

HIRO AINANA  
ILLUSTRATION BY SHRI



DEATH MARCH 9  
TO THE PARALLEL WORLD RHAPSODY



**DEATH MARCH 9**  
TO THE  
PARALLEL WORLD **RHAPSODY**



LIZA  
A scoldfolk girl.

LULU  
Born in the Kuvork Kingdom. She is Arisa's older sister.

NANA  
An expressionless homunculus.


ARISA  
A former princess of the Kuvork Kingdom. She was Japanese in her previous life.

SATOU  
A twenty-nine-year-old programmer who has been transported to a parallel universe.

MIA  
A taciturn elf who loves music.

TAMA  
A cat-eared girl.

POCHI  
A dog-eared girl.



A girl  
wreathed in  
miasma tried  
to take back the  
amnesiac Rei  
by force...

**“Wait for me, Sister! I’ll save  
you from that black-haired  
demon, I promise!”**

...That was a strange  
thing to call me.





DEATH MARCH  
TO THE  
PARALLEL WORLD

9

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HIRO AINANA  
ILLUSTRATION BY SHRI

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NEW YORK

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Death March to the Parallel World Rhapsody, Vol. 9

Hiro Ainana

Translation by Jenny McKeon

Cover art by shri

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## [A Journey at Sea](#)

*Satou here. When I think of sunken ships, I tend to picture a treasure-filled sailing ship sunk in the Caribbean during the Golden Age of Exploration. I've always found the image of a ship half-buried on the ocean floor to have a certain romantic appeal.*

“Look alive, mateys! The great Captain Arisa is setting sail!”

Dressed in their pirate-y best, Arisa and company posed at the mast.

Arisa's eyes were sparkling, although one was hidden under an eye patch, and her lilac hair fluttered under her pirate hat.

It was a fairly retro pirate costume overall, with a long-sleeve jacket, white trousers, a poofy blouse, and even a rapier in her belt.

I'd been expecting more of a “pirate king” cosplay, but I guess I misjudged her tastes.

“Aye-aye, sirrr!”

“Yessir, sir!”

Tama, with her white hair and feline tail and ears, and Pochi, with her short brown bob and matching dog ears and tail, both hopped up eagerly in response to Arisa's declaration.

They were dressed like pirate lackeys, wearing striped half-sleeve shirts and three-quarter-length pants.

Both were equipped with pirate short swords, although like Arisa's, they were dull replicas for costume purposes only.

They were both wearing eye patches, but while Arisa's was realistic, Tama's and Pochi's were cutely shaped like a cat and dog head respectively.

“Master, I brought you a drink.”

A soothing voice marked Lulu's reappearance; her beautiful black hair and eyes could sink a whole fleet, never mind a single ship.

Her bright, summery maid outfit looked great with her smooth, straight hair.

And Lulu wasn't the only one who'd emerged onto the deck.

"Master, we have brought accompanying snacks as well, I report."

Nana, a buxom blonde, was carrying a basket full of potato chips in one hand, her eyes sparkling despite her usual expressionless face.

Since she had acquired new functions in the elf village, her cup size seemed to have been enhanced as well. As a result, she was now an F-cup, despite not yet being a year old. I knew she was a man-made homunculus, but I was still surprised to find a bust size option in the cultivation tank menu.

I imagined such sudden growth would probably be inconvenient for her, so I had restrained myself and selected the smallest increase option available.

"Shall I place the table here, master?"

"Yeah, that's perfect. Thank you, Liza."

The redheaded Liza of the orangescale tribe produced a heavy-looking table from the large Fairy Pack. Aside from the orange scales on her neck and limbs and her reptilian tail, she looked just like an ordinary human.

"Satou."

Mia, who'd been standing on the observation deck gazing wistfully at the harbor, jumped down toward me with her arms spread wide as I stood at the helm.

Her pale-blue pigtails flew back in the wind, revealing her slightly pointed elf ears.

I gently caught her in my arms.

"Be careful, Mia. You could've gotten hurt."

"Mm. Trust."

She wrapped her arms around my neck, nuzzling my face as if she were a cat.

Behind her, the finfolk—mermaids, really—were already out of sight.

All that was visible was the World Tree, stretching up into space. Eradicating the jellyfish up there with Aaze the high elf already felt like it was a very long time ago.

I remembered the three or so months we spent in the tree house after we brought Mia back home to Bolenan Forest. Hunting in the forest, shogi matches, the public bathhouse, the curry parties... We made so many fun memories there.

But now, we'd departed from Bolenan Forest to travel to Labyrinth City by sea.

A shriek from Arisa interrupted my fond reminiscing.

"E-excuse me! Mia, what are you doing?!"

Arisa charged over, pointing at us accusingly.

"Guiltyyy?"

"Guilty, sir."

Tama and Pochi looked at each other and imitated Mia's usual ruling of choice, then ran over to us after Arisa. Unlike Arisa, who appeared furious, Tama and Pochi seemed to be having fun.

"You're being way too clingy!"

"Mm. Spouse."

"That's not true, and you know it!"

Arisa attempted to drag Mia off me.

Mia's statement of "spouse" referred to the fact that I had given Mia a kiss on the forehead, not knowing that this was an elf custom of betrothal.

Since I hadn't realized what I was doing, it was null and void, but Mia was refusing to accept that.

I figured she would give it up soon enough, so I'd decided not to scold her about the whole "spouse" thing.

“Forget your forehead nonsense. I’ve kissed him right on the mouth!”

“Mrrr. Satou...”

Mia furrowed her brow.

Arisa was probably referring to that first night after we met, when she’d snuck into my bedroom and attacked me.

“Kiss.”

Mia puckered her lips and leaned her face toward mine.

*Sorry, but I’m not interested in little girls.*

“Kiiiiss?”

“Mwah, sir!”

“H-hey, you two, stop that!”

Copying Mia, Tama and Pochi climbed up Arisa’s back to rain kisses on my forehead and cheeks.

Arisa’s protests about being used as their stepping stool fell on deaf ears.

Imitating them in turn, Mia stopped waiting and moved to plant a kiss on me herself.

Drawn in by the younger crowd, even Nana and Lulu approached me.

“Master, a kiss to affirm your affection, I request.”

“Th-then I want one, too, please.”

Nana’s expressionless face smacked against mine, while Lulu’s cheeks turned bright red as she placed a quick peck on my cheek near my lips.

It had been a long time since we traveled without any extra company, so they were probably a little overexcited.

Always the serious one, Liza stood at attention nearby, but it looked like she wanted to join in, too.

“Liza?” I felt bad having her be the only one left out, so I called to her and pointed at my own cheek.

“V-very well. If you’ll excuse my insolence...”

Liza sounded unusually nervous as she leaned in to kiss my cheek, her ears turning bright red.

I was assuming the ticklish little lick to my earlobe as she withdrew was some kind of orangescale tribe custom.

Everyone in our small group had actually grown quite a bit during our stay in Bolenan Forest.

Since they trained with our elf teachers, their battle abilities had gone up as well as their levels, all of which had now reached 20. If they were ordinary knights, they’d probably be strong enough to be squad leaders or commanding officers by now. The vanguard group members had all learned skills like “Blink” and “Body Strengthening,” so they were now stronger and more well-rounded than they were in the old capital.

Unfortunately, Liza was still the only one who’d been able to learn “Spellblade.” But since it was a rare skill that even many knights of level 30 or higher couldn’t use, that was no one’s fault.

As for the rearguard, Lulu learned the “Self-Defense” skill, and while Arisa and Mia didn’t pick up any new skills, their magic seemed to be strong enough to take care of street thugs without batting an eye.

Mia learned some new Spirit Magic, and Arisa acquired a new Space Magic spell book.

Nana’s Foundation abilities had reached around the level of intermediate Practical Magic, but since she didn’t gain any extra magic power, that part would depend on her future growth.

I picked up some secret moves from the elves myself, so I could now forge very cool metals, such as mithril, also known as fairy silver; scarlet ore, a very strong and heat-resistant metal; true steel, the density of which could be adjusted with magic, making it potentially harder than diamond; true silver, which was highly conducive to magic and ideal for wands, staffs, or magic tools; and gods’ gold, a valuable all-purpose metal.

Of course, creating any of these magic alloys required a great deal of magic

power, as well as Holytree Stone, a precious substance also known as Philosopher's Stone.

Only a small amount of Holytree Stone was required to produce a comparatively large amount of metal. However, since only the elves and I had enough Holytree Stone to make such things in large quantities, I couldn't really use it for our usual equipment and armor unless I wanted to cause a big scene.

"So, master, how long will it take to get to Labyrinth City?"

"Good question..."

Arisa and the others were all smiles, possibly due to the lovefest from earlier. Arisa told me that she had sufficiently replenished her supply of "masterium."

The figurehead golem at the front of the ship, called a "Scarecrow," took care of the steering and sails, so we'd laid out a blanket on the deck to relax.

It was possible to steer the ship manually, too, but it seemed easier and safer to let the golem handle it.

Incidentally, instead of the usual statue of a woman, our figurehead was in the shape of a penguin, per Mia's adamant request.

"...It would probably take a normal ship about a month," I answered as I looked at the map.

Airships aside, at a rate of around five to ten miles per hour, it would be best to assume it would take the better part of a month to get there.

But that would be the case only if this were a normal ship.

"Master! The color of the sea is different up ahead, I report."

Nana called out from the prow.

Sure enough, there was an arc-shaped line dividing this part of the ocean from a differently colored section.

According to the map, this was the end of the Bolenan Forest area.

"The sky, toooo?"

"It's true, sir!"

Tama and Pochi, who'd been running around the mast earlier, had climbed up at some point and were now in the lookout area.

They probably simply wanted to try climbing the rope ladder from the deck.

"So it is."

"I wonder why?"

Looking at the water from the area between the foremast and the main mast, Arisa and Lulu seemed nervous.

"Don't worry. We're just entering open water."

With that, I activated the ship's monster-repellent feature.

A magic circle of blue light surrounded the ship, like a Holy Stone.

It was pretty flashy, but there was also a stealth mode in which it didn't emit light, in case we were passing villages or traveling with other ships. The stealth mode also halved the range of the effect, however, so we generally wouldn't be using it.

"...It's very pretty."

Lulu and the others gazed at the light in admiration.

Finally, the ship reached the line where the color of the sea changed.

"Barrier."

I nodded at Mia and instructed everyone to gather around. Everyone but the pair in the lookout crowded close to the helm, where there were safe seats with seat belts.

"Master, look!"

Nana grabbed my shoulder, pointing ahead of us.

As the ship approached the line, the barrier above the water opened like a gate.

Of course, it was transparent, so it was only possible to see it faintly with the help of the ship's blue light.

"Master, the ocean on the other side appears stormy, I report."

“The elves told me they deliberately keep the currents strong here to protect Bolenan Forest.”

Our ship was buffeted about by the raging waves, strong even by ocean standards.

Once we passed through the barrier, it closed soundlessly behind us.

According to the map, this area was called the **Fairies’ Lost Ocean**.

“Steady as she goooes?”

“I believe ‘full speed ahead’ would be more accurate, I correct.”

Tama had only mumbled the phrase while dangling her legs off the side of the lookout post, but Nana heard it through the speaking tube.

Since the communication system on this ship used wind stones, voices came through very clearly.

Incidentally, this ship didn’t have any oars or propellers with which to go “full speed ahead.”

“Whooooa! Wheeee!”

“S-so shaky, sir! W-we’re going to fall into the ocean, sir...”

“D-don’t move, you two! It’s dangerous!”

The top of the mast was swinging back and forth, so Pochi was flying into a panic, which led Liza to start panicking as well. This was a stark contrast to Tama, who was going with the flow as usual.

Pochi and Tama had lifelines tied around their waists, and in the worst case, I could always catch them with Magic Hand, but Liza and Pochi were too alarmed to realize that.

Lulu and Mia looked pale as they latched onto me. Arisa, who was hanging on to the handrail in front of the seats, wasn’t looking too thrilled, either.

“Maybe we shouldn’t have tried sailing the ocean in such a small ship?”

“It’ll be fine.”

The ship was a small galleon with a displacement of about a hundred tons,



but it had all kinds of neat little gimmicks that would make even the stormiest waters a breeze to sail through.

According to the elves, these fierce currents shouldn't last too long. Besides...

"...Huh? Part of the deck opened up."

"There's a window on the side, toooo?"

The cover opened with a steady clacking sound, followed by the hum of an engine.

A feeling of weightlessness enveloped us, reducing the rocking of the waves.

Just as the feeling disappeared completely, a teary-eyed Pochi slid down the rope ladder from the lookout post.

Tama followed, and together they landed on the deck.

"Floatyyy."

"Master, the ship is floating in the sky, I report."

"Wait, what? The sky?"

Arisa voiced her surprise and ran to lean over the side of the ship.

The other children followed suit, undoing their seat belts and scattering across the deck.

"W-we're flyiiiiing!"

Yes, our vessel was a flying ship with a built-in skypower engine.

Feeling a tad smug, I explained the workings of the ship to my bewildered companions. All they really understood was that "this ship has a really amazing magic device," but they were all happy that the ship wouldn't rock back and forth anymore, so that was good enough for me.

Of course, being in the air also meant we wouldn't be dealing with the resistance of the water, so we'd move at least ten miles per hour in ordinary wind; if we used Wind Magic, we could reach a cruising speed of almost forty miles per hour. In fact, with a teardrop-shaped Canopy spell, we could probably go sixty.

That might be slow for an aircraft back on Earth, but considering that the destroyer ship *Shimakaze* was hailed for its speed of forty-five miles per hour, I'd say it was pretty impressive for a ship like ours.

"Are we gonna go higher?"

"We can go up to two hundred feet above the water."

This skypower engine was pretty low-output, so the ship couldn't move through the air as freely as an airplane.

"Go figure... Wait, you didn't load it with a jet engine or anything, did you?"

"No, of course not." That caused me to grin.

This was supposed to be a sailing ship, after all.

A lot of empty space still remained, and the vessel had a standard mounter that could theoretically hold a big airship-style engine powered by Holytree Stone or jet propulsion, so I could easily make a magic device like that with the stocks I had in Storage.

However, I wanted to prioritize making this look like a real sailing ship. I liked the image of sails catching the wind to propel the ship, whether it was real wind or Wind Magic.

As I was discussing this with Arisa, Liza called out a warning from up ahead.

"Master, it looks like the fog is rolling in."

Opening the map, I checked our position.

There were no obstacles or monsters up ahead, so losing a bit of visibility shouldn't be a big deal.

*...Hmm?*

*Something felt a bit off just now.*

"Meowww?"

Tama, sitting at the bow with her legs dangling, seemed to sense the same thing. Looking through the gaps in the sailcloth, I saw her ears flick back.

All at once, the fog cleared and bright light shone down on us.

The waves calmed somewhat, and even the temperature grew warm from the sun's rays—grew pretty hot, in fact.

Checking on my map, I saw that the area name had changed from **Fairies' Lost Ocean** to **Seadragon Islands**.

I selected "Search Entire Map" from the magic menu, gathering information about this new area.

"Master, what happened?"

"Don't worry. The Bolenan elves' magic sent us somewhere far away, that's all."

*This must be what they meant when they said the stormy seas wouldn't last long.*

I explained the situation to Liza and the others.

Since I hadn't asked about the details, this was only my assumption, but I thought that must have been the Wandering Ocean spell that was in the elves' spell book.

So the Bolenan Forest was protected by a spell similar to the Wandering Forest spell that kept the old spriggan's store hidden back in the old capital.

"Forced teleportation? That's pretty rough. Do you know where we are now?"

"Yes, it's fine. We seem to be in the Seadragon Islands, so if we go north from here, we'll reach the Shiga Kingdom."

Once I explained this, everyone finally looked relieved.

This area passed around a large empty space on my map and connected to the Ougoch Duchy area.

I needed to set more seal slates for the Return spell anyway, so we could go north along the Seadragon Islands, pass into Ougoch Duchy waters, and head west along the continent.

The Seadragon Islands was a curved archipelago spanning nearly two hundred miles and containing over a hundred islands of all shapes and sizes. All the islands were uninhabited, so there wasn't a single resident of the area.

There was, however, a huge amount of monsters called “sea serpents”: almost two thousand of them altogether, averaging level 30 with 40 being the max. There were a few called “deep sea serpents,” too, which were over level 50.

There were plenty of monsters level 20 or under, but they all seemed to live on or near the islands.

“It’s pretty hot, huh?”

“Yes, it really is.”

Now that they knew we weren’t in danger, Arisa and Lulu immediately noticed the area’s heat and started fanning themselves.

“Why don’t I improve the ventilation a bit, then?”

I operated the protective magic device that guarded us from the wind, setting it to let a certain amount of the breeze through.

I’d had it completely cut off before so the wind wouldn’t whip everyone’s hair around.

“Nice smell,” Mia murmured.

“Now that’s refreshing!”

“What a nice breeze.”

Arisa and Mia let the breeze cool them off.

“Saltyyyy?”

“The breeze is shorey now, sir.”

Tama and Pochi licked their lips, tasting the ocean spray carried by the wind.

“Shore-y” was probably Pochi’s take on the word *seashore*, which she heard before we left.

*Oh, right. I should probably also use the UV-cutting spell I made—I think I called it Sunlight Protection—so they don’t get sunburned.*

“Master, the sunlight has become softer, I report.”

Nana picked up on the change and reported it to me with a serious

expression, so I quickly explained that it was my magic.

Liza was squinting into the breeze, but then her eyes widened and she turned to me.

“Master, perhaps we should take more precautions to monitor our surroundings.”

I nodded at Liza’s proposal. “Good idea. I’ll leave it to you.”

Since we’d just entered a new area, maybe we would see something interesting.

On Liza’s command, Tama and Pochi clambered back up the rope ladder to the lookout post and kept watch from above, while Liza looked ahead with a longscope and Nana kept an eye out from the rear of the ship.



“A boat in the waterrr?”

“She’s right, sir! There’s a big boat underwater, sir!”

As we proceeded on our way toward the Ougoch Duchy, Tama and Pochi called down to us from the lookout post.

“A sunken ship! We’ll be rich!”

Arisa’s eyes practically turned into dollar signs as she rushed to the side of the ship.

I thought she might keep going right into the water.

“Panicking is unsafe, I warn.”

“Mm. Danger.”

Nana and Mia quickly attempted to calm Arisa.

“Master, it appears to be a large bluish ship.”

Standing next to Liza, I peered down into the water as well.

Beneath the sparkling sunlight bouncing off the waves, I could see an enormous ship below.

Its hull was a metallic blue, noticeable even through the blue of the water as

it caught the light.

“Hmm. Looks like it’s pretty deep down there.”

It was difficult to gauge the distance due to the refraction of light through the water, so I opened my map to find out the details.

In terms of displacement, the sunken ship was probably ten times the size of ours. Its upper deck was about three hundred feet deep.

Surprisingly, the AR display showed that the hull was made of blue adamantite—the same alloy as Hayato the Hero’s Holy Armor.

If I’d found this before I went to the elf village, I probably would’ve been thrilled, but now that I could make it myself, it was nothing but an expensive treasure.

The easiest solution would be to reach down with my Magic Hand and put it straight into Storage, but the idea of exploring a sunken ship did sound like fun.

Luckily, there weren’t any monsters nearby that were lethally poisonous or strong enough to be a threat to my companions. The only possible sources of harm were creatures with weak poison, like scorpion fish and jellyfish, or biting fish like moray eels and sea snakes.

“All right! Let’s explore the sunken ship!”

Everyone cheered in agreement.

Not wanting to damage our equipment in the water, I opted for void suits instead of swimsuits. I would’ve enjoyed seeing the likes of Nana and Lulu in swimsuits, but I had to prioritize their safety.

“Scarecrow, activate Dimension Anchor.”

On my command, the ship came to a halt with a mechanical *clank*.

I didn’t want the ship to get carried away by the wind while we were getting ready, which was why I had the figurehead golem take care of it.

Dimension Anchor was a simplified, more magic-efficient version of the Space Magic spell Dimension Pile, which supported the World Tree.

“The sexy Arisa is ready for her close-up!”

“Mm. Sexy.”

Arisa and Mia emerged from the cabin, wearing void suits resembling futuristic leotards.

The void suits were normally worn with full-face helmets, but since those would float and prevent us from sinking properly, I'd chosen goggles instead.

“So smooth, sir.”

“Master, submit your appraisal, I request.”

The other girls came out soon after.

“You all look great.”

Lulu seemed to be embarrassed by the clingy wet suit. Her cheeks were bright red, and she was fidgeting bashfully, which was very cute.

“Lulu, do you want to wear this over it?”

I felt bad leaving her like that, so I offered her a cardigan made out of the waterfeather cloth used by the finfolk.

“Th-thank you.”

I was sure Nana's bust looked amazing in her suit, too, but the iron-wall pair of Arisa and Mia blocked me from seeing her. They'd forced her to wear a waterfeather cloth shirt, so sadly, I wasn't able to confirm with my own eyes.

I wished they'd at least let me get a glimpse before they did that.

“Mia, once everyone's gathered together, please cast Aqua Walk over the area.”

“Mm.”

Mia nodded and started chanting.

The Aqua Walk spell was a Spirit Magic spell that fortified the target against water pressure and allowed them to breathe underwater. A combination of Water Magic spells like Water Breathing and Resist Water Pressure, it was a pretty convenient invention.

As Mia finished her chant, I also used Enchant: Physical Protection on the

group.

“The flag’s flappiiing?”

“Is there wind underwater, sir?”

While we wrapped up our preparations, Tama and Pochi gazed down at the sunken ship.

Taking a look myself, I noticed the cloth attached to the ship’s mast was undulating gently in the water.

*Oops, that was close. I forgot to check the current.*

“Nana, can you cast Mana Light on this coin?”

“Yes, master.”

I produced a large copper coin, had Nana light it up with Foundation, and tossed it into the sea. At first the coin sank slowly, but then partway down, it was suddenly whisked away.

“Huh, so the current gets faster in that area.”

Watching the coin vanish, Arisa sounded impressed.

If Tama and Pochi hadn’t noticed, that could’ve been pretty dangerous.

“Guess we had better attach lifelines.”

If I used the Practical Magic spell Magic Hand to hold the lifelines, it would probably be even more secure, but I showed everyone how to tie lifelines in case they ever needed to do it when I wasn’t around.

“Here we go.”

Using Magic Hand, I lowered everyone into the water. Then I hopped down myself with “Skyrunning,” and together we all sank into the water.

Thanks to Mia’s Spirit Magic spell Aqua Walk, we were able to breathe underwater. The ocean water made everything taste a little salty, but that was a small price to pay.

The current did get faster partway down, but since I could use “Skyrunning” underwater, it was no problem.



We kept sinking past the thirty-foot mark, and my ears didn't pop in the slightest. Magic really was convenient.

Finally, we reached the mast, which was broken in the middle.

I was a little concerned about what could possibly break a thick adamantite mast.

"Maaast?"

It was hard to hear speech when it was mingled with the sound of bubbles, so I adjusted for it in my mind with my menu.

"Let's use this mast to get down to the deck."

There was no rope attached to the mast, but there were grooves where there seemed to have been speaking tubes attached, which worked just fine for handholds.

"Maaade iiit?"

"We're here, sir."

One by one, everyone made it down to the deck of the sunken ship. The deck looked cleaner than I'd imagined. Maybe the fast currents cleaned away the dirt and salt.

"Master, I have found a potential entry point, I report."

"Let's go in that way, then."

We entered through the crack that Nana had located near the front of the ship.

*...That's a pretty clean cut.*

Again, I was a bit worried about what might have cut the adamantite hull so cleanly, but it occurred to me that a Holy Sword or my "Spellblade" could do the same thing, as well as a highly concentrated Laser, so I decided not to think about it too much.

I probably wouldn't be able to figure it out anyway, so I just made a note of it in my memo tab.

"It's darker than I expected."

Lulu sounded nervous, so I handed her a pocket Mana Light made out of light stone.

While I was at it, I had Nana put Mana Light on each person's head.

It wound up looking like the headlamps used by search parties.

"Let's explore the ship's hold first!"

"Aye-aaaye!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Mm. Onward."

Arisa led the younger crew farther into the ship.

Since we were underwater, I'd given Tama and Pochi harpoons made from land urchin spines. Even Liza, who normally refused to give up her Magic Cricket Spear under any circumstances, was using a similar harpoon so that her beloved weapon wouldn't be damaged by the seawater.

Lulu, Nana, and I followed behind Arisa and company, and Liza was bringing up the rear.

"Arisa, try not to touch the floors and walls too much. The sediment will get everywhere."

"That's a pretty tall order..."

Tama and Pochi were pulling it off pretty easily, but it seemed to be more difficult for Arisa and Mia. I used the Practical Magic spell Pure Water to clear away the dirt that was floating in the hallway.

"Hmm? Did the seawater just turn into fresh water?"

"You're right. Visibility appears to be higher, too."

Arisa and Liza looked around in surprise.

Come to think of it, when I used Pure Water to help make an open-air bath back at the big river in the Ougoch Duchy, it did crystallize all the impurities. Maybe it had cleared away the salt of the seawater along with the sediment.

After we were done exploring the ship, I'd have to figure out if I could use

Pure Water to separate seawater into fresh water and salt.

I had plenty of clean water and my Well Bag in Storage, so we wouldn't have any shortage of drinking water, but the idea piqued my curiosity.

“Little fiiish?”

“Weird creatures, too, sir.”

“Are those seahorses?”

“Mm, pretty.”

We avoided the floating matter and small fish as we proceeded down the passage.



There were patches of exposed adamantite hull scattered about and occasional places where rusted metal pipes ran along the walls and ceiling.

Most of them broke off partway through, leaving a mountain of rust fragments. I didn't see a single thing made of wood.

Contrary to what I'd assumed because it looked relatively clean from the outside, this ship must have actually sunk quite a long time ago.

"A jaaar?"

"It's sparkly and gold, sir."

"What do you suppose it is?"

"Vase?"

The younger crew had found something in the corner of the hallway.

"Octopuuus?"

"The octopus is attacking, sir!"

"Eek, don't wave that harpoon around!"

"Mm, danger."

They seemed to have agitated an octopus that was living in the golden vase, which came out and attacked Pochi.

"Pochi! Drop the harpoon and use your short sword!"

"A-aye!"

Pochi was in panic mode, but Liza's instructions brought her back to her senses, and she freed herself from the octopus's tentacles with her short sword.

"Gotchaaa?"

The octopus sprayed a cloud of ink and attempted to flee, but Tama ran it through with her harpoon.

I used the Practical Magic spell Pure Water to clear up the ink.

After a few similar incidents, we arrived at the ship's hold.

By then, the net attached to Liza's belt contained several different kinds of

fish, while Tama's net was full of shells she'd picked up on the way. Pochi was carrying a rolled-up octopus.

Nana and Lulu were in charge of transporting the valuables.

"Gold cooins?"

"Lots of shells, sir."

Just as the hallway had been buried in pieces of rusted metal, the ship's hold was full of rusty gold coins and other riches.

As Pochi said, there were cockscomb-like shellfish stuck to many of the coins.

"Why are they sticking to the coins and not the walls or the floor?"

"That's a good question."

Maybe there was some kind of anti-shellfish magic device or rune built into the ship itself.

"Master, I have located a treasury over here, I report."

"There's an armory inside, too, master."

Since there wasn't much point in looking at rusted armor, I went to see the treasury Nana had found before checking out the armory Liza had discovered.

"Ooh, look at all the gold, silver, and pearls!"

"So sparklyyy?"

Arisa and Tama exclaimed with glee.

Nana had placed Mana Lights throughout the room, which reflected off the treasure to create a beautiful effect.

Farther inside, there was artwork like sculptures and even paintings.

"It's too bright, sir."

Lulu giggled. "It is quite dazzling, isn't it?"

Pochi tried to rub her eyes over her goggles, but Lulu stopped her with a hug.

The gold ingots, ceramics, and so on were one thing, but how were these sculptures and paintings still intact?

“Fixed?” Mia murmured thoughtfully.

She was right. The treasure in the room was protected with the Fixify spell.

Fixify was a Practical Magic spell that put things in a “Fixed” state by covering them with a transparent shell. It was essentially a magic vacuum, so it was used to protect things like artwork and precious metals.

Even our ship had been Fixed in the hangar of the World Tree for long-term storage.

“Fixed? ...I wonder if the ship’s power source is still functioning, then?”

Arisa muttered a very interesting remark.

Using my “Magic Power Vision” skill, I checked the air around us. It was so faint that it was barely visible, but there was definitely magic power circulating through the adamantite walls and floor.

The magic hearth aboard the ship was definitely out of order, so it must have been some kind of backup electricity-like magic preservation system providing the power.

“Everyone, gather around!”

Disturbing things would break the Fixify spell, so I gathered everyone in one place to prevent them from touching things too much. The money and gold weren’t that big of a deal, but I didn’t want the art to get ruined by seawater.

“...So, don’t move anything, okay? I’ll collect it all later.”

“Master, I have already moved something. I apologize.”

“I’m sorry, sir.”

Nana and Pochi had already tried to pick up some treasure, breaking the Fixify spell on it.

“Just a little bit isn’t a big deal. We can fix it up on the ship.”

I gave them a reassuring smile to ease their worries.

Next, we went to the armory deeper in the hold.

There were some thick, disposable berserker-style weapons, tons of Small

Magic Cannons, and ten or so bigger cannons on wheels.

These, too, were intact thanks to the Fixify spell.

“This is a lot more than I expected.”

“Yes, and I believe this weapon resembles the one we saw in the fort in the Muno Barony.”

The fort Liza was referring to was the former haunted house that was now technically my personal villa.

Liza’s assessment that these Small Magic Cannons were similar was probably correct. Maybe this ship was a product of the same ancient magical culture that made the Magic Cannon.

“Aren’t there any staves or armor?”

“Maybe they’re in those boxes?” Lulu suggested.

She was pointing at a stack of several boxes in one corner of the room. Opening them would break the Fixify spell, so we’d have to see what was inside later.

Once we’d finished looking around the ship’s hold, we moved on to the captain’s quarters.

There were a few minor incidents along the way, but we arrived without any serious injuries. Once or twice, there was an accidental slip that might’ve been brought on by some lecherous god, but for the sake of Nana’s and Lulu’s honor, I’ll keep that close to my chest.

“It’s a door!”

“Gaaap?”

“Pochi can fit through this, sir.”

The captain’s door was warped on its hinges, but Pochi was able to push herself through.

Tama was starting to follow after her when Pochi returned in alarm, so their heads smacked into each other.

“Owwwiie?”



Tama rubbed her head, but since I'd cast Enchant: Physical Protection on everyone, there shouldn't have been any pain. She'd probably said "Owie" on reflex.

"This is bad! This is super, super bad, sir!"

Pochi flailed her arms around in a panic, her eyes darting about wildly.

"Calm down, Pochi."

"I'm totally calm, sir! Listen to this, sir!"

Brushing off Liza, Pochi ran up to me urgently.

"Master, I have located a ghost in the captain's quarters, I report."

Nana, who had found another entrance, called out calmly.

"Exactly, sir! That's what I was trying to say, sir!"

Patting Pochi's head, I checked the captain's quarters on the radar.

Sure enough, there was now a white dot in there, indicating a nonaggressive presence.

According to the information on the map, it was the ghost of the captain of this sunken ship.

He hadn't been there when I checked the map before we dove in or when we first entered this ship, but thinking back, I remembered that the ghosts we saw in the Muno Barony had abruptly appeared at sunset, too.

*I guess that's just how ghosts are.*

I'm not a fan of horror or thrillers, but I didn't want to endanger my comrades by sending them in to face an unknown ghost, so I went in alone.

Inside the room was a semitransparent man clad in a flashy military uniform. This must be the ghost, then. For now, we'll call him "Captain Ghost."

There was a massive hole in the ceiling of the captain's quarters, and the windows were still open, allowing a light current into the room.

"●●●"

**> Skill Acquired: "Ancient Language"**

I promptly allocated some points to the “Ancient Language” skill and activated it.

“<...They’ve already caught up to us?!>”

Captain Ghost completely ignored me, talking to himself like an actor giving a soliloquy.

“<Damn them—those wicked skyfolk...!>”

Captain Ghost looked up at the sky and cried out resentfully.

*I wonder why his form keeps blurring like that?*

“<So even the high-speed battleship we stole from them can’t outmatch the mobility of their floating ships...>”

The ghost strode toward the window.

Evidently, this ship had been stolen from Captain Ghost’s adversaries.

“<Impossible! Nunulie?! They’re even using the floating castles to chase us down!>”

Captain Ghost was looking out the window, but of course there was nothing there.

I thought this must be a memory of the moment he died.

“<Do they plan to use the floating castle’s Divine Wrath Cannon?! You fools! What if the Coffin you’re looking for is on this very ship?!>”

As Captain Ghost gave this final cry of despair, he vanished, leaving behind a faint misty effect.

Curious, I searched the map for this “Coffin” thing, but there wasn’t anything of the sort in the area.

Remembering the damage I saw when we first arrived at the ship, I considered the captain’s words.

This “Divine Wrath Cannon” must have been what sliced through the ship’s adamantite alloy so cleanly.

I didn’t know if that weapon still existed, but if it did, I doubted our little flying

ship could withstand it.

I would prefer to keep a thing like that as far away from us as possible.

“<...The key to Lalakie... Stolen. Now Lalakie...can no longer fly. All that remains is to bring the Coffin to His Majesty the Emperor in the Room of Reality...>”

Upon turning around, I noticed that Captain Ghost had reappeared in the same spot as before.

Exactly like before, he would occasionally become blurry, rendering his words unintelligible.

Before long, he came back to a familiar phrase.

“<...They’ve already caught up to us?!>”

It looked like Captain Ghost was in an endless loop, repeating the same moment over and over.

I tried talking to him a few times, but he didn’t respond.

“Sounds like he’s stuck haunting this place.”

When I poked my head out to update the rest of the group, Arisa made an interesting comment about Captain Ghost.

“You’re right. Maybe we can help him pass on.”

“Here’s a Holy Stone, master.”

Lulu handed me a Holy Stone that had been hanging off her belt.

She must have brought it along for the sunken ship exploration, just in case.

After thanking her, I poured some magical energy into the Holy Stone and used it to exorcise Captain Ghost’s spirit.

As he disappeared, I could’ve sworn I heard him murmur something.

“<Aaah... Finally freedom is within our grasp...>”

The pile of white bones where he had appeared crumbled and was carried out into the ocean by the current.

He never did acknowledge me, but since he seemed to have passed on now,

that was good enough for me.

We waited a moment to make sure he didn't reappear, then went back to exploring the sunken ship.

"Master, the back of this painting is suspicious, I report."

"I bet there's a room full of treasure behind it!"

Pochi's eyes sparkled, and she reached out for the painting.

I was sure she was thinking of a similar situation we'd encountered back in the labyrinth under Seiryuu City.

However, Tama grabbed her tail and stopped her.

"It's a traaap?"

Evidently, there was a dangerous trap in the hidden room.

My "Sense Danger" and "Trap Detection" skills both reacted just as Tama spoke.

"Can you disarm it?" Arisa asked me.

I nodded. "I think so, but..."

I didn't want to risk messing it up and putting everyone in danger.

"...I'd better not. There's an easier solution, so I'll get everything out that way."

My statement piqued everyone's curiosity, so I ended up having to show them my trick several times during the remaining exploration.

Once I brought everyone back up to the flying ship, I put the entire sunken ship in Storage.

If I'd done it while we were still in the water, we might've gotten sucked into the space where the ship was and drowned.

**> Title Acquired: Salvager**

**> Title Acquired: Treasure Seeker**

**> Title Acquired: Sunken Ship Explorer** Looking at my log, I saw that I'd gained a few titles when I stored the ship.

Treasure Seeker seemed like one I should've already had by now, but it wasn't like it had any special benefits or anything, so I'd just ignore that.

"Whooooosh?"

"The ship disappeared and made a whirlpool, sir!"

Tama and Pochi peered down at the water where the ship had been.

"I showed you before, remember? It's magic, sort of like the Fairy Pack."

Before we left the elf village, I'd let them see me store fresh food in Storage, so everyone but Arisa seemed satisfied with the explanation.

"A whole ship... Your powers are always so broken."

My only response was a shrug.

As a precaution, I warned everyone not to tell anyone what I did with the ship, especially Tama and Pochi.

"Our lips are seealed?"

"We'll clam up, sir."

They mimed zipping their lips shut, then hugged their knees to their chests in an apparent imitation of a clam. This seemed like another one of Arisa's weird jokes, so I didn't bother asking about it.

"Ravine."

"Looks like that ship was on top of an underwater mountain."

Mia and Arisa were looking down at the water now that it had calmed.

With the ship gone, I could see that it had been at the peak of a large mountain underwater.

Even with my "Night Vision" skill, I couldn't see to the bottom, and it appeared to overlap into a different area on the map.

With all that water pressure, I doubted some monster would suddenly come zooming up from the depths to attack; still, it would be stressful to be on guard against a surprise attack all the time, so I decided to do a little investigating.

Leaving everyone else on the ship, I dove back into the ocean, used "Search

Entire Map,” and resurfaced.

At some point, I left the range of Mia’s Spirit Magic protection, so the water pressure was a little bit of a pain.

I didn’t want to have to do that every time, so I decided to avoid sailing over deep waters whenever possible.

“I’m back.”

“Welcome back, master.”

Arisa handed me some cool carbonated water to quench my thirst.

On the deck, the group had started working on removing the dirt and shellfish stuck to the coins and valuables we’d found in the passageways of the sunken ship.

“Pochi, please be more careful. You’re scratching the coins.”

“Yes, sir. This is hard, sir.”

Liza and Pochi were laboring away to unstick the shellfish, while Tama was intently polishing the coins they’d already taken care of.

“Scrub-a-duuub?”

Looking at her handiwork, Tama let out a sigh of satisfaction.

“Mia, we must remove the dirt from these grooves, I advise.”

“Mm. Magic.”

Nana brought jewelry over to Mia, who began a Spirit Magic chant.

Lulu was spreading the polished coins out on a cloth so that they would dry in the sun.

“Well, let’s look at the rest of our spoils.”

I lined up some treasure boxes, and together we opened them one by one. I’d already confirmed in Storage that none of them contained traps or poison.

We placed artwork, sheet music, and other things that might be damaged by the sun in the shadow of the sails. In order to prevent the wind from blowing them away, I blocked the outside air again and used an Air-Conditioning spell.

“Whoa! Look at all these gold coins!”

“Pretty jewels.”

Arisa and Mia delightedly held up fistfuls of treasure.

Since they'd been magically Fixed, the contents of the treasure boxes were perfectly clean.

“Tama and Pochi, you can go look through everything, too.”

The two of them had been looking up at me and fidgeting, so they were probably waiting for permission.

“Yaaay!”

“Arisa, is there meat, sir?”

“No, but you could buy enough meat to fill your bellies with just one of these coins.”

“For reeeal?”

“That's amazingly amazing, sir!”

Thus, we began peacefully sorting through our loot.

“Sheet music?”

“Those must be very old songs.”

At that, Mia immediately began to read the sheet music with a serious face.

Evidently, the elves were the ones who had spread sheet music methods to other cultures, so they could read scores from anywhere at all.

“What a beautiful necklace.”

Lulu was staring longingly at a string of large pearls.

“We must find something even cuter, I propose.”

Nana rummaged through the jewelry boxes, more interested in cuteness than monetary value.

“Master, there are weapons in these boxes here.”

“That's a lot of bows and rapiers... Aren't there any arrows?”

“I’m afraid not. I checked every box, but there was none to be found.”

*You checked all of them already? That was fast, Liza.*

Were there not any bowstrings, either?

I picked up one of the unstrung bows.

“Oh!”

I felt a tiny amount of my magic power being sucked into the bow, like when I pulled the trigger on a Magic Gun, and the bow transformed so that it now had a transparent bowstring. Clearly, it was a Magic Bow.

When I pulled the string back, I felt a little more magic get siphoned away, and a transparent arrow appeared just like the bowstring.

Judging by the feel of the bow, it was probably made cheaply with Practical Magic.

“Hmm? It doesn’t take much strength to draw the string back, does it?”

Apparently, even the physically inept Arisa could use these Magic Bows.

“Gravity doesn’t seem to affect it, but it’s not easy to hit a target with, either. And it consumes a lot of magic power, too.” After a test fire, Arisa shared her thoughts. “It seems to be about as strong as Nana’s Foundation spears.”

“Yes, master.”

If it was as strong as Nana’s spears, that meant it was stronger than our Fire Rods and Thunder Rods.

There were around fifty of these Magic Bows, so I decided to at least have Mia and Arisa take one each for now.

“What do you think these are?”

The rapiers were magical, too, but putting magic power into them only made them sparkle pointlessly, so they weren’t very useful weapons.

When I gave one a swing, it let out a science-fiction-y *vwoom* sound effect and left traces of light in the air like an effect from an action game.

“It’s like a Mementaider Rangers toy.”



“So coool?”

“Awesome, sir!”

The sparkling swords were a huge hit with the kids, who were waving them around and striking ridiculous poses.

There were tons of these toy swords, too, so I let them put one each in their Fairy Packs.

“What about these rings?”

All of them were Magic Rings that were activated by magic power.

“Whoa! What’s up with this one?!” Arisa exclaimed after putting magic power into a topaz ring.

A magic circle appeared in front of the ring and started producing stalagmites, which shot toward me so forcefully, they could’ve stabbed right through my buckler.

“It takes up all my magic, so it wouldn’t be very easy to use.”

Arisa handed me the ring, so I inspected it.

As far as I could tell, it could be charged with magic power in advance and would then steal exactly enough magic from the user to pull the trigger when activated.

If even Arisa, who had more magic power than most people, had all her magic used up just to trigger the effect, it must be a stunningly inefficient magic tool.

Once Arisa and the others’ levels were higher, maybe they could carry them as an emergency self-defense measure.

The other kids were picking up various rings and testing them out, too.

“Wha—?! It made a shield!”

“This one produces stone spears.”

“Master, ice spears have appeared, I declare.”

Lulu’s sardonyx ring produced a Practical Magic Shield spell, Liza’s onyx ring created black obsidian-like spears, and Nana’s aquamarine ring created ice

spears that floated in the air.

The ice spears went flying in whatever direction Nana pointed. They had a range of about 150 feet and were almost as strong as a normal Icicle spell.

Wearing multiple rings at once seemed to cause them to interfere with one another and make the effects difficult to produce. I was able to wear ten rings and activate them all at once, but that was probably because of my “Magic Manipulation” skill.

There were a lot of other rings, too, but no translation or underwater movement rings.

“Aren’t there any spell books?”

Arisa sounded hopeful, but I had to shake my head.

“There are maps of both land and sea, and reports on some magic tools, but no spell books.”

The maps covered a wider expanse than the one I had, but many of the major borders and place names were different.

The only ones that looked the same were the Valley of Dragons and elf territories like Bolenan Forest.

“What do you think these different-colored dotted lines on the sea map mean?”

“It says Nunulie, Nenelier, and so on.”

If what Captain Ghost said was true, then these were probably the routes of the floating castles.

“Isn’t Nenelier the place those ancient manuscripts you got at the dark auction came from?”

Arisa’s words jogged my memory. There hadn’t been anyone in the old capital who could read Ancient Language, so I had been planning to ask in the elf village, but I completely forgot.

Since I’d picked up the “Ancient Language” skill in the sunken ship, I could finally read those manuscripts later.

Suddenly, an adorable growl rumbled from Arisa's tummy.

*I guess it's just about lunchtime.*

"Ahhh, that was some really good *takoyaki*!"

Lulu blushed at Arisa's compliment. "It's only because the octopus was so fresh."

For lunch, we'd had *takoyaki* made with the octopus Pochi defeated.

The other kids were patting their stomachs in satisfaction and dozing off on the mat we'd spread out on the deck. Mia hadn't finished her octopus, but Tama and Pochi were happy to eat it for her.

"The fish was good, too."

Lulu smiled happily, letting out a little sigh of contentment.

The *takoyaki* alone wouldn't have been enough food, so we boiled and grilled some of the scorpion fish, greenling, and other fish we'd caught in the sunken ship.

"Yes, they had just the right amount of salt."

"The soy-boiled fish was delicious as well, I report."

Liza and Nana both looked pleased.

"Let's make sashimi and sushi sometime soon, too."

"Yes!" Lulu exclaimed. "I can't wait."

The other kids chimed in eagerly as well.

Arisa was the only one who knew what sushi was, but they must have figured it was some kind of delicious food.

*Well, I'm pretty full now, so maybe I'll try to work this off a little.*

"What's up, master?"

"I thought I'd test out the thing we found in the ship's hold."

As I responded, I stood over the water with "Skyrunning" and pulled out the Small Magic Cannon.

Despite being “Small,” it was a full size bigger than the disposable berserker cannons. It was in good shape thanks to Fixify, so I needed to give it only a quick inspection.

Once I’d distanced myself from the ship by a few dozen feet, I started setting up targets for the cannon.

