the vegetables with it for a bit until they reaches just the right amount of softness and crispiness.

「Just a little bit more time and the meal should be ready.」

「Of course. Thank you for going out of your way to cook for us, master. I am sure it is going to be delicious.」

「Thanks, and you bet it is going to be delicious. I personally guarantee it, or my name is not Kaga Michio!」

All that is left to do now is to see if the meat and the vegetables are not burnt anywhere, and we are good to go. Since I was the cook responsible for the preparation of the entire meal this time, it was my responsibility both as the chef and the head of the household to divide the meat between all of the

residents.

Daddy Cool.

It would have been nice if we had some chopsticks that we could eat the meat with, but since we do not have them, forks will have to do instead. Also, even though Genghis Khan that I have prepared is the main dish and the star of the show here, we also had some side dishes to go with it, mainly: Roxanne's cream stew and Sherry's soup, both of which have been brought in and served together with bread right after I finished distributing the meat to all of us equally.



Taste wise, I have to say that it was nothing that would obliterate your taste buds with tasty goodness the moment you put it into your mouth, but it does not mean it was bad. Quite the opposite, actually. It was much better in comparison to the previous meat-based dish that I prepared last time, so I guess I could say that I was able to improve a bit as a cook thanks to that previous experience, and that is what cooking is all about: learning from your previous failures and using them as stepping stones for improvement.

「Master, it is delicious!」

Roxanne also said that the meal I have prepared was delicious, so I guess it paid to experiment with this Genghis Khan hot pot, even if I was not entirely sure how the end result was going to turn out, so all that is left for me to do now is to enjoy the taste of my deliciously-made meat and vegetables as I continued grill more of them while enjoying the mundane conversation about everything and nothing with my two beautiful slaves, which makes me feel the same level of luxury like Lieutenant General Mutaguchi when he surrounded himself with beautiful geishas during the battles in Meimyou. But even though I certainly enjoy such a cozy atmosphere, it does not change the fact that there is something that I wanted to ask Sherry about, and I think that right now might be as good of a time as any to finally get this matter out of the way.

「Sherry, I know that now might not be the best time to be asking something like that of you, but. if you do not mind, then would you tell us how exactly you have become a slave?」

I am certain that just like in Roxanne's case, there has to be some kind of story behind it, so if possible, I would like to learn what that story was.

「Uhm. I, w-well.」

「No, no, no, it is something that you would rather not talk about, then that is perfectly fine with me.」

It is true that I want to know about Sherry's past and how she became a slave, but if this subject is something that makes her remember particularly bad

memories, then I am not going to force her to share them with us just so that I could satisfy my own curiosity. So far, all that we know about her is that she must have come from a family that was doing pretty good for themselves because they were wealthy enough to have a number of books at home, but that is pretty much it.

「. No, it is all right, master. I knew that sooner or later you would want to know about it, and I do not intend to hide anything from you. The main reason, or rather, a cause behind me becoming a slave was because my brother got seriously injured while he was exploring the Labyrinth that was near our village.」

「Your brother. got injured?」

「Yes. Ours was mainly a family of Master Smiths, but my father was not as talented of a Master Smith as my grandfather was, so he was unable to create items could be sold for a lot of money, therefore he relied on my brother for being the main source of income after grandfather passed away.」

So it would seem that the generation to which Sherry's grandfather belonged was the one that was filled with pretty skilled Master Smiths and Sherry's grandfather was an especially good Master Smith even among all of them, but his son, Sherry's father, did not seem to inherit his father's abilities when it came to smithing, and that must have caused him to fall from grace, similar to what happened with Sherry when she failed to obtain the Job that everyone around her seemed to be obtaining pretty much effortlessly. The question now is: how big od a social stigma it was to be a bad Master Smith in the eyes of the Dwarven communities? Was it something that was seen as inconvenience, a kind of impotence, or something that would result in the ostracization of the entire family?