I activated eight Flexible Shields about four hundred feet away from me, lined up on top of one another. Layered like this, they could withstand even the black dragon Hei Long’s breath attack, so they should work just fine as a target.

“I’m firing now,” I called back toward the ship, and then I loaded the Small Magic Cannon with magic power.

A red conducting line extended from the muzzle of the cannon, and magic circles began to form around it.

“Kind of looks like a cutscene from a fantasy game.”

Suddenly, an unstable light started crackling along the line and the circles.

*Uh-oh.*

Just as I pulled the trigger, “Sense Danger” activated, and I produced Flexible Shields in front of myself as well.

In the next moment, a flash of light dyed the ocean waves white.

The sound of the explosion tore through the air. It was so loud, it nearly knocked me off my feet.

After a few seconds, the flash faded, and my “Light Intensity Adjustment” skill restored my vision.

More than half of my Flexible Shields still remained, but the excess energy of the Small Magic Cannon had carved a path through the waves along a distance of more than half a mile.

Water went flying in every direction as it evaporated, and more seawater poured in to fill the gap the cannon had made.

“Hot!”

I used Wind Magic to fend off the wave of heat that came toward me.

I returned the now-melted ruins of the Small Magic Cannon to Storage and headed back toward the ship, leaving the raging sea and the cloud of hot vapor behind me.

“Looks like I used a bit too much magic.”

Clearly, this weapon had similar properties to the magically overcharged Holy Arrows I’d used to defeat that demon lord; the cannonballs were made from monster cores, so they could be charged up with magic to create enormous destructive power.

If done normally, it shouldn’t cause the weapon to collapse like the Holy Armor, but I guess I didn’t fully understand how that worked.

Luckily, I still had thirty-one Small Magic Cannons left to use for research, so I decided to take one apart and examine it next time I had a free moment.

If I really couldn’t figure it out, maybe I could even ask the research-loving elves of the Bulainan and Beliunan clans for help.

“No more craziness, okay?”

“Mm. Repent.”

Arisa and Mia scolded me when I got back to the ship.

“Sorry, sorry.”

I’d gotten so distracted by the mesmerizing sight of the cannon activating that I had forgotten to adjust how much magic I was putting into it, so I really had no excuse.

When I test-fired another cannon with the proper amount of magic later, the red line and magic circles still appeared, but there was no strange crackling this time, and it fired a steady shot.

Using the rapid-fire function caused the cannon to overheat, so it seemed to require a cooldown time after a few shots.

Firing it with a cannonball overloaded with magic power produced about half the strength of Hei Long’s breath attack, while firing it the normal way was about a tenth. Regardless, it was so powerful that it wouldn’t be easy to use.

My intermediate Light Magic spell Laser was a lot easier to focus and control, so even with less range, it was probably still more user-friendly than the Small Magic Cannons.

Concerning the experiment I'd thought of in the sunken ship regarding whether I could use Pure Water to turn salt water into fresh water, it turned out that I could produce completely salt-free drinking water and mineral-rich salt particles. Not only that, but I could do a whole barrelful of it in one go.

The results were better than I expected, but it was still faster to use the Well Bag or put magic into a water stone if we needed fresh water, so I probably wouldn't get a chance to use it very often.

According to my spell books, even a veteran Practical Magic user could produce only slightly less salty water with that technique.



“Master, unidentified object discovered above the seas ahead, I report.”

“What is it? A UMA?”

My AR revealed that the flashing light Nana was pointing at was actually the back of a sea serpent monster, not an unidentified mysterious animal.

Maybe it was investigating the commotion I'd caused with the Small Magic Cannon?

“Looks like a sea serpent.”

“Whoa, it's huge! What is it, level fifty?”

“No, the one in front of us is level thirty-one.”

As Arisa and I chatted, the sea serpent raised its head above the waves and shot a ball of water at us.

Its range was a lot longer than I expected: It flew more than three hundred feet.

“Master, allow me to take care of this, I exclaim!”

A magic circle glowed on Nana's forehead, creating two transparent shields in front of her. It was a similar technique to the intermediate Practical Magic spell

Flexible Shield, which I often used.

Nana's shields successfully intercepted the blob of liquid, but as soon as it hit, both shield and liquid went up in a puff of white smoke.

Stealthily, I created a few Flexible Shields of my own beneath the ship itself.

"Looks like those blobs aren't just made of water. They're globules of acid."

"Yikes, no thank you."

I had to agree with Arisa. I didn't want to see any of my friends get a nasty chemical burn.

"Fire."

Mia took aim and fired with the Fairy Bow she'd brought from home, but her arrow was blocked by a wall of water that appeared around the sea serpent.

"Mrrr." Mia scowled.

"Master, I am running low on shields. Requesting backup."

"All right. I'll take over."

I switched into Nana's defensive position and used a Light Magic Laser on the sea serpent, which was still firing at us from far away.

The Laser pierced right through the wall of water and obliterated the sea serpent with ease. *I guess intermediate magic might've been overkill.*

The sea serpent's blood began to dye the water red.

Immediately, most of the other sea serpents on the map began making their way over to us. Like sharks, they could probably smell blood from a long distance away.

Of course, the school of them traveling along the southern tip of the area didn't react.

"Scarecrow, bring the ship back a thousand feet. Stand by at maximum altitude. Engage evasive maneuvers as needed."

I gave some instructions to the ship's golem.

Sadly, it couldn't respond out loud, so the only confirmation was text that

appeared in my log. Next time I had a chance, I would have to add a magic-propelled steam whistle or something.

“It looks like a bunch of sea serpents are swarming because of the blood. I’ll distract them, so can you girls attack them with Magic Bows from above in order to level up?”

“Nooo?”

“Teachers said powelling is bad, sir.”

*Hmm?* By “teachers,” they must mean the elf instructors, but what was “powelling”?

“You weren’t there at the time, master? Hiya and the other elf teachers told us not to use power leveling. They said it doesn’t make you stronger because you won’t learn how to use your skills properly.”

Arisa stepped in to explain.

That was strange. The beastfolk girls had been power leveling with my help from the beginning, and they seemed stronger than soldiers and such around their same level, but...

*Well, all right, then. I think it probably varies based on the individual, but if this advice is coming from the long-lived elves, it’s probably in our best interest to listen.*

Besides, there’d be plenty of enemies for leveling up once we reach Labyrinth City.

“In that case, Arisa, Nana, and Mia, please defend the ship. Lulu, stay by the helm and keep an eye on the steering. Tama, please take the lookout post, and Liza and Pochi, watch the front and rear of the ship!”

The group all shouted confident affirmatives, so I left the ship feeling reassured.

Using “Skyrunning,” I made my way over to the area above the dead sea serpent and added more monster blood that couldn’t be used for potions to the mix.

Reaching an insane speed of nearly ninety miles per hour, the swarm of sea



serpents arrived, promptly tearing into the dead one floating on the waves.

*I guess sea serpents don't have a problem with cannibalism.*

The monsters were completely focused on their meal, paying no attention to me floating above them.

Taking a closer look, I realized that their heads looked more like that of an eel than a snake. If it weren't for the sharp fangs peeking out of their mouths, they might just look like giant eels.

I was willing to bet they'd be delicious, so I took extra precautions to not damage the meat with my attack.

Picking serpents at random, I caught them with Magic Hand, lopped off their heads with a "Spellblade"-infused fairy sword, and put the corpses away in Storage.

I was able to get through about half their number that way, but when the sea serpents ran out of meat, they all started firing acid attacks at me.

Using "Skyrunning" and "Flashrunning" to avoid the attacks, I flipped acrobatically into the middle of the swarm.

At first, I continued cutting off their heads with my fairy sword, but that started to become a pain in the heat of battle, so I wound up putting "Spellblade" directly on my hands and fighting them off that way.

It wasn't the most efficient use of magic power, but considering how much I had to spare, it wasn't a huge deal.

As I cut the sea serpents down, I quickly put the bodies in Storage one after another to ensure they weren't picked off by the others.

"...Ooh. It's time for the big game now, huh?"

A level-56 deep sea serpent emerged from the depths, gaping its enormous maw.

It seemed intent on swallowing me, so I hopped right into its mouth, then spun my entire body—sword in hand—and cut off its head from the inside.

A few more deep sea serpents attacked us, so I hunted each of them down.

Finally, the last few sea serpents fled the scene, and the battle was won.

I didn't want to leave the sea in such a state, so I stored away the bloodiest parts of the water in Storage until it had thinned out to a reasonable level before returning to the ship.

"You're as overpowered as ever."

I shrugged at Arisa, then handed Lulu a big slice of sea serpent that I'd removed the blood from during battle.

I'd had my spirit light on full blast, so the dangerous miasma in the meat should have been thinned out to a safe level.

"It doesn't seem to be poisonous. Want to try cooking a sample?"

"Of course! Shall I broil it in soy sauce?"

Lulu already had a mithril kitchen knife in hand.

"That sounds good. Since we want to see how it tastes first, could you grill one piece plain, please?"

With that, I retreated to the captain's quarters on the poop deck to change clothes.

I'd used Practical Magic to clean off the grime and seawater from the battle, but changing into fresh clothes just makes one feel cleaner.

"Smells good."

"Aye-aaaye!"

"Sniffing it makes me feel all floaty, sir."

When I returned to the deck, Lulu was cooking on the oven magic tool, and Tama and Pochi were hovering around drooling. The other kids looked eager to try it, too.

"Master, could you taste it first, please?"

"Thank you, Lulu."

I started with the plain grilled piece.

First, a bite with some salt... Yep, it was delicious. Its large size

notwithstanding, it tasted similar to a conger eel. Lulu had removed the small bones carefully, so it was a breeze to eat.

Next, I added a bit of lemon and took another bite.

Mm. This would go perfectly with some dry sake.

Finally, I tried a piece that had been broiled in soy sauce with a thick sauce on the side. The sweet dipping sauce beautifully complemented the light, flaky flesh. If there were white rice to go with it, I'd probably eat so much, I wouldn't be able to move.

"It's delicious, Lulu."

"Thank you very much!"

Lulu's beaming smile could have made a field of flowers bloom.

"The rest of you should try this, too."

At that, the girls all scrambled to get a taste of the broiled sea serpent.

Even Mia, who didn't generally like meat, seemed to enjoy the plain grilled fish with lemon.

*Guess we'll have sea serpent for dinner tonight.*

A good majority of the sea serpent's body was edible, so even if we grilled, broiled, or fried it every night, it would probably take half a month just to get through a single one. Its head might taste good broiled, too, so I'd have to try that sometime.

"Tweelve ships?"

"Thirteen, sir."

"Reeeally?"

I heard Tama and Pochi conversing on the lookout post. They were probably counting the number of sunken ships I'd recently collected.

We were heading north along the archipelagos, picking up sunken ships as we went.

We'd had our fill of sunken-ship exploring with the first one, so each time we

found another, I just put it into Storage with no questions asked.

In this area, we were finding one every couple of miles, but there seemed to be even more of them up ahead.

“Another wooden one, huh?” Arisa murmured.

“Approximately twenty percent have been metal, I inform.”

Aside from the adamantite battleship we first found, we’d come upon only two metal ships, both mithril-alloy magic destroyers from the Flue Empire.

The rest were all wooden, mostly Shiga Kingdom carracks and jib-sailed caravels, with the occasional galley ship of unknown origin.

All of them were huge ships, ranging from three hundred to five hundred tons of displacement, and most were equipped with Magic Guns of various sizes, Foundation spear launchers, and so on, with about half of them having a Magic Furnace as well.

Most of the Magic Furnaces could probably be used with a bit of repairs, but they wouldn’t be nearly as powerful as my Holytree Stone magic power sources despite being bigger, so they would probably just stay in Storage.

“All right, I think that should do it.”

Since I had the time, I was fiddling with one of the Small Magic Guns that had been Fixed in Storage to make it usable again.

The Foundation spear launchers looked sort of like harpoon guns, but none of them had been Fixed, so I would have to do some maintenance over the next few days before we could test one out.

“I wish to test fire it, I request.”

“Sure. Aim for that rock over there.”

I stabilized the ship and let Nana try out the Magic Gun.

A bigger version of this was frequently used in Seiryuu City’s anti-dragon towers. It was like the weapon equivalent of a Fire or Thunder Rod.

Normally, it would be supplied with magic power from a City Core or Magic Furnace, but this ship’s Holytree Stone engine didn’t produce much extra magic,

so I was supplying the magic myself. I hadn't overloaded it this time, so it should be fine.

If we were going to use weapons aboard this ship, it might be better to trade out the Holytree Stone engine for a bigger one after all.

"Firing now, I declare."

Nana pulled the trigger.

The blast that roared from the muzzle looked like an average mage's fireball made much bigger. It hit the water near the rock, sending up a huge splash.

Though their names were similar, the Small Magic Gun seemed to be much less powerful than the Small Magic Cannon.

"Huh, that's stronger than I expected."

"About five times the strength of a Fire Rod, perhaps?"

"Little more."

Mia's guess was probably correct. To be precise, I would say it was about seven times stronger.

"Rapid-fire is also possible, I report."

Nana fired five more times, after which the body of the gun became rather hot, so I had her stop the test.

"Perhaps we could use it to dispose of monsters on our travels?"

"...Th-this isn't going to work. Maybe if it got its magic power supply from the ship, though."

While Nana was testing, Arisa had attempted to charge another one with magic power, but she threw in the towel.

Evidently, this wasn't the kind of weapon that any normal individual could fire multiple times in a row.

Since this ship didn't have a Magic Furnace, I'd equipped it with something like the magic collection device I'd learned about in the elf village.

Incidentally, my salvaging also turned up a special Garage Bag that could also

transport living things, Flying Shoes and a wooden Pegasus like the hero Hayato's party had, and other such valuable magic tools.

The Garage Bag that could carry living things didn't seem to have solved the issues that the elves had told me about, so I would have to be very careful about using it. It must have been used as a pet carrier originally, since I found the bones of a small animal inside.



"A rooock?"

"It's an island, sir!"

Back up in the lookout post, Pochi had a longscope in hand.

The biggest of the Seadragon Islands must have come into view.

Before long, we were close enough that the island could be seen with the naked eye even from the deck.

"Hey, doesn't that look more like a sideways city than a rock?"

Just as Arisa said, the large rock in the center of the island almost looked like a city that had fallen from the sky.

That was a remarkable sight in itself, but there was something else that surprised me even more...

"Emergency stop!"

On my command, the figurehead golem stopped the ship.

The city-rock wasn't showing up on my map.

That meant it must have some kind of power that hid it from my map somehow.

"Wh-what's going on?"

"It might be a little dangerous here."

Everyone was looking at me in surprise, especially Arisa, but I couldn't explain exactly what the danger might be.

"I'm going to go take a look at that island. If I don't come back before

sundown, return to Bolenan Forest and ask Miss Aaze for help.”

To be safe, I lined the deck with some Magic Bows, special Holy Swords and Spears without user limitations, and so on.

Since the group wouldn't have enough magic power to make use of the rapid-fire capabilities of the Magic Cannons and Guns, I didn't put out any of those.

“W-wait a minute! Why would you go out of your way to investigate something dangerous?! Let's just ignore that island and go right by it!”

Arisa tugged my sleeve urgently, trying to stop me.

The others all looked worried, too, of course.

But if I didn't find out why the city-rock on that island wasn't showing on my map, I wouldn't be able to travel with peace of mind.

“It's all right. Once I figure out the cause, I'll come right back.”

“Cause? The cause of what?!”

I waved at the infuriated Arisa and took off toward the island with “Skyrunning.”

The water around the island was quite shallow, giving a clear view of the ocean floor below.

“Looks like there are a lot of sunken ships here, too...”

Among the coral reef on the ocean floor were the forms of quite a few large ships.

I gradually raised my altitude as I approached the island, until suddenly...

“M-masterrrrrr!”

My “Keen Hearing” skill picked up on cries from my party as I crashed into the ocean waves.

My mouth and nose felt strange and my ears popped, like the sensation when one dives off a diving board, as I collided with a rock on the bottom of the ocean.

*...Ouch.*

Beyond the froth of white bubbles, I saw colorful sea creatures wildly fleeing from me.

But no matter how long I looked at them, no information appeared in my AR.

Kicking off the ocean floor, I floated back up to the surface. For some reason, I couldn't use "Skyrunning."

"Are you okaaaay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine."

My friends called out to me with worry, so I waved at them reassuringly.

In the meantime, my research continued. My menu was displaying normally, and I seemed to be able to bring items into and out of Storage without a problem. Even my map appeared normal at a glance, but it wasn't updating with any new information.

Next, I tried selecting magic from my menu, but like "Skyrunning," I couldn't use any of it.

Whatever the reason, it seemed that I couldn't use magic or magic-related skills around this island.

My unique skills seemed to be functioning fine, but there were evidently limits on their ability to acquire new information by way of magic.

I moved away until I could use magic again, trying to figure out the range of the effect.

By marking a few kinds of migratory fish and following their movements on the map, I was able to get a rough estimate of the range. Magic seemed to be invalidated in about a two-mile radius around the water near the city-rock.

If there was something causing this, it would probably be at the center of that circle.

I headed toward the central point at the speed of an Olympic athlete.

I wasn't very good at swimming, since my body kept popping out of the ocean, so eventually I just started running along the surface of the water at high speed.



“A sea serpent welcoming party, huh?”

I unloaded several harpoons from Storage into the depths below, eliminating any sea serpents in my way. Once in a while, bigger creatures showed up, too, like deep sea serpents and something that looked like a mosasaurus.

Because of the huge difference in our levels, I was able to defeat them easily even without any magic or magical skills.

However, since I couldn't use Magic Hand, putting the corpses into Storage was a lot harder. Because I left a lot of them behind, the sea was starting to turn red, but I'd have to deal with that later.

“This should be the center of the radius... Hmm? There's something in the water.”

On the ocean floor, I could see something that looked like a shrine surrounded by Grecian stone pillars.

Once no more monsters were coming to attack me for the time being, I dove into the water to investigate.

Occasionally supplying myself with fresh oxygen from Storage, I explored the seabed shrine.

There was something written on the walls in what appeared to be Ancient Language.

THE FLOATING CASTLE NONOLIE HAS FALLEN TO OUR DEVOURING TRAP. WE WILL USE THE HEART OF NONOLIE TO CREATE A SECOND AND THIRD TRAP. THE FLOATING SHIPS, THE FLOATING ISLANDS...AND FINALLY, THE SKYFOLKS' CAPITAL, LALAKIE... WE SHALL BRING ALL OF THEM DOWN TO THE EARTH. FREEDOM SHALL BE IN OUR GRASP.

The final sentence was written in a strange scrawl, with red staining the grooves of the carved letters. It definitely gave off a sense of madness.

It was likely a trap laid by Captain Ghost's people.

The large amount of sunken ships near this area must have been caught in the magic-nullifying trap. Without magical defenses, the wooden ships especially would never have held up to sea serpent attacks.

A ship made with a magical alloy might manage, but against a larger monster like a deep sea serpent, it would probably meet the same fate.

I found a staircase leading downward and followed it to find an underground cavern.

I swam along a slope lined with white stone slabs that looked like coffins.

It felt as though I'd wandered into a graveyard.

*...Hmm? White hair?*

Out of the corner of my eye, I thought I saw a woman lying on one of the slabs.

An icy chill ran down my spine as I whirled to face her.

"...I guess I imagined it."

There was nobody there.

If there had been, surely I would have noticed when I first passed it.

Since coming to this world, I'd thought that encountering ghosts and undead kings and such had gotten me used to the supernatural, but I guess I still didn't deal well with this kind of deathly atmosphere.

When I reached the end of the slope, I saw an open space with a gigantic jet-black rock buried in the center.

A magic circle was emanating from the black rock.

This must have been creating the magic-nullifying space.

It would be difficult to pull the stone out without magic, but if I left it alone, this part of the ocean would become a ship graveyard not unlike the Bermuda Triangle.

I pulled out a blue-steel tool the kobolds had given me and dug out the rock.

Once I put it in Storage, the magic nullifier was canceled and I was able to use magic again.

Just to be sure, I confirmed that none of the items in Storage had lost their magic power.

"I guess this case is closed."

Opening my map, I saw that I was receiving new information again.

As I thought, the city-rock was the wreckage of the city called Nonolie.

Once I dealt with all the strong monsters in the area, I returned to my comrades on the ship.



“Land hoooo!”

“Sir!”

The ship had arrived on the beach of an inlet on the city-rock island, where I activated Dimension Anchor to keep it in place.

I lowered the gangway to the beach, and everyone happily disembarked, with the little kids in the lead.

“There are monsters and other dangerous creatures in the forest and beyond the cliffs, so don’t go too far.”

I stepped down onto the sand myself as I called out a warning.

Flotsam and jetsam from sunken ships were washed up all over the shore.

I gazed at it all absently as I set up a beach parasol next to the sheet Liza and Lulu had laid out.

The sunlight was strong, bright enough that it hurt my eyes bouncing off the sand.

I handed out canteens to make sure nobody got heatstroke.

“Ooh, that’s nice and cold.”

“Bubblyyy?”

“It’s carbonated, sir!”

“Mm, yellorange fruit.”

The younger kids thanked me and ran off to play by the water.

I followed them with the older group in tow.

“Hee-hee, you can’t come to the beach without dipping your toes in a little.”

“Mm. Nice.”

“Feels funny?”

“It’s amazing, sir! There’s sand moving between my toes, sir!”

Arisa took off her shoes, and the rest of the younger crew soon followed suit, frolicking at the water’s edge.

“There is a foreign object in the sand, I report.”

“A shell, maybe?”

“No, it seems to be some kind of rusted jewelry.”

The older crowd had found a washed-up piece of flotsam from one of the sunken ships.

“Gold cooin?”

“I found a pretty rock, sir.”

“Mm. Aquamarine.”

After a little while of gathering shells, the group moved on to combing the beach for treasure.

Arisa dragged Lulu over to look at some barrels that had washed up onshore.

“Barrrel.”

For some reason, Arisa kept muttering *barrel* to herself and giggling. It was probably a joke from some famous game or anime series.

“This one smells of alcohol.”

Some of the hardier barrels still had their contents intact. There were all different kinds, including a handful that contained food, drink, or liquor that was still usable.

Unfortunately...

“Eeeeeek! B-buuuugs!”

...some of them had been infested by roaches or flies, so we had to proceed with caution.

Lulu was clinging to me and trembling, so I patted her reassuringly as I spoke to Liza.

“Liza, I’m going to go check out the city-rock a bit. Could you keep an eye on things over here?”

“Yes, of course.”

Liza nodded, but she looked like she wanted to say something else.

It was Nana who stepped in for her.

“Master, if you are going to investigate the city-rock, please bring a guard with you, I request.”

*Ah, I see. She doesn’t want me to go alone.*

“Don’t worry. I’m only going to fly around and collect some treasure from the sunken ships nearby, plus take a little peek while I’m at it.”

The older girls looked worried, so I tried to reassure them as lightly as possible.

I wasn’t too worried about monsters or other things I could detect in advance, but I didn’t want to risk putting them in danger of landslides, falling rocks, or that sort of thing.

“And I’ll put a Return seal slate here, so I can come back at any time.”

The trio still looked worried, so I showed them a seal slate, at which point they finally smiled in relief.

“That’s probably enough salvaging for now...”

I’d used “Skyrunning” to do a loop around the island, picking up treasure from sunken ships as I went.

Most of the ships themselves were in pretty rough shape, so I put them back in the water to serve as fish reefs once I’d recovered the treasure and other remains.

Some of the ships had rotted so severely that they’d lost their shape entirely, turning into piles of scrap wood and metal with the occasional treasure buried within. Since the anti-magic space had also canceled out the Fixify spells, the only valuables that were still intact were certain precious metals and gems that were resistant to rust and seawater.

Among the relatively newer sunken ships, I found a few that seemed to belong to Viscount Emerin, who I'd met in the old capital. From those, I was able to recover the remains and articles of the deceased, as well as some Magic Furnaces and Cannons that were damaged but potentially repairable.

Strangely, though Viscount Emerin had spoken of a lost fleet, there was one less ship here than the amount he mentioned. I was a little curious about this; perhaps it had broken apart and left no remains or sunk in a deep area that was part of a different map.

Once we set sail again, I decided I would give the unidentifiable remains a proper burial at sea.

These poor souls had probably been caught in the magic-nullifying barrier and slaughtered by a swarm of sea serpents near this beach, so I doubted they could rest in peace properly here.

"Next, I guess I'll investigate the city-rock."

I took off into the sky, leaving the waves far below, until I was high enough to look down at the city-rock.

The side we'd been facing was merely bare rock, but when I came around to the other side, I could see just how bizarre it was.

The image of buildings that were hundreds or even thousands of years old, all clustered together horizontally, was so strange, it seemed like something out of a movie.

There weren't any buildings as tall as you would see in modern Japan, but I thought it was pretty impressive that none of them had bent out of shape. They were still standing straight and tall, despite being tilted to one side for so long.

When I came closer, I saw something else that intrigued me.

"I've seen this crest somewhere before..."

There were four crests engraved on the front gates of the city, one of which was made with a familiar-looking red stone.

"...Oh yeah, the pyromaniac noble."

For some reason, it looked like the crest sported by the pyromaniac noble

we'd encountered a little while before we went to the elf village.

"I knew it. It's the same one in the stone from the Crimson Cane."

When I produced the stone of his fiery weapon from Storage, I saw that they were one and the same.

Still, that didn't explain what the connection might be.

I put the stone back in Storage and approached one of the buildings.

Peering in through the window, I saw that the lower wall was severely indented beneath a heap of crushed furniture and equipment.

From somewhere in this pile, I heard the flapping of wings.

"...Birds?"

The arrival of an intruder (me) seemed to have scared away some birds.

The ruins of these buildings must be a bird paradise; there were countless nests in most of the buildings below a certain point.

I passed the web of a giant spider that preyed on the birds, arriving at the ground.

"Looking up at it from down here is impressive, too, in a different way from seeing it from the sky."

I landed near some kind of monument close to the city-rock.

"'Freedom shall be in our grasp' again, huh..."

That same phrase was engraved on this monument, a warped, sinister-looking stone.

It was written in the same mad-looking penmanship I'd seen in the underwater temple.

"What's this, then?"

There was a huge pit directly in front of the monument.

"...Geh!"

I used the Wind Magic spell Blow to disperse the leaves that had settled over the pit, shedding sunlight on its contents.

“I mean, I knew there was no one left alive, but...”

In the pit below, a huge amount of human bones was trapped in a cement-like substance along with pieces of junk.

It was more like a landfill than a grave.

“It looks like the survivors were killed in a pretty gruesome way.”

In my mind, images of the events that must have transpired here arose unbidden...

The floating city Nonolie must have fallen due to the anti-magic trap, and even those few people who survived were captured and killed.

The sense of madness about this monument made it all too easy to imagine what kind of tragedies had befallen the people of Nonolie.

It must have been the same kind of atrocities committed in the witch hunts of Europe in the Middle Ages.

Imagining the kind of people who would invent such things made me sick to my stomach.

Even if this had taken place a long time in the past, it was still horrible.

Raising my eyes, I once again saw the twisted stone monument.

After seeing the remains of this terrible tragedy, the word *freedom* now called to mind the demon lord–worshipping cult the Wings of Freedom.

“I should at least bury them properly...”

I knew this wouldn’t serve any purpose beyond making myself feel a little better, but it didn’t seem right to leave these remains tossed aside with the garbage.

I sent my Magic Hand into the pit, collecting the bones, junk, and all into Storage, where I separated the human remains from the rest.

According to the detailed information in my Storage screen, the cement-like substance was actually the solidified ashes of more of the deceased.

I moved to an elevated part of the island near the city-rock, as far from the underwater monument as possible, and used the Earth Magic spell Pitfall to



create a new grave, where I buried the massive amount of bones and ashes.

One grave wasn't enough, so I ended up having to make several large pits—since I was burying all the bones from the city-rock as well.

It was easy to recover each one, since I found that I could successfully put the entire city-rock in Storage by touching it.

But since I remembered that the city-rock was a historic landmark as well as home to countless birds, I decided to put it back.

A few animals were sacrificed in the process, but I would make sure to use them for food in the future so they wouldn't go to waste.

I reinforced the base with the Earth Magic spell Wall, so there should be no risk of the city-rock falling.

“This seems a little sparse...”

I planted some of the flower seeds I'd received in the elf village in the earth above the graves, then used a Treespirt Pearl from the treants to speed up the flowers' growth, turning the hill into a flower garden.

Then I placed a meteorite from Storage near the graves and used “Spellblade” to carve the words HERE LIE THE PEOPLE OF NONOLIE into it.

Finally, I said a silent prayer for the buried victims before leaving the place.

Briefly, I remembered the bodies from the Valley of Dragons in my Graveyard folder, but I decided not to bury them here.

Dragon corpses contained highly valuable ingredients, so if anyone found out I'd buried them, it could cause some serious problems. Besides, the high elf Aaze told me that the dragon god would eventually be revived and could use its power to revive the other dragons.

They wouldn't rot as long as they were in Storage, so I decided it was probably best to keep them there for the time being.

“Welcome back, master!”

After regrouping with the others on the beach, I found Arisa wearing sunglasses and relaxing in a beach chair. The other girls were still combing the

shore for treasure.

According to my map information, the rest of the younger kids had gone to an arch-shaped rock formation at the northern end of the beach, while the older group was at a cliff on the southern side.

A bouquet of flowers was lying on the blanket set out next to Arisa.

“Thanks... Were there flowers growing around here?”

Arisa lowered her sunglasses. “These are artificial flowers we found in the flotsam. I figured we could leave them at those ruins later, so I washed them.”

Arisa really was very considerate in her own way.

She didn't pry into what I'd been doing, so I sat down at her side, enjoying the sound of the waves and the distant laughter of Tama and Pochi. The soothing atmosphere was a balm on my soul after the atrocities I'd seen.

As Arisa's warm hand stroked my hair, I sorted through the articles and remains of the deceased from the sunken ships.

For those who could be identified, I decided to mail them along with a letter to the families, saying that I'd acquired them from salvagers.

For the ones I couldn't figure out, perhaps I could find a way to put the information out for families to find.

Arisa frowned up at the sky, holding out an open hand.

“Is it going to rain?”

Looking around, I saw gray clouds on the other side of the city-rock.

Large, sparse raindrops began to hit the beach here and there, sinking into the sand and tapping on the parasol.

Before long, the light rain became a squall.

The older group seemed to have found shelter from the rain, but the younger kids were getting soaked as they ran back toward us.

*Danger.*

My “Sense Danger” skill suddenly kicked into action, just as countless red dots

appeared on my radar.

Fortunately, they weren't too close to any of the girls.

"Enemies! Everyone, get to the ship!"

I used my "Amplification" skill to relay a warning to everyone.

"Enemies? What kind?"

I could barely see anything through the heavy rain.

"Hang on a second."

I opened the map to get more information.

A dozen or so large red dots, which hadn't been anywhere on the map before the rain started pouring, had appeared around the city-rock.

"...Ghost ships?"

The dots were evidently undead monsters called "ghost ships."

Their levels ranged from the low 30s to the high 40s, with skills like "Float" and "Spirit World Passage."

As I was watching these ghost ships, I saw new dots appearing on my radar near my companions and myself.

These smaller red dots were appearing from the large dots of the ghost ships closest to the city-rock.

The ships were producing various kinds of skeletons.

Once that ended, the ghost ships floated upward as if they had no other business here, joining the rest of the ghost fleet patrolling around the city-rock.

I quickly searched the skeletons by level, checking for any that were too strong for the girls to handle.

Luckily, the only ones that were level 20 or above, and therefore a potentially serious threat to my comrades, were all near the ghost ship fleet.

I decided to keep an eye on those while supporting the rest of my party, letting them take the lead so they could get stronger.

"Master, skeletons are coming out of the rain!"

With that, Arisa produced a Fire Rod from her Fairy Pack and fired at the head of an almost-ten-foot-tall skeleton soldier.

The creature emerged from the steam and smoke with a single skull, while more skeletons dressed in tattered pirate clothes leaped out from behind it, brandishing rusty cutlasses.

“There’s quite a few of them.”

I selected Remote Arrow from the magic menu, wiping out most of the lesser skeletons.

“Come on—leave some work for your beloved Arisa, would you?”

“Don’t worry. I left five or so for you.”

“Oh, master! You’re so thoughtful!”

Her mood improving considerably, Arisa fired off some chant-less Space Magic.

I didn’t know which spell she used, since there wasn’t any incantation, but five of the big skeletons hit the ground, their shins shattered.

“Masterrr!”

The rain was starting to let up as I heard Tama’s voice approaching.

Her Magic Sword glowed red as she cut through the skeletons blocking her path. She seemed to be using the Soft Stun effect on the skeletons, since their resistance to blades was high.

Tama was followed closely by Pochi, who was carrying Mia over her shoulder.

“...■■■■ **Create Swamp** Sokonashi Numa.”

As Pochi held her up, Mia waved her staff.

The rain hitting the sand swirled into a whirlpool, forming a bottomless swamp that swallowed the skeletons chasing the three.

“Made iit?”

“Good job, you three.”

As I praised Tama and the other two, I operated my magic menu.

“I’ll take care of the rest.”

My Remote Stun spell rained down on the skeletons who had avoided the swamp, evaporating bones and blades alike into dust. Technically, this spell was supposed to be for knocking people out, but its power was equivalent to being hit by an average soldier with a mace, so it was very effective against brittle bones.

“Mia, use Water Hold, please!” Arisa called out, pointing at the large skeletons that were dragging themselves along with their arms.

“Mm.”

Mia nodded and began the chant.

“Tama, Pochi! Take out any skeletons Mia’s spell doesn’t reach!”

“Aye-aye!”

“Yes, sir!”

At Arisa’s directions, Tama and Pochi readied their Magic Swords and glared at the big skeletons.

My companions weren’t wearing armor today, so I used Enchant: Physical Protection on all of them.

*Okay, looks like these four can take it from here.*

“Master! Requesting backup, I entreat!” Nana called out from elsewhere in the rain.

I thought that Liza and Nana should be able to handle all the monsters near them easily, but when I turned, I saw a giant skeletal snake chasing the three older girls. It was a level-30 monster called a “bone snake.”

Nana, who was bringing up the rear, was using her Foundation abilities to keep the snake in check, and Liza protected Lulu from the front while fending off any other enemies who got in their way.

Even Lulu, in the middle, wasn’t just letting herself be protected. She was screaming, yes, but she was also shooting at a kangaroo-like skeleton monster called a “skeleton hopper” with her Magic Gun.

I was impressed she was able to hit her target while running.

I selected Short Stun from my magic menu and used it to take out the skeletons, starting with the bone snake. I hadn't intended to defeat them, but they ended up getting reduced to specks of dust.

Next, I produced a large shield from Storage and held it out to Nana as she rushed over to me.

"Master, I am terribly sorry to have troubled you."

"Master, thank you for the shield, I declare."

Liza and Nana handed Lulu to me, then ran to help the others fight off the large skeletons.

Lulu seemed to be panicking, so I held her steady as I instructed the Scarecrow golem to prepare the ship for departure.

"Mere piles of bones should not be working together, I exclaim!"

With her shield at the ready, Nana used her "Taunt" skill to draw the monsters' attention.

The five large skeletons had somehow fused together, turning into a single bone snake. Combining seemed to raise their level, which had gone from somewhere in the teens to level 30.

I didn't want anyone to get hurt, so I used Enchant: Physical Protection on the older girls, too, and prepared to intervene just in case.

"Shield!"

Nana combined her Foundation shield and her real physical one to parry the bone snake's attack.

Then Mia's Water Magic came in.

"...■■■ **Water Hold** Mizu Shibaru."

The rain hitting the bone snake's body merged into watery tentacles, wrapping around the monster and holding it in place.

"My turn! Dimension Pile!"

Once the bone snake was immobilized, Arisa's magic created invisible poles that pierced through the creature, rooting it to the ground.

"Good work!" Liza called. "Tama, Pochi, aim for the core!"

"Aye-aye, sirrr!"

"Roger, sir!"

Liza, too, came in to attack the snake head-on.

Tama and Pochi attacked the glowing red core from either side, but the bones transformed to defend it, then shot at them with bullet-like bone fragments.

"Whoosh, whoooooosh!"

"Waaah, don't attack so much, sir!"

Tama managed to dodge all the bones, but Pochi wasn't so lucky and wound up falling back to a nearby rock.

Her Enchant: Physical Protection was in danger of breaking, so I recast it right away.

"It is cowardly to split in two, I declare!"

The bone snake's head had split in two, with one half attacking Liza, the other attacking Nana.





Liza twisted around to dodge the oncoming head-butt and tumbled onto the sand.

“Aah! Take this!”

A part of the snake’s tail had been sneaking up on Lulu, but she shot it down with her Magic Gun.

The two magic users, Arisa and Mia, were too busy keeping the snake trapped to do anything else.

“O Magic Spear, feel my burning blood—”

Liza stood, kicking up sand, and started weirdly muttering with her spear in hand.

“—pass through my arm and gather at thine spearhead!”

Liza’s body let off a faint red glow, and the patterns on the Magic Spear pulsed with red light.

“Come forth, ‘Spellblade’!”

With that final shout, the light on the spear gathered at the tip, turning into the bright-red glow of “Spellblade.”

Liza charged toward the bone snake, leaving a streak of red light like a comet.

With the help of her “Blink” and “Body Strengthening” skills, Liza moved far faster than the scattering of the snake’s bone bullets, leaving a spray of sand in her wake as she leaped toward the heart of the bone snake.

The monster attempted to counter her with a head-butt, but— “Not a chance!”

Arisa’s spirited Space Magic blocked it.

“Begone, bone beast!”

Liza’s “Spellblade” pierced right through the bone snake’s skull, the overflowing magic cracking it into pieces.

“There’s that legendary move!”

“Mm. Awesome.”

Arisa and Mia praised Liza's "Spellblade."

Evidently, Liza's bad-fantasy-novel-sounding chant was actually a spirit-focusing incantation taught to her by the elf Gurgapoya, her spear master.

Deliberately invoking "Spellblade" could be difficult when one was still learning, so he suggested using keywords like those to help activate it.

"Miss Liza, watch out!" Lulu cried.

The snake's other head was going straight for her.

"Do not get distracted, I warn."

Nana fired a Foundation spear at the skull, using "Taunt" to draw its attention from Liza back to her.

"Pochiii!"

Realizing the snake was no longer focused on them, Tama called out to Pochi.

"Charge, sir!"

Using the "Body Strengthening" and "Blink" skills, Pochi came in at incredible speed from the bone snake's blind spot to stab through the bone protecting its heart.

The bone shards flew across the beach, and Tama dodged among them like a shadow.

"Now, Tama, sir!"

Having lost her momentum, Pochi shouted at Tama.

"Nooo problemooo!"

Tama leapfrogged over Pochi's back, sneaking through the gaps in the bone snake's body to arrive directly at the core.

"Meowly Stone!"

With this joking cry, Tama poured magic into the Holy Stone, and a pillar of bluish-white light enveloped the glowing red core.

*HISSSSHAAAAAAAHH!*

The bone snake let out an angry roar at the unexpected attack.

“You are wide-open, I report.”

Nana’s large shield smashed into the bone snake’s unprotected jaw, and Liza’s “Spellblade” slashed through its neck.

With its head gone and heart purified, the bone snake fell apart into smaller skeletons.

“Finish it!”

“■ *Ice Koori.*”

Arisa’s Space Magic and Mia’s Spirit Magic delivered the finishing blows to the remaining skeletons.

“Good work, everyone! We’ll take a break once we return to the ship.”

I led everyone back toward our ship as I praised their teamwork.

“Master, the ghost ships are coming this way.”

Sensing a change, Liza alerted me.

Evidently, defeating the bone snake had drawn the ships’ attention to us.

“Don’t worry, Liza.”

Once we got off the coast, I could use my intermediate attack magic to wipe them all out in one go.

If I did it here, I might accidentally destroy the city-rock of the grave of the Nonolie people in the process.

“Master, we are prepared for departure, I report.”

“All right, let’s set sail!”

The skypower engine let out a roar, and our ship took off into the sky.

By now, the rain had let up from an intense squall to an average downpour, but in exchange, the wind had gotten much stronger and stormier.

“Dome, close!”

A transparent dome covered the helm and the other seats on the deck.

It was a powerful defensive dome made from the cornea of the giant monster

fish Tobkezerra. It could ward off even my Fire Ball or a concentrated Laser.

“Shiiips?”

“There are lots and lots of them, sir!”

Tama and Pochi, who had changed into armor and fastened their seat belts, pointed frantically back in the direction of the city-rock.

The ghost ships were approaching through the curtain of heavy rain, wreathed by black clouds. It was hard to see clearly in the rain, but the silhouettes of the ships ranged from small sailing ships to galleys.

“Big.”

“Th-they’re quite fast.”

Mia and Lulu trembled as they looked at the oncoming ghost ships.

“Master, shall I produce Flexible Shields? I inquire.”

“I think I can slow down one or two of them.”

“It’s all right,” I reassured Nana and Arisa. I appreciated the offers, but we were on track to put a perfectly safe distance between us.

“Master, at least allow me to guard from the stern—”

“No, you could fall.”

Liza, who had changed into her armor, looked eager as well, but I shook my head.

Perhaps due to the intense rainfall or the appearance of the ghost ships, the formerly calm seas were becoming increasingly tempestuous.

If someone fell in there, they could drown in a matter of seconds.

Besides...

“I’ll take care of the rest. You all just stay here and watch.”

I smiled at everyone, then used “Skyrunning” to take off from the poop deck.

The figurehead golem should be able to take care of steering the ship.

“Wow, they really are ghost ships, all right.”

As I came closer, I could see the ships more clearly.

They weren't merely different sizes—they were from all different places and eras, too.

All the ghost ships in the fleet had tattered sails, and some even had broken masts or huge holes in the sides.

They were each trailed by a black cloud, giving the illusion that they were burning from a direct cannon hit.

All they had in common was the fact that they were floating in the sky and that they were all captained by ghosts or skeletons with rusty cutlasses.

It was a fantastical scene and all but a little bit too horror-flavored for my tastes.

*“Okwabeetouga!”*

Beneath the sounds of rain and whipping winds, I heard a skin-crawling voice shrieking.

### > Skill Acquired: “Hallowed Language”

The inflection was similar to Ancient Language, but apparently, it wasn't the same.

I quickly put skill points into “Hallowed Language” and activated it.

On the map, I could see that my comrades' status condition had changed to **Fear**. That shriek must have had a similar effect to the black dragon's roar.

I felt bad for them, but I would probably have to deal with this situation first.

“<Ye covetous whelps who dare target the gods' floating island Lalakie! For as long as there be living light in these eyes, I, the Skeleton King, shall never surrender the key to Lalakie!>”

The bearded skeleton captain of the largest ghost ship shouted from the deck.

*Um, aren't you dead, though?*

“<You misunderstand! We care not for the key to Lalakie.>”

Just to be safe, I searched my Storage and the map for it, but the key didn't

seem to be anywhere around.

“<Any thief would say the same. But you shall answer to the Skeleton King, companion to the final queen of Lalakie!>”

The Skeleton King swung a dark-red rapier, and all the ghost ships turned their sides toward me.

“<Fiiiiire!>”

*Boom!* The ghost ships shot at me with a dull sound and clouds of black smoke.

Cannonballs flew toward me, blazing with black flame.

My Flexible Shields or the ship’s defenses could probably ward them off, but there was no need to put everyone in danger like that.

Instead, I changed my title to Hero and brought out the Holy Sword Claidheamh Soluis.

“<Dance,> Claidheamh Soluis!”

On my command, the Holy Sword transformed into thirteen blades and began counterattacking the cannons.

“<How impudent for a measly thief! Go forth, undead army! Drag these thieves into the next world as your comrades!>”

Upon hearing the Skeleton King’s words, I finally understood.

The ghost ships were all different because they were the shades of the Skeleton King’s victims. That explained why the crews’ clothing ranged from that of pirate lackeys to navy uniforms.

The ghost ships attacked at the Skeleton King’s command.

They were led by former pirate ships, which had naval rams on their bows.

The ghosts who were able to fly took off like carrier-based aircraft, and the deck-bound skeleton soldiers began to fire with guns and bows.

*AWUOOOOOOWN.*

The skeletons’ cries echoed through the stormy sky. There was no meaning to

their words.

Giving a brief, silent prayer for their souls, I swung my raised hand down.

“<Dance,> Claidheamh Soluis—bring the dead to rest.”

My slightly dramatic words scattered on the wind.

The blades of my Holy Sword let off a bright-blue light as they zoomed around like guided air-to-air missiles from a certain mecha anime.

*WHOOOSH.*

Claidheamh Soluis reached the first of the ghost ships.

The black clouds of the ghost ship and the blue glow of Claidheamh Soluis clashed for an instant, but the latter quickly won out.

When the flash of light faded, the ghost ship was gone, leaving nothing but white ash falling amid the rain and gusts.

All over the stormy skies, the same scene was playing out.

One by one, the ghost ships turned to ash along with their skeletal crews and disappeared.

I thought I heard the skeletons sigh with relief as they vanished, but it might have been my imagination.