「So your brother got injured while in the Labyrinth, which made him incapable of providing further income for the family. What happened then?」

「We had to borrow money in order to buy the medicine that could help with his injury.」

「Borrowing money just so you could help heal your injured brother.

oh, Sherry, I am so sorry for you.]

「Well, if your brother's injury was a serious one, then I guess no ordinary medicine could help him, but rather a high-end one, right? In that case you would really have to pay a hefty amount to get that kind of medicine, which. . . . damn, I cannot even imagine how tough it must have been for you.」

Even if I did not want to patronize Sherry, I had no choice but to agree with Roxanne's words here.

「Let me guess: the real problems started only after you already bought the medicine, but you lacked the means of returning the money to those whom you borrowed them from？」

「That is just how it is with debts: once you end up taking one, getting out of it is going to grow harder and harder with each passing day.

Chapter 5: Genghis Khan, Part 21

「I have seen what debts, even the smallest, seemingly insignificant ones, can do with those who have taken them and their families. It might not be immediately obvious to those looking from the outside, but the families stricken with debt are all the same: slowly rotting away from the inside, little by little, until it tears them apart completely. I. I absolutely did not want that to happen to my family.」

So it was actually such a thing? Well, I can certainly agree with what Sherry said just now. Once you get yourself stuck in the clutches of debt, there is no way to easily get out of them, because interest rates are unfairly high and they keep on growing on a day to day basis, not to mention that if you fail to deliver the payment in time, moneylenders will not hesitate from employing hired muscle to finish the collection in a. not so subtle manner.

「I. I guess houses like that really do exist, huh?」

「Yes, unfortunately. And, well. you know how it is. Once you start borrow money, no matter how hard you would work the amount that needs to be returned never seems to be dwindling down but keeps on increasing instead, and before you even realize it, you end up relying on borrowing more money and taking other debts just so you could pay off the previous ones, and soon you are going to run yourself so ragged trying to pay them all off until at one point you are going to be too sick and tired to lift a finger, much less work to get money for your lenders. And. and once that happens, it will inevitably lead to a family break-up. That is why I offered myself to be sold as a child-slave before the same miserable fate could have befallen my family.」

She did what?! Did I just misheard it, or perhaps heard it right after all?!

「Wait a second. Are you telling me that you. sold yourself into slavery of your own free will?!」

「. Yes, that is what I have decided would be best under the circumstances my family was under in that moment.」

Was that the rational thing to do? Could Sherry not have look for some other solutions first before turning herself towards this drastic one. no, if my assessment of her is correct, then Sherry must have been a smart individual ever since she was young, so she probably determined that given her family's situation, it really might have been the best thing for her to do. but I still feel like I have to ask her about it. I need to hear her say that it was the only option remaining for her, or else I feel like I am not going to be able to fully accept it.

「Was. was there no other way besides that? Because becoming a slave just so that your family could get out of debt seems a bit. excessive.」

「I realized that as well, but back then, it seemed like a perfectly reasonable thing to do for me. no, it was the only. the best thing that I could have done. Think about it, master. I was a failure who failed to become not only a Master Smith, but a Shrine Maiden as well, so the reputation of my family as a whole has already been damaged enough, so I decided to remove myself from it before my presence could cause any more harm than it already did to them. Of course, I was uncertain. and scared of what would happen to me, but if I became a slave, then the least I could do was to learn how to speak and write in Brahim, which would allow a whole new set of possibilities to open themselves before me one day when I would eventually regain my freedom. All I had to do was to do my best to learn it, because I heard over and over again that highly educated slaves tend to be bought by the richer kinds of clients.」

「Brahim, huh?」

Was the ability to learn how to speak and write in Brahim really worth selling yourself into slavery? I mean sure, in this world, if you can speak and write in Brahim, you will be able to do much more than those who cannot speak and

write in it. so did Sherry analyze all of the pros and cons of that situation and ultimately decided that the potential profits far outweighed the demerits?