“<Impossible! How darest thou destroy my elite troops with such ease?!>”

The Skeleton King shouted with rage as his ghost fleet disappeared.

His pompous mannerisms reminded me of the jet-black greater hell demon I'd encountered in Seiryuu City.

“<Hang in there. It's almost your turn.>”

“<Such insolence! Art thou perhaps with Doghead?! Then destroying the god-granted floating islands and floating castles was not enough to slake thy bloodlust—thou hast turned thy hand toward the sea-hidden Lalakie as well?!>”

I had no idea what the Skeleton King was talking about at that point.

“<I shall not allow it! Lalakie shall someday return to the skies, destroy the false kings who run rampant on land, and reign over the world once more. This I

swore to my wife on her deathbed—>”

For some reason, the Skeleton King was glaring into the swirling black clouds. I'd thought he was talking to me, but it seemed he was shouting at some other person in his memories instead.

“<—and I shall see that promise through, no matter who or what I must sacrifice to do so!>”

This all sounded very grandiose but also maybe a little crazy.

World domination was the kind of goal that should show up only in children's stories.

As I resisted the urge to roll my eyes, my Holy Sword returned from sweeping away the ghost fleet.

All that was left was the Skeleton King's flagship.

“<Save that kind of ambition for the living, please.>”

I had a bad feeling about it, so I put a marker on the Skeleton King and his ship.

If conversation was possible, I preferred to settle things with words rather than trying to kill each other, but...

“<Foolish vermin. Feel the wrath of the Magic Cannon granted to me by the gods.>”

The bow of the ghost ship opened, revealing a giant cannon.

Red particles of light began to gather at its muzzle.

...Clearly, this guy was out to kill me.

The red light began to form into a straight conducting line.

This Magic Cannon must have the same firing sequence as the Small Magic Cannon I'd tested before.

“<Tremble in fear, thou earth-crawling worms!>”

Magic circles began to spawn around the red line.

*...Yeah, I'm not going to just let this thing fire.*



I would've let him go if he was harmless, but having a phantom ghost ship with a grudge against us roaming around would be bad for my mental health.

From Storage, I produced a Holy Bullet that had been overloaded with magic power, and then I flung it toward the Magic Cannon with all my might.

A blue flash evaporated the nearby raindrops, piercing the Magic Cannon along with the ghost ship itself.

The ship exploded, leaving a few rings of black dust.

“Was it wasteful to use a Holy Bullet when a few of them could kill a demon lord?”

Within moments, the rain let up, and the clouds began to disperse. The Skeleton King appeared to have been the cause of the storm.

A dark voice spoke to me from the seas below.

“<Foolish vermin—nay, demon who dareth harm me and hide thyself from the spirit world! I shall return Lalakie to the skies, even if thou standeth in my way! No matter what I must offer up in exchange...>”

Just as I suspected, the Skeleton King had some tricks up his sleeve.

According to my marker, his current location was now the **Spirit World**. He must have used the “Spirit World Passage” he and the ghost ships had.

The Skeleton King had next to zero HP left. He must have fled to this Spirit World place moments before the attack could kill him.

The marker I'd attached to the ghost ship had disappeared, so I'd successfully destroyed that, at least.

I searched around for the source of the voice. If I could hear him, there must be a gate to the Spirit World somewhere.

“<...Let us meet again, elsewhere in time.>”

Finishing his monologue, the Skeleton King's presence vanished completely, leaving the echo of an ominous laugh.

I didn't manage to find the gate, but my “Sense Danger” would be on high alert for this guy. If we did “meet again,” I would dispose of him with no

questions asked.

You had to deal with guys like that before you wound up with some kind of fated adversary.

## The Amnesiac Girl

*Satou here. I've been on ferries and fishing boats before but never sailing ships. When I first saw a model sailing ship at a friend's house, I was surprised by how much rope there was.*

"...Lalakie?"

"Yeah, that's what the Skeleton King on the ghost ship said."

Once I cleared the Fear status condition from my party, I summarized what had happened.

"That name sounds familiar... Wait, didn't you say the ghost captain of that blue sunken ship said the same thing?"

With a nod, I presented my hypothesis.

"He may have come to search for the 'key to Lalakie' in the ruins of Nonolie because I deactivated the anti-magic trap."

I didn't know how spirits and magic were connected, but I had a feeling that might have been keeping them away.

"So do you have it?"

"Nope."

This wasn't a game, so of course an important item like that wasn't just lying around.

"Didn't Captain Ghost say something about keys and coffins and stuff like that?"

Arisa's words sounded familiar, so I searched my memories.

*Let's see, I think he said...*

*"...The key to Lalakie... Stolen. Now Lalakie...can no longer fly. All that remains is to bring the Coffin to His Majesty the Emperor in the Room of Reality..."*

*...or something like that.*

Based on the clues, I guessed that Captain Ghost's men had stolen from the Skeleton King the "key" required for Lalakie to fly, as well as this "Coffin" thing, which they were trying to bring to some "emperor."

"All this happened a long time ago, so it probably reached this 'emperor' after that."

"I guess so."

Arisa nodded in agreement, and we put the subject of Lalakie to rest.

"Master! There's someone on the beach!"

Lulu pointed back toward the edge of the water.

I couldn't see too closely, but it looked to be a woman with long white hair.

The tips of her hair were blue. Maybe they were dyed?

"Oh no! We have to help!"

*Whoops. Arisa is right.*

*Better rescue her first and worry about her hair later.*

We were still roughly three hundred feet from the shore, so I used Magic Hand to retrieve the person.

Once she was on the deck, I could see that she was a gorgeous woman with dark-brown skin.

Her face was pale, and she looked to be in pain.

Lulu produced a blanket from her Fairy Pack and covered her with it.

"Master, this woman...!"

"I know."

Arisa looked serious, and I nodded gravely.

*To think that there is someone else with a bust big enough to rival Miss Karina's...*

"Hi-ya!"

Arisa's tiny fist bopped my head.

"Judging by that face, you're not thinking what I'm thinking at all, are you?"

Arisa put her hands on her hips, glaring down at me as I knelt next to the unconscious woman.

"What—?" I started to ask, but then I realized what Arisa was talking about.

*Half-ghost?*

The AR display said that her race was **Half-Ghost**.

In a strict fantasy world like this where humans and elves couldn't even produce half-elves, how could a half-ghost exist?

I had the urge to lodge a complaint with whatever gods made the rules of this world.

"Looks like she's lost her memories, too."

I nodded at Arisa, using the "Poker Face" skill to hide my inner complaints.

Her status condition read **Amnesiac**. Maybe that was why most of the fields in her information, like name and affiliation, were blank; white text stated that she was **level 1** with the skill "**Song**," but next to that was gray text that said **level 27** and listed skills like "**Earth Magic**," "**Summoning Magic**," "**Singing Magic**," "**Meditation**," and "**Sociability: Lalakie**."

"She's level one with only one skill, so maybe we shouldn't pry about her race?"

Raising an eyebrow at Arisa's muttered remark, I turned off my menu display and used my "Analyze" skill to check her status.

As it turned out, the regular "Analyze" skill could see only the white text.

In that case, Arisa could probably see only the white text that read **Amnesiac**, not the grayed-out titles like **Last Princess of Lalakie** and **Sacrificial Maiden**.

Her race-specific inherent skills like "**Magic Absorption: Weak**," "**Health Absorption: Weak**," and "**Spirit World Passage**" were grayed out, too.

It was similar to the state of my companions' newly acquired skills before they fully sank in.

“What’s wrong, Tama, sir?”

Turning at the sound of Pochi’s voice, I saw Tama lurking behind the mast, glaring at the unconscious woman.

Her tail was puffed up, and she was clawing at the mast, growling a little.

The half-ghost woman was probably putting her on edge.

“Satou.”

“Don’t assault her!”

Mia and Arisa protested when I put my hand to the woman’s wrist.

“I’m just checking her pulse.”

*What the...?*

When I let go of her, something felt strange.

Passing my hand over her skin, I felt some kind of reaction when my skin was on the verge of brushing against hers.

“Mrrr. Guilty.”

“How is *that* checking a pulse?!”

The pair tried to pull my hand away, so I passed them off to Nana and Lulu.

*What’s going on here?*

No matter how hard I stared, I couldn’t see anything.

With Spirit Vision activated, I saw that the space around her was utterly devoid of spirits.

With “Magic Vision,” I noticed she was giving off more magic power than the average person.

But what I was feeling wasn’t magic.

If anything, it was more like when I touched the Undead King Zen’s shadow...

**> Skill Acquired: “Miasma Vision”**

Now I could see a faint black aura around the girl.

Like when I first started to see spirits, it didn’t show up if I concentrated; I had

to look at it out of the corner of my eye.

I added points to the new “Miasma Vision” skill and turned it on.

My vision turned black-and-white, like I was looking at a negative of the world.

“...Geh!”

I could see an ominous aura of miasma around the young woman much more clearly than before. It was like a dark hatching effect from a manga.

A chill ran down my spine.

“<...Nnngh...>”

The aura seemed to constrict the woman, and she cried out in pain.

Instinctively, I reached out and grasped some of the miasma.

When I moved to break it apart, the mysterious woman’s face relaxed just a little.

I set about removing the miasma that was tormenting her, like untangling a knotted web of fishing line.

It was pretty difficult work.

But as I concentrated so intensely that I could see only the tangled miasma, I became able to remove it faster and faster.

The shackle-like miasma around her hands and feet was especially strong, but it wasn’t anything I wouldn’t be able to handle with a bit more concentration. The chain-shaped miasma trailing from the shackles cut off partway down, so I probably didn’t need to worry about that too much.

“Aaaah!”

In a distant part of my consciousness, I heard Arisa shriek, but it didn’t sound like anything too important, so I just kept working at the miasma.

“Whew, all done— Wait, what’s going on here?”

“Master, we must bathe the larva and give it new clothing, I advise.”

Nana lifted the woman—or should I say, the little girl?—and carried her

downstairs.

“What in the world happened?”

Lulu explained. “You started moving your hands like you were pulling on rope, and after a while, she started shrinking—or rather, getting younger.”

I had been so focused on untangling the miasma that I hadn’t even seen what was happening around me.

“Master, what were you doing?”

Arisa looked at me suspiciously, so I explained that I’d been unraveling the miasma.

“But why would that make her younger?”

“Don’t ask me. She looked like she was in pain, so I just thought getting rid of the miasma would help her.”

I had no idea why disentangling the miasma would have turned her into a little girl.

“Maybe it was a curse?”

“That’s possible.”

I hadn’t seen anything about a curse in her status, but that dark tangle of miasma was definitely out of the ordinary.

Whatever it was, it couldn’t have been anything good.

The girl’s Sacrificial Maiden title worried me, too.

If what the Skeleton King said was true, that girl was probably his daughter. But judging by her titles and that miasma from before, it seemed to me like he might have tried to sacrifice her to resurrect Lalakie... Whatever that meant.

Maybe she was the woman I thought I saw lying on one of the stone coffins in the underwater shrine.

As I speculated, Arisa pressed me with another question.

“More importantly, what do you think of that key-shaped hair barrette she was wearing?”



“She had something like that?”

“You boob-obsessed moron! You must’ve been distracted by that Karina-tier rack of hers!”

She was absolutely right, but I tried to defend myself anyway.

“Don’t be ridiculous. I was just worried about the miasma around her.”

Sunlight began to peek through the clouds, bringing light to the deck.

I gave a saintlike smile as the soft light washed over me, which seemed to convince everyone but Arisa.

“I’ll let you get away with it this one time!” she snapped, grabbing me by the ear like a wife who’d seen through her husband’s lies.



“Master!”

With my “Keen Hearing” skill, I heard Nana call out to me from downstairs.

“Nana!”

I used “Warp” to get down to the central cabin as quickly as possible.

“Wha—?”

Bursting in through the open door, I found a completely naked Nana with the young girl reaching out to her.

Noticing my entrance, Nana turned toward me, making zero effort to cover herself.

She must have intended to warm the little girl up with a bath.

“Master, the larva has requested magic supply. Permission to proceed?”

Nana tilted her head, completely unabashed about her own nudity.

“Um, no. And please put something on.”

I picked up Nana’s clothes from the floor and pushed them toward her.

According to the AR display, the little girl had zero MP remaining.

“If she needs magic, she can have some of mine.”

The girl was kneeling on a massage table, so I reached out toward her.

Then I noticed that she was naked, too.

Just as Arisa had mentioned, there was a key-shaped ornament attached to her hair. The key itself was golden, with six different-colored gemstones set into it.

Her red eyes were blank and unfocused, suggesting that she wasn't fully conscious yet.

Catching my outstretched hand with both of her own, she bit my pointer finger and started sucking on it feebly.

In my AR display, I saw my MP starting to go down, so slowly that it immediately recovered after each point.

It was probably so slow because her inherent skill "Magic Absorption: Weak" was grayed out, to say nothing of the "Weak" aspect. If this was the most she could do, she probably didn't pose a threat to my companions.

As she continued to absorb my magic, the young girl slowly began to age, until she looked slightly older than Arisa.

The color started to return to her face, and a bit of warmth came back to her cold hands.

"<Such...pure magic...>"

Mumbling in Hallowed Language, the young girl released my hand and passed out on the massage table, evidently satisfied.

She was still completely exposed, so I took a piece of cloth from Storage to cover her.

Turning around, I saw Nana and everyone else staring at me.

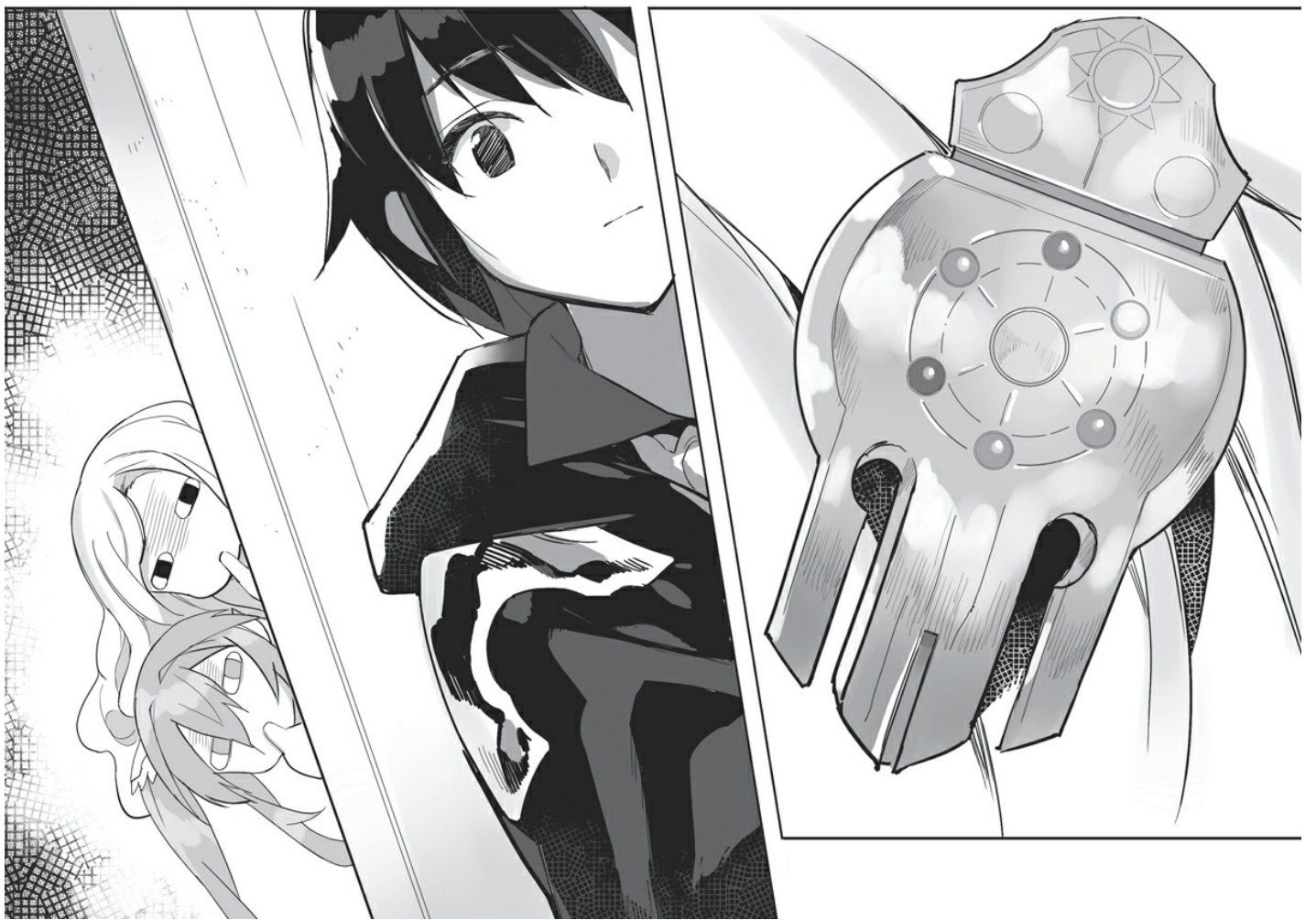
"Well, I'll be..."

"What are you doing?"

Arisa abruptly grabbed my hand and attempted to bite my finger, so I held her off by the forehead.

"Well, it looked like that girl was enjoying it, so..."

Arisa giggled innocently, and the other girls nodded.



I could see why the younger kids and Nana would fall for her games, but I wasn't sure why Lulu and Liza were agreeing.

In the end, they all insisted that I hold out my hand.

Liza, Lulu, and Mia each lightly kissed my fingertip, while Pochi and Tama licked my fingers like a puppy and kitten respectively.

Fortunately, Tama was no longer growling at the little girl like she had on the deck. She had probably just been sensing that miasma before.

“Looks like I'm up next.”

“You must not take both hands, I rebuke.”

“You can have the right hand, then.”

After this strange exchange, Nana and Arisa each clamped on to one of my fingers like they were ice pops.

Something about the way Arisa was sucking felt like sexual harassment, so I stopped her, ignoring her protests of “Just a little mooore!”

“Master, no magic is coming out, I report.”

“Oh, sorry.”

At Nana's request, I produced some magic power from my fingertip.

“I believe that receiving it through my back is more efficient, I request.”

Still just holding her clothes to her chest, Nana turned to face her smooth back toward me.

Come to think of it, it had been a while since I last provided her with magic, so I decided to comply with her request.

“Master, I'll give this girl a bath.”

“Lulu! I shall care for the larva, I insist.”

Just as I was reaching for her back, Nana whirled around to face Lulu, which meant that my hand wound up directly on her new-and-improved F cups.

It felt like the god of perverts was smiling down on me, but I prudently withdrew my hand without even a single squeeze.

*I am her guardian, after all.*

Arisa and Mia accused me of being “Guilty” as usual, but this was a genuine accident, so I didn’t feel guilty about it.

Behind them, I saw Nana snatch the young girl from Lulu’s hands and start rushing over to the bath.

That worried me a little, so I asked Lulu to intervene.

“Hmm? I don’t see that young lady’s clothes anywhere.”

Picking up Nana’s discarded clothing, Liza looked around in puzzlement. From the massage table to the floor, there was no sign of the girl’s clothes.

The young kids peeked around the laundry basket and beneath the table, but they were nowhere to be found.

I wondered if maybe they had gotten mixed in with some other clothes, but when we’d first rescued her, she’d been wearing a silk garment with a distinctive luster, so it would still stand out.

“Search.”

Mia threw the door to the bathroom open unceremoniously and stepped inside.

“Eeeek! Mia, I keep telling you not to leave the door wide open when you enter the bath!”

“Mm. Sorry.”

Lulu was wearing shorts and a T-shirt for post-bath stretching, so it was no big deal, but I still looked away out of politeness.

Arisa poked her head into the bath. “They don’t seem to be in here, either.”

My “Keen Hearing” skill picked up on a conversation between Mia and Nana.

“Clothes. Where?”

“Once removed, her clothing faded and disappeared, I report.”

Maybe her clothes were ghostly in nature, too.



“That’s a good wind.”

Standing on the starlit deck, I looked out at the island in the dim light.

I’d set up Holy Stones, purifying magic circles, and runes all over the island to ensure that the people I’d reburied that afternoon wouldn’t be disturbed or resurrected as undead monsters.

Since my Light Magic spell Laser was too strong, I used an inverted version of the Condense spell to disperse the wind and lessen its intensity so that I could use it to draw magic circles.

This was my first time drawing such a large magic circle, but it was easy enough, since I used the map to draw it, adding Holy Stones as I went.

Then, using techniques I learned in the elf village, I connected a magic power line from the magic circle to the island’s mana source, creating a weak purification field that should perpetually stay in effect throughout the island.

If people started visiting the Seadragon Islands in future generations, maybe this island would become a popular sightseeing spot.

With these absentminded thoughts, I continued reading the ancient text I had open in the menu, *Secrets of the Underwater City Nenelier*.

In addition to the titular city, the book contained information about the ancient Lalakie civilization’s demise as well.

*Hmm?*

My radar alerted me to a white dot moving on the ship.

I heard light footsteps that stopped behind me.

“<Are you hungry?>”

“<Magic...please.>”

“<Sure thing.>”

I held out my hand, and the young girl—now wearing a baggy T-shirt—started sucking magic from my finger again.

She’d looked around Arisa’s age when she fell asleep, but now she looked like a preschooler.

Unlike earlier, her red eyes were no longer glazed over.

I'd assumed that her faltering speech from before was due to her consciousness still being hazy, but maybe I was wrong.

As she absorbed my magic, she gradually grew taller and rounded out a bit.

It was like watching someone grow in fast-forward.

When she'd had enough magic, she let out a sigh of satisfaction and gave me a timid "<Thank...you.>"

"<It's no problem. By the way, could I ask your name?>"

I knew she had amnesia, but I asked anyway, since she should probably be aware as well.

"<Name?>"

The girl closed her eyes and furrowed her brow, trying to remember.

"<...I don't...know.>"

She frowned, biting her lip.

I noticed that her white hair had grown from around ear length to down past her shoulders in the magic-absorption process.

"<We found you washed up on the beach, so it's possible that you were in some kind of shipwreck. The shock might have addled your memory.>"

She looked up at me with wide eyes, possibly surprised that I believed her so readily.

"<But we have to call you something until you remember your name. What would you like to be called for now?>"

I wasn't the most creative person, so if I gave her a name myself, it'd probably be something like "Lala" from "Lalakie" or "Ha" from "half-ghost."

"<Name...>"

The young girl looked around uncertainly.

Then her eyes fell on the city-rock—Nonolie.

"<Soul lights...pretty.>"



At first I thought she might cry, but she simply gazed at the city-rock with a soft expression.

The city-rock was lit up with blue light, creating a solemn atmosphere.

“<Soul lights... How about...Rei?>”

I didn't understand at first, but then I realized that the first part of the Hallowed Language word for *soul lights* was pronounced “rei.”

“<Nice to meet you, then, Rei. I'm Satou.>”

“<Nice to meet you...Satou.>”

We exchanged a friendly handshake, then smiled at each other.

“<Thank you...for...saving me.>”

“<Don't mention it.>”

I tried to convey that it was no big deal.

*Oh, right. Maybe I should ask her one more question...*

“<Do you know what 'Lalakie' is?>”

“<Lalakie...>” Rei caught her breath abruptly. “<...I want to go home...>”

Tears began to stream down her cheeks, so I wiped them away with a handkerchief.

“<Am I...crying?>” Rei touched her own cheeks in surprise, unaware of the reason for her tears.

“<Lalakie must be very important to you.>”

“<I think...so. I don't know why...but my heart says...I want to go there...very much.>”

Rei's homesickness must have been so strong that even her amnesia couldn't erase it completely.

Her small hands trembled as she clung to my leg.

“<I see...>”

I didn't know how to tell her that her civilization was long gone.

The ancient text was primarily about the Underwater City Nanelier, but within the text were also rumors stating that when Lalakie sank into the ocean, its survivors created a hidden village on an island somewhere in the southern seas.

It would be a little bit of a detour, but we might be able to bring Rei to meet the descendants of Lalakie.

As long as the others were okay with it, of course.

“<Um... Satou...>”

Rei tugged on my hand, interrupting my thoughts.

She looked a little shy for some reason.

“<Could I have...a bit more magic...please?>”

“<Sure, but first...>”

I didn't want her to get cold in the evening breeze, so I sat her on my knee and wrapped her in a terry-cloth blanket.

She hadn't eaten since we rescued her, either, so I had her drink a sweetened nutritional supplement potion, a concoction I'd popularized in the elf village.

As she drank, I noticed her hair ornament swaying in the breeze.

“<Could I have a look at that, please?>”

“<No!>”

I reached out to touch the barrette, but Rei quickly covered it with both hands.

I caught the potion she'd dropped before it spilled onto the deck.

“<No one...can...touch this.>”

Her voice trembled as she shook her head.

“<I don't...know...why. But...I feel it...deep in...my heart.>”

So Rei didn't know what the key was or why she didn't want me to touch it.

“<I'm sorry—that was rude of me. Don't worry. I wouldn't try to take it from you or anything like that. Please finish drinking.>”

Once she finished drinking the potion, I took the empty vial back and supplied her with more magic as she'd requested.



*Squish, squish.*

Feeling a soft sensation enveloping my right arm, I opened my eyes to find a beautiful woman—Rei, returned to her adult form—sleeping beside me.

Lowering my gaze, I found that she was hugging my right arm to her chest.

Thinking back, I remembered that I'd been giving her magic last night.

The blanket I'd produced so she wouldn't catch a cold was just barely covering her body and my left hand.

For some reason, I could feel *something* warm beneath my left hand— Oh.

“Master, the larva has vanished, I report!”

Nana came flying out of the hatch and landed on the deck.

I started to call out to her, then remembered my current precarious position.

Since I'd been holding her as she sat on my lap in her smaller form, my hand had naturally wound up somewhere on her lower half while we were sleeping.

I hastily extracted my hand and folded both of them innocently on my lap.

“Over here, Nana!”

“Master... The larva has grown? I inquire.”

“She asked me to supply her with magic last night, but I must have given her a bit too much.”

Nana's normally expressionless face was full of surprise.

Checking my MP reserves just to be safe, I found that they'd already recovered to the maximum amount.

Rei's “Magic Absorption: Weak” must have absorbed magic at the same rate as my natural recovery, perhaps even a little slower.

The other girls gathered around and made a fuss as well, but since Rei's clothes were perfectly in place, it didn't get too out of hand.

“Hey, is she shrinking again?”

“Master, she is almost there, I report.”

Judging by the magic I felt leaking from Rei, staying in adult mode seemed to deplete the most magical energy, while being in young-girl mode took less. She probably reverted to near-infancy only when she ran out of magic entirely.

Once Rei shrank back down to the size of a young girl, she opened her eyes.

Greeted by the sight of the entire group staring at her, she winced.

“<G-good...morning.>”

“Mm. Morning.”

Rei cautiously greeted them in Hallowed Language, and Mia responded quite naturally.

“Satou, rings.”

Mia held up the translation ring on her finger for me and the others to see.

When we were in the elf village, she’d worn one so that she would match with the rest of us.

Evidently, the translation rings we got from the elves also supported Hallowed Language.

“Good thinking, Mia.”

When Arisa complimented Mia, Nana held up her ringed finger as if to point out that she, too, had done well.

So that was why Nana had been able to tell me that the “larva” had “requested magic supply” before.

I just thought that she figured it out by looking at her somehow.

“Riiings?”

“I want to talk, too, sir.”

The other girls produced translation rings from their Fairy Packs, put them on, and introduced themselves one by one.

“<Nice to meet you... I’m Rei.>”

Rei looked bashful under all the attention.

“You remembered your name?”

“<No... Satou...gave me...this one...yesterday.>”

Arisa whipped her head around at me like a haunted doll in a horror movie, looking accusatory, so I simply said, “It makes things easier.”

Still, Rei was the one who had chosen that name herself.

Could it be that she didn't remember?

“All right, want to offer up those flowers before we head out?”

Now that Rei was awake, I directed the ship toward the grave of the Nonolie people on the opposite side of the island.

I'd been worried that the purification barrier I put up around the island would have a negative effect on Rei, but now that the miasma had been cleared away, it didn't seem to affect her at all.

I supposed in that case, the ship's anti-monster barrier would've had a stronger effect anyway.

Putting on the Flying Shoes, I sped our journey along by shuttling the ship through the air.

The Flying Shoes I'd found in the salvaged goods automatically adjusted their size, so they could fit anyone without a problem, but they weren't very easy to use.

With my “Skyrunning” experience, I was the only one who was able to use them.

Tama seemed pretty close, though, so she might get the hang of them soon.

“Funeral song.”

Once we offered the flowers, Arisa had a moment of silence, and Mia started playing a lilting tune on her lute.

It reminded me of the memorial we'd held for the lost ratmen at a battlefield in Seiryuu County.

"<Sleep now... Sleep well...>"

Rei began to sing a requiem, matching the tune to Mia's song.

It was a calming song, almost like a lullaby.

I listened peacefully to their singing and playing for a while.

Then Mia put her lute away in her Fairy Pack and pointed to a well-lit area.

"Satou, seeds."

"You mean you want me to plant some seeds there?"

She was referring to the Treant seeds from her hometown, which the high elf Aaze had asked us to plant on our travels.

"Mm. Best."

It was a good spot, and the purification barrier would prevent miasma from harming them.

Mia was probably right that it was the perfect place for some.

"Can you all help me plant some Treant seeds?"

"Aye-aaaye!"

"Of course, sir!"

With the girls' help, I planted ten or so of the Treant seeds.

"Master, will one fertilizer orb do?"

"It should. Bury it a little ways away, please."

The golden fruits that contained the seeds had been removed for use in magic potions, so instead we were using fertilizer orbs to promote healthy growth.

These were given to us by Jia, the elf gardener.

"Larva, you must not pack the earth too tightly when you bury it, I advise."

"<I'm sorry... I've never...touched earth...before.>"

"Mm. Experience."

Nana and Mia were helping Rei plant.

She was fitting in with the group faster than I'd expected.

"Are you worried about how to deal with that girl?"

Having planted her seeds, Arisa came over to me, her mature expression at odds with her age.

"Yeah, a little."

Judging by Rei's Last Princess of Lalakie title and the Skeleton King proclaiming himself as the *companion to the final queen of Lalakie*, the chances were good that Rei was the Skeleton King's daughter.

Normally, I would assume I should return her to her father, but between her Sacrificial Maiden title and the Skeleton King's insane-sounding promise to *return Lalakie to the skies...no matter what I must offer up in exchange*, I was hesitant to put her in harm's way.

If the Skeleton King was going to try to sacrifice Rei, I would prefer to keep her safe at least until her memories returned.

However, the warning of the sunken ship's ghost captain—without its key, Lalakie cannot fly—seemed too obviously linked to Rei's key-shaped hair ornament to be a coincidence.

My concern was that the Skeleton King might be after Rei's hair ornament in order to return Lalakie to the skies.

If I blindly took Rei in, knowing she might be targeted by the dangerous and elusive Skeleton King, I would be putting my companions in danger.

"I see..."

Once I explained my concerns to Arisa, she folded her arms and nodded thoughtfully.

"I don't think the Skeleton King would be able to reach her if she's protected by the purification barrier on this island, but...I don't want to leave her here after she's been alone for so long."

"Alone? How do you know that?"

"I mean, she seems to really want company. She's always staying close to one

of us, and even when Nana and Mia fuss over her too much, she actually seems happy about it.”

Obviously, Arisa was more observant about other people than I was.

“Thank you, Arisa.”

I smiled at her, grateful for the push.

“Everyone, I’d like to talk to you about something...”

When I proposed that Rei travel with us until her memories returned, everyone was in total agreement.

“<I...truly...appreciate it...>”

“Tsk, tsk, tsk!”

“You can just say ‘thanks,’ sir!”

“<Okay... Thanks.>”

Rei was trying to be polite, but Tama and Pochi shook their fingers at her.

Pochi didn’t seem to be very good at clicking her tongue, so she just said “Tsk” out loud.

Meanwhile, as far as the Skeleton King’s movements were concerned...

I’d been keeping an eye on his status since the day before via the marker on my map. It seemed like my attack had hit him harder than I realized, though, as his health gauge was recovering very slowly. His stamina and magic gauges were still totally empty.

His location hadn’t changed from the Spirit World area, either.

For now, I would just have to keep checking on a regular basis.



“<Satou... Good...morning.>”

“<Good morning, Rei.>”

As I was leaning over the side of the ship and looking at the sunrise, Rei showed up, barely awake and in her younger form.



She didn't seem particularly surprised that the ship was flying.

When Captain Ghost was raging about Lalakie, he had used phrases like *floating ships*, so she was probably accustomed to this kind of thing.

"<Would you like a drink?>"

"<Thank...you.>"

Opening my Item Box, I produced a glass of yellorange fruit juice with ice.

The ice was actually cubes of juice that I'd created with the Freeze Water spell.

"<Yummy.>"

Rei gulped down the juice in one go, letting out a contented sigh.

She must have been thirsty after sweating in her sleep.

"<Want some magic candy, too?>"

"<Yes...please.>"

I handed her the candy, and she popped it into her mouth immediately.

The magic candy was a version of one of the magic recovery potion recipes I'd learned in the elf village. Sucking on it would continuously restore your magic.

The original recipe for the candy restored six points of magic per second, but the one I'd just given Rei was a type I'd specially made for her that restored only one point per second.

With this, even if she ate the whole thing, she would stay in her little-girl form.

I'd come up with this solution because if she kept growing and shrinking, her clothes would keep ripping or coming off.

At first I thought I should stop giving her magic, but if she ran out completely, her status would change to **Starvation**.

If she stayed in that state for too long, she would enter a magic-hungry trance like the day we first met her, which was why I'd created these candies.

While she sucked on the one I'd just given her, Rei gazed out at the sea,

resting her head against me.

“<Did you have a nightmare?>”

“<Yes... I dreamed...a shadow person...was chasing me...>”

A shadow person? The Skeleton King, perhaps?

“<It was very...very...scary...>”

Normally, a bad dream was still nothing more than that, but in Rei’s case, I had the feeling it might be some kind of omen.

Just in case, I decided to stay on guard for a while.

“Master! Do not monopolize the larva for yourself, I beseech.”

“<Good morning...Nana.>”

“Good morning, Rei, I greet.”

As soon as Nana came onto the deck, she picked up Rei and rubbed her cheek against her.

Rei had been bewildered by Nana’s behavior at first, but now she seemed accustomed to it.

“Mrrr. Excessive.”

Mia emerged next, shaking her head at Nana.

“Cuteness is justice, I declare.” Nana seemed undaunted.

“<Good morning...Mia.>”

“Mm. Morning.”

Rei smiled sheepishly at Mia, who gave up on her efforts to stop Nana, instead securing a spot on my lap.

“Good morniiiing.”

“Good morning, sirs!”

Tama and Pochi bounded onto the deck, arm in arm with Arisa.

Like a student who had recently come back from summer vacation, Arisa had been late to rise since we left Bolenan Forest.

“Wake uuup?”

“Time for calisthenics, sir.”

“Yeah, yeah...”

Tama and Pochi pushed Arisa forward, but she just slumped tiredly to the deck.

“Part one.”

With that, Mia started playing a lute version of a radio calisthenics tune from Japan.

Rei escaped from Nana’s grasp to join Tama and Pochi.

She seemed to have become quite fond of this little morning exercise.

“Master toooo?”

“Join us, sir.”

Nana had started doing the calisthenics with Rei, so I would’ve preferred to stay off to the side and watch her, but Tama and Pochi insisted that I line up next to them.

While I was at it, I dragged Arisa to her feet to participate along with me.

“Ughhh, I hate mornings...”

Despite Arisa’s grumbling, she was back to her usual energetic self by the time part one of the calisthenics was over.

Once we finished part two, a delicious smell drifted up from the vent of the galley, and the girls’ stomachs began to growl.

When Liza emerged onto the deck carrying an enormous stockpot, everyone’s attention was riveted on her.

“Breakfast is ready.”

Lulu’s call was met with a chorus of cheers, and everyone scrambled to reach the food.

“Breakfast is the most important meal of the day, I report.”

“Mm. Let’s go.”

“<Okay.>”

Even Rei was among them, dragged along by Nana and Mia.



“Master, I’ve spotted a ship run aground.”

I was in the ship’s hold making a magic tool to deal with the Skeleton King when Liza came in to give me her report.

“Thanks, I’ll be right there.”

As I stood, I opened the menu to check the time and found that it was later than I realized. If that much time had passed, it meant that we had to leave for the Seadragon Islands area fairly soon.

I needed to set up another seal slate here, or I wouldn’t be able to return to the city-rock island with only the Return spell from a long distance.

“Satou, look.”

Once I reached the deck, Mia pointed at an island up ahead.

Among the reefs surrounding the island, I could barely make out the shadow of what looked like a ship.

Using my “Telescopic Sight” skill and the Clairvoyance spell, I took a closer look.

The ship’s three masts all seemed to be intact, but there were holes all over the hull of the ship itself. There didn’t seem to be much evidence of acid attacks, so they’d probably managed to avoid sea serpents.

“Isn’t that a Shiga Kingdom flag?”

“Yeah. And the one below it is from the Ougoch Duchy—it’s Viscount Emerin’s flag.”

So the missing ship from the viscount’s fleet had actually run aground here.

The area up ahead was unexplored territory, so I couldn’t check the status of the ship.

It would be a pain to explain things if they saw us flying, so I lowered the ship

into the water to sail toward the island normally.

As we traversed the few miles between us and the ship, we were attacked by monsters like flying manta rays and the mosasaur-like sea monster I'd seen elsewhere in the Seadragon Islands.

Liza's harpoons and Mia's bow made quick work of the flying rays, but the sea monster attacking the bottom of the ship was hard to reach directly, so I used my Remote Arrow to take care of it.

Remote Arrow was only half as effective underwater, but since it was already overkill to begin with, that didn't matter much.

Once Mia mastered her Spirit Magic skill a little more and could use Create Water Spirit, she would probably be able to help with underwater battles more.

"There are survivors. That's a relief."

As soon as we passed into the new area, I used "Search Entire Map" and found there were some thirty-seven people alive on the other side of the fairly large island. All of them were sailors from the ship that had run aground.

"Then we'd better save them right away."

I was about to nod, but I wasn't sure how we were going to fit that many people onto our little ship.

Our best bet was to repair their ship for their transportation.

"We have to prepare a bit first."

I stopped the ship at the edge of the reef area and took off with my Flying Shoes, heading for the grounded ship. The shoes were so that Rei wouldn't question why I was flying.

"It's more beat-up than I expected."

The two lower decks of the four-deck ship were flooded, and there was a huge hole in the bottom of the hull.

I had planned on just repairing it normally, but this would probably require some special maneuvers.

*"Arisa, you're on."*

*“Okey-dokey!”*

Using the Space Magic spell Telephone to contact Arisa, I instructed her to begin Operation: Keep Rei Distracted.

*“We’re good to go.”*

Once Arisa gave me the okay, I put the grounded ship into Storage and separated the seawater.

Next, I used Freeze Water to solidify the surface of the sea, took the ship out on top of the ice, and sealed up the holes from the outside with boards. Conveniently, I had the parts from the other sunken ships we’d stumbled onto in the Seadragon Islands.

Once they were reasonably covered, I used Treespirit Pearls to adhere the boards to the ship.

All I needed was for the ship to be able to sail again, so I casually ignored the dents in the hull.

With the repairs completed, I used Storage to bring the ship back to safe sailing waters and got rid of the ice I’d been using to hold it up.

Now all that was left was to put up the sails. For some reason, there were no spares to be found on the formerly grounded ship, so I used the most intact ones from the sunken ships of the same build.

Then I towed the ship—a carrack—with Magic Hand and returned to our own ship.

*“All done.”*

*“Welcome back, master.”*

Liza was the only one to come greet me; the rest of the girls were playing dress-up in the main cabin with Rei as their doll.

*“I better get things set up now,”* I murmured, opening the biggest Fairy Pack.

*“<Numbers one through ten, activate. Advance forward ten paces and stand by in remote mode.>”*

When I gave these orders in Elvish, large wooden living dolls around the

height of brownies marched forth from the Fairy Pack. There were a few gargoyle-style dolls for reconnaissance, as well. I had made them as practice in an elf workshop, so they all moved rather clumsily.

The living dolls had squat, gnomelike bodies and were wearing loose, hooded brown robes. It might look a bit strange in this hot weather, but at least it wasn't obvious that they were living dolls.

These low-cost versions didn't use Holytree Stone, but they were made with a lot of the elves' secret techniques, so I didn't want any thieves coming after them.

"Scarecrow, control the living dolls according to the 'sailor' preset."

When I gave the order to the figurehead golem Scarecrow, the living dolls began moving about briskly, miming various sailor-like tasks.

Since I'd made the Scarecrow golem after mastering the art of controller units, it was pretty high performance.

Hearing the living dolls' footsteps, my companions came up to the deck and were caught completely by surprise.

I explained to them that these were dummy crew members so we would look like a normal sailing ship.

This might've been a small galleon, but it still wasn't very realistic to claim that it was being operated by nine people, most of whom were children.



"Master, there are people on the beach, I report."

"Yeah, they probably came because they saw the ship."

"I believe there are people hidden in the woods near the beach as well, master."

I nodded at Nana and Liza.

I was aboard the newly repaired ship, which I'd brought over to the inlet where the survivors were living.

The rest of my group was on the galleon, which was stopped nearby, out of

range of any possible attacks from the beach.

Of course, I'd put the flash anti-monster magic into stealth mode.

I lowered the bigger ship's anchor in a safe area away from the reef and had my "sailors" take a small lifeboat back to our ship. The sailors were actually living dolls made to look like humans with the Light Magic spell Illusion.

I was actually operating the ship myself with Magic Hand, but my official story was that I couldn't use magic, hence the facade.

"I am a noble of the Ougoch Duchy in the Shiga Kingdom. For my valiant battles against monsters, I have been granted the Ougoch Duchy Blazing Scarlet Medal. They call me Baron Jeetbert!"

A middle-aged man who was carrying a two-handed sword like a walking stick greeted me in a clear voice. The emblem with the red gem on his chest must be the aforementioned Blazing Scarlet Medal.

He must have introduced himself preemptively because I was wearing noble clothing.

"His Excellency has introduced himself. Now it is your turn!"

A smaller man standing next to the baron in mage-like robes shouted at me next.

There were a few other men stationed nearby with large shields, ready to guard the baron at a moment's notice. Since they were sailors to begin with, none of them was wearing heavy metal armor.

"I am a noble of the Muno Barony in the Shiga Kingdom. For fending off a lesser hell demon in Gururian City, I have been granted the Ougoch Duchy Sapphire Medal. My name is Satou Pendragon, hereditary knight."

Just for fun, I decided to match the baron's style of self-introduction.

While I was at it, I produced the Sapphire Medal from Storage by way of my pocket and fixed it to my breast as well.

"...The Sapphire Medal?!"

The baron's eyes widened as he stared at my medal.



His hands were visibly shaking, revealing his alarm.

The knights and mages around him all murmured in surprise, too.

Thinking back, I remembered that Sir Ipasa Lloyd, the imperial knight and son of a viscount, had been surprised when I received the Sapphire Medal, too.

A few of these men were muttering things like, "Isn't the Muno Barony that cursed territory?" but most of them seemed to be more surprised by the medal.

None of them made any effort to hide their surprise, but the baron was the first to recover.

"Sir Pendragon, might you be willing to take us to the trade city of Sutoandell on your ship? We are the sole survivors of Viscount Emerin's trade fleet. Naturally, we shall reward you however you may wish."

"Yes, of course."

I had no intention of asking for a reward for helping out a friend of a friend.

"Perhaps it was fate that I discovered that ship adrift at sea."

"Adrift, you say?"

I thought it might cause a scene if I told them I repaired it, so I decided to say that I'd just found it by chance.

I wasn't sure if they would believe my story, but they definitely wouldn't believe the truth.

"Indeed. Since it was flying the flag of Viscount Emerin, I thought it prudent to search for survivors on the nearby islands. This is the last island in the area, so I was quite relieved to find you here."

My "Fabrication" skill helped me make up a story on the spot.

Of course, I'd already confirmed on the map that there were zero survivors anywhere else.

If I didn't tell them that I'd searched the islands, they might drag me into a lot of pointless searching.

"Well then, Sir Pendragon, if you do not mind a brief wait, we shall prepare to depart at once."

The baron called over his associates and asked how long it would take them to prepare enough water for the trip.

“Five days... No, if we mobilize everyone with the ‘Item Box’ skill, we can do it in three,” his first mate responded with grim determination.

“Your Excellency,” I interrupted. “Pardon my intrusion, but if it’s water that you need, we have more than enough on board for the journey to Sutoandell.”

“A-are you quite certain?!”

I nodded and gave the first mate a number of barrels.

“Yes, that is more than enough. Why, with that amount, we could make a round trip to the ends of the Seadragon Islands and still reach Sutoandell safely.”