「Was. was your family really okay with such a solution?」

「It was more like they accepted that solution, because to be honest. . . . my offer was a Godsend to them. My younger brother and sister were still too small to work, and selling my older brother, the one responsible for supporting the family with his income from his goings into the Labyrinths was absolutely out of the question. Whether they liked it or not, they had no choice. Selling me was the best option from the standpoint of my family's well-being.」

The best possible choice? Could they not sell their father? Or maybe they did consider it at one point, but ultimately decided that it would not be worth it because no one would be willing to give half a decent price for a Dwarf who has a reputation of having no talent as a Master Smith? Yeah, that would make frighteningly much sense, because Sherry could always be sold to someone as a sex slave, and since she was a virgin, and an educated one at that, then her overall price could have been elevated that much higher.

「Well, that is in the past, so do not worry about it anymore, okay? Right now, Roxanne and I are your new family, and we will never abandon you, so just focus on doing your best and making sure that you are going to be living your life to the fullest everyday from morning until dawn, all right?」

「Of course. Thank you for your understanding. and your compassion. It really means a lot for me, Miss Roxanne, master.」

「Now that you have met master, you will never have to worry about things like that Sherry. Because master is the best possible, most amazing master we could have ever hoped for!」

「Yes, that is certainly true.」

Although it made me immensely happy to hear Roxanne singing such high praises of me, I was beginning to think that it is more than a little scary how

she was able to come up with such increasingly complex things almost at the spur of the moment and without batting an eye at that. Okay, do not think too hard about it. Just. just go and offer her more meat. Yeah, that is a good thing to do. Stuff Roxanne's mouth with more of that delicious meat of yours so that she would focus more on eating rather than on anything else.

That being said. god damn, this Genghis Khan hot pot turned out to be more popular than I thought, which could be clearly seen by the rate of how fast all of the ingredients were disappearing from my makeshift grill. Even though there were three of us at the table right now and we were all eating as if tomorrow was supposed to never come around, we still practically burned through all of the side dishes in an instant, and the meat and vegetables that my Genghis Khan hot pot consisted of were running low at an astonishing rate.

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At this rate, I do not know if we are going to have enough of it to last us for another serving for all of us.

At times like these, I really do pity that this world does not have yakisoba like the one you could buy and make in Japan, because some sizzling hot yakisoba with teriyaki sauce would have gone amazingly well with that grilled Goat Meat. Unless. if I remember correctly, then I think I saw something that looked like pasta noodles in one of the shops that sold food and cooking ingredients, so if I were to buy such pasta noodles and experiment a little with grilling them and with the ways of replicating the taste of the sauce, then I think I might have been able to pull such a makeshift yakisoba off. although thinking about making plans for it and actually preparing it are two entirely different things, and no one can guarantee me that a dish like that could really be prepared with the ingredients this world has to offer. At best, I could have made something that could only be classified as poor imitation of yakisoba, and at worst, I would have wasted the ingredients only to receive a tasteless mess of a dish for all my troubles and expenses.

However, I do not know if the fish sauce they sell in this world, like the one I bought in the Imperial City from that old lady at her stand could make a good yakisoba at all, and the prospect of failure and having to eat something that might not even be edible in the first place is too scary for me at the current moment, so instead of trying to make something like yakisoba, maybe I should start with something much simpler and safer to make, like a garnish, for example.

Okay. that is it. . . . I am not going to eat another bite. I am completely and utterly filled to the brim.

「Phew. thank you for the meal, it was great, if I do say so myself. By the way, I wanted to ask this before, but I could never find a good moment to do so: how do you find your lives with me? Do you have any complaints with the lifestyle of the Explorers of the Labyrinths we have been living?」

I asked them about the thing that I was interested in ever since I have bought Roxanne way back when. She has already said a few times that she enjoys her life with me, but a small part of me could not help but to wonder if that was actually true, or was she simply saying that because she knew that this was what I wanted to hear her say? After all, one of my responsibilities as the master of my slaves was to make sure that they are going to be provided with food, clothing and the appropriate living conditions, so I wanted them to tell me if their lives have been lacking in any of those areas so far, because what I might think of as good living conditions might actually not be like that at all in their eyes.