I pulled out a sea chart from my Garage Bag, showing them our current location.

This chart was for use with the general public, so it wasn’t marked with the places I’d set seal slates.

“Wh-what a detailed map!”

“It even includes the watering holes on the islands and the distribution of monsters...!”

The sailors were all very impressed with my sea chart.

“You really searched the islands this thoroughly for survivors...?”

One easily moved sailor fought back manly tears as he gazed at me in admiration.

I definitely couldn’t tell them that I’d drawn it in the thirty minutes or so it took to get here.

“Your Excellency, from here, we should be able to reach Sutoandell within less than ten days.”

At the navigation officer’s words, the other men embraced one another with shouts of joy.

Even the archers who’d been hiding in the forest forgot to keep concealing

themselves, jostling shoulders with one another excitedly.

In the end, we decided to depart the following morning.

The sun had set while the men were carrying their supplies from their base onto the ship.

We'd decided to have a banquet that night to celebrate the departure, so I was sitting with the baron at a table on the bigger ship.

I'd already sent Liza and Nana back to join the others on our ship. Some of the young sailors' eyes were fixed lustily on Nana, so I thought it best to have them retreat.

“■■■ *Lamp Toumyou.*”

The monster wards hanging from the prow to the stern, which looked a bit like mosquito lamps, weren't very bright, so the Practical Magic users on the crew created magic lights all over the deck.

“Oh-ho, that smells tasty. How long has it been since we've had any seasonings but salt?”

“Sir Pendragon was kind enough to share some of his spices, so I used them to the best of my ability!”

The baron and his sailors looked thrilled when the food was carried out.

Most of the hearty fare was made from seafood the men had caught on the island. To celebrate their departure, they even brought out tankards full of ale, which were distributed to even the lowliest soldiers.

“Sir Pendragon, you have women in your crew, no? It's bad to bring women on a long journey at sea, you know.” The baron took a swig of ale. “Some captains bring their wives or lovers on board, but that often leads to mutiny, see.”

I assumed he was referring to the old bad-luck superstition, but it turned out he just meant it could cause unrest with the crew.

“Thank you. I'll keep your advice in mind.”

In our ship's case, we were more like a family than a crew, so I didn't think it

would be a problem. Besides, I was the only man in the group.

“Raise anchor!”

“Anchors aweigh!”

““““Anchors aweeeigh!”””””

When the captain gave an order, the head sailor would repeat it back loudly, followed by a chorus of the rest of the sailors. Together, they began hauling on a pulley.

Many of them had the “Strength” skill, but it still looked pretty tough.

I wanted to see how a normal ship prepared to set sail, so I asked the baron to let me stay on board. I was able to use the Telephone spell to give orders to our ship’s figurehead golem, so there were no issues there.

“Bowsprit, hoist the sails!”

“Saaails!”

““““Saaails!”””””

The sailors climbed the mast easily, untying the ropes that kept the sails in place.

Once the sails were unfurled, the wind began to turn the ship gently.

“Pull the port rigging!”

“Pull to pooort!”

““““Pull to pooort!”””””

A few of the sailors turned bright red with exertion as they yanked on the rope.

Once the ship was turned in the proper direction, they used the rigging to keep it running straight.

There was probably still a rudder, of course, but the sails were the main power source regardless.

Leaving a few sailors in charge of the bowsprit, the rest rushed to help with the stern. Their crew wasn’t as large as usual, so they seemed to have their

work cut out for them.

Arriving at the stern, the sailors climbed the rope ladder easily.

“Main mast, hoist the sails!”

“Saaails!”

“““Saaails!””””

When the central sails were unfurled, the ship’s speed rose.

The sailors on the main mast slid down the rope, heading to their assigned rigging.

“Stern, hoist the sails!”

“Saaails!”

“““Saaails!””””

Once the rear sails were ready, most of the crew came down to the deck, operating the rigging ropes to keep the ship on course per the captain’s orders.

This work seemed primarily fueled by manpower; they weren’t using the ship’s Magic Furnace.

I guess since Magic Furnaces were fueled by cores, it would be too costly to use them all the time.

Thinking back, I remembered that the dwarves used something called “refined monster coal” instead of cores because Magic Furnaces were so inefficient.

“Sir Pendragon, your sailors are a talented bunch. It’s rare to see such skilled steering and effortless departure.”

“Much obliged.”

I’d borrowed the blueprints from the elves’ self-steering ship library, so I didn’t feel like I could be particularly proud.

“By the way, why isn’t your ship flying the Shiga Kingdom or the Muno Barony flags?”

“My apologies. I’m afraid our flagpole was blown off in a recent storm, flags

and all.”

My “Fabrication” skill helped me answer the baron’s question.

I’d completely forgotten about flags to show our affiliation.

According to the information I casually gathered from the navigation officer later, most ships generally flew the flags of their kingdom, territory, and captain, as well as a flag to indicate whether they were warships or general passage.

I mostly remembered the Muno Barony flag, and I could probably copy the kingdom flag from this ship’s.

As for the general passage flag, I could probably re-create it from some of the sunken ships I’d recovered.

“Captain, we’ve entered the current.”

“Very well. Activate the Magic Furnace and double down on our lookout.”

The first mate nodded, then shouted, “Activate Magic Furnace, lowest output!” into a speaking tube.

After a few moments, a voice reported, “Activation complete,” and a mage used the Wind Magic spell Long-Range Search Wind. It appeared that he was using the power from the Magic Furnace to maintain the spell after he cast it.

The results of the search were displayed on a mirror near the helm.

Keeping the spell up continuously cost a huge amount of magic, so it couldn’t be used at the same time as their defensive barrier when the Magic Furnace was in low-output mode.

Apparently, with their current stock of fuel, the Magic Furnace could run in high-output battle mode for only thirty minutes at the most.

“Oof, I gotta take a leak...”

“Fool! We have a guest here!”

As the captain scolded him, the soldier ran to a mysterious object at the side of the ship, a sort of car seat–like protrusion.

*That’s a toilet?!*

Once his business was taken care of, the soldier hurried back to his post, ducking his head toward me apologetically.

“Don’t just stand around! Swab the decks!”

The head sailor barked a command, and the lowest-ranked sailors scrambled to start cleaning the decks with seawater.

Maybe this was for sterilizing, but if anything, I thought the salt might actually damage the wood.

Curious, I asked the head sailor if he knew why they were using seawater, and he explained that soaking the wood caused it to expand, shrinking the gaps in the deck to reduce the risk of flooding.

*I see. That makes sense.*

Our ship was coated with resin, so that wouldn’t be necessary in our case.

We used a resin called “alua” developed by the elves, the same substance that was used for my favorite goblets in our tree house. Alua was transparent and light yet durable, and like acrylic, it wouldn’t break when dropped, so I used it frequently on tableware for the kids and such.

“Sorry it’s nothing fancy.”

At the baron’s request, I joined him for lunch. As he said, it was fairly modest: a few lightly baked biscuits, salty soup with beans and jerky, and a sauerkraut-like side along with some dried yellorange fruits.

Aside from the dried fruits, the rest of the ingredients came from the barrels we’d found washed up on the beach at the city-rock island, as well as the ale they were drinking.

I was reluctant to give them secondhand goods, but all we had available that was appropriate for a voyage at sea was the dried fruits, so I didn’t have any other choice.

I used “Analyze” to make sure none of it had gone bad, of course.

“This is delicious. What kind of fruit is it?”

“Oh, that’s dried yellorange fruit from a Mountain-Tree.”

When I answered the young assistant mate's question, everyone froze.

"Y-yellorange fruit?"

"Y-you mean the legendary Mountain-Trees that only grow in the elves' forest?"

The sailors all peppered me with questions.

*Mountain-Trees grow in the giants' forest in the Muno Barony, too, you know.*

"Ch-chef! Cease distributing the dried fruit at once!"

Looking flustered, the baron gave an order into the speaking tube connected to the galley.

"Is something wrong?"

"S-Sir Pendragon, do you not know how valuable yellorange fruits are?"

*Huh?*

Each giant piece of fruit weighed more than a ton, so I had lots, and I knew they were delicious.

But I'd never seen them in a market before, so I hadn't gotten the chance to use my "Estimation" skill on one.

Looking at the dried fruit, I saw that a single slice was worth anywhere from one to three silver coins each. So five slices would be worth more than a gold coin? Even if they were rare, that seemed pretty ridiculous to me.

As we ate lunch, I decided to find out if the captain or any of his men happened to know anything about Lalakie.

"Lalakie? I feel like I've heard of it."

The baron stroked his beardless chin thoughtfully.

"...Ah, I remember. I heard about it at a festival in the Kingdom of Sorcery, Lalagi, which is in the middle of the sugar route."

According to the baron, the royal family of Lalagi were said to be descendants of the skyfolk, and the Skydea Festival was exhibiting something called a "Lalakie Box."



If I remembered correctly, “skyfolk” referred to the people of Lalakie.

Perhaps the descendants of Lalakie were secretly living in this Kingdom of Sorcery called Lalagi.

“Thank you very much, Your Excellency.”

“Not at all. I’m glad I was able to be of some assistance.”

I thanked the baron and later asked a navigator to tell me the locations of the sugar route and Lalagi.

Getting to Labyrinth City would probably take a little longer than expected, but if we traveled at full speed with the flying ship, the detour should amount to only a week or so of lost time.

In the middle of this conversation, we unluckily came across some monsters.

“Captain! We’ve spotted a school of torpedo squid to starboard! They haven’t noticed us yet.”

“All right, hard to port!”

The ship veered off to the left, attempting to avoid getting into a battle.

The torpedo squid were only around level 10, but there were a lot of them, somewhere between thirty and fifty. If they all came at us at once, it would be a pain to deal with.

“Increase power to the Magic Furnace. As soon as it’s ready, raise the defensive barrier!”

After a minute or so, the ship was surrounded by some kind of Practical Magic-type defensive shield, and its speed raised slightly.

The underwater portion of the shield was probably reducing the friction from the water.

“W-we’ve detected the presence of rock-head bass near the island up ahead!”

A sailor who was in charge of monitoring the enemy detection reported this with a shaking voice.

According to my map, there were only about ten of these rock-head bass, all

of which ranged from level 10 to 15.

Was that really an enemy worth shaking over?

“Magic Furnace, maximum power. All hands not steering the ship, prepare the Magic Cannons! We’re going around the right side of the island, so focus on the port-side cannons!”

The baron called out orders.

I helped move the Magic Cannons across the deck as well.

“Here they come!”

“Their rock heads can repel Magic Cannons! Aim for their bodies or the center of their foreheads!”

“““Aye-aye!”””” chorused the men.

So these were a type of monster whose defense was focused on their heads.

The captain shouted, “Fiiiiire!” and thunder shots flew forth from the cannons. For water-based enemies, they apparently used thunder, ice, and rock shots. Fire was reserved for foes like pirate ships.

Since they were short on shooters, I got to man one of the cannons.

Because the magic supply was relatively sparse, the shots weren’t very powerful. And since one Magic Furnace was powering all the Magic Cannons, it took a long time to recharge between shots.

Forced to lower their speed to dodge the shots, the rock-head bass were circling around to regain speed, aside from one that charged forward without attempting to evade.

When it got close, the fish monster leaped into the air, aiming to strike one of the crewmen on the deck.

It was enormous, easily around the size of a car. I guess even low-level sea-based monsters could be pretty huge.

“Aaaagh!” The targeted sailor screamed in fear.

The captain drew his two-handed sword, but it didn’t look like he’d get there in time.

I pulled out a heavy rock spear from Storage and tossed it at the rock-head bass.

It hit the monster much harder than I expected, pinning it against the forecastle wall.

“Thank you, Sir Pendragon! Hurry up with the second volley, men!”

The baron made no comment on the spear that had suddenly appeared in my hand. He was too preoccupied with giving battle commands.

Just in case I needed an excuse later, I put on a stone spear ring.

As far as anyone else could tell, I was officially level 30, so I didn't think the fact that I defeated the monster would be too suspect, but it was possible that someone would question the sudden appearance of the spear.

“Let's finish them off! Aim carefully, lads! Once you've fired, prepare for close-quarters combat!”

“““Aye-aye!””” the crew shouted again.

The first round of shots managed to take out only about 30 percent of them. At this rate, the rock-head bass would definitely break through, possibly putting my party in danger.

So instead of preparing a second shot, I went to the other side of the ship and made sure nobody was watching as I fired Remote Arrow into the water.

I chose the most roundabout course possible so that they would hopefully reach the fish at around the same time as the second round of shots from the cannons.

“All cannons, fire!”

“““Aye!”””

The shooters looked grim as they pulled the levers to fire the second volley.

A barrage of magic shots hurtled toward the rock-head bass, which were now incredibly close.

At the same time, there was a flash in the waves, and the underwater monsters began to sink as they were hit by Remote Arrow.

“Whew. Looks like we drove ’em off somehow.”

The baron heaved a sigh of relief, then started giving post-battle orders.

The crew gathered the cores that had wound up on deck, but since it seemed like they were just going to give up on the ones in the water, I collected them for myself. The captain wanted to buy them off me to power the Magic Furnace, so I sold them at the price he proposed.



“It’s the water gate to the port!”

Back on our ship, we heard a shout from the baron’s ship.

Seven days since the battle against the rock-head bass, we were about to safely enter Sutoandell.

I’d returned to my own ship right after that battle and hadn’t bothered the baron’s ship any further except to confirm our route.

Since the sailors hadn’t been bathing, their ship smelled absolutely awful.

They avoided using up precious fresh water whenever possible and would use seawater for cooking, washing their faces, and so on.

No wonder the first mate and I had such different outlooks on the value of water.

Before my eyes, the water gate began to open.

*Oh, I better warn her now.*

“<Rei, you mustn’t sing in front of other people, all right?>”

“<Okay...Satou.>”

The rest of the group often sang together to pass the time on our journey, but whenever Rei joined in, it always attracted schools of fish or swarms of seabirds.

This was all very nice and fantasy-like, of course, but in reality it might cause problems if she did it in front of strangers.

While the girls amused themselves on our travels, I’d secretly been doing a bit

of remodeling on the ship.

In preparation for a possible rematch with the Skeleton King, I'd made portable Holy Stones for each member of the group and upgraded the ship's Holytree Stone engine to a bigger, more powerful model.

In the future, I planned to add features like a rocket launcher and improve the defensive barrier.

"Wow, now that's a big gate."

"They have so many big cannons and towers..."

Arisa and Lulu gazed at the gate and its fully armed defensive towers in surprise.

The towers also seemed to be staffed by birdfolk soldiers, archers, and mages. Defense must be very important to them.

"They use the gated entrance to the bay there to keep out monsters."

There were large pillars placed inside the gates for warding off monsters, too, like the ones we saw on the huge river near the old capital.

The flow of water coming through the narrow gates was as fast as a river.

That was probably because the water from that same river let out into the bay.

Checking my map, I saw that there were other gates and channels for routing out excess water. One particularly large channel even doubled as a place to cultivate seaweed.

"Master, the harbor watch ship has given us the signal that we may enter."

"Thank you, Liza. Let's head on in, then."

Thanks to the baron's ship preceding us, we were able to get into the harbor after only a simple identity check.

Normally, the harbor watch would have to thoroughly inspect any weapons and search for smuggled goods before allowing us in.

There were virtually no monsters in the harbor, so there were plenty of small boats fishing.

“<Lots of...big...ships.>”

“<Yes, they seem to be from many different places.>”

Rei pointed out the many larger ships in the harbor.

Several of the largest ones were Ougoch Duchy gunships; a few large and medium battleships were anchored in the harbor as well.

They were evidently kept here as a precaution against the foreign ships in the same harbor.

The most noticeable ships were what looked like paddle steamers with sails from the Saga Empire and Weaselman Empire ships with oars, but there were also many medium-size ships from the southern islands.

As I was explaining some of the ships to Rei and the others, I heard the rumbling of the beastfolk girls' stomachs.

“Well, it's almost lunchtime. Shall we eat once we get into the harbor?”

“Meeeat?”

“I want meat, sir!”

Tama and Pochi hopped up and down excitedly.

We'd been subsiding largely on seafood during our travels at sea, so they were overdue for some red meat.

“All right, let's find a place that sells some good meat dishes.”

Everyone except Mia cheered in agreement.

“And rice and vegetables, too, of course,” I added.

“Mm, yeah.”

At that, Mia smiled and nodded, too.

## Trade City Sutoandell

*Satou here. They say “fate works in mysterious ways,” and I think that’s true. Lots of relationships start from unusual connections, not just romantic ones. Especially in a parallel world...*

“Well, Sir Pendragon, let us meet again at the New Year’s kingdom conference! I’ll repay my debt to you then with treasures the likes of which you’ve never seen!”

When we entered the trade city of Sutoandell in the Ougoch Duchy, Baron Jeetbert shook my hand fiercely before riding off to the viceroy’s castle on horseback.

He was going to borrow an emergency high-speed boat from the viceroy to hurry to the old capital.

“Wobblyyyy?”

“Kinda feels like we’re still on a ship.”

Tama, Arisa, and a few of the others were stumbling around, unaccustomed to solid ground after so many days on the ship.

“You’ll get used to it pretty quickly. For now, let’s take care of things here and find somewhere to eat.”

At that, everyone immediately jumped into action. I guess they really wanted to eat some meat.

Leaving the care of the ship to the figurehead golem and the living dolls, which were disguised with Illusion, we went to the harbor’s chamber of commerce to rent a small temporary warehouse and place some requests with the merchants.

I’d used up a good deal of my supplies and ingredients in the elf village, so I wanted to restock as much as I could here.

Once that was taken care of, we went to a meat restaurant as promised, which turned out to be a big hit.

We'd mostly been living off seafood during the journey, so aside from Mia and Rei, the girls all dug in to their meat with a great deal of relish. I decided I would start cooking meat for them a little more frequently when we resumed our travels.

Patting their bellies, everyone practically bounced out of the shop.

"So fuuuuull?"

"Meat really is the best, sir."

"The mutton was truly delicious. Its sinew had such an excellent mouthfeel."

The beastfolk girls seemed especially satisfied.

Liza's remarks were a little unusual, but if she was happy, that was good enough for me.

"Whaaat? The lamb steak was waaay better."

"The sauce was very flavorful. I can't wait to try to make it myself."

Arisa and Lulu, too, looked so pleased that it wouldn't have surprised me if little musical notes appeared next to their heads.

"Larva, what is the matter? I inquire."

"<I'm okay... It's just...bright.>"

Rei staggered a bit when we left the shop, but Nana was quick to hold her up.

She was probably merely a little dizzy, but her face looked strangely pale, so I decided we should find an inn as soon as possible so she could rest.

"Pilaf tasty."

"<Yes... The pilaf...and the salad...were very...good.>"

Mia was the last to leave the restaurant with a comment, and Rei nodded in agreement.

Apparently, she liked the pilaf and salad so much that just thinking about them brought her back to her regular self.



“I agree with the larva. The seaweed salad was delicious as well, I report.”

They were right: Even the non-meat dishes were very tasty.

I was particularly curious about how they'd made the seaweed salad Nana mentioned. I'd gotten them to wrap up an extra portion for me, so perhaps I could ask the elf chef Miss Nea next time I went back to the elf village.

I could probably figure it out with the Space Magic spell Clairvoyance, but that would be cheating.

“So we're spending a night here, right? What are we doing after that?”

Arisa turned around to face me as she walked ahead of us.

“I want to buy some scrolls at the magic shop, so we'll check out some street stalls along the way.”

It was actually quite fun to walk around the open, friendly trade city.

Like in the harbor area of the old capital, there were a lot of exotic sights and people wherever we looked.

I picked up a few foreign language skills, but most of them were just dialects of languages I already knew, so I didn't put any skill points into them.

Besides, the magic shop in this harbor seemed to be selling a scroll of the Practical Magic spell Translation: Lesser.

I was hoping to buy it along with any scrolls that might be of use in our journey at sea.

“In that case, I'd like to take a look at some accessories!”

“Mm. Yeah.”

Mia, who was walking alongside me, nodded in agreement with Arisa, who was still facing us.

Despite the fact that we'd recently eaten, the beastfolk girls and Lulu were eyeing all the food stalls with interest.

“Okay, but could you stop walking backward like that? It's dangerous.”

“All riiiiight... Hmm? Who's that?”

Looking past us, Arisa tilted her head in confusion.

“<Sister! I’ve found you at last!>”

A voice called out from behind us that nearly sent a chill down my spine.

It had a strange echo to it.

Turning around, I saw a slender young girl with black hair, the ends of which were red, standing with her shoulders squared.

Her skin was so light that it almost blended in with her white clothing. She bore a strong resemblance to Rei when she was in young-girl mode.

This girl’s eyes, however, were alarming. They looked like a photo negative: black where there would normally be white and white where the pupils should be black.



“<It’s me, Reiaane! Father sent me to collect you!>”

Judging by the direction of the girl’s gaze, Reiaane must be Rei’s real name.

But while she looked happy to see Rei, Rei was trembling and hiding behind my arm.

“<It’s the shadow person... Scary...>”

Rei clung to me even tighter.

So this was the person Rei saw in her dream?

“Grrr...”

“Tama, what’s wrong, sir?”

Tama was growling at the black-haired girl, the same way she’d reacted when we first met Rei.

Liza and Nana moved to stand in front of me, but I stopped them with a wave of my hand.

Tama’s reaction prompted me to activate my “Miasma Vision,” and when I did, I saw something truly frightful.

With “Miasma Vision,” the girl in front of us looked like an evil spirit.

She was completely shrouded in a black aura, and black chains of miasma writhed around her body like snakes.

There were shackle-like miasma shapes around her hands and feet, too; the thick chain attached to them faded into the mist that had suddenly risen up around us.

If she could see this, it was no wonder Rei was frightened.

Since she was speaking Hallowed Language, this girl was probably connected to the Skeleton King, so I put a marker on her just in case.

“<Listen to me, Sister! Aside from the long-lost Crimson Cane, we have gathered all the Sacred Treasures. All we need now is a large crystallized Firelight Pearl, the Box, and your key, and we’ll be able to bring Lalakie back to the skies!>”

As soon as the girl finished shouting, something about Rei suddenly changed.

The light left her eyes, which became unfocused as she looked up at the girl.

“<Lalakie must not be returned to the skies. The queen’s dying wish was for it to rest at the bottom of the ocean forever...>”

Rei spoke in a voice and manner that didn’t sound like her own.

Her tone resembled a prerecorded announcement being played back.

“<Sister? What is wrong?>”

Finally noticing Rei’s unusual state, the girl squinted at her quizzically, then saw me standing in front of her and scowled.

“<Hi there. Are you a friend of Rei’s?>” I attempted a friendly greeting, but she jutted out her chin and glared even harder.

“<Out of the way, servant. Don’t interrupt my reunion with Sister Reiaane.>”

According to the information in my AR display, her name was **Yuuneia**. She was level 30, with the inherent ability **Foundation**. She had four skills: “**Ghost Magic,**” “**Tuning,**” “**Evasion,**” and “**Animal Training.**”

Judging by her *apparent race*, she couldn’t possibly be Rei’s sister by blood. They were probably either sisters-in-law or simply had been raised as siblings.

“<...Can you hear me? I keep telling you to get out of the way.>”

As I raised my head to stare at her, Yuuneia sounded exasperated.

She must have told me to move a few times while I was inspecting her information.

“<Oh, sorry. I was a little lost in thought, so I didn’t hear you.>” I apologized, but it didn’t seem to be enough to calm her anger.

“<So you intend to keep blocking my way...>”

As she scowled, a gear-like ring of light appeared over her forehead.

*I guess I messed up.*

I should have been dodging to the side, not apologizing.

But I wouldn’t have done that even if I knew, of course.

“<Then perish!>”

*SHWNESHWNEEEE!*

A call like a mynah bird’s cry echoed over Yuuneia’s voice.

Wondering where the call was coming from, I nonetheless focused on using Break Magic to ward off the shots from her forehead.

Before long, twenty or so skeleton pirates rose from her shadow and attacked.

*Is that Ghost Magic?*

“Aaaagh!”

“Monsterrrs!”

The passersby who’d been gathered around talking about Yuuneia in a language I didn’t know all screamed and fled when they saw the skeleton pirates.

“Prepare for battle, everyone.”

On Liza’s command, the rest of the group started producing their weapons from their Fairy Packs.

Nana chose the large shield.

Despite their numbers, the skeleton pirates were only around level 10, so the girls could probably take them without my help.

Just to make sure they didn’t get hurt, I used Enchant: Physical Protection and Enchant: Magic Protection on all of them.

“They’re level ten,” Arisa called. “They have the Paralysis effect, though, so watch out for unarmed attacks, too!”

The others all shouted affirmation.

“<Can’t we talk this out, please?>”

“<I will kill you and bring my sister home, along with the key. Those are Father’s orders.>”

Yuuneia produced another gear-shaped magic circle over her forehead.

*I knew it. So Rei's key-shaped hair ornament really is an important item.*

*But also... "Orders," huh?*

At this point, I finally noticed that her status condition read **Possessed**.

That explained the miasma around her.

"<Let me help you with that.>"

I entrusted Rei to Lulu and zipped over to Yuuneia with "Warp."

She tried to fire a Foundation spear, but I again evaporated it with Break Magic.

"<Evil spirit, begone!>"

I produced a Holy Stone from Storage and put magic power into it.

Given her *race*, she shouldn't be purified along with the evil spirit possessing her.

*GHWEGHWEEEE!*

"Aaaaah!"

As Yuuneia was bathed in holy light, a black cloud erupted from her body with a roar. For some reason, she let out a scream as well.

Luckily, she didn't seem to be hurt, but her white clothes started contracting around her, binding her tightly.

I felt awkward seeing her like that, so I switched over to "Miasma Vision," which revealed the cause.

The vortex of miasma around her was fading, but the miasma chains had tightened on her body. The shackles were still totally intact.

I stopped the Holy Stone at once and started to unbind the miasma around her by hand instead.

If I kept trying to banish it with the Holy Stone, it might seriously harm her.

I could just defeat the thing possessing her whenever it came out.

"<L-let me go!>"

“<Don’t worry. It’ll all be over in a minute.>”

With this absurd response to Yuuneia’s protest, I drained her magic to prevent her from trying to fight me off with Foundation.

“<Stealing my magic isn’t going to stop me!>”

Yuuneia kept struggling, so I held her up with Magic Hand while I undid the chains of miasma.

“<Nnngh... I told you—let me go!>”

I wanted to get the shackles off first, but judging by the way they were put together, it looked like I might have to start with the chains.

Ignoring Yuuneia’s violent resistance, I continued my work.

“Wh-why, you heartless... Nnngh... Aaah... Aaah!”

As I started to remove more of the miasma, a few of Yuuneia’s screams seemed to take on a borderline sexual tone, but I figured that must be my imagination and ignored it.

Meanwhile, my companions finished off the skeleton pirates with ease.

*SHWNESHWNEEEE!*

I heard the mynah-like cry again.

“Master, her shadow!” Arisa exclaimed.

Turning off the “Miasma Vision” in my left eye, I glanced at Yuuneia’s shadow, but I didn’t see anything.

Wait—a bird.

The shadow of a bird was sitting on her shadow’s shoulder.

There was nothing on her real shoulder, so it must have been some kind of shadow monster.

I tried stomping on the bird’s shadow as hard as I could, but it simply flew away unharmed.

“Behind you!”

“<Aah!>”



Arisa's shout and Rei's scream rang out at the same time.

Whirling around, I saw a shadow stalker emerging from Rei's shadow.

At the same time, she returned from her trancelike state to her normal self.

"Take this!"

Lulu fired at it with her Magic Gun.

It seemed to be weaker than the shadow stalkers the Undead King Zen used, disappearing after only a few shots.

*SHWNESHWNEEE!*

The mynah bird's cry echoed, and the shadows at my and Rei's feet turned into a dark pool. This must be Shadow Portal, the same spell Zen used to kidnap Mia.

But this time, it didn't feel like my feet were sinking in all the way.

"Don't expect to get away with using space manipulation in front of a Space Magic user like me!"

Arisa grinned, her arm stretched out toward Rei and me.

She'd used her Space Magic to block the Shadow Portal.

But there were still some shadow tentacles left...

"There!"

"Take this, sir!"

Lulu shot down a tentacle that tried to grab Rei, and Pochi sped in to stab the vortex of shadows with her Magic Sword.

The shadows shrank back, the tentacles freezing in place.

"Dun-dun-duuun!"

Tama sliced through the shadow tentacle that had grabbed Rei's leg.

"We will never surrender the larva, I declare."

Once Rei was freed, Nana lifted her up.

Then, finally...

“No mere shadows can stand up against the Magic Spear master gave me.”

Using “Spellblade,” Liza used her glittering Magic Spear to destroy the shadows.

Pushing away the sudden urge to brag to someone about my companions’ growth, I finished off the wriggling remains of the shadows with Break Magic and turned my attention back to Yuuneia.

I’d gotten rid of about half of the miasma; possibly as a result, one of her inverted eyes had returned to a normal blue.

I reactivated my “Miasma Vision” and moved to resume unraveling the miasma.

“<Get away!>”

Yuuneia struggled desperately to escape Magic Hand, but it wasn’t so easy to shake off.

“<Nnngh! Ch-Chibi! Help me!>”

Realizing this, Yuuneia cried out for help.

*SHWNESHWNEEE!*

As if on cue, the mynah bird’s call echoed again.

But the bird wasn’t the only one waiting for that chance.

Stepping away from Yuuneia, I found the red point of light that had appeared for just a moment and punched it as hard as I could.

*GHWEGHWEEE.*

“<Ch-Chibiiii!>”

Yuuneia gave a worried cry when she heard the bird’s scream.

“<Get away from me, you fiend! How dare you do that to Chibi!>”

I didn’t see anything, but it did feel like my hand had hit something.

Shadowy feathers flew everywhere, and something appeared in my log:

**> Defeated Ghost Bird: Copy!**

*Shoot, so it has the same kind of ability as that lesser hell demon I fought in the Muno Barony?*

“<Release me at once! I shall avenge Chibi!>”

Not realizing that what I'd beaten was only a copy, Yuuneia struggled even more fiercely than before.

*SHWNESHWNEEE!*

“<Chibi!>”

Yuuneia's face lit up when she heard the ghost bird's cry echoing from somewhere.

*SHWNESHWNEEE!*

This time, there were seven different red lights around me.

They all attacked at once, so I got ready to fend them off with the rest of my party.

“Master, she's gone!” Arisa exclaimed.

By the time I turned around, Yuuneia had already vanished, and her location in my marker information screen read **Spirit World**.

She must have escaped from Magic Hand somehow while I was distracted.

“<Wait for me, Sister!>”

Yuuneia's voice seemed to come from nowhere.

I switched to “Miasma Vision” and looked around.

“<I'll save you from that black-haired demon, I promise!>”

That was a strange thing to call me, but I decided to ignore it for now.

*Aha.*

Spotting an area of miasma that was moving a little, I shot out my hand.

“<Eeeeeek! He's coming! It's the black-haired demon!>”

The wormhole to the Spirit World expanded around my hand, and Yuuneia let forth a fearful cry.

For some reason, I was starting to feel like the villain here.

A little disheartened, I nonetheless began to widen the fragile entrance.

“<Chibi, cut the connection! Quick!>”

*SHWNESHWNEEE!*

The bird let out a cry, and a few decomposing corpses emerged from the wormhole.

“Ew!”

The sight and smell made me instinctively draw back, and the entrance to the Spirit World closed, leaving behind the terrible corpses—reanimated undead monsters.

“Larva! Master, the larva has fainted, I report. Requesting assistance!”

Turning around, I saw Nana holding Rei, who’d lost consciousness.

Her condition read **Fainted**, and with “Miasma Vision,” I could see that a snakelike trail of miasma was wrapping around her leg.

The miasma carried by the undead monsters must have attacked her.

“Tama, Pochi, take care of that thing.”

“Aye-aye, sirrr!”

“Leave it to us, sir!”

The beastfolk girls took care of the monsters while I started working to remove the miasma from Rei.

By the time I finished, the beastfolk girls had defeated all the undead, leaving behind countless bones and rotted meat.

“Hey, you! What’s the meaning of this?!”

The sound of hooves clattered through the street, announcing the arrival of the viceroy’s army of Sutoandell.

*Uh-oh. How am I going to explain this?*



“Sir Pendragon, we simply cannot thank you enough.”

I thought I was being apprehended at the viceroy’s mansion, but instead I was given a royal welcome by the viceroy himself.

My companions weren’t with me, but they were being well cared for in a separate room.

“I had no idea that you were the viceroy of Sutoandell, Viscount Emerin.”

I’d first befriended Viscount Kirk Emerin, a high-ranking noble of the old capital, when he came to me on the brink of ruin, asking if I could develop some cooking methods to popularize the unsellable lulu fruit.

The reason the viscount had been so close to bankruptcy was the destruction of Baron Jeetbert’s fleet, but far from being resentful, he was simply overjoyed that some of his vassals and friends had survived.

“Indeed. Traditionally, I would have a while longer to wait before becoming a viceroy, but certain circumstances sped things along a bit.”

Oh, right. The previous viceroy of Sutoandell, Count Bobino, had been removed from his post because the former head of his family turned out to be supporting the demon lord–worshipping cult the Wings of Freedom.

“At any rate, Sir Pendragon, you need not stand on ceremony so. I believe I told you that you may simply call me Kirk.”

*Why are you calling me Sir Pendragon instead of just Satou, then?* I thought, but I supposed that was simply his nature.

“You saved my vassals from being stranded on a remote island. I owe you a great debt.”

“Precisely! When Sir Pendragon appeared sailing our ship that had run aground, we thought an agent of the gods had come to us.”

Sitting next to Viscount Emerin was Baron Jeetbert.

Several members of the viscount’s family were present as well, although his second daughter, Rina, who I’d danced with at the ball in the old capital, was not among them.

I was told that she was traveling back to the Muno Barony with Miss Karina to study as a lady's attendant.

That seemed like a pretty big deal, since she was only around middle school age.

Still, if she wanted to become an attendant, why was she studying in the faraway Muno Barony instead of the Ougoch Duchy castle?

Well, she was a young teenager, so maybe she wanted to prove that she could get by on her own far away from her parents. Next time I sent a letter to the Muno Barony, I would have to write to her as well. And Miss Karina, of course.

There was a knock at the door, and a servant peered inside.

"Your Excellency, Baron Jeetbert's family has arrived."

At that, the baron half rose from his seat, looking eager.

"Is that right? Baron Jeetbert, don't feel obliged to stay. You may go and see them."

"I appreciate your kindness, Your Excellency."

With a bow to Viscount Emerin and me, Baron Jeetbert hurried out of the room.

Soon, my "Keen Hearing" skill picked up on his reunion with his family.

*Yeah. It feels good to help people.*

"Lord Kirk, I believe this is yours."

"Th-this is the Magic Bag I entrusted to the crew!" Viscount Emerin exclaimed in surprise.

"I found it when we discovered the sunken ships. At first I thought I should give it to Baron Jeetbert, but the contents seemed incredibly valuable, so I wanted to deliver it to you directly."

Peering into the bag, the viscount was at a loss for words.

It didn't contain much in the way of gold or silver coins, but there was a great deal of sculpted coral and delicate magical handicrafts, as well as large, high-

quality gems like jade and agate and an amazing amount of raw ore containing more gemstones.

Though Baron Jeetbert hadn't noticed, I'd also removed the ballast from that ship and replaced it with as many Magic Cannons as I could fit. I wasn't able to fit extra Magic Furnaces, though.

"Wh-why, Sir Pendragon...?"

*Huh? I'd expected him to be happy, but his reaction was a little strange.*

"With all this treasure, you could buy yourself an honorary baron title or even a permanent one! Why would you give this to me without asking for any reward in exchange?"

"Well, it belongs to you, doesn't it?"

*When you find something lost, you return it to the owner.*

*Any Japanese person would tell you that.*

"What are you saying? Anything found in monster territory, be it from a sunken ship or flotsam and jetsam, belongs to the person who finds it. Piracy is another story, but in this case, these treasures belong to you by rights."

*I see. So it works the same way as items found in a labyrinth.*

But pocketing something knowing full well it belonged to someone I knew just wouldn't sit right with me.

"All right. Let me explain, then."

"Explain what?"

So I decided to put my "Fabrication" skill to work.

"I did not mention this because I thought you might find it hard to believe, but these bags and sunken treasures were given to me by the ghosts of the captains who passed away in the Seadragon Islands."

"Wh-what?!"

I told him that we had been lost in the Seadragon Islands when the ghosts appeared, guided us to safety, and asked us to rescue the baron and his men and bring them and these items to Viscount Emerin.

With that story, I figured even Viscount Emerin would have to accept the items.

“Incredible! Such loyal vassals they were...”

“Quite so. Once I promised to carry out their wishes, they seemed to be able to pass on peacefully.”

That didn't actually happen per se, but I did purify that whole area, so it probably wasn't wrong.

For a few moments, Viscount Emerin closed his eyes tearfully to pray silently for his lost vassals. Then he opened his eyes again and looked at me.

“Thank you for bringing these to me. What can I ever do to repay you?”

“Well, I do have one rather impudent request...”

If I didn't say something, I was afraid I'd get dragged into marriage talks and have to find a way out of it, so I asked for permits to buy and sell scrolls and spell books in Sutoandell.

I didn't really care about selling them, but just permission to buy them didn't seem like enough of a reward, so I tried to make it sound like a bigger deal.

“Are you sure that is all you desire? If you wished it, I would be more than happy to even welcome you into my family...”

*That was close.*

If I remembered right, his eldest daughter was already engaged, so he probably would've tried to set me up with Miss Rina.

Rina was a good kid, but she was barely old enough to be in middle school, so she was definitely too young for me. Besides, I had feelings for someone else now.

“If you intend to travel to Labyrinth City, I imagine you will pass through the trade city Tartumina on your land route. Perhaps I can give you some items that are likely to turn a large profit there.”

As it turned out, Viscount Emerin wasn't done rewarding me yet.

That night, he held a ball in honor of Baron Jeetbert and me.



Viscount Emerin introduced me as a “new friend,” so at first I was surrounded by eligible young women and nobles with unmarried daughters, but Rina’s older sister helped me escape.

But then...

“What an exquisite aroma! Whatever could it be?”

“It resembles the freshness of new leaves but with a faint trace of sweetness. How delightful.”

This time, she and her friends surrounded me instead.

They seemed to like the cologne I’d received as a parting gift from the brownies.

“I have never seen this particular fabric before, either.”

“It has the luster of jade silk, but it’s not quite the same... It’s almost like the legendary fairy silk.”

The fairly plain-looking young noblewoman’s guess was correct. Her face was a little too close for comfort, though.

“The way it gives off a jade-green shimmer when it catches the chandelier light is so beautiful.”

“Indeed. Perhaps I shall ask you for a dance?”

“If you wish, milady...”

I agreed to Rina’s elder sister’s request and wound up dancing with her and her friends.

Once I’d humored all of the rather young women, they finally released me.

“How would you like to try some spirits from the Saga Empire?”

“Certainly, thank you.”

As if waiting for his chance, a Saga Empire merchant jumped me as soon as I left the dance floor.

I used this as my opportunity to start chatting with the nobles of Sutoandell, captains of foreign merchant ships, and other guests.

I didn't gain any new information about Lalakie, but I did learn more about the Kingdom of Sorcery Lalagi, where the descendants of the skyfolk might reside.

"The king there can't get enough liquor."

"Yes, he even invented titles to give people for offering him rare drinks, like Liquor Baron and Liquor Knight."

According to this man, a liquor baron was considered the same rank as other barons in Lalagi, while a liquor knight was a low-ranking form of nobility.

Even nobles from other countries often sought these titles. The reason being...

"The only real responsibility is to give rare liquor to the king if you happen to find it, and being a liquor baron is useful for trade."

Basically, the title came with certain trading permissions and privileges.

I also spoke with a weaselman captain and a Saga Empire captain, who gave me information about certain sea routes, rare recipes, and special products that turned a high profit in some places.

However, apparently, they weren't just sharing that information out of kindness...

"The route to the Bolenan Forest?"

"I-indeed. I know it is a secret, but even a hint would be appreciated."

"Is it true that you get there through the Seadragon Islands?"

The captains seemed to want to trade with the elves in Bolenan Forest.

"I wasn't especially told to keep it a secret, but I was teleported out via the elves' special techniques, so I'm afraid I don't know the route back to the Bolenan Forest."

The pair had gotten excited when I said I could tell them a land route, but they lost interest as soon as they heard "cross the Black Dragon Mountains."

I still felt like I owed them something for all that information, so I decided to give them a few small casks of fairy wine and dried yelloorange fruit before I left

the harbor.

As for the viceroy's soldiers who took care of the aftermath of the battle for us, I sent them a few barrels of high-quality ale and delivery from a high-class restaurant.



“Get outta here, kid.”

As soon as I set foot in the tavern where most of the visiting sailors reportedly gathered, I was met with this corny line. It came from a suntanned sailor near the entrance.

I was here to gather information: I wanted to ask the sailors about Lalakie and its successor, Lalagi.

I'd gotten most of the details from Baron Jeetbert, his men, and the captains at the ball, but I thought people who had just come back from that area might have different information.

“Noble or not, no brats allowed here.”

“This is where we men of the sea come to take a load off.”

More sailors jeered at me from farther into the tavern.

“Do I not look like a sailor?”

I was wearing a shirt and trousers instead of my usual noble garb, but I guess I still looked like a noble to them.

“Course ya don't. What kinda sailor would go around smellin' like fancy perfume with nary a wrinkle in his shirt?!”

The man grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and scowled.

I must have still smelled like the cologne I'd worn to Viscount Emerin's ball.

“Not to mention, yer skin and hair look like ye've never felt the sun nor the sea breeze in yer life.”

“Kid's either a noble or some merchant's boy.”

True enough, I'd been protecting myself from the harsh sun and winds using

magic, so they weren't wrong.

Still, if they were going to object to me this much, I wouldn't be able to gather any information.

As I wondered what to do, I caught wind of a conversation in the corner of the tavern.

"Whaddaya mean, ale? What kinda sailor don't drink rum?!"

"C'mon, can't a man drink what he wants when he comes back to dry land?"

Two of the sailors were arguing over drinks.

Seeing them, the man holding me smirked and winked.

"We don't got none of yer hoity-toity booze here."

"Yeah, go on home."

"Or are you gonna show us how manly you are by knocking back some rum?"

The soldier who'd been winked at grinned back and poured a full glass of rum in front of me.

The strong smell of alcohol assaulted my nose.

Rum was a kind of liquor made from sugarcane, with a high alcohol content—at least, it certainly was on Earth.

Expecting me to choke, the men all sneered at me unpleasantly.

"Well, if you insist..."

With that, I brought the glass to my lips.

*Whoa.*

This was very different from the rum I knew.

The taste and smell were incredibly aggressive, so strong it practically numbed my mouth with the first drink.

But it was *good*.

The rum still retained a bit of the sweet molasses taste of the sugarcane, perhaps due to imprecise brewing. It would go great with a bitter, salty snack.

I drank the rest down in one gulp.

“One more, barkeep!”

The men around me all stared in surprise as I called to the bartender.

“Another glass?”

“I’ll take a tankard!”

All at once, the bar was filled with crude laughter and the sounds of tankards being slammed down on tables.

“Good one, boy!”

“Ye’ve got the making of a real sailor-in-training!”

It appeared that I’d earned their approval.

I drank with the sailors for a while, and they taught me all kinds of things about ships and sailing. Unfortunately, I didn’t get any information about Lalakie, my original goal here.

“I dunno about no legendary sky cities, but I do know of a legendary pirate.” One of the men said, pointing at the wall.

Looking closely, I saw a board of wanted posters with drawn faces and their respective bounties. Most of them were grim-looking male pirates, but there were a few women in the mix, too.

The most faded, timeworn wanted poster bore a drawing of a skull. I guess the Skeleton King had a bounty, too.

“Urgh, don’t call that disaster a legend!”

“Yeah, what if talking about ’im brings ’im around?”

“Heaven and hell forbid!”

I gathered that the Skeleton King appeared every few years, unpredictably attacking island countries, trade fleets, and the like and pillaging their treasures.

“My gramps who was a sailor said that he first heard about the Skeleton King from *his* gramps.”

*Hmm.* If that was true, then the Skeleton King had been around since the

ancient times when Lalakie fell.

I'd assumed he showed up because I broke the anti-magic spell on the city-rock island, but maybe it was actually only an unlucky coincidence.

"Aye, and the sailors he kills are forced to work in his ghost fleet for all eternity."

"If ever ye find a drifting ship without a crew, turn round and run for all yer worth. It's a sure sign of a Skeleton King attack."

"Be wary of storms, too. They say the Skeleton King's ghost fleet brings dark clouds and fierce winds wherever it roams."

"Storms are never a good thing anyway, moron!"

Wow. So the Skeleton King was basically on par with a natural disaster.

I'd destroyed his ghost fleet, though, so hopefully he'd stay quiet for a while.

"Oh, don't look like that, boy. As long as ye stay away from Lalagi, the Kingdom of Sorcery, ye're hardly likely to see 'im."