「Uhm. Can I really say that? Because I do not know if I should be saying that.」

「It is okay. I am your master, after all, so you can tell me anything.」

Roxanne, who is usually supportive of me to a fault, was now hesitating. Is it something difficult to say? Or maybe something that she would feel bad for saying because of how good I have been treating her and Sherry so far?

「Living with you so far has been a pleasure filled with positive surprises, completely unlike the usual three ways in which slaves are treated by their masters.」

「Three ways of how slaves are treated? What are those? Care to elaborate on that?」

「The first one is when you, the slave, have been bought by a rich man who took a liking to you for some reason or other. Generally speaking, for us slaves, everything depends on how wealthy of a client decides to take us in. The wealthier the client, the better our treatment and environment are going to be, at least theoretically. Also, in case of ending up in a place that has a lot of slaves, the thing that decides who is going to be in the higher and who in

the lower social position is almost always the principle of seniority, and the slaves with the most seniority in the group is considered to be the leader who gets to call the shots among the entire group.]

Ahh, so I guess that in places and households that accommodate a lot of slaves, it could be said that the first slave to be bought, the one with the highest position and authority among all the other slaves could be said to be someone akin to a slave manager. And once a slave achieves the position of the manager of all the other slaves, then of course his or her treatment is going to change for the better, because they will no longer be at the bottom of the hierarchy, but a step above all the others. To draw a parallel to the modern world, it would be like a difference between working as a bottom-dwelling pencil pusher for a company and working as the chief of the entire section of it, who does not have to do the mundane work that all the others do and has the power to do literally whatever the hell he wants with everyone who works under their command. And to continue along that train of thought, if you had the option to choose between working for a small upstart company and the big megacorporation with a firm position on the market, which of these two would you choose? Heh, the answer to that question should be pretty obvious, am I right? Bigger ones are always better, if only for their prestige and the potential benefits of working in such corporations, hands-down. However, all of the above only applies to the houses and environments where there is a greater number of slaves, so I have no idea at all if any of what I just stated would apply to the households where there are only two slaves.

「Ohhh, I have heard that too!」

「You also knew about that, Miss Roxanne?」

Since both Roxanne and Sherry were being kept in the same Slave Shop, it is no wonder that they have heard the same kind of story.

「I have also heard that even if the female slaves do not have a good position in the regular hierarchy of their new master's household, they can still have a good life if they become his concubines. Based on what I have been told, if you become a concubine of a rich or powerful man, you could enjoy a comfortable life in luxury that you have never even known existed! Back at

the Slave Shop, before master bought me, Alan-san told me that I could have become one if I worked hard enough for it!]

Yeah, that is. certainly one way to look at it, and at the same time that is a way of life that could also be possible for the women back in my old world. Go find yourself a rich, older guy and live comfortably as his concubine while simultaneously sucking him off of all of his money. It is a sad thing to say, but in modern day Japan and in the rest of the well-developed countries, being a concubine of the rich guys was one of the more valid ways for the women of the twenty first century to live a comfortable, easy-going life. All they had to do was to make sure that the guy they have set their sights on would be wrapped around their little finger and does not get bored with them and voila, here is your recipe for a life void of worries and responsibilities. Also, Roxanne, about that last bit. . . . I am honestly not sure if I should be happy or concerned for you. But at least that puts into perspective why Roxanne is as well mannered as she is at all times: it is all because being well-mannered is one of the most important prerequisites to being a good concubine, and I am sure that at some point or another Alan the Slave Merchant must have considered selling Roxanne as not just any ordinary slave, but as a concubine to some wealthy client.

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Heh, good thing that I managed to make her my own before that happened, but at the same time, I feel like I should be a little more grateful to the guy, because if it was not for him educating Roxanne in such a way, then who knows if she would still be the same lovely, well-mannered and obedient Roxanne she is today?

「Well. all things considered, to me it seems like you would still need quite a fair amount of luck to be noticed and then taken in by someone rich, since the client's mind and preferences are something that no slave has a way of knowing, so in the end, if a slave manages to catch the rich client's eye, then it all boils down to the price that the Slave Shop's owner dictates, and whether or not the client is going to be willing to pay the specified price or reaches the conclusion that this is still too much and that he is going to try his luck looking elsewhere, right?」

Anyway, while this aspect of how the slaves are being kept up and cared for by the Slave Shops they have been sold to is undoubtedly very interesting, we should not let ourselves get sidetracked by it too much. I have to make sure that we stay on the main subject without going off topic at every possible chance, otherwise we will be talking about it way into the late night hours.

「Of course, you are right, master, but in practice such cases tend to be more on a rare side of things. It is true however, that most of the slaves who dream of winning themselves the favor of a rich patron are those who have lost their previous lives and were turned into slaves due to unfortunate circumstances.」

「In other words, being spotted by a wealthy client is a form of potential escapism for some of the slaves?」

If you think about it, that makes a lot of sense. If someone was made a slave

against their will, then of course they would try to do anything in their power to stop being slaves as soon as possible, but if they wound up in a multi-slave residence or establishment, then getting back their freedom for themselves would take not only an exceedingly large amount of luck, but also strength of will and tenacity to make yourself more appealing than the rest of the slaves they have been stuck with. I have never been a slave myself so I cannot say for sure how such people must be feeling, but if I were to hazard a guess, then I would say that it would be pretty similar to how I wanted to escape from my shitty life back in Japan, the only difference being that I thought that suicide would be the miraculous panaceum that would make all of my pain and suffering go away.

「Okay, so that takes care of one way of how slaves are being treated. What about the other ones?」

「Right. The second way of slave treatment involves Adventurers, Explorers and anyone who is venturing into the Labyrinths on a daily basis and they have lost their adventuring companion. Instead of hiring a new Party member for themselves, such people might choose to buy themselves a slave who is going to accompany them instead.」

「Oh? So things like that actually do happen, huh?」

I guess it would be similar to my case, only that I did not buy Roxanne because I lost my previous companion. I bought her because I did not want to be all by myself in this strange, unfamiliar world.

「Yes, and in that case, the rights of ownership can even be transferred from a parent to a child once they grew up, and the same rule can be applied if the owner remarries. However, if you buy a slave that is of a different race then you then there will be no issues with inheritance. That is also why slaves are recommended as caretakers for children, since they can look after them at all times and even go to the Labyrinths to fight for them on their behalf.」

「So in that particular case it is okay to just think of slaves as long-term caretakers?」

It looks like this world seems to be filled with various things and

opportunities across all aspects and walks of life, just like in my old world. In accordance to that, those who have the money to afford it will not think twice about buying themselves slaves, because a slave is always a pair of extra hands, be it for tasks such as taking care of the children, doing household chores like cleaning or cooking or even going to the Labyrinths to make money for their masters. I can certainly see the benefits of having them, and I also understand why in general it is better to have your slaves be inherited by the other members of your family in case of your sudden, unexpected death. They are just too good of an improvement to your daily lifestyle to not have them.