As I was lost in thought, one of the sailors appeared to mistake my reaction for fear, so he clapped me on the back reassuringly.

"S'right. I hear he oft shows up in years when the Skydea Festival is held."

"Why? To check out the festival?"

The men around me burst out in raucous laughter.

"Yer a funny little noble, kid."

"If the Skeleton King were such a fun-lovin' sort, nobody'd be so afeared of 'im."

Once they'd wiped away the tears of laughter, the sailors explained the real reason.

"It's a war, see. Once the Skeleton King's strengthened his ghost fleet, he attacks Lalagi."

*War?*

That was strange. Why would the Skeleton King, the companion to the final

queen of Lalakie, attack a kingdom where the descendants of the skyfolk—the people of Lalakie—lived?

Did they have some mysterious enmity or something?

“C’mon, I told ye—don’t make that face. The kingdom of Lalagi’s got mighty powerful magics, so you oughtta go check it out at least once. You’ll see how they’ve staved off the Skeleton King’s ghost fleet all this time.”

The soldier smacked my back heartily again, then loudly shouted for another drink.

From there, the topic changed to the Skydea Festival, from the different parades to which shopgirls were the cutest.

Some of the sailors also knew that the royal family of the Kingdom of Sorcery Lalagi were called “skyfolk,” so it didn’t seem to be a big secret.

“Well, there *is* a place kind of like Lalagi at the very end of the sugar route.”

“The end of the sugar route... Y’mean Ishrallie?”

Oh, that was a new name.

“Ishrallie?” I echoed.

“Aye, the maritime nation. Rumor has it their royal family is descended from some kinda flying castle place, too.”

As the veteran sailor explained, I searched my Storage for information.

“If ye’re a real man, ye’ll aim to make a real fortune out there.”

“Ye mean by finding a Heaven’s Teardrop in Ishrallie?”

The men crashed their tankards against one another and roared with laughter.

“Oi, don’t tell the kid to go to Ishrallie. It’s all prospectors and pilferers out there.”

“There are tons o’ pirates in those waters, not to mention the bullet tuna and monster fish...”

“Aye, I’d steer clear. Might be a different story if ye were as strong as the

Eight Swordsmen of Shiga, but for the rest of us, it ain't worth the danger. Only gamblers and fools with a death wish dare travel to that place."

"It's still safer than treasure-hunting in the Seadragon Islands, though, eh?"

"True that. Not even gamblers go there."

As I sat searching in silence, the men around me explained everything they knew about Ishrallie.

The Heaven's Teardrop in question was a particularly high-quality gemstone that could be found only in Ishrallie.

It was highly sought-after, especially by well-to-do nobles living in the royal capital of the Shiga Kingdom, who would pay a fortune for it.

*Wait, forget about that.*

*I heard something much more important just now.*

"There are tuna there?"

"Huh? Y'mean the bullet tuna? Aye, they appear time 'n' again there."

The sea captain seemed a little taken aback by my sudden enthusiasm.

*All right! We've gotta go there!*

First, I would have to make a knife that could properly cut tuna. *I know! I'll make a tuna knife out of orichalcum.*

"I hear the battleships and speed ships alike that go after the monster-fish fins disappear into the depths of the sea..."

"Not like ye can just bring a battleship into a trade area anyway."

"Course not. Ishrallie's Dragon Cannon would send ye up in flames, ship and all."

Monster-fish fins were an important material for skypower engines, but I had seven enormous giant monster fish in my Storage, so I wasn't interested in that.

"Are you really planning to go to Ishrallie, boy?"

"Yes, my interest is certainly piqued."

*In the tuna, that is.*



“Then ye better buy some silk. I doubt ye can afford jade silk, but I hear all kinds of silk sell there for several times the amount in the old capital.”

“And glasswork for Lalagi, right?”

“Oh yes, ye’ll sell plenty of glasswork there. But unlike in the old capital, transparent glass is valued higher there—at least, according to me captain.”

As we drank together, I learned more from the sailors about sales and trade.

I didn’t particularly need to turn a profit, but I wound up writing down **buy glasswork and silk** on my to-do list on my menu anyway. I couldn’t resist the allure of a phrase like *making a killing in trade* and all the exciting images it brought to mind.

In a good mood now, I declared that I would pay for everyone’s drinks as thanks for all the information, and we wound up drinking together until dawn.

I’d already stopped by the magic store to buy the scrolls and spell books I couldn’t get earlier in the day, so it was no big deal.

There were some establishments with pretty ladies, too, but those would have to wait.



“So you drank until morning, hmm?”

“Mrrr.”

When I returned to the viceroy’s castle, I ignored Arisa’s and Mia’s complaints and asked the maid to send for their regular tradesman.

“Are you going to order something?”

“That too, but I wanted to see if they could send some articles of the deceased to their respective families.”

For those who were related to people I knew in the old capital or their retainers, I had the items delivered directly. I sent the rest of the old capital deliveries to Tolma; for those who couldn’t be identified, I sent the items to Sara at the Tenion Temple to donate to the old capital museum.

Foreigners often visited the museum, so that way a relative of the deceased

owners or a researcher might find them. It was certainly better than letting them rot away in my Storage forever.

My excuse for having the goods was that I acquired them from a trader friend who bought them off pirates at a black market.

“You must really trust Sara and Tolma.”

“You could say that.”

They couldn't be more different as people, but I was confident that neither of them would misuse someone else's belongings. Despite his generally lax attitude, Tolma actually had a very strong sense of duty.

For items that belonged to deceased people from outside the Ougoch Duchy, I kept them in Storage for now, thinking that I could give them to someone trustworthy when I visited the royal capital.

Miss Nina, the competent consul of Baron Muno, was coming for the kingdom conference, so I could also potentially give the items to her to help the Muno Barony form stronger ties with the rest of the world.

A butler asked if he could do anything else to help, so I requested that he send some small casks of fairy wine and dried yellorange fruit to the two captains from the previous evening.

I didn't want to leave anybody out, so I sent some to Viscount Emerin, too.

While I was at it, I gave the staff of the house some simple baked sweets as thanks.

Seeing the beautiful women's serious expressions melt at the scent of the pastries was well worth the trouble.

“You're departing already? Why not stay a little longer and rest?”

“Thank you, but I recovered more than enough energy at last night's ball.”

Viscount Emerin seemed disappointed that I was leaving so soon, but he saw me off kindly nonetheless.

On top of that, he even gave me a large supply of silk, jade silk, and transparent glasswork. Evidently, one of Baron Jeetbert's subordinates had

been at the tavern the night before.

The rest of the group besides Rei had already set out, so the viscount's vassals generously carried these supplies to the harbor for us.

Rei still wasn't back to her usual self, which was why she was leaving late with me.

It was also a precaution against another attack from Yuuneia.

"Oh, I almost forgot."

I reached into my pocket and produced a replica of Rei's hair ornament.

I'd used my "Forgery" and "Metalworking" skills to make it, so it was virtually indistinguishable from the real thing, even up close.

I'd added a little bonus feature to it, too, but that wasn't too important.

"<Rei, I made this...>"

As soon as she saw the fake key, the light left her eyes, and she stopped in place.

"<...Rei?>"

I called out her name, but she didn't respond.

Then her mouth opened, her face expressionless.

"<The key to Lalakie... The controller that activates Lalakie's heart.>"

She spoke rapidly, in the same tone she'd used when we ran into Yuuneia.

"<The proof of royalty that has been passed down by the queens of Lalakie for generations...>"

When she finished, the light slowly returned to her eyes.

"<Are you all right?>"

"<Yes... I'm fine.>"

Speaking in her usual manner again, Rei blinked a few times.

No, maybe not quite usual. Her hesitant pauses hadn't changed, but her pronunciation was more fluent than before.

“<Did you remember something?>” I asked, wondering if her memories were returning.

“<No...>”

Rei shook her head.

On further questioning, she remembered that she'd been speaking, but she couldn't recall what she'd actually said.

Seeing Yuuneia again must have jogged her memories a bit.

It didn't seem like the kind of thing I could rush along, though, so I went back to the main point.

“<It seemed like Yuuneia was after your hair ornament, so I made a fake one just in case she manages to steal it.>”

Rei touched the key-shaped hair ornament on her head as she looked at the one in my hand.

“<It looks...the same.>”

Her eyes widened in surprise as she compared them.

“<You can put the real one in this pouch and keep it around your neck so you don't lose it.>”

I handed her a small Fairy Pack–style pouch, which I'd made with the interior of a Magic Bag from the salvaged goods.

Judging by the information she had just unknowingly spoken, it was increasingly clear that her hair ornament was extremely important to anyone connected to Lalakie.

“<Satou... Thank you.>”

“<Don't worry about it.>”

I smiled at her and fixed the fake ornament to her hair.

The barrette glowed a faint blue for only a moment.

It was meant to absorb the excess magic coming off Rei and use it for purification, which should reduce her chances of getting attacked by miasma

again.

It might not have much of an effect on Yuuneia, but it should work against the Skeleton King or the ghost bird Yuuneia called Chibi.

It could even communicate with certain other magic tools like a walkie-talkie, but it would work only within a thousand feet and absorbed a great deal of magic, so I had that feature turned off.

When I brought her to the harbor and passed through the crowds of people, I found the rest of my companions getting ready to set sail.

“Master, all cargo has been loaded on board, I report.”

“Here is the inventory list, master.”

The vanguard group, who’d left early, had brought all the goods delivered to our temporary warehouse onto the ship.

“We haggled ’em down—don’t worry.”

“There were some good bargains, too, so we purchased them like you said, master.”

“Satou.”

Arisa, Lulu, and Mia, who’d gone to pay the merchants, returned from the chamber of commerce.

Mia rushed through the throngs of people and wrapped her arms around my waist.

“Mrrr.”

Noticing that I was holding Rei’s hand, Mia puffed out her cheeks and started rubbing her face against my side.

She seemed to be the jealous type.

“Mia.”

I held out my free hand to her, and she accepted it with an “Mm” and a happy smile.

It goes without saying that when the rest of the group saw us, I was forced to

take turns holding hands with everyone and doing laps up and down the deck.

Waving good-bye to Viscount Emerin, Baron Jeetbert, and the others who'd come to see us off, we left Sutoandell behind us.

They had offered to send gunboats along to escort us to the border of the neighboring Ganika Marquisate, but that seemed inappropriate, so I politely declined.

I appreciated the thought, but if we had a guard with us, then we could hardly use the ship's flight mode.

## The Sugar Route

*Satou here. The compass is known as one of the Four Great Inventions, but doesn't it seem like surprisingly few people actually know how it works? When I first learned about it myself, I remember being surprised that it was so simple.*

“Where are we going next?”

“We'll head west for a while, then go south by southwest to Ishrallie. After that, we'll head to Lalagi.”

I looked at the map in my menu and the physical sea chart in my hands as I explained my plan to Arisa.

She was wearing a white sailor suit—the kind a seafaring person would wear, not the school uniform.

“I get why we're putting off visiting Lalagi for a while, but why aren't we heading straight for Ishrallie as soon as we leave?”

“For appearances, that's all.”

We were heading west first to give the impression that we were going to the Ganika Marquisate. Once we passed the border between the Ougoch Duchy and the Ganika Marquisate and kept going for a little while, we would change course and head straight for Ishrallie.

“If we head south-southwest right away, certain profiteering types might try to come after us.”

In fact, I could already see on the map that a few high-speed ships were following us from a distance.

They were probably trackers from fleets like the Weaselman and Saga empires.

“I don't know how long it'll take if we follow the normal route at a leisurely

pace, so we'll just have to keep going until they give up."

The normal route would be to head toward the long peninsula at the western tip of the Ganika Marquisate, then pass from one small island to another until reaching the Kingdom of Sorcery Lalagi, until finally heading northeast from there to Ishrallie.

The route I chose was faster, but there were few safe places to drop anchor and lots of monsters in the waters.

But that also meant we were less likely to be seen by others.

This route was ideal for making full use of our flying ship.

"Arisaaa?"

"Lulu's sampling, sir."

Tama and Pochi, who were wearing sailor outfits as well, called Arisa over to the cabin.

Judging by Pochi's suspicious wording, they were probably working on some kind of meat dish.

Since they didn't call for me, Lulu was probably making some experimental dish, so I decided not to poke my head in until I was called.

"<Satou.>"

"<What is it, Rei?>"

Rei, who was dressed in the same outfit as the rest of the younger crew, came over to peer curiously at the scrolls I was using.

Since we left the harbor, she hadn't gone into a trance to rattle off information again, but she said that she sometimes got headaches along with fragmented flashbacks.

Her memories must have been starting to come back.

Trying to force her to remember seemed to cause her pain, so I'd decided to wait until they came back naturally.

She should remember the past, including her self-proclaimed sister, Yuuneia, soon enough.



However, I wasn't sure whether those memories returning would really make her happy.

Based on what little information I had so far, it didn't exactly seem like Rei had a fun, carefree past.

From what I understood, her key-shaped hair ornament was a device that activated the heart of Lalakie, and the Skeleton King, who was very likely her father, was coming after it. On top of that, there was Rei's Sacrificial Maiden title and the Skeleton King's ominous statement about *no matter who or what I must sacrifice*.

He probably intended to sacrifice his own daughter to *return Lalakie to the skies*.

I wasn't sure about the Coffin that Captain Ghost from the sunken ship had mentioned, but my guess was that it referred to the Lalakie Box that was reportedly in the Kingdom of Sorcery Lalagi.

Yuuneia also mentioned that the combination of a box and Rei's key could bring Lalakie back to the skies, and that would explain why the Skeleton King kept attacking Lalagi, the home of the descendants of Lalakie.

Glancing at the marker list on my map, I saw that the Skeleton King was still staying quiet in the Spirit World.

As long as Rei was with us and had the key, the Skeleton King and Yuuneia would probably attack us again, so I was trying to keep an eye on their movements.

"<What...are you...doing?>"

"<I was just checking out the scrolls I bought in the city.>"

The seven scrolls I purchased in Sutoandell were as follows:

Mana Light, a Practical Magic spell for illumination.

Create Water and Purify Seawater, two spells said to be indispensable for traveling by sea.

Translation: Lesser, an intermediate Practical Magic spell that could translate to and from various languages.

Water Breathing and Resist Water Pressure, two Water Magic spells to help with underwater mobility.

Water Wall, a useful defense spell for battles at sea.

Big Wave, which was more useful for disturbance strategies than a full-on attack. Surfers would probably love this one.

Finally, Remote Harpoon, a Water Magic spell that produced harpoons that could lock on to and chase a target—similar to my Remote Arrow spell but for underwater use only.

All of them except Mana Light were outrageously overpriced, but I was confident that they would be worth the money.

Rei watched me use each of the scrolls with unwavering interest.

Obviously, I wasn't going to let the Skeleton King take her, but if her memories didn't return after visiting Ishrallie or Lalagi, maybe I should just take her with us to Labyrinth City.

Of course, even if her memories did return, I still planned on inviting her to join us.

“Whoooosh?”

“I can spin it even faster, sir.”

Tama and Pochi were playing with a prototype artillery rack I'd made, essentially designed after a revolver cylinder.

It wasn't a plaything, but I couldn't bring myself to stop them when they looked like they were having so much fun.

“What's that? A Gatling?” Arisa asked.

“It's a rack for the Magic Cannon. I'm trying to come up with a way to reduce the lag between shots and create the possibility of rapid-fire.”

We probably wouldn't need them, but I wanted to add self-defense capabilities to the flying ship in case it was attacked while I wasn't around.

It was taking a long time to implement, but I was hoping to have it finished by the end of this journey at sea.

Tama and Pochi, abandoning their game with my prototype, shifted their attention to pointing at the shore.

“Baaay?”

“A bay, sir!”

An entrance to a bay that enclosed a few small towns and fishing villages had come into sight.

It had been only about half a day since we left Sutoandell, but it would be a long while until we reached the next bay, so I’d decided we should stay the night here.

Like the entrance to Sutoandell, this place was equipped with a water gate.

This one, too, had some anti-monster pillars, but the gate was more primitive, with a crank device like the gates of a city wall.

Instead of Magic Cannons, it was equipped only with catapults and large crossbows.

“Master, a small boat is approaching, I report.”

“It must be the harbor authority.”

The yacht-like vessel stopped next to our ship and requested permission to board, so I lowered a rope ladder for them.

“Hello, we are from the harbor authority, tax department. We are here to collect your bay entrance fee, if you please.”

Since our ship had the air of nobility, the government officials spoke to me very politely.

Nobles were generally exempt from city entrance taxes, but apparently, that didn’t apply here, probably because we were aboard a potential trading vessel.

“Thank you very much.”

I paid the amount they requested.

The fee seemed to be based on the displacement volume of the ship, since they didn’t make any effort to inspect our cargo or anything. We continued into the bay without incident.

It wasn't a particularly large bay, but there was one major town and a number of fishing villages.

We decided to spend the rest of the day wandering around the port town.

"Big caaatch?"

"So many little fish, sir."

"You could probably catch tons of these with some *sabiki* rigs."

Standing on the pier, the kids seemed to be having fun gazing at the swarms of fish in the water.

"You don't have any, do you, master?"

"No, I'm afraid not."

I did have rods and fishing line from when we went mountain stream fishing near the elf village, but I didn't have any small lures like that.

"Yeah, I guess that was too much to ask..."

"I'll make you one, though. Just give me a minute."

"...Wait, what?"

I ignored Arisa's confused expression, picking out some materials from Storage to make the *sabiki*. I had all kinds of colorful objects that might work as the reflector, so it was fairly simple.

"There, all done."

I attached the finished lures to a fishing rod and cast it out into the water.

In a matter of moments, small fish were swarming to the *sabiki*.

I didn't even need to scatter bait first.

"Lots of biiites?"

"There are tons of them, sir!"

"<That's...amazing.>"

Tama, Pochi, and Rei all looked very impressed by the amount of small fish I'd hooked with my makeshift *sabiki* rigs.

I handed the fishing rod off to the younger group and started making more lures.

“Fiiive?”

“Pochi will catch fish on all six hooks, sir— Aaaah! Don’t run away, sirs!”

“This manner of fishing is quite involved, it seems.”

Each of the beastfolk girls enjoyed her own unique way of fishing.

“I knew *sabiki* would catch lots of ’em.”

“Arisa, I’ve got a bite! What do I do?!”

“Reel it in quickly, or it’ll get away.”

Seeing Lulu acting all excited for a change while Arisa stayed calm was an amusing role reversal.

“<This is...very...fun.>”

“Mm. Pleasant.”

Rei and Mia were humming as they cast their *sabiki*, which gathered a noticeably bigger crowd of fish.

Humming seemed to attract the fish, too.

“Are these small fish larvae?”

“No, they’re fully grown. They’re just different species from the bigger kinds of fish.”

“Master, your advice is appreciated, I declare.”

Nana seemed to be going through some kind of internal conflict, so I helped her out.

“Whoa, get a load of that!”

“Are they magic users or something?”

“Maybe he’s a fish mage!”

“Dang, that’s amazing.”

We seemed to have drawn the attention of some locals.

“Would you like to try, too?”

I’d made some extras in case my companions got their lures tangled, so I let the local kids use them.

“Whoa, this is nuts! I’m catchin’ tons of ‘em!”

“Mister Mage! Can I borrow one, too?”

“Sure, go right ahead.”

I subscribed to the philosophy of “the more, the merrier,” so I ended up popularizing the *sabiki* rigs.

By the time we’d caught several bucketfuls, there was practically a festival going on around us.

Maybe that was because I started frying up the freshly caught fish on the spot into deep-fried fish and so on.

Even the local guard wound up coming to check things out, so as an apology for causing trouble, I gave the baron of the guard a model *sabiki* rig.

“Sir Pendragon, we knew you were a miracle chef, but you appear to be a miracle fisherman, as well. We shall treasure this *sabiki* as a family heirloom!”

I didn’t know whether the baron’s words caused it, but I wound up getting titles like Master Fisherman and Avid Angler.

Since the sun was about to set, we asked some of the spectators to point us to the best seafood restaurant in town and left the baron and the other townspeople absorbed in the *sabiki* rigs.

“I’m sooo fulllll.”

“Oh, Arisa...”

Lulu gently chided Arisa, who was rubbing her stomach as we left the restaurant.

“That was a pretty great restaurant.”

The full-course meal, which featured local specialties like shrimp and crab, was absolutely delicious.

“Putting the shrimp on the bread and eating it with that scallop dip was the perfect bite.”

We weren't very far away from Sutoandell, so I found it interesting how much the menus and cooking styles varied between there and here.

“Indeed. The grilled crab had a particularly wonderful mouthfeel.”

“The shrimp was yumyyy?”

As usual, Liza and Tama ate the crustaceans shell and all, surprising the waitstaff.

I was glad we'd rented out a separate room of the restaurant.

“Pochi liked the mountain goat meat best, sir.”

For some reason, one of the middle courses included some kind of preserved mountain goat dish.

Maybe it was supposed to be a palate-cleansing type of thing.

“Meat doesn't cooount?”

“That's right. Meat is always delicious.”

Pochi's comment prompted Tama and Liza to start rambling about the merits of meat.

*I guess it's still in a league of its own for the beastfolk girls.*

“The crab meat paella was also delicious, I report.”

“Mm. Yummy.”

“<It was...quite...good.>”

Nana, Mia, and Rei enjoyed the seafood paella best.

Mia gave most of her seafood portions to the other kids, but she seemed to like the seasoning.

“...Master, what is *that*?”

As we came out into the town square, Arisa pointed at the monument in the center, looking rather alarmed.

“A stone sculpture of...a gaming console?”

“<The Dragonturn Rock, a magic apparatus developed to repel the dragons who strode about Lalakie as if it were their own. Magic circuits in the slate surface display images when it is provided with a great deal of magic power and the buttons are pushed.>”

Rei entered a trance state and answered my murmured question.

*I guess Lalakie's influence is more widespread than I thought.*

“There's an explanation over here.”

A stone tablet in front of the monument explained that it was a symbol of peace and prosperity that had been in place since before the Shiga Kingdom was founded.

I tried putting a little magic into it to test it out, but the magic circuits of the Dragonturn Rock seemed to have deteriorated over time; it didn't work at all.

We chatted for a while in front of the monument, then started walking toward the inn.

“Are we being followed again?” Arisa whispered.

“Yes, we seem to have an expert spy on our hands.”

I checked the radar for more information.

The spy was hiding his presence well, but it was very obvious to Tama and me. Pochi seemed to be sensing some kind of presence, too, but the spy's “Invisibility” skill prevented her from seeing him.

He seemed to be monitoring the inn all night but didn't appear to notice when I used “Invisibility” myself to slip out.

Checking my map to make sure I wasn't followed, I placed a few seal slates for the Return spell in discreet areas along our route.

I took a quick look around the pleasure quarter just for fun but decided to go straight back to the inn for the night.

For the next few days, we continued traveling like a normal sailing ship during the day and staying in port cities and towns at night.



Fortunately, by the time we reached the border, the Saga Empire ship that had been tailing us turned back toward Sutoandell, presumably convinced by our act.

There were a great deal of islands of all sizes not far from land in the vicinity of the border and a lot of reefs, meaning the route forward was fairly narrow unless you took the long way around through open waters.

Because of all that, we wound up passing a lot of other ships throughout the day.

“Reminds me of the Seto Inland Sea,” Arisa remarked.

“That’s true.” I nodded. “The water’s pretty calm, and there are a lot of small islands.”

Since we’d passed over the border, I used “Search Entire Map.”

Just as it said on my chart, the Ganika Marquisate was a lengthy territory that continued for a while. If I had to compare it to anything on Earth, I might say it was like Chile but stretching to the east and west instead of north and south.

The Fealty Mountains to the north and the long peninsula surrounded by the sea made up the borders; most of the population seemed to live in cities and towns that were in bays or otherwise close to the ocean. Most of the fishing villages were in the bays as well.

It was difficult to compare, but I thought it was between the Ougoch Duchy and the Muno Barony in terms of surface area. Its population was less than half that of the Ougoch Duchy.

As I was distracted with the map, an incident began to occur...

“Fightiing?”

“Master! A ship is being bullied, sir!”

Tama and Pochi shouted down from the lookout.

*Please help them!* was written all over their faces as they pointed desperately.

As far as I could tell, some pirates whose turf was the barrier area were attacking a midsize merchant ship.

The pirates had three galleys of easily two hundred tons of displacement each, which were firing Fire Shots and arrows at the merchant ship's sails.

There was a small escort vessel accompanying the merchant ship, but it seemed to have already fallen under the control of the pirates.

As I assessed the situation, our ship drew closer to the merchant vessel being chased by the pirates.

"Master, preparations are complete."

While I was investigating, my companions had changed into their armor on the deck.

Tama and Pochi, who had joined in late, were being helped into theirs by Lulu and Nana.

"I guess we'll go fight some pirates, then."

I put the ship's defensive shield on max power and headed toward the battle.

The captain was level 26, but even the rest of the pirates averaged around level 10, stronger than many soldiers on land.

They probably encountered monsters more frequently at sea.

"Ready, Mia?"

"Mm."

Mia and I stood at the helm, firing with our bows.

We'd equipped them with non-lethal stun arrows from the Magic Bow stash we'd found in the sunken ship.

"Th-that's some serious range..."

"What're ye waiting for? Fire back!"

"W-we can't from here."

"What?! But the wind's in our favor!"

My "Keen Hearing" skill picked up the pirates' conversation.

"They're passing right through our anti-arrow defenses!"

“All free hands, grab yer shields and block ‘em!”

Ignoring the increasingly frantic voices of the pirates, we continued to fire, reducing the numbers of their archers.

“Pirates! Please go get help from the navy!”

A voice from the merchant ship reached me with the help of Wind Magic, so I used my “Amplification” skill to call back to them.

“We’ll take care of them. Just get to the next bay!”

As the merchant ship passed us, they called out to us to turn back, but if we turned around now, the pirates would catch up to both of us easily.

The pirates’ attacks started targeting us instead of the merchant ship.

“Dammit, we can’t hit ‘em!”

“Our arrows, they’re—they’re going off course!”

“They’ve got an arrow barrier! Shoot ‘em with the Fire Shots!”

“Why are their attacks still hitting us?!”

The pirates’ Fire Shots flew at us along with their complaints, but our ship’s defensive barrier warded them off easily.

The high-capacity Holytree Stone engine I’d developed was working great, along with the improved barrier production device.

“The Fire Shots are bouncing off, too?!”

“Must be an intermediate barrier! They’ve got an intermediate Everyday Magic user on their side!”

“That means they’re gonna use Foundation spears! Bring out the Ultramarine Turtle Shield, boys! Those’ll pierce right through regular shields!”

Three of the pirates propped up a huge shield, obviously made from monster parts.

“Nana! They’re expecting Foundation spears, so let’s give them what they want.”

“Orders accepted, master.”

Nana fired her Foundation spears, but the so-called Ultramarine Turtle Shield warded them off easily.

“It’s our turn, Lulu.”

“Okay, I’ll do my best.”

“Helping.”

Now that we were in range, Arisa and Lulu attacked with Fire Rods. Mia stood next to them, shooting more arrows.

However, the turtle shield blocked them exactly like it had Nana’s spears.

“Look alive, mates! We’ve got this!”

The pirates seemed to be recovering their morale, so I prepared five Magic Arrows and some Short Stun shots and fired them a few at a time at the ships on the left and right.

We could always claim we’d hired a mage at the time, though I doubted anyone would suspect after the fact that I was hiding my true power.

“I-impossible! Their Foundation spears broke through the Ultramarine Turtle Shield? Do they have an advanced Practical Magic user?!”

“Captain! The other ships are done for! They must have an advanced Wind Magic user, too.”

“Tch! It must be a pirate-hunting battleship disguised as a merchant ship!”

The pirates seemed to be misunderstanding the situation, which was fine for me.

Their defense was surprisingly weak, though. Their ships weren’t big enough to carry multiple Magic Furnaces, so they probably had a mage on board producing the barrier for them.

My Short Stun bullets had opened large holes in the flanking pirate ships, which began to sink. The pirates started jumping into the water, swimming for shore.

As they swam, however, small monsters came up from the sea to attack them. It was becoming a survival-of-the-fittest situation.

The monsters didn't seem to be too strong, though, so the pirates probably wouldn't die if we left them to their own devices for now.

Mentally shutting out the screams of the pirates, I focused on the ones who were still fighting back.

"Some of these small-fry pirates aren't making a break for it."

"Wrooong?"

"They're in chains, sir."

The oar men of the galley ships appeared to be slaves.

I would've felt terrible if they drowned, so I stretched my Magic Hand as far as it would go to keep the ship from sinking.

"Scarecrow, we're going to charge the flagship. Turn the bow's defensive barrier into a sharp point."

I gave an order to the figurehead golem, and its steam whistle gave off a *phweeee* that indicated an affirmative response.

I'd been killing time over the last few days by making a response mechanism for the Scarecrow, and it seemed to have turned out quite well. These things just didn't feel satisfying without a good reaction.

"We're boarding them, right?! It's your time to shine, Liza!"

"Understood." Liza turned to the rest of the vanguard. "Prepare for close combat."

"They're charging at us, Cap'n!"

"Trying to ram a pirate ship, eh? These guys have some nerve."

"We'll show 'em the power of our Narwhal Horn Ram!"

The pirates opted not to flee, instead facing us head-on.

"All hands, ready the Antiflash Protection Shockfield!" Arisa cried, retreating to the forecastle and squeezing her eyes shut.

It was probably a reference to a certain battleship anime, but I didn't think "antiflash" would be necessary here.

As the ships collided, there was the sound of wood splintering.

The impact almost sent my companions flying into the air, but I kept them safe with Magic Hand.

Without the support of magic, of course, the pirates went flying across the deck, a few of them plummeting into the sea.

“Draw your swords! Let’s teach these pirates a lesson.”

“Aye-aye, sirrr!”

“Roger, sir!”

“Prepare to die in shame, you filthy garbage of the sea, I declare.”

Charging onto the pirate ship along with the beastfolk girls, Nana used her “Taunt” skill to insult the pirates.

Scrambling to get up from the deck, the pirates responded to the taunt, drawing their cutlasses to attack Nana.

“Useless, I inform.”

Since Nana had her large physical shield combined with Foundation shields, it was all but impossible to break through her defenses.

And Nana wasn’t alone.

“Your guard’s dooown?”

“You’re supposed to watch your footing, sir.”

Tama and Pochi stayed low as they zipped around the pirates, slicing at their ankles with Sharpness-enhanced Magic Swords.

“Yaaargh, there be monsters at our feet!”

“No, they’re nothing more than a couple of brats with Magic Swords!”

“Quit running around so fast, damn ye!”

The pirates cursed, visibly shaken.

Tama and Pochi were making quick work of them, but because of the violently rocking waves, the pirates managed to land a few attacks.

Fortunately, none of them seemed strong enough to break through the Enchant: Physical Protection spells I'd placed on them. Even if they had, they would've just been met with whale-hide armor anyway.

"Arr, what're ye doin', letting these little rats get the best of ye?!"

The pirate captain, the only one of them with a high level, charged forward with a broad cutlass and a parrying dagger.

Liza, who was crushing the pirates near Nana, moved to intercept him.

Liza's Magic Spear left a trail of red light as it streaked toward the captain, who caught it with his parrying dagger and swung a counterattack with his cutlass.

"Useless, I exclaim!"

Nana blocked the cutlass with a Flexible Shield and used her "Taunt" skill as she struck the pirate captain with her shield.

"Tch, so the Practical Magic user is on the front lines now, eh?!"

The captain dodged Nana's shield with a backstep, but Tama and Pochi were waiting in the wings to slash at his legs.

It looked like they'd finished dealing with the weaker pirates.

"Back off, ye brats!"

Seeing his men lying at his feet, the captain kicked a few of them at Pochi and Tama.

"Be careful, sir. I almost cut him in half, sir."

Pochi nearly sliced through the pirate who came flying at her, but she stopped in the nick of time.

"Don't worry, be happyyy?"

Tama, on the other hand, dodged hers easily and managed to land another light cut on the captain's leg.

"Urgh! That was damn dirty!"

The captain cursed as he swung his sword toward Tama.

“That seems rich coming from a pirate.”

“I agree with Liza, I declare.”

Liza’s Magic Spear and the vanguard’s Magic Swords swung toward the captain at the same time.

Despite the injuries on his legs, the captain managed to protect himself from all four of them. It was probably due to the difference in level, or maybe the pirate captain was accustomed to fighting solo against a group.

“Awfully stubborn, aren’t you? Jamming Field!”

Arisa’s Space Magic hit the captain, throwing off his balance.

“Now.”

“Right!”

Mia’s bow and Lulu’s Magic Gun pierced the pirate captain’s shoulders, causing him to drop the cutlass and parrying dagger, and the vanguard quickly knocked him out.

Having arrested the pirates, we loaded up the near-sinking galley with people and headed to the nearest harbor.

We had a bit of trouble getting permission to enter at first, but one of the slaves we’d rescued turned out to be something of a celebrity in the port city, so we made it through somehow.

“Now, are you quite certain you wish to release these slaves without any compensation?”

“Of course. They are victims who were captured by the pirates, after all.” I nodded at the official.

The pirates had pretty hefty bounties, and since their levels were relatively high, they earned a good price as criminal slaves as well.

The handful of Fire Rods they had were pretty priceless, too.

“Sir Pendragon, we intend to strike the pirates’ base next. Perhaps you would like to join us?”

“No, I’ll leave that in your capable hands, thank you.”



The baron of the guard, who was already armed and ready, left with his subordinates in tow.

He'd probably invited me along because they had high expectations for the treasure hoard they would find in the pirates' hideout.

Later that day, we were invited to the mansion of the celebrity we'd freed from slavery for a lavish feast.

There were even a bunch of fantasy-style hostess ladies, but thanks to the iron-wall pair of Arisa and Mia, I wasn't able to get anywhere near them.

As for the other slaves we'd freed, the celebrity took the lead by starting a new trading company and hiring all of them.

To commemorate the start of their new lives, I presented them with the galley we'd stolen from the pirates.

The newly minted president of the company was very moved and modeled the company's crest after my surname: a sea serpent wrapped around a spear-like pen. The company even ended up being named the Dragonwrit Trading Company.



“All right, shall we start heading south?”

The next day, I saw that the Weaselman Empire ship tailing us had also turned back toward Sutoandell.

I guess they weren't planning to follow us all the way through the territory after all.

We spent about half the day heading west on the southerly ship route, until there was no longer anyone around us, at which point we switched to flying mode and started heading south.

“Ahhh, I definitely like the flying mode better.”

“Mm. Pleasant.”

Arisa and Mia seemed pleased that the ship had stopped swaying.

“So a big cut of *ootoro* is waiting for us in this Ishrallie place, right?”

“Yeah, that’s right.”

Technically, *ootoro* was a specific cut of the underbelly of the tuna, but there was no point correcting her.

We’d turn them into cuts of meat in no time anyway.

Since there was finally nobody around to see us, we zipped along above the sea at a fast clip. In no time at all, our ship passed out of the Ganika Marquisate area and into monster territory.

“They’re not here...”

For some reason, the tuna I’d been promised didn’t show up on my map search.

“Maybe they’re farther ahead.”

“Yeah.” I nodded.

Arisa was right. If they weren’t here, we just had to keep going until we found them.

They couldn’t escape from my map search, after all.

“Bored.”

As Mia grumbled, Nana was teaching the Shigan language to Rei.

“Larva. Repeat after me, I instruct.”

“Larba.”

“Pay careful attention to the movements of my lips, I request. Larva.”

“Larva.”

She seemed to be teaching Rei some unusual words, but Mia would intervene if it went too far, so it was probably fine.

“So peaceful...”

“Mm.”

Watching their language lesson, Arisa sighed listlessly and flopped onto one of the cushions on the deck. Mia promptly dropped down next to her.

“Peace is a good thing, though.”

“Exactly.”

I nodded in agreement with Lulu.

Tama, who was crawling around on all fours on the deck, looked up at me urgently, so I gave her a signal not to worry the others about it.

She was the only one of the group besides me who'd noticed the level-52 squid kraken charging up to attack us, along with a school of torpedo squid, but I promptly wiped them all out with my new Remote Harpoon spell.

I then stretched my Magic Hand as far as it would go to recover the corpses, but since they were underneath us, I didn't think anyone noticed.

Like Remote Arrow, the Remote Harpoon spell could fire up to 120 shots at once, so it had no problem making quick work of a level-50-odd monster.

Sadly, the squid kraken didn't taste particularly good; it had a strong scent of ammonia that no amount of cooking or preparation could wipe out. I could probably use its parts to make armor, ink, and things like that, so I decided to use it that way instead.

On the other hand, the torpedo squid were pretty tasty, so we wound up having squid prepared in all kinds of ways for lunch.

“Delicious.”

“Fried is yumyyy?”

“The boiled squid rings are chewy and good, too, sir.”

The beastfolk girls seemed particularly fond of the fried squid and boiled teriyaki squid rings.

“The sashimi's pretty good, but squid *somen* is still my favorite.”

“Yeah, it's very good. Since the fish is so fresh, it's nice and jiggly.”

“Yes... It's very...<good>.”

Normally, Arisa and I were the only ones who would eat sashimi, but this time Rei was joining in, too.

“Larva, you will get a stomachache, I warn.”

“Mm. Parasites. Danger.”

Nana and Mia tried to steer Rei away from the raw squid.

Unfortunately for them, I'd already checked that there were no parasites or eggs inside.

Silently resolving to make sushi once we finally caught some tuna, I spent the rest of the afternoon working on a tuna knife.

“Satou... Is this...<orichalcum...>?”

Rei was still practicing her Shigan as she asked me a question.

I nodded. “<That's right—it's orichalcum.>”

I had forbidden the others from coming to the front part of the deck as I used Elvish alchemy equipment to make orichalcum ingots.

Rei entered her trance mode for the first time in a while.

“<...Orichalcum. A sacred, mysterious metal that can only be made by the gods and the elves. The technique is so top secret that even the Lalakie dynasty could not replicate it through experimentation.>”

After a few moments, her eyes returned to normal.

“<Did I...say something...again?>”

“<Yes, you were explaining orichalcum to me.>”

“<I still...remember...a little bit. Orichalcum is...a metal...that can't be made... by humans.>”

Her amnesia seemed to be slowly wearing off.

“<Satou, what are...? Never mind. It's...nothing.>”

Rei seemed to want to say something else, but she simply closed her mouth and walked back over to Nana and the others.

I was curious about what she'd wanted to ask, but I didn't plan on forcing her to say it, so I just went back to work on my tuna knife.

I wasn't adding any magic circuits to this one, so the work went by fairly

quickly.

“They’re not here, either...?”

I finished my tuna knife not long before we entered the next area, but there weren’t any tuna there, either.

We might have to go all the way to Ishrallie to find them at this rate.

Instead, we found something else...

“Whoa, it’s Nessie! A real live Nessie! I wonder if it’ll go *pji, pji*?”

The sea monster that emerged from the depths looked exactly like a plesiosaur. It seemed to be a related species to the mosasaurus-type creature we saw in the Seadragon Islands.

Since it also resembled a certain cryptid, I sort of understood Arisa’s excitement, but I wasn’t sure why she was quite so worked up.

And where was this *pji, pji* thing coming from?

“Broiled eel! Prepare to fall into my stomach, I vow!”

Nana seemed to think any sea creature with a long neck was simply an eel waiting to be broiled.

*HROOOOARRR!*

Reacting to Nana’s taunt, the monster let out a roar that sent tremors through the air.

“Th-that wasn’t a *pji* at all!”

I didn’t know what exactly Arisa was talking about, but she explained that it had reminded her of some heartfelt story about a child becoming friends with a plesiosaur.

As she did so, she became teary-eyed and tore at a handkerchief with her teeth.

I got that she was play-acting and all, but I didn’t want her to hurt her teeth, so I gently took it away.

“...■■ **Water Hold Mizu Shibaru.**”

“Now!”

“Gotchaaa?”

“Take this, sir!”

Mia’s Water Magic held the plesiosaur in place, and the beastfolk girls finished it off.

It was only around level 20, so I guess it wasn’t as strong as it looked.

As far as taste, it was a bit tougher and stranger-tasting than sea serpent, but it should be fine as long as it was paired with a flavorful sauce and seasoning.

“Flower island.”

“Flower island... <Pretty...>”

“Mia and the larva are correct, I concur.”

We’d been traveling south for about two hours after running into the plesiosaur when we came across an island covered in blooming flowers.

Rei was speaking in Shigan with occasional Hallowed Language words mixed in.

“Master, let’s make land there!”

“Sure, but you’ll have to wear void suits, all right?”

Arisa tilted her head. “What do you mean?”

“Those flowers are all poisonous.”

According to my AR information, many of the flowers used neurotoxins, sleeping powder, and other such poisons for targeting animals.

Many of them could be used for potion ingredients, so I warned everyone to use Air Control to make sure the poison didn’t get in as we approached, then used my Magic Hand to pick a few.

“I guess every rose has its thorns,” Arisa said wisely as we left the island behind.

I didn’t think someone who looked like a child should really be saying that kind of thing.

It turned out that Tama and Pochi had been dozing in the lookout post, earning them a scolding from Liza.

So that was why Mia had spotted the island first.

As we made a detour around the island, we saw a metal frame in the middle of it, covered in flowers.

“<Late-Period Biakii Floating Ship. A masterwork ship that was the most frequently built model in Lalakie.>”

Judging by the trance state of Rei’s words, the metal frame was the ruins of a floating ship from the Lalakie era.

I checked it out with Clairvoyance and my map, but there didn’t seem to be anything of special note inside, so I decided to just pass it by.

“What is that? Sand?”

“It seems to be volcanic ash.”

A few days after we saw the flower island, Arisa noticed some ash drifting on the breeze.

Since we had magical Air Control, it didn’t land on the deck. As far as I could tell, it was coming from an island near the center of the area.

Unlike the previous monster territory, this area contained a few islands with human settlements.

It would probably be fun to visit one of these remote inhabited southern islands, but I had something more important to do first.

As I was getting ready to set out, Arisa looked at me nervously.

“Don’t do anything reckless, okay?”

“Don’t worry. I’m just going to set a seal slate and do a little harvesting while I’m at it,” I responded lightly.

Volcanic islands tended to be useful bonus stages where you could get lots of sulfur and fire stones and such, after all.

I brought the ship as close as I safely could, then used my Flying Shoes to take off from the deck. Once I was far enough away from the ship, I used

“Flashrunning” to teleport to the volcano, which was almost six miles away.

“Wow. ‘Flashrunning’ long distances when you’re not in space is pretty intense.”

My shirt had been blown off in the process, so I replaced it with a new one, then used the Everyday Magic spell Deodorant to get rid of the burned smell.

I had assumed that it would simply use magic to teleport me like “Warp” does, but when it was that long of a distance, the atmosphere clearly had some kind of effect. It was pretty strange, considering there was no inertia once the movement was complete.

“Ooh, it’s erupting.”

I used the Canopy spell to protect myself from the ash and smoke, putting my Flexible Shields to work to ward off the flying debris.

“Lots of fire monsters. I figured as much.”

Bright-red fire-spitting snakes attacked me from the ground, while burning human-shaped spirits flew at me, so I used Remote Arrow to deal with the lot of them.

The volcano’s crater was full of red-hot lava, with yellow sulfur peeking out through the cracks.

“I got plenty of sulfur and ash and stuff, but I haven’t found any fire stones...”

I muttered to myself as I searched the map, which showed a huge amount of fire stones inside the lava. There were even a few shards of the rare Firelight Pearls.

There was also a level-82 creature called a “flamebeast” lurking in the lava; this territory was its domain. This one even had a proper name, which was rare for a monster: “Flame Lord.”

Its specialty was Blaze Breath, and its species had a special trait that reduced the effect of physical attacks by half. Fire and light attacks wouldn’t work on it at all.

I prepared the intermediate attack spell Implosion from the magic menu.



See, I read in a book long ago that a shock wave was the best way to put out fire.

*GGRAAAAAAARRR.*

The Flame Lord appeared, bursting through the lava.

“It’s a T. reeeeeex?!”

For some reason, it looked exactly like the infamous Tyrannosaurus rex.

Startled, I instinctively flung out a kick to the side of its head and then automatically used Implosion to attack its unprotected neck, defeating it instantly.

I had aimed the focal point of the Implosion at its back to avoid getting caught in it myself, so I wound up with a headless corpse.

Although I was able to defeat it easily thanks to the huge difference in our levels, it was an over-two-hundred-foot-long monster that could even fly, so it might’ve actually been a pretty powerful enemy.

I stored away the corpse of the Flame Lord, which had a thick hide with a red to orange gradation, then reached into the lava with Magic Hand to pick up some gigantic fire stones and Firelight Pearls.

When this harvest was finished, I turned away, feeling very pleased with myself, and spotted some kind of man-made structure in one corner of the crater.

“...What’s that?”

As I approached the structure with “Skyrunning,” I could see that it looked like some kind of temple.

In fact, it bore a strong resemblance to the underwater shrine I saw at the city-rock island.

It had been mostly destroyed, but there seemed to be enough space for someone to fit into it, so I stepped inside.

“It hasn’t deteriorated much, considering it doesn’t have a Fixify spell protecting it.”

The shrine must have been destroyed more recently than I realized.

Inside, there was some kind of sealing device, which didn't seem to be working anymore.

It must have been sealing the Flame Lord I just defeated.

The Flame Lord didn't seem to have any phoenixlike revival skills or abilities, so it was probably safe to leave this device as it was.

I set a seal slate far enough away that it should be safe even if there was a major eruption, then changed out of my burned-up boots and clothes before returning to the ship.



Later on the journey, when we stopped at one of the islands along our route...

“Piiineapples?”

“Bananas are the best, sir.”

“There are even kiwis and mangoes.”

...we were able to find a bunch of tropical fruits.

When the head chief of the island saw Mia, he became very welcoming.

There were hardly any monsters around the island, either, which made it very peaceful.

Rei's trance state explained the reason, which turned out to be a cone-shaped magic object.

“<Monster-ward stones—a magic monster-repellent device that was distributed to all territories under the control of Lalakie.>”

Many of the people of this island had tanned skin like Rei, along with black hair and eyes. A lot of them also wore a garment that looked like a single piece of red cloth draped over their shoulder. Since that alone would leave half of their chests exposed, the women wore white chest wraps underneath.

Most of the inhabitants also wore accessories around their necks, wrists, and ankles that looked like strings of small wood pieces. More extravagant accessories denoted someone with a higher rank in their village.

“<Are you certain it’s all right if we take this much?>”

“<Of course. It is our tribute to our honored elf guest.>”

The chief was speaking a language called “Ujan Language,” which sounded closer to the Saga Empire language than Shigan.

I acquired the skill for it, but it seemed to be unique to this island, so I just used the Translation: Lesser spell to communicate.

I wondered at first if these people were descendants of Lalakie, but that didn’t appear to be the case.

“<Besides, you have already gifted us with foreign food and drink the like of which we have never seen.>”

I’d given the man some transparent Shigan sake and bitter ale. Since the liquor of this island all seemed to be a sweet unfiltered sake-like drink made from fruit, it was probably unusual for them to taste a different kind of alcohol.

For the food, I’d given them some deep-fried hydra meat and whale steak from the giant monster fish Tobkezerra.

As thanks, the villagers made us a delicacy that they rarely ate: sea turtle soup. It wasn’t quite the same as soft-shelled turtle, but it was still unbelievably good.

“<Satou, drink this.>”

The chief’s daughter, an adorable high school–age girl, offered me a cup filled with some kind of black liquid after dinner.

Her chest wrap wasn’t as wide as the other girls’, so an enticing little bit of volume peeked out around the edges.

If she weren’t a child, I might’ve been tempted to talk her up.

“<Is this...cocoa?>”

The drink was bitter; a powdery texture filled my mouth.

If it was cocoa, there definitely wasn’t any milk or sugar in it.

“<‘Kokoa’? No, this is ‘drops of love.’ When two people drink it, they share a special love and are granted a child.>”

The chief's daughter drew closer to me, fiery heat in her tone and gaze.

But of course, the iron-wall pair wasn't going to let that slide.

"Nuh-uh, you're not taking on any local sweethearts on my watch!"

"Mm. Banned."

*Who says "sweethearts" anymore, Arisa?*

It was probably her penchant for outdated lingo at work again.

"<But we always seek a child from a powerful visitor, of course. I was chosen from among all the girls of the village.>"

Apparently, someone in the village had the "Analyze Person" skill.

Just as we'd done in other settlements, Rei was equipped with a recognition-inhibiting magic tool, so we should be all right. Nana was wearing her Amulet of Humanity, too.

"Don't give me that folklorish world-building nonsense!"

Arisa complained about the village's customs with some hard-to-follow logic.

"<Satou drank the drops of love.>"

The girl pointed at the cup almost accusingly.

Did drinking it mean accepting a marriage proposal or something?

I covered the top of the cup with my hand, added some milk and sugar from Storage, and stirred it with Magic Hand.

"<Want to give it a taste?>"

"<What? But I just did...>"

I showed her the cup, which now contained the same amount of liquid as it had before.

Intrigued by the sweet scent now rising from the cup, the chief's daughter gave it a sip.

"<It's sweet...and tasty. What did you do, Satou?>"

"<It must be a miracle from the gods. They're telling us that it's too soon for

love to bloom between us.>”

I used my “Fabrication” skill to mislead the young girl.

“<...I see. Very well.>”

She hesitated for a bit but finally gave in to the allure of the sweet cocoa and drank it up, then returned to the other villagers.

I felt a little bad, but she should really find a spouse in her own village instead.

“<Madam Elf, we pray that your journey is a safe one.>”

“Mm. Thank you.”

The next day, some of the island people came to see us off.

After Mia’s brief answer, the villagers threw themselves to the ground in gratitude.

“<Sir Satou, there is a cursed island in these waters called the ‘Fire-Breathing Island.’ It is said in our village that a dreadful monster called a ‘flamebeast’ is sealed there, so powerful it could burn the ocean itself.>”

The chief’s expression was so grave that I couldn’t bring myself to tell him I’d already beaten that thing.

“<If you see smoke on the horizon, pray turn around and distance yourself as far as you can.>”

“<Thank you. I’ll be sure to do that.>”

I nodded at the villagers, and we left the island behind us.

We passed several uninhabited islands where cacao fruits grew, so we gathered plenty of ingredients for chocolate as well as tropical fruits.

But we took care to avoid harvesting too much, of course. That would be bad for the environment.

Besides, since I’d set seal slates in the area, I could come back for more anytime.

## Maritime Nation Ishrallie

*Satou here. For some reason, the phrase maritime nation makes me picture a floating man-made island in the Pacific Ocean. I must have read some memorable sci-fi story about a floating nation like that.*

“Is that Ishrallie?”

Arisa pointed at a structure up ahead that looked like an island.

The Kingdom of Ishrallie was in the next area after the volcanic island.

It was an island nation consisting of several hundred islands of various sizes, centered around an island about the size of Shikoku, the smallest of Japan’s four main islands. The biggest island contained a lakelike inlet, at the center of which was the capital of Ishrallie.

Unlike the subtropical climate of the previous area, the weather here was light and summery. The climate seemed to be controlled with a City Core.

“I think so, yeah.”

I answered Arisa’s question vaguely as I looked at the map.

The place Arisa was pointing at seemed to be a settlement on the edges of a donut-shaped island.

Including the ocean, Ishrallie was about the size of the Ougoch Duchy, but its population was barely a tenth of the duchy’s. Most of the inhabitants seemed to live on the bigger islands.

Just as I’d been warned, there were a great deal of pirates in the kingdom’s territory, but since we were so far from the usual route, we didn’t encounter any of them.

“We’re not running into many monsters here.”

“Well, we’re not in a monster-dominated territory anymore.”

We'd captured all kinds of sea life along the way; the green quartz seahorses and flying shark fins would probably fetch a particularly high price.

Not that I had any intention of selling them.

"I suppose. But what about my *ootoro*?" Arisa asked, her eyes gleaming with gluttony.

I understood her eagerness, but we were looking for tuna.

"They don't seem to be in this area, either."

I couldn't find them anywhere. Maybe they had a wide migration range.

"Master, a small airship is approaching, I report."

Looking up to where Nana was pointing, I saw what resembled a bathtub with dragonfly wings coming right at us. Its pilot was a man with a big, bushy mustache.

"<Be ye pirates? Speak!>"

### > Skill Acquired: "Ishralliese Language"

This country's language sounded fairly similar to Ancient Language.

If they were descended from Lalakie, I thought they might use something closer to Hallowed Language...

Largely out of curiosity, I put some points into the new skill and activated it. Translation: Lesser was only for speaking, not reading, anyway.

"You, pirates! Yes, no?!"

When I didn't respond, the mustachioed man called out in broken Shigan instead.

"<We are a trade ship from the Shiga Kingdom! We wish to make port at the capital of Ishrallie.>"

After a short question-and-answer exchange, the man guided us to the only gate into the inlet.

"Biiig?"

"Amazingly amazing, sir!"

On a cliff above the gate was a dome-shaped fortress equipped with two huge Magic Cannons.

“<...Totorie Magic Cannon, eighth-generation model. Also known as Dragon Cannons, they boasted the highest attack power of any in the Lalakie dynasty. Because of these Dragon Cannons, Totorie’s Magic Cannon technology was praised as the greatest in the world; this led an envious Lalakie engineer to involve the senate, accusing the Totorie royal family of treachery, which led to its fall as well as that of the floating castle. The prince fled with the Dragon Cannons, which were forever lost to the annals of history...>”

Rei entered her trance state and gave a lengthy explanation in Hallowed Language.

“Larva, you are quite knowledgeable, I commend.”

“Hmm? Nana?”

Coming back to her senses to find Nana lifting her up in a hug, Rei blinked in confusion.

She’d become so accustomed to the Shigan language that she even spoke it when she was surprised now. It probably helped that the other girls were teaching her, too, not only Nana.

Our ship traveled through the narrow passage between the cliffs and toward the inlet.

“It’s a little scary how close these walls are...”

“Fear not, Lulu. If the worst should happen, master will surely protect us.”

Normally, Liza would offer to do the protecting herself, but apparently, extreme cases like natural disasters fell to me instead.

But I really would protect them from a landslide or a tidal wave and so on.

“Soldierrrs?”

“There are so many, sir.”

Tama and Pochi looked up at the defense garrisons that had been carved into the cliff faces.



The younger girls waved up at the soldiers, who kindly waved back in return.

Before long, our ship came out into the inlet, and we headed for the island in the center.

“What a pleasant place,” Arisa remarked.

The temperature in the inlet felt like a warm spring day, and the waves were gentle and subdued, barely rocking the boat at all.

Many small fishing vessels floated in the water, pulling in colorful tropical fish.

“Swirlyyy?”

“It’s a spirally city, sir.”

“Mm, snail shell.”

Tama, Pochi, and Mia were gazing at the island that held the capital of Ishrallie. It was a multilayered city, bearing a resemblance to a carved seashell.

If anything, it looked more like a sci-fi setting than a fantasy.

Arisa was silent for a moment, but just as she muttered an expectant “Well?” Rei’s pupils disappeared and she went into another trance.

“<Totorie-style buildings. The spiral structure was characteristic of the floating island Totorie.>”

Rei’s explanation was fairly short this time. Judging by this and the previous round of information, the inhabitants of this island seemed to be descendants of a nation called Totorie from the Lalakie-dynasty era.

It was probably a vassal nation of Lalakie’s or something like that.

“Big shiiips?”

“They’ve got oars *and* sails, so they must be strong, sir!”

There was a dock in one part of the harbor reserved for battleships, including five large warships and forty smaller ones of various sizes.

As Pochi observed, the Ishrallie warships were all sailing ships with oars.

This seemed like a surprisingly large navy for such a small nation, but they probably needed to protect themselves, since they were in the middle of a

monster-infested ocean.

Most of the large warships were wood, but the flagship in the center, which was bigger than the other four, was made from a mithril alloy.

It looked a little beat-up, as if it had recently returned from battle.

“<The flamebeast...>”

I heard a familiar word come drifting on the wind from the direction of the naval port, so I used the Space Magic spells Clairvoyance and Clairaudience to check it out. My “Keen Hearing” skill worked only within a certain range, after all.

“<Captain! We’ve dispatched a messenger. But is the rumor true?>”

“<Yes, it’s true. The seal on the Fire-Breathing Island has been broken, and the flamebeast has been revived. Our land forces were completely wiped out, and the other warship challenged the flamebeast so that we could escape...>”

“<But who would want to revive the flamebeast?>”

“<The Skeleton King.>”

“<What?!>”

“<A witness from a neighboring island said they saw a flying ghost ship.>”

“<It can’t be! Is he after Ishrallie’s Dragon Cannons, then?!>”

“<Indeed. No doubt he intends to incite the flamebeast to attack us, then steal the cannons once our nation is consumed by flames.>”

“<What a devious scheme. And all to bring down Lalagi...>”

*...I see.*

So the Skeleton King had been working on a scheme all this time.

I opened my map to check on the whereabouts of the Skeleton King and Yuuneia.

The Skeleton King was still in the Spirit World, just as he had been that morning, but Yuuneia was in an area I’d never heard of before called the **Kraken’s Domain**.

Since they seemed to be taking action now, I had better keep a closer eye on them.



“<Totorie Royal Villa. A palace-type floating castle. Bears a close resemblance to the one utilized in the time of the prince’s escape.>”

The day after we arrived at Ishrallie, I was visiting the royal castle with Rei in tow.

“Is she quite all right?”

“Yes, she just tends to talk to herself.”

The official from the trade ministry, who was the reason we were at the castle, cast an alarmed look at Rei.

When he’d learned that our ship was from the Shiga Kingdom upon our arrival, he approached us to negotiate the purchase of some Shigan silk.

“<We simply must have silk for Her Highness the princess’s coming-of-age ceremony!>”

Taking advantage of his obvious need, I offered him some silk in exchange for an audience with the king of Ishrallie.

They must have seriously wanted that silk, because the very next day, my request was granted, thus our visit to the castle.

Of course, I was seeking contact with the royal family in the hopes that it might jog Rei’s memories and cure her amnesia.

“<Nenelier design. An engraving style originating from the floating island Nenelier. Popularly used during the Lalakie dynasty.>”

Listening to Rei’s trance-state muttering, I looked more closely at the structure of the royal palace.

There was a repeated arch structure of pillars that supported more pillars above, creating a stately dome-like space.

It reminded me of some architecture I’d seen on my trip to Europe. The St. Sophia’s Cathedral, perhaps?

“Please do not worry. We’ll be sure to avoid any such muttering in front of the king.”

The official still looked nervous, so I smiled reassuringly as we followed the court lady who was guiding us.

Unlike the men, who were generally dressed in an Eastern Roman Empire style, the woman was wearing a thin cloth draped over a short vestlike garment and a wrap skirt, which gave bewitching glimpses of her curves as she walked ahead of us. From the front, her belly was very much exposed.

Overall, it was sort of like a combination of Roman Empire style and an Arabian Nights costume.

As we continued through the enormous dome, we reached a throne at the center of the room.

It was raised two steps higher than the floor we walked on.

Rei looked up at the dome and started to explain it, but since we were about to have our audience with the king, I broke her out of the trance with a light prod.

It seemed to me that her transitions in and out of the trance state were getting smoother.

“Are you the merchant who wishes to present us with silk for my daughter?”

The king of Ishrallie looked down at me from the throne and spoke (in Ishralliese, of course).

The man had a bit of an “evil uncle” look to him, giving off the impression that he’d played around a great deal in his youth.

His crown was a wrap of gold thread lavishly decorated with Heaven’s Teardrops, impressive in a different way from the more traditional crown of the Shiga Kingdom.

The Heaven’s Teardrops were perfectly round jewels that sparkled in the light, so I could understand why they would be so valued by Shigan nobles—*Wait, what? That’s alua.*

My AR display labeled them **Heaven’s Teardrops: Alua Resin**. With the normal

“Analyze” skill, it read only **Heaven’s Teardrops**.

Alua was a material I’d acquired in the elf village, which I’d used for the coating on the deck and Tama and Pochi’s favorite hard-to-break cups and plates.

Opening my map, I searched for the trees that produced the resin used to make alua.

They grew on a single uninhabited island.

The royal family was probably monopolizing it to produce Heaven’s Teardrops for themselves.

My curiosity was now sated, so I turned my attention back to the king.

“It is an honor to meet you, Your Highness. I am a hereditary knight of the Muno Barony in the Shiga Kingdom. My name is Satou Pendragon.”

I thought it best to give an honest answer to his honest question, so I introduced myself and gave a noble bow. Luckily, the classes I took for new nobility in the Muno Barony had taught me how to introduce myself to a foreign king.

“So you are a noble, not a merchant? Forgive me.”

The king nodded magnanimously, urging me to continue.

“This is jade silk from the Shiga Kingdom.”

“Jade silk, you say?!”

The king, the official next to us, and even the nearby nobles all exclaimed in surprise.

*I didn’t think it was so special that even a king would react like this...*

“You’ve avoided the preposterous tax imposed by Lalagi? Do you by chance have a Liquor Baron title, perhaps?”

As it turned out, the Kingdom of Sorcery Lalagi antagonized Ishrallie by imposing taxes on jade silk of more than a hundred times its worth whenever a merchant ship passed through their kingdom.

Their goal was to sell their rival product red silk at a high price and buy

Heaven's Teardrops more cheaply.

I'd gotten all this information from Ishrallie citizens, of course, so it was probably best to take it with a grain of salt.

"If you have brought gifts of jade silk—and such high quality, at that—you must be seeking the right to trade in Heaven's Teardrops, correct? Very well."

This caused a commotion among the officials and vassals in the room that bordered on shrieking.

"But first, I must speak with you. Come this way."

With that, the king of Ishrallie stood and led me to a royalty-only passageway behind the throne.

The official was made to stay behind, but Rei was allowed to come with me.

"<Aquasphere. A magic device made from wind stones and water stones that constantly produces bubbles of water.>"

Looking at an art sculpture in the hallway, Rei entered a trance again.

This special hallway was a wide-open corridor with a view of the mansion and the castle town below. It didn't seem very well protected against assassination attempts.

"<What a knowledgeable girl. Is she connected to the royal family of Lalagi?>"

It seemed that the king of Ishrallie could speak Hallowed Language.

"<I'm not sure. She was struggling with amnesia when we found her.>"

"<Oh-ho, you understand Hallowed Language well for one so young... Perhaps you could tutor the prince? I would give you a far better title than hereditary knight.>"

I wasn't sure how serious the king was, but when I politely declined, he seemed unbothered and turned his interest back to Rei.

"<What do you know about that one?>"

The king pointed at a mysterious object at the top of the royal castle.

"<Heavenslight Protection. A protective power given to the skyfolk by the

gods.>”

“<That’s right. With the Heavenslight Protection and the Dragon Cannons, not even the *Skeleton King* can touch us.>”

I wondered why the king mentioned the Skeleton King and not the flamebeast there.

When Rei heard this, she returned from her trance and looked like she wanted to say something, but in the end, she stayed silent.

“...Guard the prince?”

“Just so. You are surely aware that Lalagi will soon hold the Skydea Festival? It is the custom for the prince to make an appearance as a show of goodwill.”

When we reached the king of Ishrallie’s private room, he made an unexpected request.

He probably wanted to send his son to another nation in case the flamebeast attacked.

Still, it seemed a little careless to entrust his precious son to somebody he’d met only recently.

“Why ask a foreigner such as myself? Ishrallie is known far and wide for its impressive navy.”

“I need them for the fl... No, never mind that.”

The king started to say something about the flamebeast but then cut himself off.

“Please forget everything I just said. Instead, I would like you to carry an advance messenger for me. Your ship should surely be able to carry a messenger with no guards, yes?”

*That definitely sounds like you’re going to send the prince disguised as a messenger.*

“This will be your reward.”

The king placed a pouch on the table that was full of Heaven’s Teardrops.

That seemed excessive for transporting one messenger.

“Surely this is unnecessary for one messenger—”

“I am paying for your utmost haste, as well.” The king cut me off. “Please be prepared to leave Ishrallie by the day after tomorrow.”

This made sense. A bigger ship would take much longer to prepare for departure and certainly wouldn’t have time to buy or sell supplies.

So the generous reward was to compensate for the cost and inconvenience of preparing quickly.

“Very well. I shall do my utmost to meet your needs.”

*I guess doting fathers exist even in a parallel world.*

As long as we made sure the prince enjoyed himself at Lalagi’s festival, it shouldn’t be a problem.

“So you accept! Wonderful! I shall lend you a room within the castle. Please come to dinner tonight and tomorrow, as well.”

With that, the king ushered us back out.

I would’ve liked to ask about Lalakie, but I could probably just do that at dinner.



*“Master! Over here, over here!”*

Arisa called me with the Space Magic spell Telephone, so I came to the shopping district in the castle town.

Apparently, she wanted to show me some kind of seashell workshop.

The signboard read LI-BURA with a fancy logo that looked like something out of a game art book. Since *bura* was the word for *workshop* in this language, the store name probably meant “Li Workshop.”

“What do you think? Amazing, right?!”

“Yes, it really is. It’s more like an art studio than a workshop.”

Looking at one of the delicate shellwork pieces, I noticed something strange.

The “Estimation” price was far too low. The bigger pieces cost silver coins, but



the rest were mostly one copper coin apiece.

“How much is this one?”

“They’re all three copper coins each.”

The shopkeeper gave me a price that was three times my estimated market price, but that wasn’t a problem.

Normally, I would haggle down to the market price, but in this case, that seemed like an insult to their delicate handiwork.

“Well? Pretty cheap, right?”

“Yeah.”

I nodded. Artwork this elaborate ought to be at least one gold coin.

The biggest piece, a crown made with pearls and seashells, would look amazing on a mermaid—a finfolk girl. It would make anyone look like the queen of some underwater kingdom.

“Don’t you think we could resell these?”

*So that’s why Arisa called me here.*

That made sense. Since I gave each of them a gold coin’s worth of spending money, she should be able to buy any of these for herself if that was what she wanted.

This would be the perfect gift for nobles in the royal capital and Labyrinth City, so I decided to go along with Arisa’s plan.

The idea of making a killing in trade was always an alluring one, after all.

“So if you have extra stock, I would love to make a bulk purchase.”

“R-right. The young lady suggested as much to me, so I’ve just come back from our storehouse with a list.”

According to the shopkeeper, they had around three hundred pieces altogether, but only fifteen or so were of the highly intricate quality found in the shop window.

“I’m afraid I only have Shiga Kingdom coinage. Is that all right?”

“Yes, of course. We rarely get Shigan copper coins around here, so the traders will exchange them without a fee.”

Ishrallie copper coins were only a third of the size of Shigan copper coins, so I realized that the price the owner gave me was actually equivalent to my initial estimation.

Either way, it was far too cheap, so I threw in some extra coins.

“Master Noble, if you like, could I perhaps interest you in my friend’s shop as well?”

Once I’d finished paying, I accepted the shopkeeper’s proposal. Bringing the rest of my group along, I wound up doing even more trading at the pearl workshop, and a coral workshop as well.

The pearl shop was called Lai-Bura, and the coral shop was Tori-Bura.

All of them showcased highly skilled craftsmanship to rival the shellwork. The coral workshop in particular had a great deal of inventory, with a varied lineup ranging from accessories to interior design, so I bought up quite a bit of stock.

Products with sea-based materials like coral and pearls were quite highly valued in the inland areas of the Shiga Kingdom, after all.



“My name is Sabaan Ish—”

The handsome, droopy-eyed prince’s self-introduction was interrupted by a sharp elbow strike from the king of Ishrallie.

He was probably about to give his real name instead of an alias.

I was the only one who’d been invited to the banquet; the girls were being treated to a feast in the castle room we’d been given.

“Erm, Sabaish. Thank you for taking me to Lalagi.”

The prince introduced himself in a still obviously royal tone, eliciting a groan from the king.

Doing my best to look completely oblivious, I introduced myself to “Sabaish.”

After a brief conversation, I asked the king about Lalakie.

“Are you interested in Lalakie?”

“Yes, I happen to be doing some research on it.”

Thanks to my “Fabrication” skill, I came up with a plausible reason on the spot.

I doubted he would’ve believed me if I told him I was trying to bring the half-ghost Rei back to her home.

“If it’s treasure you seek, I advise against it.”

The king sipped a goblet full of an orange cocktail as he gave me a warning look.

“Even the Flue Empire failed on their quest to acquire the treasure of Lalakie.”

I wasn’t sure what he meant, so I waited for the king to continue.

“It is written in our history books. In their battle against a demon lord, that empire sent a large fleet east of Lalagi to seek the ancient weapons.”

I checked the location in question on my map as I listened.

The Kingdom of Sorcery Lalagi was to the southwest of our current location, Ishrallie, so maybe this area was to the southeast?

“Almost the entire fleet was sunk by monsters called ‘sea lord’s spawn’ in the Kraken’s Domain near the Seadragon Islands. Only one captain managed to bring his ship back to tell the tale.”

The king went on to explain that the mithril-alloy warship in their harbor was stolen from survivors of the Flue Empire.

“Thanks to those sea lord’s spawn, the greedy empire’s fleet was destroyed, so they could not steal our autonomy or our Dragon Cannons.” The king chuckled heartily. “I guess even monsters can come in handy sometimes.”

When I asked, he explained that the sea lord’s spawn was the general term for a variety of octopus-type monsters that lived in the Kraken’s Domain.

“They say that Lalakie undoubtedly sank somewhere in the wide expanse of the Kraken’s Domain, but to venture into that area would be suicide. Steer clear of that place, I tell you.”

With that, the king and the prince led me to the banquet hall.

The feast consisted of all kinds of seafood; the giant fish boiled in soy sauce in particular was unbelievably delicious.

Sadly, there was no sashimi, but the chefs' remarkable talents came through in every dish, so each course was a delight for the tongue.

This was the last leisurely moment I would spend in Ishrallie, however; at dawn the next morning, per the king's request, our hurried preparations for departure began.



"Sir Pendragon, I can't go on..."

Prince Sabaan fell into my arms, whimpering.

Not long after we left the harbor, the prince became incredibly seasick.

Ignoring Arisa's shrieks from her cabin, which sounded something like, "Satou x Sabaish, now that's a good ship! A pale *shota* and a tanned, handsome prince!" I held up the slumped Sabaish.

"Don't be silly. I have medicine for seasickness."

"I'm sorry, but that stuff doesn't work on me."

I wasn't expecting the prince of a maritime nation to fare this poorly on a ship.

"How about some medicine to make you sleepy, then?"

"Yes, that would be great, thanks. I hope we're in Lalagi when I wake up..."

I gave the prince a long-lasting sleep potion and laid him down in a guest cabin on the forecastle.

The prince being asleep for the journey meant we could use flying mode, so it worked out for everyone.

"...Arisa."

I bopped Arisa lightly on the head to stop her deranged mumbling and went back onto the deck.

The guard ships hadn't followed us past the gate.

Most likely, Ishrallie needed all of its navy to prepare for the flamebeast.

"Master, *more* pirates!"

"So it's three small galleys this time, hmm?"

Half a day had passed since we left Ishrallie. Exactly as I'd heard at the bar in Sutoandell, there were a lot of pirates patrolling the route between Ishrallie and the Kingdom of Sorcery Lalagi.

It would be a pain to arrest the pirates and bring them all the way to Lalagi, so we were merely chasing off the pirates without much bounty and sinking the ships that were full of pirates with lots of sins on their bounty list.

The galley ships tended to attack from behind islands, so the pirates could just swim to shore.

Of course, whether they would survive on the monster-infested desert islands was up to their own abilities and luck.

A few of the pirate ships that attacked us were actually ship-like structures on the backs of giant fish-or turtle-like monsters, but we managed to deal with them anyway. Of course, the giant monsters in question went right into our food stores.

"Which kind?" Arisa asked.

"The really evil kind," I answered after checking their bounty info.

They didn't seem to have any slaves on board, so I went ahead and hit the ship with a preemptive Water Wall attack, overturning the boat and shooting a few holes in the bottom with Short Stun to sink it. By now, I had the whole routine down to a science.

"Master, recommending a change in course."

"Good idea."

I nodded at Nana and opened my map.

We were about to leave the Ishrallie area.

As soon as we did, I used "Search Entire Map" to investigate the Kingdom of

## Sorcery Lalagi.

The area was about the same size as Ishrallie, but its population was about 30 percent larger. The island that housed the capital was fairly large, about the same area as Hokkaido.

Like Ishrallie, it was primarily populated by humans, with very few demi-human races; a small amount of sea-dwelling demi-humans lived around an island in the far-off reaches of the area.

Though Ishrallie was swarming with pirates, there were hardly any in Lalagi.

They appeared to stay in the part of the sugar route that connected Ishrallie to Lalagi.

The City Core here in Lalagi seemed to be set to a higher temperature than the one in Ishrallie; the closer we got to the capital, the hotter it became.

“Arisa,” I said abruptly. “They’re here.”

“Whaaa—?” she responded blankly.

“Tuna.”

“Wh-where?!”

There were several of them in the sea east-southeast of Lalagi. That must be the area where they lived.

I put markers on the bullet tuna as I spoke with Arisa.

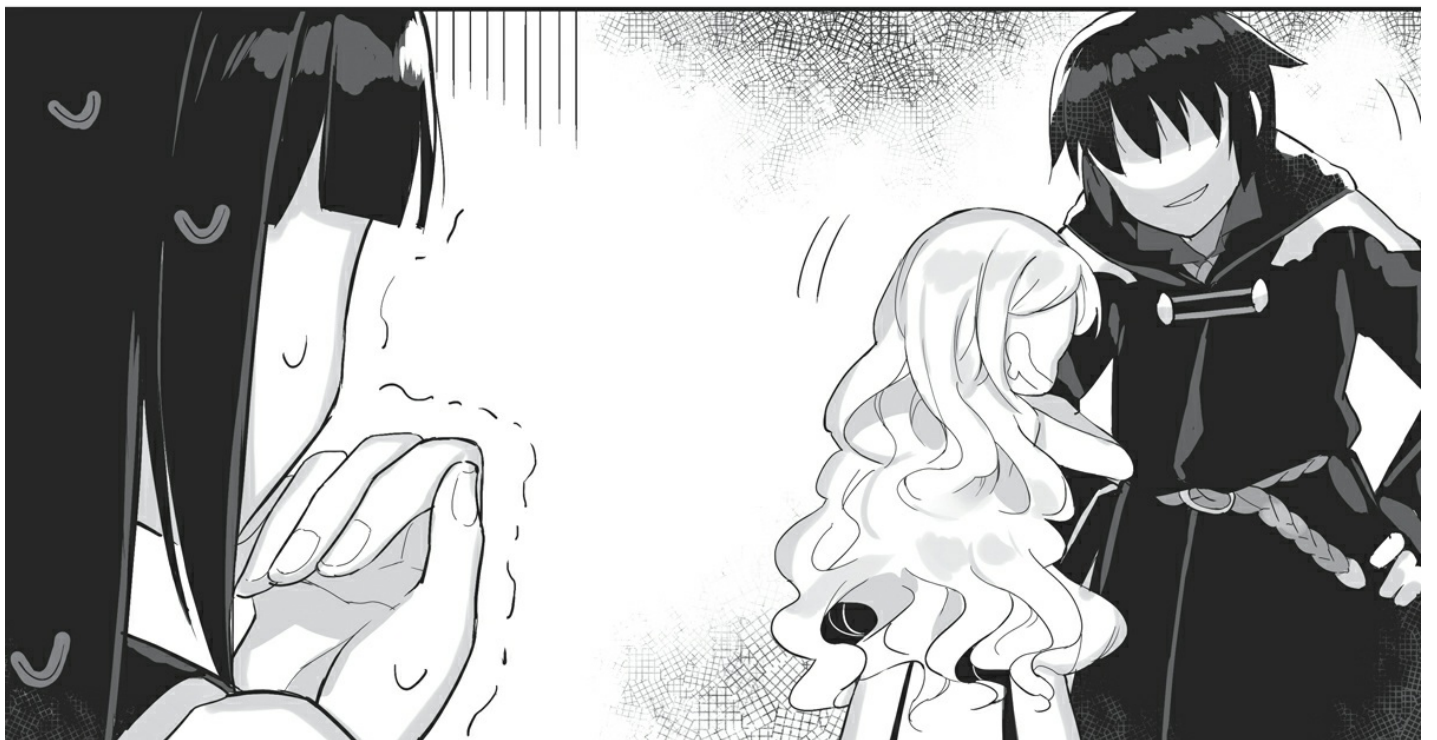
*You’re not getting away now.*

“They’re a little far away, so we should take care of things in Lalagi first.”

As Arisa and I exchanged looks, both of us started grinning at the same time.

We had plenty of wasabi and daikon radishes for garnishes, plus white rice and vinegar to make sushi rice, so all we needed now was the tuna.

In the meantime, we’d have to practice making sushi rice and *nigiri*.





“There’s a sailing ship over thataway, sir.”

The first to spot the vessel was Pochi, who was on duty in the lookout post.

Tama, who’d been stretched out lazily below the mast, sat up with her ears twitching.

Swiftly climbing the rope ladder, she borrowed the longscope from Pochi and looked at the ship.

“No one’s theere?”

Just as she said, the ship drifting toward us was unmanned.

Checking my map, I saw that four fleets of twenty-eight ships total on the route ahead of us were drifting without a crew.

A few of them had run aground, but still, it was strange.

*Why would they all be unmanned?*

Looking at the map, I didn’t see any monsters lurking nearby.

“What’s up with that?”

Like Tama, Arisa had been lying around due to the heat, but now she sat up and shaded her eyes to look.

“Mrrr?”

“Master, the larva’s hair decoration is glowing, I report.”

Mia and Nana drew my attention to Rei’s hair barrette, which was indeed letting off a faint light.

“Satou...?”

“It’s okay—it’s just purifying miasma.”

Reassuring the nervous-looking Rei, I activated my “Miasma Vision.”

*...Yikes.*

The unmanned ship coming toward us up ahead was completely covered in miasma-like blobs of thick black ink.



The dark aura reached out from the drifting ship like tentacles, one of which had already reached our ship.

It wasn't behaving like ordinary miasma, so this was definitely the work of some nonhuman culprit.

Judging by the tales of the Skeleton King and drifting ships that I'd heard in the tavern in Sutoandell, it was very possible that the Skeleton King was rebuilding his ghost fleet.

Either way, we should probably investigate the ship before jumping to conclusions.

And so...

"Hang on a minute. I'm going to get rid of the miasma."

I unleashed my spirit light, which I normally kept suppressed, at full throttle, driving away the miasma around us. Any miasma that touched my multicolored spirit light promptly evaporated.

I had learned in the elf village that spirit light could dispel miasma, but it was still amazing to see it with my own eyes.

"I'm going to go check out that ship for a minute."

"B-be careful!" Arisa called nervously.

Giving her a wave, I purified the drifting ship as I explored the interior.

The Magic Furnace was still running, and there was food on the table and in the pots, so the situation must have happened very abruptly.

Judging by the state of the food, it had probably been only a day or two since the people disappeared from the ship.

Like the famous case of the *Mary Celeste*, all the cargo was still intact, with only the crew missing.

Documents on the ship indicated that this was the flagship of a Shiga Kingdom trade fleet belonging to a man called Duke Vistall.

I wasn't familiar with the name, so I checked my notes from Tolma, which were full of information about nobles.

It read that he was one of the three dukes of the Shiga Kingdom and the political opponent of Duke Ougoch. His territory was in the northwest of the Shiga Kingdom, separated from the Saga Empire by several smaller nations.

Once I'd satisfied my curiosity about Duke Vistall, I continued my investigation.

The coins, magic items, and other goods in the captain's cabin were still safely stored away, so this clearly wasn't the work of ordinary pirates.

"How many ships are left? Three?"

Arisa was looking at yet another unmanned ship that had appeared up ahead.

"No, this twenty-fifth one is the last."

After about an hour of traveling around in flying-ship mode recovering the drifting ships, we finally reached the last one.

The last three had been sunk by monsters before I could retrieve them.

Of course, I recovered as much of the bodies, cargo, and so on as I could.

The fact that I was able to collect twenty-five of the ships in the kind of seas where three ships could get sunk in such a short time must have meant that the Skeleton King was closer than I realized.

Up until now, I'd been checking his marker only once in the morning and once at night, but now it seemed like I might have to start checking every hour.

"Do you think this is the work of the Skeleton King?"

"Most likely."

The sailors at the tavern in Sutoandell had said things like *a drifting ship without a crew is a sure sign of a Skeleton King attack and the sailors he kills are forced to work in his ghost fleet for all eternity.*

The Skeleton King had probably taken the lives of all of these ships' crews and turned them into undead sailors in his ghost fleet.

I used my Magic Hand to put the last unmanned ship in Storage.

Once that was done, I could open each ship like a folder and move the miasma around like an item.

“It’s...gone.”

“Vaniished?”

“Poof, sir.”

At first, Rei had been surprised to see the drifting ships disappear, but now she seemed to be used to it: She was standing with Tama and Pochi, watching the small whirlpool created by the ship’s disappearance.

“Larva, do not lean over too far or you may fall, I advise.”

“Mm. Danger.”

“Okay... I’m sorry.”

Rei meekly pulled back from the railing.

“What about uuus?”

“Aren’t we in danger, too, sirs?”

“Of course you are. Come back to the deck at once before you fall.”

Tama and Pochi seemed to be feeling left out, so Liza scolded them gently.

“Aye-aaaye?”

“Yes, sir.”

Tama and Pochi looked strangely cheerful about being rebuked, and they hopped down to the deck with big smiles.

“Master! There’s someone out there!”

Lulu, who was peering through the scope of a rifle-style sniping Magic Gun, called out in an uncharacteristically loud voice.

This Magic Gun was something I’d made by repurposing one of the Small Magic Cannons from the sunken ships.

It was only about a tenth as powerful as the original, but I thought it was still pretty impressive for something that could be carried by a single person.

It also featured a battery made from bluecoins, so even Lulu could fire it.

“Ah! They’re sinking!”

*Oops, this is no time to be monologizing to myself.*

I took off from the deck and used See Through and Magic Hand to retrieve the person from the sea.

The miasma seemed to have knocked him unconscious, so I healed him and let him rest in one of the guest cabins.

I wanted to ask what had happened when his ship was attacked, but he appeared to be in a weaker state than I thought, so we might not be able to get any information from him until we reached Lalagi.

“Huh, so he’s a Shiga Kingdom noble?”

“The second son of Marquis Ashinen, it seems.”

According to my Tolma notes, the house of Marquis Ashinen was one of the most influential families in the royal capital.

And his father, the current head of the family, was the viceroy of Labyrinth City Celivera, which we were planning to visit soon.

That was a convenient coincidence.

“Let’s make our way to Lalagi. We’re passing a few pirate hideouts along the way, so better get armed and ready.”

“Understood.”

Liza nodded and took the rest of the group downstairs.

“Satou...?”

“What is it?”

Rei, who’d stayed behind on deck, looked at me with a grave expression.

“My heart...feels sort of...noisy.”

Thinking that she might be sensing the presence of the Skeleton King or Yuuneia, I searched the map, but there were no signs of either of them.

The nearest threat was a level-50 octopus sea monster lurking not far from Lalagi.

There’d been at least one or two such monsters in most of the sea territories

we passed through, so it didn't seem worth mentioning.

I decided to stay on guard to be on the safe side, but even after we dealt with the pirates and arrived at the Kingdom of Sorcery Lalagi, nothing ever came of Rei's fears.

It was probably just her imagination.

The capital of Lalagi was deep inside a bay around the size of Tokyo Bay.

Unlike the Shiga Kingdom, instead of having a physical water gate at the entrance to the bay, there was a magical invisible barrier.

It was similar to the Bolenan Forest barrier that protected the home of the elves. No wonder they called this place the Kingdom of Sorcery.

"Tiltyyy?"

"It's slanted, isn't it, sir?"

Tama and Pochi leaned to the side to match the slanted surface of the capital of Lalagi.

Were they trying to find an angle where it would look perpendicular to the sea?

"<Lalakie's northern branch castle, Lalagi. A battle-ready floating castle that oversaw discipline of the landfolk.>"

Rei went into a trance and spoke as she looked up at the city.

There were countless white buildings, surrounding an enormous cone-shaped structure that was probably the castle. At the top was a mysterious object similar to the Heavenslight Protection on the Ishrallie royal castle.

Most of the buildings around the castle were quite tall, but the outer edge of the city consisted of mostly one-or two-story houses.

The fact that the entire city was on a slant was likely an indication that it had made an emergency landing on the ground long ago.

When Rei returned from her trance, her eyes narrowed as she sniffed the air.

"It smells...sort of...sweet."

“That is the scent of pastries, I inform.”

“Mm. Sugar.”

The Kingdom of Sorcery Lalagi was probably the biggest producer of sugar on the sugar route. There even seemed to be a sugar refinery in the royal capital.

As Rei listened to Nana and Mia discussing what kinds of sweets might be waiting in the city, the anxiety she'd mentioned before we dealt with the pirates was gone without a trace.

## Lalagi, Kingdom of Sorcery

*Satou here. When you think of alcohol-loving fantasy races, dwarves are on the top of the list, but it looks like the sailors in this parallel world are no slouches, either. Rum never tastes better than when you're drinking it out of a tankard while surrounded by jovial sailors.*

“Isn't that ship behind you the Gabato Trading Company's SS *Cloud*? Why would a Shiga Kingdom noble have such a vessel with him?”

The harbor official frowned as he looked at the large merchant ship behind us.

By now, I'd already acquired the “Lalagian Language” skill, so I could understand him. It sounded fairly similar to Ishralliese.

“We found this vessel drifting unmanned, so we brought it with us. On board are—”

“Sir! This ship is full of suspicious-looking men!”

Before I could finish, a harbor employee who'd boarded our consort ship exclaimed loudly.

“—some pirates we apprehended when they attacked us along the way.”

These men had come from a total of seven different pirate ships and three different hideouts.

The victims we'd rescued from these pirates were aboard our own deck.

I explained all this to the director and his officials in the office of the harbor authority. Then I just had to accept some bounties and sign some criminal-slave-sale consent papers.

The pirates would soon find permanent employment as rowers on a galley.

As the harbor official was leaving with the papers, Liza and Nana came in

instead.

“Master, we have found accommodation for the marquis’s son and the other rescued victims in an inn recommended to us by the harbor authority.”

“Thank you, Liza.”

Those victims who had friends or relatives within the capital of Lalagi had already been sent off to them.

I planned to provide travel expenses for those who had a home to return to elsewhere and some emergency living expenses for those who had nowhere to go, but after that, they’d have to figure it out on their own.

These funds would come from the profits from selling the treasure we’d recovered from the pirates.

The bounties from the pirates went into my Savings folder for my companions.

Once the paperwork was taken care of, I stood up to stretch when Lulu entered with a timid knock.

“Master, you have a visitor.”

A middle-aged man practically shoved past Lulu to enter my room.

“Is it true that His Royal Highness Sabaan is here?!”

This man seemed to be an Ishrallie ambassador.

“Yes, if you mean Sir Sabaish, he is currently resting on that sofa.”

Obvious though it was, I was technically transporting the king of Ishrallie’s messenger Sabaish, so I made a point of using the official story.

However, the ambassador didn’t seem to be paying that any mind.

“Your Highness!”

“Indeed. I do appreciate your coming to greet me.”

Sabaan responded with an equal lack of subtlety.

After speaking with the ambassador about something for a moment, the prince turned toward me.



“Let us go, then, Satou.”

“Where to, exactly?”

I thought I just had to deliver the prince to his keeper here. Was there some other procedure involved?

“I heard from my father. You wish to speak with the king of Lalagi about the ancient Lalakie dynasty, correct? You may bring the knowledgeable girl Father spoke so highly of, as well.”

*I see. So this is a surprise reward?*

Grateful to Prince Sabaan and the king of Ishrallie, I decided to take them up on the offer.

“It is good to see you after so long, Prince Sabaan.”

“I am glad to see you doing well, Your Highness.”

Rei had been in a trance state for the entire visit, so I covered her mouth as I listened to the king of Lalagi speak with Prince Sabaan.

The grim-faced king looked more like a pirate in the prime of his life.

Unlike the Eastern Roman style of Ishrallie, the popular style in the sweltering Kingdom of Sorcery was largely tropical. Men and women alike had a lot of exposed skin and usually wore layers of thin, semitransparent fabric.

The abundance of crimson clothing was probably due to the widespread use of Lalagi’s native red silk.

“Now then, Prince Sabaan. Will you be introducing the two people behind you?”

“These two are nobles from the Shiga Kingdom who are researching the ancient Lalakie dynasty.”

The king’s frown deepened at the prince’s explanation.

“<They seem quite young to be researchers.>”

“<It is an honor to meet you, Your Highness. I am Satou Pendragon, hereditary knight of the Muno Barony in the Shiga Kingdom.>”

I didn't want to argue with the king, so instead I politely introduced myself, matching his use of Hallowed Language.

"<Oh-ho, I see you are indeed a researcher.>"

The king's expression cleared into an amused grin.

*Oh, right, I should give him those gifts while I have the chance.*

I had heard that the king here gave people titles like Liquor Knight and Liquor Baron for bringing him rare alcohol, so rather than giving him a drinking set or anything, I decided to go directly with some high-grade sake.

Personally, I was more interested in putting him in a good mood so he would tell me about Lalakie than any of those liquor-related titles.

I gave a signal, and the castle servants brought in a wagon with baskets of gifts to present to the king.

"Allow me to thank you for granting me an audience by offering you these."

"Hmph! No doubt it's the same old Shigan sake, or Kingsblossom, or White Mountain."

The king opened the baskets with a rudely dismissive air but then raised his eyebrows.

"Wine, sake with some kind of floating red particles, and...is this amber liquid by chance distilled barley liquor?"