「When the master of the slave dies and they had no family to pass the slave to, it is common practice to include a passage in your last will and testament that states that the slave is to be free of his slave status and get his freedom back, and many such slaves tend to turn that into an opportunity for themselves, since if they were heading into the Labyrinths and managed to get a hefty amount of experience while battling there, it makes them a perfect choice for a potential Party member and companion, and people who buy slaves for the purpose of making them the members of their Party have been around for years, being almost as old as the system of slavery itself.」

「And the slaves have nothing against it? I mean, statistically speaking, not all of them have to be thrilled about the perspective of heading into as dangerous of a place as Labyrinths on a daily or almost daily basis.」

「Even if some of them feel like that, they usually keep it to themselves and endure it. After all, being somebody's Party member is certainly better than lifetime of serving someone who would only exploit and abuse them.」

That is an argument that I cannot argue with. Also.

「Exploitation and abuse? That is pretty crazy!」

I mean, I know that no anyone is capable of treating slaves as fellow human beings and instead treat them like things, or their personal possessions that they can do anything the hell they want with them, the examples from the history of my own world are more than plenty. but even knowing those examples, I still find it hard to believe that someone could be

mistreating their slaves in the world of this game, but that is probably because I did not see any such mistreating with my own eyes just yet, and to be honest, I hope that I will not have to be a witness to them for a good while longer.

「It definitely is more than crazy, but thankfully, the majority of the wealthy clients buying slaves are people who managed to achieve some degree of success in their lives, which usually means that they are calm, well behaved and treat their slaves in a good way, and they are doing that because they do not want to antagonize their slaves, because they know that they are going to be the ones who are going to be taking care of them when they grow old.」

If that is so, then I wonder if the good way of treating their slaves by the nobles and wealthy people is a genuine act stemming from kindness and understanding, or is it nothing more but a cold pragmatism fueled by the knowledge that if they are going to try to abuse them, it will have a negative impact on the master-servant relationship with their slaves in the future, where the masters are going to be needing them the most?

On the flipside, even if they are treated badly, slaves have probably learned to put up with any abuses that bad masters have been throwing their way because they probably realized that any attempts at getting revenge for getting mistreated would be utterly pointless. After all, in the relationship that slaves have with their masters, slaves are the ones with the weaker positions of the two. If they tried to do anything to their masters, the abuse would just get even more severe than it already might have been.

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In the most extreme cases, slaves would probably start getting accused of crimes they did not even commit and had their supply of food taken away from them so that they would suffer from hunger and malnutrition for their insolence. There might also be cases where a whole group of slaves might be unilaterally punished for the sins of just one of them, simply to prevent them from even thinking of ever doing what the offender had done if they know what is good for them.

However, I wonder how are the things in this world from a purely medical standpoint. My previous world, the twenty first century one is the kind of world that is so technologically advanced that there are very little cases of diseases that cannot be cured at all, and the people who are afflicted with them are not doomed live a miserable existence, but can instead still enjoy a relatively long life, even in the face of something as serious as cancer. But as for this world I am living in right now. well, let me just put it this way: if your head is being filled with suicidal or nihilistic thoughts when your MP gets completely depleted, then something is telling me that this world might have a serious problem when it is going to be hit with diseases such as dementia or depression.

As for the housing situation. in Japan, up until recently there was this trend where it was not uncommon for the three whole generations of the families: grandparents, parents and children to live in the same house, but from what I have heard that trend seems to be on the decline now because an increasing percentage of young people wants to live and work in the big cities were they can be independent from their parents. but can such a situation really be likened to having a master living in one home with a bunch of his slaves? No, definitely not. These two situations might appear to be similar when we look at them purely from the perspective of numbers and logistics, but are completely different when you start delving deeper into

them. In modern-day Japan, and probably across the rest of the world as well, even if large families live together under one roof, usually there is no need for everyone to constantly keep tabs on one another and have all of the members of the household under constant surveillance. In most cases, usually the members of the three generations living in the house tend to not interfere with one another and simply live out their lives as they normally would, but there is still that particular feeling of familial bond between all of them, which prevents the situation from devolving into the one where it is basically that one house is inhabited by six or more complete strangers. But since in this world it is customary that a long-term care of the children is often relegated to slaves (and probably servants and maids in case of wealthier members of the nobility as well) so I think that if it ever came to the situation that a family that has slaves would be forced to live with the members of their extended family, or in some cases maybe even their in-laws, then I highly doubt that they would try to make an effort to talk and keep in touch with them. The most likely scenario in such case would probably be that the head of the household would simply order the slaves to take care of the needs of the extended family members, and that would probably be it. No complaints, no protests, just acceptance from both sides that this is simply how the things are supposed to be. And that, to be honest. is kind of sad, actually.