"These are drinks made by the fairy races: fairy wine, Leprechaun Claret, and Spriggan Treasure."

"Wh-what's that?! This is the legendary fairy wine, you say?! And these others, too, are so famous that I have only ever heard whispers of their names!"

*That went over well.*

"Th-then could this little bottle be Treant Drops?!"

"No, that bottle is something else."

The king's excitement was tempered ever so slightly by my response.

"O-of course. I suppose it is not even known for sure whether Treant Drops

truly exist. What could it be, then? Surely it is no ordinary liquor?”

“Yes, it’s a bottle of something called ‘dragonspring liquor—’”

“Dragonspring liquor?!”

The king interrupted me with a shout.

He looked so wild that I took a step back without thinking.

“Y-you say this is the sake said only to be made by fully grown dragons?! But that is the stuff of legends!”

*Ooh, we’ve hit legendary-tier now.*

“W-wait just a moment. This is no fraud, is it? Send for my Analyzer! Right away!”

The king of Lalagi had scarcely finished shouting when an elderly man practically tumbled in from the hallway.

One of his vassals must have already called for him.

“Analyze this bottle at once!”

“A-as you wish, Your Highness.”

Trembling a little before the king’s half-mad shouting, the man confirmed that the contents of the bottle were indeed black dragon’s dragonspring liquor.

“How in the world did you acquire such a thing?”

“While I was on a mission to deal with a black dragon along with the Hero of the Saga Empire, we discovered a spring of dragonspring liquor. The spring dried up before long, but Sir Hero kindly shared some of the vials they had drawn from it first.”

I’d actually given the dragonspring liquor from that time to Ga Hou and the other orcs who lived under the old capital, but this was still dragonspring liquor made by the same black dragon, Hei Long, so that seemed like a minor detail.

“I thought surely this must be presented to the King of Lalagi, famed for his love of drink, and so I brought it here as soon as I could, Your Highness.”

Oops. My “Fabrication” skill went a little too wild, carrying me into suck-up

territory.

Just to be safe, I showed the king my Ougoch Duchy Dragon Conquering Medal, which seemed to convince him.

“I never imagined I would meet a real dragon conqueror.”

The king of Lalagi looked at me with the eyes of a young boy gazing at a superhero.

I told him that Hayato the Hero was the one who'd defeated the dragon, but the king was too excited about the dragonspring liquor to listen to the details.

“You deserve a higher honor than the title of Liquor Baron. I shall make you a liquor marquis! If you find any more rare liquor such as this, be sure to bring it to me!”

At that, the king's vassals around us all exclaimed in surprise.

“A liquor marquis? Hasn't it been more than three hundred years since anyone held that title?”

“But he presented His Highness with three fairy liquors and even the legendary dragonspring liquor. I can understand why the king would say a liquor barony would be insufficient.”

“Indeed! A fitting title!”

“Ah, I wish I could try even a single drop of that dragonspring liquor.”

Even the vassals in this kingdom seemed to be alcoholics.

I had never heard of a liquor marquis, but apparently it was a higher rank than a liquor baron.

Unlike normal nobility, these special titles came with no further duties than to present the king with liquor; in exchange, they did not qualify the holder to participate in the kingdom's politics and essentially granted little more than the right to enter and leave the royal castle as one pleased, as well as special tax exemptions for trading.

“In fact, even a title alone is an inadequate reward for such choice liquor. Have you any desires? If you wish to marry a princess, I can offer you one with

little inheritance, such as the twenty-sixth princess.”

*Um, I'm all set, thanks.*

Still, there were at least twenty-six princesses? That was pretty amazing. I had to wonder how many wives he had.

“Then could I perhaps request any information you might have about the ancient Lalakie dynasty?”

Sidestepping the marriage offer, I tried to steer the conversation back toward my main goal.

Prince Sabaan, who was standing beside me looking a bit put out, breathed a sigh of relief.

“Very well, Sir Pendragon. If you wish to hear about Lalakie, I shall be glad to tell you. After all, the kings of Lalagi have handed down the history of Lalakie for generations.”

The cheerful king readily agreed to my request, and we were guided into a separate room, where he told me all about Lalakie.

The only people in the room were the king and me, Rei, a few guards and musicians, and the crown prince of the Kingdom of Sorcery Lalagi.

His role completed, Prince Sabaan excused himself under the pretext that he was tired from his long journey. According to my map information, he was meeting with one of the daughters of the king of Lalagi. Coincidentally enough, it was the twenty-sixth princess who'd just been mentioned earlier.

While I was distracted with such thoughts, the king finished his preparations and began to speak in a solemn tone.

For this, he was using Hallowed Language.

“<Some twenty-eight thousand years ago, a king who had earned the favor of the gods was given the floating island Lalakie.>”

Oh, this was farther in the past than I'd expected.

“<The chosen people of Lalakie were given the role of guiding the ignorant masses who walked the ground below, who called them the 'skyfolk' and

worshipped them.>”

This was pretty elitist right from the start, but it only got worse from there.

“<The fools among them who dared to rise in revolt against the skyfolk were cleansed by the Divine Wrath Cannon in place of the gods, and the good citizens were given their land.>”

*Uh, you're saying that like it's this grand thing, but doesn't that actually mean they destroyed a country that opposed them and colonized their land?*

If it weren't a king telling me this story, I'd have a hard time not butting in.

The king of Lalagi spoke in a grave, clear voice, accompanied by the stately music the musicians provided, but it sounded to me like Lalakie was a pretty crazy nation with the support of the gods.

Besides...

If I remembered right, the Divine Wrath Cannon was the powerful weapon that had easily sliced through the adamantite alloy of the first sunken ship we'd found in the Seadragon Islands.

I doubted even cities and castles protected by a City Core would be safe from that.

“<...but like the ripest of fruit, the golden era would soon fall.>”

*Oops. Are we starting a new chapter?*

“<Guided by evil, the Dogheaded Demon Lord appeared at the ends of the earth and began to amass evil followers who worshipped no god.>”

The Dogheaded Demon Lord, huh? Now that was a name I'd heard a few times before.

According to a conversation back in Baron Muno's castle, it was a demon lord so powerful it was also known as an evil god.

The Golden Boar Lord had mentioned the same name when I fought him beneath the Ougoch Duchy, too, and the Skeleton King had shouted something along those lines.

If I kept hearing about this guy, I had a bad feeling that I was going to wind up

having to fight the Dogheaded Demon Lord eventually.

“<The evil Dogheaded Demon Lord relentlessly targeted pious priests and priestesses and sought to burn all the temples in the world.>”

I guess they didn't call him a demon lord for nothing. He wasn't exactly an ally of justice out to save the people from tyranny.

After that little segment, the king described some violent atrocities, but it was so graphic that I tuned the whole thing out. *Tales of old should be a little more PG than this, if you ask me.*

“<The Dogheaded Demon Lord, whom the skyfolk called an evil god, taught his followers heretic arts with which to bring down the floating castles. And he imparted upon them his kin—the Sea Lord, the Flame Lord, the Sky Lord, and the Ground Lord—to impose all manner of atrocities.>”

*So the creature I beat on the volcanic island was related to the Dogheaded Demon Lord?*

Then were the other three types lurking in the Kraken's Domain where Lalakie sank, by any chance?

This better not be some gamelike mechanic where defeating all four summoned Doghead himself.

The king of Lalagi continued his story for some time, so I'll summarize: Doghead was defeated by one of the gods, the Flame Lord and Ground Lord were sealed away by the god's followers, the Sky Lord was chased to the far reaches of the sky by the sky dragons, and...

“<Thanks to the devotion of its final queen, the god's floating island Lalakie sealed away the Sea Lord at the bottom of the ocean.>”

Phew. If that was how it ended, maybe Doghead wouldn't show up after all.

Still, if Lalakie had to sink in order to seal away the Sea Lord despite having the Divine Wrath Cannon, that meant that even a weapon that could slice through adamantite like butter wasn't strong enough to defeat the Sea Lord completely...

If I ever ran into this Sea Lord, I would have to hit it with all my attacks at max

power, even if it ended up being overkill.

Incidentally, the royal family and other citizens of the Kingdom of Sorcery Lalagi were descendants of the people who had escaped from Lalakie.

“That was wonderfully told, Father.”

“And quite tiring in the telling. Bring me the Water of Life!”

Waving off his son’s high praise, the king had a lady-in-waiting bring something to drink.

Water of Life turned out to be a brand of rum.

Before long, the slightly sweet, alcoholic scent of rum filled the room.

Evidently, the king liked to drink his rum hot.

“How is it, Sir Pendr—?”

The king stopped mid-sentence and sent a lady-in-waiting to fetch some cloth.

Following his gaze, I saw that Rei was sitting next to me in a trance state, tears flooding down her cheeks.

The lady-in-waiting handed me the cloth, so I wiped her tears.

“Satou... I feel...really...sad.”

Her memories didn’t seem to have returned, but the king of Lalagi’s story had stirred something that moved her deeply.

Given Rei’s distressed state, we decided to wrap up for the day, so Rei and I left the king’s room.

On our way out, however, the king had an invitation for me.

“<Sir Pendragon, be sure to come to the Skydea Festival three days from now. As thanks for introducing me to the legendary dragonspring liquor, I will allow you into the inner sanctum of the royal family to see the Box.>”

“<Thanks, I’d love to!>”

I was so surprised that I responded a little less formally than I should have, but the king didn’t seem to mind.

The Box was probably the Lalakie Box that Baron Jeetbert had mentioned



after we rescued him in the Seadragon Islands.

Though I was excited to participate in this secret ceremony, I also had a premonition that something strange might happen there.



Rei had fallen asleep, so I carried her on my back as we walked the halls of the royal castle, sorting through the information I'd gathered so far as I did.

I had learned a lot from the king's tale, but the most important new information was that the Lalakie of old had been a pretty intense place with the power of the gods backing it and that the "last queen" had helped seal the Sea Lord at the bottom of the ocean.

We already knew that the Skeleton King's goal was to *return Lalakie to the skies* and that the three items he needed to do that were a box, a key, and a Firelight Pearl.

The key was likely Rei's hair ornament, which left the Coffin and the pearl.

The "box" probably referred to the Lalakie Box here in Lalagi.

It could also be the Coffin that Captain Ghost mentioned, but if I started including clues I didn't have any further leads on, it would only make it harder to reach a conclusion, so I decided to forget about that for now.

Next, I thought back on the volcanic island where I'd acquired fragments of a Firelight Pearl.

"Come to think of it, if Doghead is an enemy of the Skeleton King, why would he unleash the Flame Lord when it's related to Doghead?"

The Ishrallie soldiers seemed to think he'd freed the Flame Lord to try to steal Ishrallie's Dragon Cannons, so maybe the cannons contained Firelight Pearls.

I'd been checking the map periodically, but there was no sign that the Skeleton King was attacking Ishrallie.

Which would mean that as of now, the Skeleton King hasn't gotten his hands on a single one of the three key items.

If those unmanned ships were indeed the work of the Skeleton King, he would probably attack either Ishrallie or Lalagi.

Between the two, Lalagi was probably more likely, since the Skydea Festival was about to occur there.

So the Skeleton King would most likely go after the Lalakie Box first.

Still, I should probably tell Arisa and the others that Rei's key was being targeted and that the one she normally wore was actually a fake.

I wouldn't want any of them to get hurt trying to stop the fake from being stolen, after all.

Next, I took my theorizing a step further.

"If the Skeleton King did steal all three items, what would happen?"

I muttered to myself as I thought.

If the Skeleton King did manage to get Lalakie to fly again, the sealed Sea Lord would be freed, and the Skeleton King would gain control of the floating island Lalakie and its Divine Wrath Cannon, which could cut through even adamantite alloy with ease.

That sounded like a potentially world-ending threat, but neither of them was anything I couldn't handle.

Having reached this conclusion, I let out a little sigh of relief.

"If it's in the middle of the ocean, there won't be any risk of collateral damage, so I should be able to go all out."

With that, I looked up at the evening sky, catching a glimpse of a twinkling first star.



""""Cheeeers!""""

When I returned to the inn from my audience at the royal castle, some kind of party was underway.

The person leading the toast appeared to be Mr. Rayleigh, the second son of Marquis Ashinen who I'd rescued when he was almost lost at sea.

From the way he was tipping back his tankard, you'd never imagine that he had just been bedridden not long ago.

On his cheek was a cartoonlike bright-red handprint.

He'd probably tried something with one of the waitresses and gotten a well-deserved slap in the face.

My companions weren't at the feast; my map indicated they were in one of our rooms on the upper floor of the inn, so I went up the stairs without stopping at the party, since Rei needed rest anyway.

"I'm back."

"Welcoome!"

"Sir!"

When I opened the door, Tama and Pochi came flying at me.

Looking around the room, I noticed there seemed to be a strange, heavy mood in the air.

Clearly, Tama and Pochi were relieved to have a break from it.

"Master! You won't believe this!"

"Mrrr. Death to noblemen."

Arisa and Mia, the iron-wall duo, stormed up to me indignantly.

"Could you calm down first, please? You're scaring Tama and Pochi."

At that, the two of them calmed down a little.

"Ah... I'm sorry."

"Apology."

Once they'd cooled off, they explained that the drunken Mr. Rayleigh—no, let's call him "that bastard"—had put his arms around Nana and forcibly grabbed her breasts.

"U-um, master?"

"What is it?"

As I was getting ready to go deal out some divine punishment, Arisa held me back.

“You’re making a really scary face...”

Glancing around, I saw that Tama’s ears were flattened back, and Pochi was teary-eyed with her tail between her legs.

*Oh geez. I guess I had no right to scold Arisa earlier.*

I took a deep breath to calm myself.

“Don’t worry. He already got what he deserved.”

The other girls backed Arisa up.

“Kaslaaap?”

“Nana smacked him right in the face, sir!”

“It was a very good, firm strike.”

“I think she should have hit his other cheek, too.”

Lulu chimed in after the beastfolk girls. It was uncharacteristic for her, but I couldn’t blame her for hating a sexually harassing bastard.

“My chest belongs to master alone, I declare.”

*That was a great declaration, Nana, but I wish you wouldn’t say things that’ll cause serious misunderstandings like that.*

Arisa’s and Mia’s iron-wall rage aside, it pained my heart to see Lulu’s sad expression.

Still, even if Nana had already gotten her revenge, I couldn’t just let the bastard off the hook.

*You’ve got to nip creeps like that in the bud.*

“Sir Knight, over here!”

A boy we’d rescued from a pirate hideout called to me.

“Oh-ho, so this is Sir Pendragon? Come, I owe you my life, good sir!”

The creepy bastard waved me over to his side.

“I say, it’s thanks to you that I didn’t drown at sea! I cannot thank you enough, sir. My father is pretty famous even in the Shiga Kingdom, so I’m sure

he can make you an honorary baronet at the very least!”

The drunken bastard chattered away cheerfully.

“You know, I woke up to find myself in the water, surrounded by the ruins of my ship. I didn’t think I was going to make it!”

I opened my mouth to voice my grievances when he paused, but he kept talking before I could get a word in.

“Oh yes, I owe you an apology. I was trying to court a beautiful woman earlier, but I had no idea that she was your wife. Please forgive me for my rudeness.”

Having him apologize before I could speak made it hard to give him the talking-to I’d planned.

Especially when he then pointed at his cheek and added, “She gave me a very painful slap, too!”

Since this man was a noble, he could easily get Nana in serious trouble for hurting him.

“Might I make it up to you with more than words once I’ve returned to the Shiga Kingdom? I’m afraid I have little on hand at the moment.”

Still, I had to get in at least one jab.

“If you can promise me that you’ll never lay a hand on Nana or my other companions again, you need not make it up to me in any other way.”

“I see. Then I shall swear on the name of Marquis Ashinen and the ancestral king Yamato. I, Rayleigh Ashinen, shall never again commit any act that might harm you and yours, Sir Pendragon.”

The creepy bastard—also known as “Rayleigh”—put his hand to his heart with a humble expression.

In the new-nobility classes I’d taken in the Muno Barony, I was told that swearing on one’s family name and the ancestral king was the most trustworthy pledge of all, so it was probably safe to believe him.

Since he seemed to regret his actions, I decided to put the matter to rest.

Although, if he ever did anything like that again, I'd have him living out the rest of his life all alone on an uninhabited island.

For now, I asked him what had happened to his ship when we found him.

"Well, I was looking out at the foggy seas from the deck when I suddenly lost consciousness and was thrown into the water. So I have no idea how the ship sank."

Most likely, a large amount of miasma knocked him out, and falling into the water was the only thing that kept him alive.

Rayleigh was a mere level 12, and his only skills were "Etiquette," "Negotiation," and "Analyze Goods," so he certainly wasn't suited to combat.

He must be a lucky man, since he wasn't attacked by monsters while he was adrift.

Prompted by the man next to him, Rayleigh asked me a question.

"By the way, Sir Pendragon, I heard you went to the royal castle. Were you seeking a Liquor Baron title?"

"No, I did not receive the title of Liquor Baron. I was simply escorting an important person from Ishrallie to the castle."

The title I received was Liquor Marquis, not Liquor Baron.

Upon hearing my response, Rayleigh and the man next to him sagged with obvious disappointment.

"I see... Since you had an elf with you, I thought you might present the king with the legendary fairy wine and receive the title of Liquor Baron..."

"Is there something special about the Liquor Baron title?"

I wasn't quite sure why he was so concerned with me getting that title.

"What do you mean? With the Liquor Baron title, you can get that horrible tax reduced to only twenty percent! Then you could bring Shiga Kingdom silk into Ishrallie and acquire their Heaven's Teardrops to sell in Shiga to your heart's content!"

*Right, I guess I heard in Ishrallie that there was a high tax on silk.*

“I had hoped that I could borrow a ship from you and perhaps lead some folks with nowhere else to go on a trade route, but that would be quite difficult without the Liquor Baron title.”

“A ship?”

“Yes, you have a big ship called the *SS Cloud* or something, right? Some people from the Gabato Trading Company came to start a fuss, but I chased them off.”

*Oh, right. The drifting ship I used to transport those pirates.*

Evidently, ownership of it now belonged to me, but if its original owners, the Gabato Trading Company, had come in good faith to negotiate, I had planned to give it back to them.

According to Rayleigh, though, they’d sent a bunch of ruffians to take it back by force.

“Boy, those little ladies are strong. I hear they dispatched a bunch of pirates with ease, too, didn’t they?”

Rayleigh was the one who’d cajoled the leader from the Gabato Trading Company into backing off, but my companions were the ones who’d fought back the ruffians.

The ruffians and the men from the trading company had been taken away by guards called by the inn.

“My Liquor Knight title allows me to trade, but it doesn’t really change the taxes. Not a very fair reward for bringing him my prized Kingsblossom and White Mountain, don’t you agree?”

“That’s to be expected, I’m afraid,” the man next to Rayleigh said. “The king of Lalagi isn’t very fond of dry Shigan sake.”

So the brands the king had mentioned were the ones that Rayleigh had brought him.

“I know it’s impudent of me to ask this of the knight who saved our lives, but would you by chance be interested in investing in our new company?” the other man asked me.

I didn't want to leave these people with nowhere to turn after I'd rescued them from pirates, and it'd be on my conscience if they turned into pirates or criminals themselves; besides, there was far more money in my Storage than I could possibly use.

It might not be a bad idea to offer them a little contribution.

"Then, would I be able to see your business plan outline?"

"...Business plan outline?"

"Of course. A document describing what path you intend to take, what products you will handle and in what quantity, as well as your estimated costs and projected profits."

Naturally, I wouldn't want it to turn into a bad debt, so it was best if they came up with some estimates.

Making a snap decision here would be a rookie mistake.

"V-very well. I'll find out the *SS Cloud's* speed and loading capacity and draw up some plans."

"I'm looking forward to it."

At first the man seemed flummoxed, but soon his eyes were filled with promising determination.

Rayleigh didn't seem too interested in dealing with the details, instead clapping the man on the back and saying, "I'm counting on you!" So he was dumping all the work on his subordinate.

Depending on his business plan, I was willing to give him more trade ships as well as money, and maybe offer them a bottle of fairy wine so that one of them could become a liquor baron.



"Whew, I really worked up a sweat."

"Nice job, Arisa."

I wiped the sweat from Arisa's gleaming forehead with a handkerchief.

She'd been busy selling glasswork in the trading square.



“They sold at a great price thanks to you.”

“Hee-hee, I have to remind you of my amazingness once in a while.”

Arisa grinned proudly as I tugged her back toward the others.

Since it had seemed like we might be here for a while, and Lalagi was sweltering hot, I’d had everyone else cool off under the shade of a nearby tree.

“That’s a lot of people over there.”

“Yes, they’re all trying to get ice.”

A crowd was gathered around an ice pillar that I’d set out to help everyone cool off.

Many of them were young boys and girls in the same outfit, which, according to my AR, was the uniform of Lalagi Magic School.

*I guess they do call this place the Kingdom of Sorcery.*

Maybe I could take Arisa and Mia to visit the magic school and public library during our stay.

“I bet a shaved-ice stand would make a killing here.”

“No kidding.”

Nodding, I checked that everyone else was ready.

“Shall we go?” I prompted, and we all started to leave.

“Wait a minute, sir!” called one of the people gathered around the ice. “What about your ice pillar?”

“That’s all right. You can use it to keep cool.”

This provoked an excited shout from the crowd so loud that I thought it might shake the leaves off the trees. *It is hot, after all.*

“Sweet ’n’ yumyyy?”

“Nougat is so sweet and strong, sir.”

“Mm. Tasty.”

“It’s...very good.”

The younger kids were eating some molasses candies, a by-product from our trip to the sugar purification factory.

It had been a long time since I had something so sweet that it almost hurt my teeth.

“I think you’re supposed to dip this pastry in it, not eat it with your fingers.”

Just as Lulu said, the nutty pastry seemed to be intended for dipping into the syrup-like candy.

“Delicious.”

“Master, my sweetness detectors are experiencing an anomaly. Requesting regulation, I entreat.”

Liza gave a normal reaction, but Nana came over to me with her lips trembling.

The sweetness was probably a little too aggressive for her.

In addition to the usual brown sugar and molasses, the sugar factory also sold rock candy and pure, high-grade white sugar.

The former was widely available, but the latter was expensive and produced in small quantities, so most of it was consumed only by local nobles.

“If you wish, Liquor Marquis Pendragon, we could gladly arrange for some rock candy and high-grade sugar for you.”

“I would appreciate that. We’re renting a storehouse in the harbor, so please have it delivered there.”

The owner of the sugar factory knew about my title for some reason, so I was happy to take him up on his proposal. I also bought many barrels’ worth of brown sugar and molasses, since they were so affordable here.

“N-now, Sir Liquor Marquis, there is one thing I’d like to ask...”

The owner gave me an unexpected request.

“You want me to tell you what the legendary liquor tastes like, but you’re not asking to try it yourself?”

I had imagined that it would be about the fairy wine, but his question was

humbler than I'd imagined.

"Yes, I thought that as a liquor marquis, you are likely to have tasted it."

"Well, they say the proof is in the pudding. Why don't I have you try a sip?"

Touched by the owner's modesty, I decided to offer him a small vial of the fairy wine.

"Surely you don't mean...!"

"Just don't tell anyone else, all right?"

The owner closed his eyes and breathed in the fragrance from the top of the vial for a few moments before bringing it to his lips with shaking hands, pouring a few drops of the fairy wine into his mouth.

It was clear from his ecstatic expression that he truly loved liquor.

Just as promised, he stopped after only one sip, capped the vial, and held it out to me.

"What a magnificent wine. Truly, my meager vocabulary could not even begin to describe its complexity."

His body trembled with emotion.

I gently pushed the vial back toward him with my palm.

"Please keep it. I'm giving that to you."

"A-are you certain?"

"Very. The brownies who gave this to me would surely be pleased for someone who loves liquor as much as you to drink it."

At that, tears of joy filled the owner's eyes.

*I feel kinda bad that he's this excited over a vial that only has a few sips of wine left in it.*

The man continued to thank me as we waved and left the sugar factory.

The next day, the molasses I'd ordered was delivered to the warehouse, along with some barrels of rum, beef jerky, and so on.

The owner must have thrown these gifts in from his farms and wine cellar.

Lalagi beef, which was raised on a diet of leftover sugarcane dregs, was said to be extremely delicious.

He also had some beef delivered to our inn, so we ended up having a steak-and-hamburger party that night.

I was surprised by the Lalagi-style steaks, which were prepared with a sugar-based dry rub, but they were so soft and tasty when eaten with the accompanying sweet sauce that I was ordering seconds before I knew it.

As thanks to the modest and dutiful owner, I decided to send him a letter along with vials of Leprechaun Claret and Spriggan Treasure.



“So this is the Box?”

“That’s right. You are free to take a closer look, too, little girl.”

Two days after our visit to the sugar factory, we were in the chapel-esque inner sanctum of the Lalagi royal castle to see the Box, also known as the Lalakie Box.

My AR display labeled it **Lalakie Maintenance Terminal for Senior Personnel Use**.

I’d assumed it was going to be some kind of treasure box, but evidently I was wrong.

Maybe the Skeleton King was after a different box, then.

“A white...box.”

The Box didn’t seem to be triggering any memories for Rei, since she didn’t go into her usual trance state.

The king of Lalagi didn’t look thrilled about Rei’s indifference.

“Sir Pendragon, try giving it some magic power.”

“Are you certain?”

“Go on. It will only make the surface glow.”

I nodded and put a tiny amount of magic into the Box, not even one full MP.

"<This device can only be used by senior personnel. Please speak your identification number.>"

The voice from the Box startled me, but I wasn't the only one.

"Wh-what is this voice? What does it mean by *senior personnel*?!"

"I—I don't know."

The king and the crown prince exclaimed in surprise, and there were murmurs from the other nobles as well.

"<La. 1090609. Rei—>"

The voice put Rei into a trance state, and she started to state a number, but I stopped her in the nick of time.

This Box was probably just an ordinary maintenance tool, but if Rei was able to activate it when the royal family couldn't, there was no telling what they might do.

Hastily, I drew the magic power back out of the Box, shutting it down in the middle of repeating its statement.

"Whew, that was close. Your Highness, this Box seems to have a mechanism that rejects anyone but royalty. The security system might have activated and destroyed your treasure."

"What do you mean, 'security'?"

"An anti-theft automatic self-destruct function."

The king looked doubtful, but I used my "Fabrication" skill to come up with an explanation.

At skill level max, it was ridiculously powerful, enough that he believed my made-up story.

Aside from that little incident, the long-practiced ritual went off without a hitch in the inner sanctum. Soon the Box would be loaded onto a portable shrine and carried in a parade through the main street.

As a precaution, I put a marker on the Box.

It was going to be heavily guarded, but there was no telling whether the

Skeleton King or Yuuneia might show up.

I didn't think they could possibly have heard that thought, but it wasn't long after that the incident occurred.

"Your Highness! We've just received a report from one of the coastal watchtowers!"

The king was waving to his people from the balcony when a soldier came running up below.

"Go on."

"A giant sea-dwelling monster has appeared in the sea to the east."

"What sort of monster exactly?"

The soldier hesitated for a moment.

"What is it, man?"

"I-it's an octopus-type monster... Possibly one of the sea lord's spawn."

Checking my map, I saw that Yuuneia was aboard a small ghost ship next to the octopus monster. The monster was in a possessed state, much like Yuuneia herself.

Most likely, it was being controlled by a monster like Yuuneia's ghost bird, Chibi.

"Prepare the castle's Magic Cannons. Suspend the festival and evacuate the people to the underground shelter."

""""Yes, sir!""""

The king's vassals jumped into action at once.

"T-terrible news!" Another messenger appeared.

"Calm down! What is it now?"

"A ghost fleet has appeared in the sky to the west."

Looking at the map, I saw a fleet of nearly thirty ghost ships.

However, the Skeleton King wasn't with them.

“Seems like they’re both diversions.”

“Of course. That empty-headed skull always uses such obvious tactics. He’ll come at us himself from either the north or the south.”

Just as the king confidently stated, the Skeleton King was approaching from the northern sea, with a school of undead monster fish coming from the south, likely as another diversion.

This nation’s army could probably take on any one of these attackers individually, but judging by the information displayed by my AR next to the king of Lalagi’s City Core, they wouldn’t be able to supply all the Magic Cannons and Heavenslight Protection with magic power at once.

*I should probably turn into Nanashi the Hero and help them fight off the enemy.*

But first, I wanted to confirm a few things...

“You mentioned an ‘empty-headed skull.’ Does that mean you know who’s attacking, Your Highness?”

The king nodded. “It is said that the filthy undead monster who calls himself the companion to the final queen of Lalakie seeks the remains of the main engine from the floating island era, which are kept deep within this castle.”

*Huh?*

*So the Skeleton King’s not after the Box?*

“Have you ever spoken with this creature directly?”

“Nay, only the king of two generations ago was foolhardy enough to do such a thing.”

Since the king could speak Hallowed Language, I thought he might at least have tried to negotiate with the Skeleton King, but apparently, that wasn’t the case.

They probably thought of these attacks as a sort of natural disaster.

“Forgive my insolence, but might it not be safer to return the Box to the castle?”

“You are quite the worrier, Sir Pendragon.” A rare smile graced the king’s face. “Fear not—I have already ordered for the Box to be returned. Besides, no undead monster could ever break through the holy protection of the Heavenslight Protection given to us by the gods. If the undead attempted to break through, they would simply be purified and turned into ash.”

In that case, there was probably no fear of the Skeleton King stealing the Box.

I breathed a sigh of relief, then decided to take my leave so as not to trouble the busy king of Lalagi further.

“Your Highness, given the situation, I believe I had best leave you be.”

“Indeed. You should hasten to the underground shelter, too.”

The king didn’t even spare me a glance.

He was looking out at the sea lord’s spawn, which had broken through the barrier around the bay.

“Let’s go, Rei.”

“Y-yes, Satou...”

I took Rei’s hand and headed toward the square where the rest of our friends were waiting.

“Th-the Sea Lord’s coming for us!”

“Don’t worry! His Highness will protect us somehow!”

“Official orders from the king! Evacuate to the underground shelter until the monster has been defeated!”

The townspeople were quavering at the sight of the octopus monster in the seas of the harbor, but thanks to their faith in the king and the swiftly issued evacuation orders, they didn’t fly into a panic.

The Heavenslight Protection over the castle gleamed and created a glowing dome around the entirety of the castle town.

A rock thrown by the sea monster crashed into the dome and sent ripples of light across its surface with an echoing bell-like sound.

The sound seemed to have an added magical effect of calming people down.



Running along the now-empty streets, I soon arrived at the square to meet up with my companions.

“Liza! Is everyone here?”

“Yes, master. We are all prepared for battle.”

Liza responded fiercely, but the enemy this time around was just too strong.

“I’m sorry, but I need you all to evacuate underground.”

As I spoke, I handed out various magic items for self-defense.

“<Queen’s Ring—a defensive magic item held by the queen of Lalakie.>”

When I put a topaz ring on Rei’s finger, she went into a trance again.

That sounded like an important item, but there was no time for that now, so I entrusted Rei and the ring alike to the rest of the group.

“Arisa, take this seal slate. If anything happens, call me with Telephone.”

“Okey-dokey!”

Arisa’s Telephone had a fairly short range, so I gave her permission to use her unique skill “Over Boost” just once in case of an emergency.

Before I left, I gave more detailed information to Arisa and Liza about the possibility that the Skeleton King or Yuuneia might come after Rei’s hair ornament.

Since they were outside the Heavenslight Protection dome, however, I doubted they would be able to get in very easily.

*Well, I guess it’s hero time.*



The enemy was attacking from all four cardinal directions.

To the east, the octopus monster. It was level 51 with “Water Magic,” “Water Resistance,” and “Regeneration” skills. The small ghost ship carrying Yuuneia was with it, as well.

To the west, a fleet of twenty-eight ghost ships. They carried a total of sixty or so skeleton soldiers, ranging in level from 30 to 45.

To the south, a school of over a hundred undead monster fish. They were all level 30 or below.

And to the north, the Skeleton King.

“The ghost fleet to the west is probably the most dangerous, but I know where I have to go first.”

I transformed into Nanashi the Hero in a back alley, then headed north toward where the Skeleton King was approaching over the ocean.

*It's important to beat the main culprit first in situations like this.*

“Not the most ideal area for this...”

The Skeleton King's ghost ship was approaching above a beautiful coral reef in waters so clear and blue, it made you want to go scuba diving.

If I attacked with magic from here, I'd end up destroying the coral reef in the process.

I withdrew the Holy Sword Claidheamh Soluis from Storage and put magic into it, transforming it into thirteen blades.

“Wait—is the coral turning into a monster?”

The parts of the reef the ship passed over grew rapidly and began to produce tentacles that broke through the water's surface. It looked more like a sea anemone than a coral monster.

“<Dance,> Claidheamh Soluis.”

When I spoke the scripture, the Holy Sword released a blue light and zoomed toward the ghost ship like a seabird that had sighted its prey.

Its holy power turned the ghost ship into a cloud of black dust in a matter of seconds.

Quickly, I opened my log and map to check the results.

“...He sure runs away fast.”

The Skeleton King had escaped into the Spirit World.

I hadn't expected him to get away so easily. Maybe he had started fleeing

while I was hesitating about destroying the coral reef.

Things hadn't quite gone according to plan, but I had dealt him a significant amount of damage just like before, so he shouldn't be back for a while.

I used the Water Magic spell Remote Harpoon to destroy the coral tentacles and headed off to the next location.

This time, my target was the octopus monster in the east, which was being led by Yuuneia.

"Magic Cannons won't work on something that's under the control of my Chibi!"

Yuuneia was standing aboard a single-person boatlike ghost ship, looking smug.

There was a thick wall of seawater in front of her and the octopus monster, which was blocking the crimson cannonballs fired by the Magic Cannons of the castle and the defensive tower.

Fireworks and explosions danced across the surface of the sea, and the seawall created rainbows as it splashed apart.

The water wall seemed to last for only two Magic Cannon shots before falling apart, but the octopus monster was simply creating more walls incessantly as each one was destroyed.

"They stopped attacking! Get them, Chibi!" Yuuneia shouted.

*SHWNESHWNEEEE!*

*TWAWWWAAAAAAKYWOOOO!*

The mynah bird-like cry rang out, overlapping with a low howl like the sound of air blowing through a conch shell.

Massive spears made from ocean water formed in front of the octopus monster's tentacles.

They were so big that even a single one looked like it could sink a battleship.

"How many of these can your precious Heavenslight Protection withstand?"

*Sorry, Yuuneia, but not even one of those is going to reach its target.*

I used my concentrated Laser to slice through the octopus monster, defense magic and all, and broke apart the massive spears with Break Magic.

The Laser created an explosion of steam, blasting a huge quantity of hot air and salt water up into the sky.

*Oops, looks like that was some pretty serious overkill.* I probably could have used a few regular Lasers instead of the concentrated one.

The little ship carrying Yuuneia was tossed around like a leaf, but before I could rescue her, she quickly fled into the Spirit World. Like father, like daughter.

The brief battle had created a small tsunami on the water's surface, so I flew through the rain of seawater and cast my Magic Hand out like a net, storing some of the water to reduce the size of the wave.

It was still fairly large, but that shouldn't cause a problem.

With my cleanup finished, I moved on to the next battlefield.

"Are these the sailors from those drifting ships?"

The ghost ship at the head of the fleet looked just like the *SS Cloud*.

Its crew lined up perfectly with the amount of people who seemed to have been missing from the unmanned ship, too.

I poured plenty of magic into Claidheamh Soluis and transformed it back into thirteen blades.

*SKREEEEEEEEE!*

The shrieks of the skeleton sailors shook the skies. There was a deep sadness and lingering regret in their cries.

Saying a little silent prayer for them, I recited the scripture of the Holy Sword.

"<Dance,> Claidheamh Soluis."

The Holy Sword flew about purifying the ghost ships and skeleton soldiers, leaving a trail of blue light in its wake.

Occasionally, a cannonball from a Magic Cannon on one of the ghost ships would fly toward me, but I caught them with Flexible Shields and quickly used

them to recover some of my spent MP by using Mana Drain.

With a quiet *shiiiiing*, the Holy Sword Claidheamh Soluis returned to float at my side.

Taking it along with me, I headed south and destroyed the school of undead monster fish.

As I was starting to recover the corpses, Arisa contacted me with Telephone.

*“Master! Come back quickly.”*

*“Coming!”*

Without sparing a second to ask what was happening, I quickly operated my menu and teleported back to the group.



*“<Why do you reject me, Sister?>”*

When I arrived, there was Yuuneia, already back from the Spirit World, facing off against my friends as they protected Rei on the opposite side of the room.

This must have been their main objective.

*“<Why? Tell me!>”*

Rei’s fake hair decoration was lying at Yuuneia’s feet as she spoke to Rei in a dispirited voice.

The hair ornament’s purifying mechanism must have activated when she took it from Rei.

I was still connected to Arisa with Telephone, so I let her know that I’d arrived, moved to a position where I could intervene if needed, and listened to Rei and Yuuneia’s conversation.

*“<I’m...scared...>”*

*“<Why...? Why would you be scared of me, Sister?! I’m your only sibling!>”*

Yuuneia’s wrath caused the miasma to swirl and well up around her, scaring Rei even further.

*“<I—I don’t...remember you...>”*

“<What do you mean...?>”

“The larva has amnesia, I inform.”

Nana responded to Yuuneia’s question.

“<I-it can’t be...>”

A range of emotions played across Yuuneia’s face: confusion, despair, and finally anger and frustration.

Overwhelmed by these feelings, she lowered her head and hugged her arms to her chest.

Her hands were shaking, revealing her inner turmoil.

Finally, she looked up and shouted accusingly at Rei.

“<...It’s not fair; it’s not fair; it’s not fair!>”

“<Not fair?>”

Rei didn’t seem to know how to respond to the sudden statement.

“<How can you forget everything and live in peace while I suffer the curse of the binding chains in your place?!>”

The “curse of the binding chains” probably referred to the miasma chains and shackles around Yuuneia.

Her right eye, which had returned to normal, was starting to turn back to the same inverted coloration as her left eye.

“Calm down!” Arisa exclaimed. “I’m sure our master can free you from that curse with his cheating powers!”

*I’m glad you have so much faith in me, but was the “cheating” part really necessary?*

Since no one else seemed to be around, I removed my Nanashi disguise and showed myself in front of them.

“<Th-the black-haired demon!>”

Seeing my face, Yuuneia screamed as if a horrifying monster had appeared before her.

I had to admit that hurt my feelings a little.

“<D-don’t come any closer! I’ll be back for you, Sister.>”

I used “Warp” to get close to Yuuneia in an attempt to catch her and get rid of the miasma around her, but a gross undead corpse started to rise from the shadows at her feet.

*Geh?!*

I instinctively stopped short, and as I did so, ghost birds started attacking me from all sides.

Creepy corpses were one thing, but I had no problem dealing with a few birds.

All of them seemed to be copies, and they exploded into feathery black shadows when I punched them.

Yuuneia faded away amid the swirling shadow feathers.

“<Sister! Remember who I am by the next time I come to you! You absolutely must!>”

Her voice echoed around the room.

This time, there was no wormhole at the source of the voice, so she must have learned her lesson.

Liza and the others quickly took care of the undead creature.

“Rei, are you hurt?”

“I’m...fine.”

“Larva, I have recovered your hair ornament, I report.”

Nana fixed the fake hair ornament back on Rei’s hair.

“Satou!”

“Master, bad news!”

Turning toward Mia and Arisa, I saw that Rei’s Fairy Pack–style pouch had fallen to the floor, its contents spilling out.

“Rei’s hair ornament is gone!”

According to the marker on my map, Rei's hair ornament was now in the Spirit World.

Unlike the other kids', Rei's bag didn't have any user restrictions, so Yuuneia or the ghost bird must have stolen the key.

*That's not good...*

Elsewhere on my marker list, the Lalakie Box had also been moved into the Spirit World.

I may have won the battle, but we'd lost our advantage in the war.

I was a little frustrated, but our most important priority was to protect Rei from the Skeleton King, so at least she was still safe.



"Sir Pendragon..."

I was summoned to the royal castle to meet with the king of Lalagi.

Somehow, he almost seemed to have aged considerably in the short time since I saw him last.

"The Skeleton King has stolen the Box... Soon the world will end."

*That seems like an exaggeration.*

"The letter from the king of Ishrallie said that the Flame Lord's seal has been undone. And that it was the doing of the Skeleton King..."

His voice was low and loaded with despair as he continued.

"If the Skeleton King was foolish enough to release the seal in order to steal the Blazeshine Sword that held it in place, despite his fear of Doghead and his kin, then he must have found a way to bring Lalakie back to the skies."

The king seemed grimly confident about this.

If I remembered right, Yuuneia had said something along these lines when we first encountered her: "*<All we need now is a large crystallized Firelight Pearl, the Box, and your key, and we'll be able to bring Lalakie back to the skies!>*"

He was probably going to use this Blazeshine Sword that had been used to



seal the Flame Lord in place of the gem from the Crimson Cane, which was in my possession.

It seemed strange to use a fire-type item to seal a fire-type monster, but there was no reason that the king would lie about that right now.

“If he offers up the elemental jewels at the Sealtower Islands and Lalakie rises into the sky, then the most powerful of Doghead’s kin—the Sea Lord—will be unleashed.”

*Oh, there’s a new key phrase.*

“Doghead’s kin will run rampant on land and sea, and the Skeleton King will control the floating island Lalakie and its Divine Wrath Cannon in the sky...”

The king of Lalagi looked up as if he might die at any moment.

“...There is nowhere left to go.”

“That’s not true.”

If I left the king to his own devices, he might die of despair, so I spoke without thinking.

“Spare me your empty consolations. Who in the world could possibly stop such a disaster?”

The gods probably could handle it, but in this world, they seemed to just warn people about disasters with the “Oracle” skill and leave them to handle the rest themselves.

“A hero will surely rise to meet the evil.”

“A hero? You mean the Hero of the Saga Empire?”

A faint light of hope entered the king’s eyes.

Casually tossing out the word *hero* seemed to carry some serious clout around here.

“Did you not see the hero who protected this land earlier this very day?”

“You mean that mysterious figure who was flying around in the sky?”

*Shoot. I should’ve showed myself off a little more.*

“Yes, that is the very same hero who swiftly defeated Tobkezerra and the other giant monster fish when they appeared in the Shiga Kingdom.”

“Th-the giant monster fish Tobkezerra?!”

I nodded and continued speaking. “Not long before I left the Shiga Kingdom, the Skeleton King attacked a harbor town there, so I suspect the hero was waiting here for the Skeleton King to arrive.”

My “Fabrication” skill was on a roll as usual.

“There is no doubt in my mind that the hero will put an end to the Skeleton King’s foul plans.”

I smiled reassuringly, and the dark shadow over the king’s eyes lifted completely.

“Well then, I suppose I cannot simply cower in here any longer. I must go and reassure the people.”

The king of Lalagi stood with renewed energy and went to calm the people of the castle town, which was in near chaos after the Skeleton King’s attack. He could probably take care of the rest.

I asked the king for more information about the Sealtower Islands, then left the castle.

On the way, I told Rayleigh that our discussion about his new company would have to wait and gave him some money to get started for the time being.

They seemed to still be working on their business plan anyway, so I’d have to come back once the Lalakie situation was dealt with.

“Master, we are prepared for departure, I declare.”

I nodded at Nana on the deck and gave the order to the figurehead golem Scarecrow to set sail.

The Sealtower Islands, the Skeleton King’s likely destination, were said to be somewhere in the Kraken’s Domain.

And so we set forth from the Kingdom of Sorcery Lalagi to put a stop to the Skeleton King’s plan to resurrect Lalakie.

## Lalakie Route

*Satou here. I think exploring unknown waters is an important part of any adventure at sea. Even if you have a map that's basically a walk-through guide...*

"Master! There are seabirds circling around up ahead!"

Liza called out from the lookout post on the mast.

"We finally found them."

"Uh-huh. I'll finish them off with a single slice."

Arisa grinned eagerly, and I responded with a similar expression.

Even the orichalcum alloy knife in my hand seemed keen to finally see action.

"All right, I'll be right back."

"Good luuuck?"

"You can do it, sir!"

I took off from the deck with a quick wave.

Near where the birds were circling, something broke the water's surface.

*Gotcha!*

It leaped into the air with a spray of seawater, far larger than anything I was expecting.

"Haaaaaa!"

"Flashrunning" put me right in front of my prey within an instant, and I swung the orichalcum blade with all my might, slicing through its head as easily as cutting through cloth.

The attack, so sharp that it seemed as if it could have sliced a molecule in two, went straight through its target and cut a swath through the ocean waves

behind it.

The creature continued its leap as if it hadn't even noticed that it had been cut, but as soon as it tried to turn in midair, its body split into perfect halves, killing it instantly.

I wasted no time in grabbing both halves with Magic Hand and putting them away in Storage.

*Finally! We've got ootoro!*

I almost struck a victory pose right then and there, but I was getting ahead of myself.

"Master, behind you!" Lulu cried.