「All right, let us say that I can more or less wrap my head around how that second way works. There are points that could definitely use some ironing out in my opinion, but we will worry about that some other time. Anyway, that leaves only one way of treating slaves to discuss, right?」

「Yes, and the third way of treating slaves is buying them exclusively so that they would explore the Labyrinths for their master, and nothing else beside that.」

「That sounds really similar to the second one that you mentioned.」

「It cannot be helped since the second and third way really do sound similar to one another, but in truth, the cases of the third way being used are way fewer in comparison to the first and second way.」

「So that is how it is, huh?」

I said that, but even so, I really cannot see what is the difference between buying slaves just for the purpose of exploring the Labyrinths and hiring them as the members of your Party.

「At first glance, there really appears to be no difference between normal slaves bough for the purpose of taking care of the house and the children, but there is one major difference between them, and a pretty big one at that: the ones meant only for exploring the Labyrinths will improve their fighting skills and will become stronger and stronger with each battle they are going to be engaging in. Also, since strong and reliable combatants whom you can trust are a necessity if you want to tackle the higher floors of the Labyrinths, they are pretty much irreplaceable and will almost never be treated badly, since poor treatment would most definitely reflect poorly on their willingness to fight for their master as well as their overall performance.」

「I see. So that is it.」

It is a well-known fact that the work at the farms, in the mines or with household chores can be a physically demanding one that is also unlikely to give you a decent amount of money, so the slaves who work with those things are unlikely to be earning more than their masters do.

On the other hand, the slaves who enter the Labyrinths have one advantage over their master: they can actively increase the Level of their Job and become progressively stronger, so with enough time spent on dungeon crawling and Levelling Up, it might not be impossible for them to one day become strong enough to proclaim themselves stronger than their master, but that is only under the assumption that the master is someone who only sends their slaves to gather the items in the Labyrinths while they themselves simply stay in the safety and warmth of their house, because the story is going to be different if the master chooses to go to the Labyrinth together with his slaves. And since the EXP points are always divided equally between all the Party members, the slaves would not be able to earn more EXP than their master, who would simultaneously be the Party Leader as well.

But just as Sherry and Roxanne said: as the levels go up and the slaves going to the Labyrinths become stronger, their treatment is going to drastically

improve. The stronger they become, the harder it will be for them to die while fighting the monsters in the Labyrinths, and they are going to secure their position further, since it would be inefficient and unwise to get rid of your strongest Party Members just so that you could replace them with weaker ones.

After all, if you do not have access to Bonus Skills that increase the amount of the EXP that you obtained from defeated monsters, the process of gaining levels is going to take a long time, and it is extremely unlikely that the slaves going to the Labyrinths would be able to increase their levels to something around Lv.40 or Lv.50, even if they were going there every day and stayed inside for the majority of the day, so it is not like they would be swaggering around trying to look all important if they did not have the stats and strength to back that up.

「Master, I want you to know that I am only telling you what I am about to tell you because I know how good of a person you are, okay? So, it seems that there is also a possibility of striking an agreement with the strong Labyrinth-going slaves that would allow you to buy them from their master's if they conclude that they are being treated especially badly, and sometimes even the slaves themselves can come up with such a initiative.」

So such a thing can happen, huh? Well then, I guess I will have to make sure that I treat Roxanne and Sherry especially well to make sure that does not. happen.

Right then, a certain thought has downed upon me.