I didn't even need to turn around to know that a school of bullet tuna was coming this way, aiming for the circling birds.

As the school of thirty-foot-long bullet tuna zoomed toward me, I prepared my orichalcum tuna knife and charged into the fray.

"Ahhh, it's melting in my mooouth."

"Very...yummy."

As Arisa and Rei enjoyed the *ootoro* sashimi with wasabi and soy sauce, I reached out my chopsticks as well.

Sushi was high on my list, but trying out the sashimi was my main objective.

Lulu, Tama, and Pochi seemed very interested, but Liza stopped them, so they were just watching.

At last, I took a bite of the long-awaited *ootoro*.

The fat really did dissolve in my mouth, spreading the delicious taste of tuna across my tongue.

I'd eaten *ootoro* in Japan before, but this was on a whole different level.

It had an incredible depth of flavor and was rich enough that a single piece seemed like enough to satisfy me, yet I couldn't stop myself from taking another bite.

*Delicious. It's way too delicious.*

I'd prepared a few different kinds of wasabi and soy sauce with the intention of figuring out which went with it best, but I accidentally wound up eating a whole plate's worth of sashimi with the first kind of soy sauce alone.

"Ahhh, I can die happy now."

"Yes... It was very, very...good."

Arisa and Rei sighed happily.

"Meeew?"

"I—I want to try it, too, sir."

Tama and Pochi, who were still being held by Liza, had stopped squirming and were now just staring at the empty plates with drool on their lips.

"You mustn't. Raw fish has a high chance of giving you a stomachache."

"I want to try it even if my tummy hurts after, sir."

"Me toooo?"

"I-I'm willing to take the risk, too."

Liza was trying to dissuade them, but Pochi, Tama, and even Lulu seemed determined this time.

"It's all right, Liza. I've already removed any parasites or eggs that could make us sick."

"Master... Very well, then. Since the three of them seem quite firm about this, I shall test it first as a guinea pig."

Liza's expression looked grim.

Her spirit of self-sacrifice was admirable and all, but since some of us had already eaten a lot of it, a guinea pig wasn't really necessary.

Still, this was my chance to finally get Liza to try sashimi.

I lined a plate with more tuna sashimi, and Liza tremulously lifted the *ootoro* with her chopsticks, then squeezed her eyes shut and popped the whole thing into her mouth.

“I-impossible...”

Liza’s wide-eyed expression prompted the other girls to reach out with their forks and chopsticks as well.

“Fishy, yumyyyyy?”

“It’s so squishy and juicy and tasty, sir!”

“This is amazing, master! Tuna is unbelievably delicious!”

Tama, Pochi, and Lulu all praised the taste as they reached for another bite.

“...Delicious.” Liza put a hand to her cheek and murmured blissfully.

I guess she must have liked it, too.

“I see now why you were so beside yourself about acquiring this, master,” Liza added.

*I wasn’t really that worked up, was I?*

I turned to Arisa to ask her, but she quickly averted her eyes. Ridiculous.

“Want to try it...Nana?”

“If you insist, larva, then I shall do so, I consent.”

“You too, Mia...”

“Mrrr. No.”

Nana gave in to Rei’s adorable request, but Mia hated fatty foods, so she made an X in front of her mouth with her fingers.

“It is delicious, but it would be even more so if cooked, I declare.”

“Yes, tuna steak might be good, too.”

My Japanese instincts cried out in protest at the thought of cooking such high-quality tuna, but I had read somewhere that it was good that way, so I decided to cook some per Nana’s request.

“Ahhh, what a waste...”

“It smells good, though, doesn’t it?”

I understood Arisa’s feelings, but Lulu was right: The scent certainly piqued

one's appetite.

Tama and Pochi were visible proof of that. They were standing next to the charcoal grill, sniffing the air and drooling excessively.

Once it was finished, I cut it up and gave Tama and Pochi the first two pieces.

“Yaaay!”

“Thank you, sir.”

The pair picked up the tuna steak with their forks and brought it to their lips.

“*Très bieeeen?*”

“It's almost as strong as Professor Hamburg, sir!”

Tama and Pochi burst into huge smiles immediately, waving their fists around gleefully.

Just flailing their arms evidently wasn't enough to express their feelings, as they soon started stamping around on the deck, too.

It may have been my imagination, but I thought I even saw tears in their eyes.

“Master, as I surmised, tuna is better cooked than raw, I insist.”

“It is...really good...cooked. But I think...the sashimi...was even better...”

Nana was head over heels for the tuna steak, while Rei quietly stated her own preference.

It was nice to have someone else who understood the deliciousness of sashimi.

“Grrr, I hate to admit it, but it *is* really good.”

Arisa frowned reluctantly even as she stuffed her cheeks with the tuna steak.

“It's quite delicious. The taste is somewhat similar to beef.”

“Yes, it really is tasty.”

Liza and Lulu seemed satisfied, too.

“Satou...”

Mia rubbed her cheek against me, clearly feeling left out, so I decided to make

a dish for her before moving on to sushi.

Hopefully everyone would like the sushi right away, though.



“Ahhh, that was delicious.”

Arisa, who'd been tidying up after the meal with the other girls, flopped down next to me, sitting back against the forecastle.

“Did you finish cleaning up?”

“Why, of course we did. So have you figured out our route from here?”

I used the Light Magic spell Illusion to display the map information of the Kraken's Domain, which was next to the Kingdom of Sorcery Lalagi.

“This is where we are now, and these four points are the Sealtower Islands.”

The Skeleton King was likely planning to place a gem similar to the one from the Crimson Cane at one of these four islands to raise Lalakie.

It was a pretty gamelike setup, but if I had to use force, there were plenty of ways I could stop him. I could even destroy all the islands without a trace if I had to.

Not that I was looking to use that option at the moment.

“What's the scale on this map?”

“One inch is about twenty miles.”

“Wait, then they're super far apart! Won't it take days to get to all of them?!”

Arisa jumped up in surprise.

She was shouting pretty loudly, but I'd used the Secret Field spell to put a sound barrier around us, so the others didn't seem to notice.

It certainly was far, but if I had to, I could sacrifice my clothes and use “Flashrunning” to travel around in no time.

“Right now, we're trying to get to this spot.”

“The middle of the four islands? But there's nothing there, is there?”



Arisa frowned in puzzlement, so I zoomed in on that part of the map.

“Another island?”

“That’s right. We could go to each of the islands, but they’re all pretty far apart. It seems likely that there’d be something important on the center island, right?”

“True. And even if there isn’t, if something happens on one of the islands, we can get to any of them in about the same amount of time, so...that makes sense, yeah.”

It didn’t take Arisa long to catch on to my line of thinking and nod in agreement.

“Hmm? But up is north on this map, right? Aren’t we going off course?”

“There’s a place I want to stop at on the way.”

Since we were stopping at islands to set seal slates as we traveled, our course was already pretty zigzagged, but it was still farther south than it should be.

“I have some business over here.”

“What is it?”

“The roc lives on this island.”

“You really want to go sightseeing right now?”

Arisa raised her eyebrows, but I shook my head.

“No, no. The Sky Lord is on that island.”

The Sky Lord was supposed to be kin to the Dogheaded Demon Lord, an enemy of the floating island Lalakie, so I didn’t want to risk it interrupting while I was facing down the Skeleton King.

That guy was already pretty quick to flee, so the last thing I needed was to give him another chance to do so.



“So this is the roc, huh?”

When the bird spread its wings, it was around the same size as the island it

was using as its nest.

*PYWEEEEWN!*

With a loud cry, its enormous heavy bomber–like body took off into the sky. It was most likely supporting itself with Wind Magic.

At level 87, it was a little stronger than the Flame Lord. Its species was **roc**, while its individual name was **Sky Lord**.

I put magic power into Claidheamh Soluis, elongating the blade, and then added Sacredblade to the tip, making it long enough to cut the Sky Lord.

*PYWEEEEWN!*

The Sky Lord produced a tornado full of wind blades, so I blew it apart with a wind spell of my own, Air Cannon.

I thought I saw surprise flash through the Sky Lord’s eyes, but that might have just been my imagination.

Dodging the compressed-air shots that zoomed toward me like anti-aircraft missiles, I swung my glowing blue blade almost casually and cut through the Sky Lord’s thick neck.

“All right! Poultry!”

I wasn’t sure how it would taste yet, but it was easy to run low on poultry, so I was genuinely happy to acquire it in such a large quantity.

Grilled chicken skewers were one of Liza’s favorite meals, so now I could make plenty for her.

I put the enormous body into Storage and headed for the nest in the middle of the island.

The nest contained twenty-odd enormous eggs the size of small houses, a huge amount of bones, and a pile of treasure.

Rocs seemed to share with crows a love of shiny objects; there were even gems the size of large eggs, like emerald and sapphire.

Most of the bones belonged to monsters, fish, and other creatures, but there were more than a few human bones in there, too. The nest itself seemed to be

made of the remains of ships.

I recovered the treasure, the eggs, and the human bones into Storage before returning to the ship.

I planned to give the latter a proper burial at sea later.

“That was...a big...bird.”

The ship had been pretty far away, but I guess they could still see it from here.

Luckily, the island wasn't in view to give a size comparison, so nobody seemed to have noticed just how gigantic the bird was.

“Yeah, I guess it was called a ‘roc.’”

I probably should've said “Sky Lord” in the hopes that it would jog Rei's memories, but I didn't want to remind her of the downfall of her home, so I decided not to mention that name.

I should also note that we dined on roc meat that evening, which was a little tough but very flavorful in a rustic way.

“Satou...”

As I was sitting in my usual after-dinner spot behind the forecastle, watching the sun set on the horizon, Rei came over to me.

“Can I talk to you...about that girl...?”

“You mean Yuuneia? Sure.”

Arisa would probably be better at giving advice than I would, but since Rei had gone out of her way to ask me, I didn't want to pass her off on someone else.

“Do you think you can...remove her shackles?”

“Yes, of course.”

Rei breathed a little sigh of relief.

If that ghost bird hadn't gotten in my way the first time, I'm sure I could've gotten rid of those miasma shackles.

I had been able to do it for Rei when we initially rescued her, after all.

“Then...please...do it. Remove...that girl’s...shackles.”

“No problem.”

When I agreed immediately, Rei broke into a smile.

She’d only seemed scared of Yuuneia, but I guess she was concerned for her after all.

“So you’re worried about Yuuneia, Rei?”

“Yes... She’s scary...and I don’t remember her...but she calls me ‘Sister’...and she seems to...miss me.”

That made sense. Rei did seem to care a lot about other people.

“We’ll be...at Lalakie soon...”

Rei gazed at the seas ahead.

“If I go there...do you think...my memories...will come back?”

“It’s very possible. But try not to stress out about it too much.”

She looked anxious, so I placed a hand on her head and rubbed it gently.

“S-Satou...?”

“Oops, sorry, sorry.”

I’d automatically done the same kind of gesture that I would normally use to comfort Tama or Pochi.

“Don’t worry. Whether your memories return or not, you’ll still be Rei. And you’ll always be our friend.”

“...Thanks.”

Rei’s eyes almost looked teary as she smiled back at me.

Our conversation ended there, and together we enjoyed the sunset in a pleasant silence.

Although Arisa’s and Mia’s faces as they stared at us from around the corner were a little bit frightening.



“Is that our destination? I inquire.”

“That’s right.”

The other kids gathered around the helm to see where Nana was pointing.

A subtropical-looking island had come into view, with a little inlet and a small mountain wreathed in trees.

Along the way there, we’d been attacked by octopus, horned swordfish, and other such sea monsters with relative frequency, but I took care of any threateningly high-level ones with Remote Harpoon, so to the rest of the group, it probably seemed like a pretty boring journey.

“I wonder if that’s Lalakie, then?” Arisa asked Rei in a light tone.

“...I don’t...know.”

Rei lowered her head sadly, so I reassured her.

“You don’t need to try to force yourself to remember. This place just happens to be near the Sealtower Islands, so we don’t know if it’s part of Lalakie or not.”

With that, I steered the ship into the bay.

“Swirlyyyy?”

“So whirly, sir.”

Up in the lookout post, Tama and Pochi were excited about something.

The entire island was surrounded by a whirlpool-like current, as if to prevent ships from entering, with sharp reef outcroppings hidden in the water.

I checked it out with the map and my scouting gargoyle golems, but there didn’t seem to be any suspicious barriers or defense mechanisms hidden in the vortex.

“An island protected by a whirlpool... Do you think Poseidon’s going to show up?”

If I remembered correctly, Poseidon was the Greek god of the ocean, but knowing Arisa, this was probably some kind of anime or manga reference.

Our ship easily flew over the whirlpool and proceeded into the bay.

“Sea turrrtle?”

“It looks delicious, sir!”

The waters were so clear that it was easy to see the ultramarine-shelled sea turtle swimming slowly past.

Liza threw a harpoon at it, but I’m afraid it got away.

I was busy making sure nothing unusual was happening on the island, so I wasn’t able to participate in this particular hunt.

“It’s so peaceful.”

“Yes, it seems that way.”

We laid anchor near the beach, and there was still no reaction. The island seemed to be very quiet.

I had been half hoping that some mysterious objects would rise from the sand or the sea, but I’d probably read too many stories.

“What a beautiful beach.”

Lulu gazed at the near-paradise-like island with an admiring sigh.

I wanted to take a picture of that expression.

“I imagine there are plenty of shrimp and shellfish here.”

“I hope to find more tropical fruits, I propose.”

Liza and Nana seemed more concerned with food.

I did a map search across the island.

There were no monsters within the circumference of the whirlpool; the island seemed to be inhabited by normal animals and rare mythical beasts.

We could already see palm trees laden with coconuts, but there seemed to be other fruit trees growing elsewhere on the island, like bananas and mangoes.

Until anything strange happened, we could probably just enjoy a relaxing vacation.

“First we should find a safe place to set up camp.”

We went to shore in a small rowboat, then set up a simple camp on the beach a safe distance away from the tide line.

I placed a magic tool on top of a waterproof sheet and poured magic into it, and it produced cloth and a frame with a little *pop*, forming a tent in no time flat. The tent was big enough for everyone to stand inside.

I'd made this myself in the elf village, since they had textiles that expanded and contracted magically, the magic version of a shape memory alloy, and other such materials.

I could've simply produced a bungalow from Storage complete with all our everyday needs, but since it was the first day of our little trip, I thought it would be more fun to camp out.

"All right, everyone, time to change!"

"Aye-aye, sirrr!"

"Roger, sir!"

Tama and Pochi struck a dramatic pose, and the three of them ran into the tent, followed closely by the rest of the group.

Mia and Nana tried to drag me in as well, but that would defeat the purpose of putting up the tent in the first place, so I slipped out of their grasp right before the entrance.

While everyone was changing, I used my "Quick Change" skill—transformation sequence excluded—to put on a pair of knee-length trunks.

Arisa wanted me to wear some kind of thong-like swim briefs, but I didn't think anyone but athletes and pro swimmers wore those, so I declined.

I wasn't really interested in showing off my beach bod anyway.

"Master, look?"

"Look at Pochi, too, sir."

The first two to pop out of the tent were Tama and Pochi.

As they sent the tent flap flying on their way out, I thought I caught a glimpse of Lulu's pale skin, but I'd just pretend that didn't happen.

Tama was wearing a peach-pink two-piece swimsuit, while Pochi wore a similar getup in yellow. The bottom of Tama's was skirt-shaped, while Pochi's consisted of shorts.

"The two of you look very cute."

Both of them grinned bashfully.

"Master, the three of us will go harvest some seafood, if that's all right."

Liza appeared in a crimson two-piece, wielding a harpoon made from a land urchin spike.

To cover for her lack of volume, there was a rose-patterned decoration over her chest.

"All right. I'll put some magic on you for safety, but don't rely on it too much."

"Understood."

"Aye-aye!"

"Yes, sir! Get ready for a big haul, sir!"

No doubt the three of them would return with some tasty prey.

I would have preferred for them to simply enjoy some normal swimming and relaxation, but everyone has fun in different ways. No doubt Arisa would invite them to play after we ate later.

"Satou."

Wearing a white-and-aqua-striped bikini, Mia did a little twirl in front of the tent.

Her usual twin tails were braided into buns.

"Master, the larva and I are ready as well, I declare."

Instead of a bikini, Nana was wearing a plain one-piece suit, probably thanks to the iron-wall pair.

Unfortunately for them, their plan had backfired: The plain swimsuit only increased the sexiness factor, especially considering her bust size increase from the cultivation tank.



“How do I look...Satou?”

Rei hesitantly peeked out from behind Nana.

She was borrowing one of Arisa’s spare swimsuits, a bikini that matched the design of Mia’s.

“All three of you look extremely cute. They look great on you.”

They smiled, looking pleased.

“I’m ready, too, master.”

Lulu appeared from behind the other three, clad in a pink cardigan over a black-and-white one-piece with a low back. The cardigan covered her back and shoulders, but the open front revealed a glimpse of her cleavage and cute belly, giving her an innocent charm.

“I’m sorry—it took a while to braid everyone’s hair.”

Come to think of it, Nana and Rei had the same braided-bun style as Mia.

Lulu seemed to be the one who had done their hair for them. Her own long black hair was held in a simple braid.

“That’s all right. You look wonderful.”

“Th-thank you, master.”

Lulu turned adorably bright red, although the way she pressed her shoulders together and ducked was a little dangerous.

“Ta-daaaa!”

Finally, Arisa appeared in a white swimsuit, announcing her own arrival with a little tune.

“Obviously, you’ve got to save the star of the show for last!”

...*Oh, Arisa.*

“What’s the matter? Have you succumbed to the adorable Arisa’s charms?”

I rolled my eyes at Arisa, who was wearing a classic old-fashioned school swimsuit. There was even a name tag on the chest that said ARISA in hiragana.

The school swimsuit was a staple of anime and light novels, but I had never

seen someone wear one in real life outside of cosplaying.

Dryly averting my gaze from Arisa as she struck pose after pose, I turned to address the others.

“Why don’t you all go for a swim while I prepare a barbecue?”

“Awww, c’mon, swim with us!”

“Master, if you’re preparing food, I’ll help you.”

Lulu seemed determined to help me rather than enjoy herself, so I agreed to go swimming with everyone instead.

“It’s the oceeeeeean!”

Arisa shouted as she made a mad dash for the water.

“Mm, ocean.”

“That is without a doubt the ocean, I confirm.”

“Yes...ocean...”

Nana took Mia’s and Rei’s hands and ran after Arisa.

Nana usually seemed oblivious to anyone else’s pace, but this time she did shorten her strides to match the smaller girls’ as they ran.



“Huh? Okay... Um, it’s the ocean!”

Finally, Lulu sheepishly followed me toward the water.

I was quick to put away her unnecessary cardigan in Storage.

“Whew, that was fun!”

“Mm. Satisfied.”

Arisa and Mia sighed happily as they finished burying me in the sand.

Lulu and Rei had long since given up and were relaxing under a beach parasol.

“Master, I have found many small and cute seashells, I report.”

Nana showed me the contents of her bag.

Freeing myself from the sand to look inside, I saw that it was indeed full of colorful little shells, true to her report.

“Very nice. Why don’t we make some seashell accessories later?”

“Am I capable of making them? I inquire.”

“Of course. We’ll all make them together.”

The other girls would probably be interested, too, so I figured we could have a little seashell accessory–making class after we ate.

“Preeey!”

“We caught a lot, sir.”

“We’ve successfully captured fish, lobster, and some large shellfish.”

Liza opened the hunting Fairy Pack and showed me their haul.

There were tropical fish, striped beakfish, and enough spiny lobster to go around, plus oysters, turban shells, and even a pearl oyster so gigantic I almost expected Venus to be inside.

“Mia, can you take care of the shellfish?”

“Mm.”

Mia used the Water Magic spell I’d made on the journey, Clean Clams, to quickly remove the sand and grit from the shells.

This particular spell had taken a lot of work, and more than a few exploded clamshells, to perfect.

“Awww, you couldn’t get any sea turtles?” Arisa asked.

“No waaay?”

“Mr. Sea Turtle is very speedy in the water, sir.”

Tama and Pochi shook their heads sadly.

“Master, may I open this shell?”

“Yes, of course. Clams can be very strong, so I’ll get it started for you first.”

I didn’t want Liza’s arm to get stuck in the shell by mistake.

I gave it a light pull and it came apart easily enough, and Liza thrust her short sword into the gap, expertly slicing up the clam.

The clam did its best to close, but it didn’t stand a chance against my high strength stat.

“Whoa, what a big pearl!”

It really was big.

Probably around the size of a softball.

“Master, is the shell transparent now?”

“You’re right—that’s strange. It was normal only a moment ago.”

For some reason, the giant clamshell had turned transparent.

“Actually, I think it’s just blending in. Looks like it changes colors using magic power.”

It probably used this ability to disguise itself on the seafloor.

It was pretty solid, so I could probably make some fun things with it, which was an exciting creative prospect.

As I thought about such things, the other kids opened the smaller shells.

“Master, I have found a pearl larva, I report.”

“Wow, I didn’t know they could have pink pearls.”

“This one has a black pearl.”

A high proportion of the clams near this beach seemed to have pearls inside.

There weren't enough to make a pearl string necklace, but I could probably make a single-pearl necklace for each of the girls.

There was coral washed up on the beach, too; our post-lunch accessory-making workshop was shaping up to be pretty involved.

Meanwhile, as for the lunch itself...

“Whoa! It's like a beach-house smorgasbord!”

I'd prepared a lineup of curry, *yakisoba*, ramen, and grilled squid. The *yakisoba* and salt ramen were new menu items.

“But the clam's not missing from the curry, and the ramen's not soggy enough...”

Arisa complained that it didn't seem like real beach-house food, but I wasn't going to make it poorly on purpose.

Even as she complained, she slurped up the ramen with a satisfied expression.

“Mm. Yummy.”

Mia seemed to be enjoying her vegetable-filled salt ramen, too.

“The one with meat is good, sir.”

“That's roast pork. It's also called '*chashu*.'”

“*Chashu* rameeen?”

Tama's pronunciation was a little off, but she and the others all took a liking to ramen at once. Tama and Pochi were using forks, since eating it with chopsticks proved difficult for them.

For some reason, the *yakisoba* wasn't particularly popular, so I would have to work on my recipe some more.

“Ramen is hot, but it's delicious.”

“There are lots of other kinds, so I can make more next time we're someplace colder.”

Unsurprisingly, I didn't want to boil up *tonkotsu* ramen broth in this sweltering heat.

I could've simply used magic to control the temperature, but that was beside the point.

"Spicy...and good..."

"Curry is most delicious on the third day, I inform."

Rei and Nana were enjoying some curry together.

"It's very good. The curry and fried seafood go quite well together."

Liza was eating curry topped with fried shrimp and fish.

Afterward, once we'd cooled off with some shaved ice, we made the seashell accessories and built a tree house as part of our island vacation.



"Firewoorks?"

"Pop-pop, sir!"

Tama and Pochi were twirling around on the beach by the campfire.

They were both holding a short staff in each hand with a Fireworks Illusion spell on them.

These staffs had been made by the high elf of the Beliunan clan when I told her about the Fireworks Illusion spell I made. She said she wasn't very good at making light-type magic tools, but she still turned these out in a pretty short time.

Making them required special magical assistance, so I couldn't reproduce them myself.

"Larva, it is used like this, I instruct."

"It's...very...pretty."

Nana was teaching Rei how to use the Fireworks Illusion short staffs.

"They really pull you in, don't they?"

"Yes, they are truly impressive to behold."

Lulu and Liza were fascinated by the prototype sparklers I'd made.

These ones just used regular gunpowder.

"Campfires are pretty romantic, huh?"

"You think so? Didn't you ever have one at a school event?"

At Arisa's request, we were dancing the "Oklahoma Mixer," with accompaniment by Mia.

*I don't think you're supposed to do this dance with only two people.*

"Mrrr. Trade."

Mia was the only one who could play an instrument well, so Mia and I danced to Arisa's humming.

"Larva?"

Hearing Nana's confused voice, I turned to see Rei with the light gone from her eyes, staring into the campfire with a blank expression.

"<...Fire,>" she murmured.

"Mew!"

"Something's coming, sir!"

Tama and Pochi dropped their short staffs and got down on all fours, looking alarmed.

A moment later, the ground shook.

At the same time, birds took off in droves from all over the island, and we heard animals howling.

"An earthquake?"

"I don't think there are any underwater volcanoes or anything around here."

Opening the map, I checked for any moving monsters, but nothing stood out. The Skeleton King's and Yuuneia's markers were still in the Spirit World.

"Let's check the other islands, then."

I used the Space Magic spell Clairvoyance to look at each of the Sealtower



Islands.

Three of them were unchanged, but one had produced a towerlike structure that was letting off a red light.

*Guess he's making his move.*

"Is it an evil omen of some sort?" I heard Liza murmur.

"No, don't worry," I reassured her lightly.

Minimizing the menu that had taken up all of my vision, I saw that most of the group members were trembling and clinging to me.

There weren't many earthquakes in this world, so even a magnitude three was probably enough to scare them.

Arisa was clearly just taking advantage of the moment, so I flicked her forehead, and we decided to turn in for the night once everyone had calmed down a little.

I thought about going to the Sealtower Island now but decided against it.

The Skeleton King might come after Rei while I was gone, and it would be annoying to run around being one step behind him anyway, so I figured it would be easier to destroy the Sea Lord and the Divine Wrath Cannon after Lalakie had been revived.

Although I planned to do my best to stop him before that happened, of course.



"Let's look for tropical fruits tomorrow!"

"Mm, agree."

"Arisa, I wish to play split the watermelon, I request."

"All right, we can do that in the afternoon."

Despite their earlier unease, everyone was back to normal before long, largely thanks to Arisa.

At first, they were all staying awake and chatting even after we'd laid down to

sleep on beds of banana leaves, but by the time the moon was gleaming gently in the sky, they were all sound asleep, no doubt tired from playing during the day.

Then, late at night...

I woke up feeling as if something was calling to me.

With my “Night Vision” skill, I quickly realized what was wrong.

Rei was gone.

On my radar, I saw that Rei’s dot was moving toward the mountain in the center of the island.

Being careful not to wake anyone up, I extracted myself from bed and followed Rei on her unexpected evening walk.

The soothing cries of nocturnal creatures echoed through the tropical rain forest, along with the gentle rustling of the leaves.

“There she is.”

I was chasing her from above the trees using “Skyrunning,” so I caught up to her very quickly.

Wandering along unsteadily, Rei looked like she was sleepwalking.

I continued to follow her, looking after her from above.

When Rei reached the rock face of the mountainside and extended her hand, a gear-like magic circle appeared over the rock, and I heard a voice similar to the one that came from the Box in Lalagi.

“<This device can only be used by senior personnel. Please speak your identification number.>”

“<La. 1090609. Reiaane Tuuwa Lalakie.>”

Rei identified herself in a trance state.

That might’ve been the first time I’d heard anyone in this world use a middle name.

“<Identification number accepted. Disengaging camouflage.>”

The rock fell apart like sand, revealing a small towerlike structure beneath.

The top of the tower was inlaid with a crystal like the Lalakie crest.

“<The Lalakie central control core welcomes your return, Queen Reiaane—Warning, negative interference detected in Queen Reiaane. Initiating security scan.>”

The crystal on top of the tower flashed.

“<...Queen...?>”

With that murmur, Rei suddenly fainted on the spot.

“Rei!”

I rushed over at once, but the central control core created a defensive barrier around her.

“Get out of my way.”

With a wave of my arm, I effortlessly broke the barrier into fragments of light.

“<Potential threat to Queen Reiaane detected. Suspending scan to remove threat—>”

I picked up Rei and prepared to block the tower’s attack with Flexible Shield.

“<Removal suspended. Unable to harm an elf envoy in accordance with article E-3.>”

The tower must have detected the Silent Bell of Bolenan on my belt.

“<Addressing elf envoy. Return our queen at once. Queen Reiaane’s memories show evidence of tampering. They must be repaired via the central control room at once.>”

“<I am her traveling companion. If you’re the central control core, you’ve been monitoring us since we arrived on this island, right? Then you must know that we would never harm her.>”

The crystal began to blink like an electrical device that was low on battery.

“<...Fellowship acknowledged. Lalakie is currently in magic-conservation mode and therefore cannot safely guide Queen Reiaane to the central control

room. Envoy, requesting that you escort Queen Reiaane...to the central...control room...>”

With that, the crystal fell silent.

Its voice sounded strange at the end; maybe it really was running out of magic power.

I pried open the door and used “Search Entire Map,” since we’d entered a new area.

*So this is the entrance to Lalakie.*

The map name read **Lalakie: Ruins**.

That meant I had fulfilled my mission of bringing Rei back to Lalakie, but it sounded like I needed to bring her to this “central control room” to completely restore her memories.

Maybe this was like a follow-up mission to bring her to the main control room.

Anyway, I brought my attention back to the map.

It was much bigger than I thought—so large that it could encompass all of Tokyo. There was no one inside the ruins, not even any monsters or golems.

True to its name, the central control room seemed to be right in the middle of the enormous ruins.

I checked the time on my menu.

“It’s almost morning...”

I returned to the campsite with “Skyrunning,” laid Rei down on the bed, and started preparing breakfast.

There didn’t seem to be any danger inside the ruins, so I figured I could take the whole group with me to explore on the way to the central control room.



“Yikes, this staircase is looong!”

Arisa looked down the spiral staircase, which descended so far that light

didn't reach the bottom.

“■■■■...■ *Create Wisp Makoudama Souzou.*”

With the ball of light that Mia created using Spirit Magic going on some thirty feet ahead, we had Nana use her Foundation ability Mana Light and take the lead.

In the middle of the group, Lulu was carrying a lantern with the same Mana Light magic. This was a farewell gift from Inenimaana, the witch's apprentice we'd met in Kuhanou County.

I was also able to use Mana Light, since I'd learned it from a scroll, but my version of it was so bright, it would ruin the exploratory atmosphere, so I refrained.

In case of an emergency, I had our flying ship ready in Storage.

“Ugh, it's waaay too long...,” Arisa grumbled, sounding bored now.

The rearguard and Rei had quickly gotten too tired to walk, so they were sitting on a Floating Board I'd produced from Storage that followed along with us.

Lulu and Mia still seemed all right, but the board could carry four people as easily as it could two, so I had them ride it, too, to increase our speed.

“Not looong?”

“I heard the rock before I got to two, so we're almost there, sir.”

The pair was gauging our progress by dropping small stones from Tama's pocket down the length of the spiral staircase and counting how long it took to hear them hit the bottom.

I doubted they understood gravitational acceleration and other such calculations, but they seemed to be able to get a general idea.

“Mm. Hall.”

Mia sent the wisp ahead, illuminating a hall at the bottom of the staircase.

It was a fairly empty place with a single door.

Immediately, Tama and Pochi sprinted toward the exit.

“Dooooor?”

“Can we open it, sir?”

Reaching the double doors, they looked back at me.

There were no enemies on my radar, and my skills like “Trap Detection” and “Sense Danger” weren’t reacting, so it should be fine.

“Go ahead.”

As soon as I gave them the okay, Tama and Pochi pushed the doors open with all their weight.

Light shone through from the other side.

“Woow?”

“Amazingly amazing, sir!”

Tumbling into the next room, Tama and Pochi frantically beckoned us over.

Curious, I stepped through the exit into the large open space and was greeted by a completely unexpected sight.

“Master, the ocean is above us!”

“Master, I can see the sun through the ocean, I report.”

Both the serious Liza and the usually sensible Nana were looking up in surprise.

Sure enough, the only ceiling was the ocean, with no visible barrier between us. There was probably either a highly transparent resin or some kind of Foundation magic creating the illusion.

On the other side of this ceiling, colorful sea life swam along rhythmically, almost like an aquarium exhibit.

According to my map, this was the central residential area of Lalakie.

The space was so enormous that I couldn’t see the other side.

“It’s beautiful...”

“It *is* beautiful! It’s so very, very pretty. It’s as pretty as watching spirits dance; it really is!”

“But doesn’t it seem as if the ceiling could collapse? It’s a little unnerving.”

Lulu released an admiring sigh, Mia went on one of her rare excited rants, and Liza looked up worriedly.

As for Arisa...

“Grrr, it’s like an aquarium where stupid normie couples would go on their stupid dates...”

Better leave her alone. She seemed to be remembering something unpleasant.

“<Ultra-effective magic-enclosing barrier, a miracle from a god. A device to protect Lalakie from the cold winds and air pressure of high altitudes. Only the floating ships of Lalakie can pass through it.>”

Entering a trance, Rei explained the workings of the ceiling.





It was a little different from the information in my AR display, but that wasn't a big deal, so I didn't bother correcting her.

"Is the tower over there the central control room?"

"<Sky Tower. A sacred place where the queen communicates with the gods. The imperial palace of the queen and the royal family.>"

Arisa and Rei were looking at a thick tower at the center of the residential area.

It was made from orichalcum that glittered gold in the light.

As we continued through the wide room, we happened upon a grate-like floor from which a draft was blowing.

The mischievous wind lifted Lulu's and Mia's skirts, revealing a glimpse of white and stripes.

"<...Wind.>"

Rei's murmur made me think of something, so I trusted my intuition and used Clairvoyance to check on the three remaining Sealtower Islands.

Another one of them had produced a tower, which was glowing green.

Of course, the Skeleton King and Yuuneia were nowhere to be seen.

"Another shake... This one was pretty weak. Magnitude two, maybe?"

"Yes, around that."

The tremors weren't as noticeable this time, so the rest of the group didn't get as scared as before.

Lulu and Liza tugged on my sleeves, and the younger girls grabbed my hands, but that was all.

"Master, there are people, I report."

The far end of the enormous space tapered into a cliff of sorts, looking out on the townscape of Lalakie.

There were indeed a large amount of humanoid figures where Nana was pointing.

However...

“Something seems off, no?”

The people were semitransparent, and they were all young adults—no children, no seniors, not even anyone middle-aged.

“<The Happy Ones of Lalakie—people who have cast aside their needless physical forms to live in happiness forevermore as souls. They are reborn as half-ghosts in the Purifying Mausoleum, and when their physical bodies decay, they cast aside even their spirit bodies to take pure soul form.>”

So a half-ghost wasn't a child of a human and a ghost—it was a state somewhere between human and ghost.

As usual, it seemed like any civilization that ruled the world in glory ended up striving for eternal youth.

“Huh... It's better than being turned into a bolt in some distant galaxy, I guess, but is being a disembodied soul really any fun?”

“<They no longer feel anything but happiness. The human heart is frail. Without a physical body, one's memories fade, and without a spirit body, even one's emotions fade as well. They have become mere vestiges of the past. If the backups stored in the Lalakie central control core should cease, they will simply disappear.>”

Rei's face was expressionless, but tears were pouring down her cheeks.

That explained why my AR described them as **Lalakie apparitions**, treating them like undead monsters.

Nana and Mia wiped the tears from Rei's face with handkerchiefs.

After taking a moment of silent prayer for the transparent figures, we left them behind.

The Purifying Mausoleum that we passed through on the way looked similar to the elves' sleeping tanks, but while the elves in the tanks looked healthy as they slept, the people in the glass cylinders of the mausoleum were dried up like mummies.

As we made for the central control room, some of the passages had been

submerged in water by broken waterwork pipes, but we used Water Breathing and Resist Water Pressure to walk right through.

“<...Water.>”

That was fast. The third Sealtower Island had been unlocked.

The earthquake that followed must have opened up a hole; a sudden fast current formed, so I used Magic Hand to hold on to everyone until we made it to our destination.

“Scaryyyy?”

“I thought I would be washed away, sir.”

I used the Practical Magic spell Dry to deal with all our soaked clothing, and we hurried toward the control room.

If possible, I wanted to restore Rei’s memories before the final seal was broken.

Both sides of the huge hallway leading to the central control room were lined with black sheetlike stone pillars. The hall was so large that a giant could walk through it.

There were murals on the stone pillars flanking the hallway.

“Whoa, these are some pretty grim light-versus-darkness murals.”

Half of them showed how Lalakie controlled the world, prospering at the expense of the land-dwelling people.

“Looks like the land people didn’t take it lying down, though.”

Farther down the hall, the latter half slowly changed into a war against the rebels, until in the end, the Dogheaded Demon Lord brought destruction on the world.

“...What’s this?”

One of them caught my attention so much that I stopped without thinking.

“What is the matter, master?”

“Some girls and some octopuses?”

Arisa's summary of the mural was a little oversimplified.

It showed sacrifices being thrown off a cliff into an ocean, where octopus monsters lay in wait.

"<The sacrificial maidens. In order to turn the tides of the battle, which had become unfavorable, young women with the rune of domination engraved into their bodies were offered to the sea lord's spawn.>"

If I remembered right, Rei had a Sacrificial Maiden title, too.

Were the events in this image part of her past?

"<The sacrificial maidens were usually twins or sisters. Once a spawn had been captured with the first maiden's rune of domination, it could be controlled with the rune of operation carved into the other maiden's body.>"

Looking closely, I saw that the girls in the picture were bound in chains, being thrown almost like fishing bait.

I knew that lots of places used some extreme methods when they were about to lose a war, but just looking at it made my chest burn with anger.

In the next image, the controlled spawn were causing tidal waves, destroying the enemies' ships and harbors.

"<With the controlled spawn, they were able to turn the war back in their favor, but all was lost when Doghead's four warlords entered the battle. The attempt to control the Sea Lord itself failed, the queen's younger sister lost her life, and the queen herself had her soul rent away and entered eternal slumber in the Coffin.>"

The next few images showed an island that was probably Lalakie being dragged into the sea by the Sea Lord, which was about equal to it in size.

It was probably an exaggeration, but I still would have preferred not to fight an island-size giant octopus.

The final six images showed the Flame and Ground Lords being sealed and the end of Doghead's reign.

"What's this giant cone-shaped creature? A faceless ghost?"

“<The gods’ apostles overwhelmed the Sky Lord, sealed the Flame Lord with the Blazeshine Sword, and confined the Ground Lord to the labyrinth.>”

*The gods’ apostles, huh?*

Rei made it sound like these “apostles” crushed Doghead’s kin effortlessly, but the images showed a single lord being surrounded by a dozen or more apostles.

This part was probably drawn after Lalakie sank into the sea.

“What about the seven pillars of light surrounding a wolf and a person here?”

“<The forms the gods took when they descended to seal Doghead. One of the gods took human form to defeat Doghead.>”

*Huh? Do those numbers add up?*

I doubted the evil god who created the demon lord joined in to defeat him, so maybe the dragon god joined instead?

Since the dragon god taught the goddess Parion the Hero Summoning magic, they seemed to get along well enough.

Besides, since dragons loved battling so much, I bet the dragon god would’ve shown up for a fight either way.



“<We have been waiting for you, Queen Reiaane.>”

When we arrived in front of the central control room, an orb above the door glowed, and the voice of the central control core spoke.

“<Elf and elf envoys. Your escorting of Queen Reiaane is appreciated.>”

We were invited in through the door.

“Master! The larva has disappeared, I report.”

“<What’s going on?>” I shouted at the control core.

Part of the shutters around the dark room opened, illuminating one section like a spotlight.

There was Rei, floating in the middle of a red magic circle.

"<Security scan complete. Evidence of tampering located within Queen Reiaane's memory storage. Recommending restoration from backup.>"

*What is she, a PC?* I wanted to joke, but I decided it wasn't quite the right time.

"<...I don't want to...forget.>"

"<Only altered memories will be targeted. No other memories will be changed.>"

From the sound of things, Lalakie's technology was pretty amazing.

"<Then please...do it.>"

"<Understood. Initiating restoration.>"

Layers of gear-shaped magic circles appeared around Rei, and a light similar to the scan from before continued for a half hour or so.

"<Restoration complete. Are you well, Queen Reiaane?>"

"<Thank you. My memories are still somewhat cloudy, but most of them have come back to me.>"

Rei spoke in the same tone she usually used in her trance state.

She still looked like a little girl, but she seemed more composed than usual.

Her name in my AR display changed to **Reiaane Tuuwa Lalakie**, and her once-grayed-out skills and level turned white.

"Satou, I remember now. I am—"

Rei's words were interrupted by a particularly large quake.

"Aaaaah!"

Lulu's scream was the loudest, but even I was a little perturbed by a magnitude five-class earthquake.

Rationally, I knew I would be fine at my level even if the ceiling and floor caved in, but some things are still scary no matter what.

"<Queen Reiaane, a report. The Queen's Tower has declared a state of emergency. Until the declaration is revoked, the central control core will enter

slave device mode, prioritizing commands from the Queen's Tower. If you did not request this declaration, please suspend it using the control terminal in the Queen's Tower.>"

After making an announcement that was sort of reminiscent of a password change notification e-mail, the central control core fell silent.

"M-master, something's wrong! This doesn't feel like an earthquake!"

Arisa was right. This felt more like an intensified version of the shaking in a large ship's engine room than an earthquake.

I couldn't tell what was happening from here, so I used Return to teleport us to the seal slate I'd placed in the large viewing area in Lalakie.

"Master, look at the ceiling."

"Is the ocean...moving?"

I looked up.

"Skyyy?"

"The sun is bright, sir."

"Lalakie is surfacing? B-but...that would mean that Father has released the Sea Lord after Mother sacrificed her life to seal it..."

Rei's eyes widened in horror.

So it was true. Lalakie was rising to the ocean's surface.

*Hmm? Surfacing?*

*But if this much mass suddenly rises to the surface—*

"Satou."

"Master!"

Following Mia's and Nana's gazes, I saw a gear-like magic circle growing and a person appearing through it.

Sure enough, it was Yuuneia.

"<I've come for you, Sister!>"

Yuuneia was wearing an old-fashioned shrine maiden–style outfit, shooting Rei a challenging smile.

The outfit was similar to the formal shrine maiden clothes I'd seen in the Tenion Temple in the old capital but with less humble saintliness and more flashiness.

“<You are...Yuuneia...correct?>” Rei asked uncertainly.

“<That's right! You finally remembered me, Sister!>”

Unconcerned with Rei's strange state, Yuuneia quickly nodded.

“<Let us go, Sister. Father is waiting for us!>”

For some reason, Rei was giving Yuuneia a sad look.

Sad or even pitying.

“Satou... I'm...going with her.”

Without answering Yuuneia, Rei turned to me and spoke in the Shigan language.

“I will bring an end to Father's delusions...prevent the world from falling into chaos...and protect the gravestone of those sad lost lives of Lalakie.”

“Is that what you want?”

“Yes... If everything is to be saved, then I must go.”

Rei gave a faint smile, the expression of a martyr.

“Larva! I will go with you, I declare!”

The rest of the group all clamored forward in agreement.

“Nana... Thank you for *all* you've done. The rest of you, too... Thank you for being kind to me when even I did not know who I was.”

Rei shook her head, refusing to let Nana and the others come along.

“<Let us go, Sister.>”

Yuuneia took Rei's hand.

“Rei, wait! If you want to save everything, shouldn't that include yourself?!”



Rei gave no answer to my final question beyond an unhappy smile, and then she disappeared into the Spirit World.

Then the dots that represented the two of them reappeared on the top floor of the Queen's Tower—along with that of the Skeleton King.

"<Evacuation orders received. Initializing...>"

A moment after we heard the central control core's voice, we were returned to the beach of the central island where we'd had the campfire.

But now the bay was little more than a puddle. The island had become a part of the top of the ridge around Lalakie's urban area.

It seemed that this place was actually the western end of the city of Lalakie.

On the other side of the mountain, I could see the glowing dome of Heavenslight Protection.

"Master!"

Arisa's light punch hit me in the stomach.

"That's when you're supposed to embrace Rei and stop her from leaving!"

"Mm. Duh."

"Master..."

The indignant iron-wall pair and the expressionless Nana surrounded me.

But I knew that, of course.

"I didn't go with her because there was something else I had to do first."

"What could possibly be more important than saving Rei?!"

"Tidal waves."

If I didn't do something, the enormous tidal waves created by Lalakie's rise would strike all the nations on the coast.

And a tidal wave moves faster than most people realize.

"I'll take care of it quickly and then go save Rei, so all of you board the ship and get away from Lalakie."

As I spoke, I produced the flying ship from Storage, then the core parts of the figurehead golem from the large Fairy Pack Lulu was carrying, setting it up on the helm.

Since golems were considered living things once they'd been activated, they couldn't be put in Storage.

"Mrrr. We'll save her."

"Master, I wish to join the larva's rescue party, I request."

Mia and Nana puffed furiously, insisting they would go save Rei.

"Let's gooo?"

"Pochi wants to help, too, sir."

"Master, I, too, request your permission."

"I want to help her, too."

The beastfolk girls and Lulu felt the same way.

Arisa was giving the rest of them a thumbs-up, so it was probably safe to guess how she felt.

"Arisa, the ship's defenses are perfect, but try to avoid battle if you can."

"I know that, duuuh! We'll just buy some time for you!"

"All I need is ninety seconds. I'll be back after that."

"Okey-dokey!"

I transferred control of the ship to Arisa and taught her a few command words.

These were the key to activating the armament and propellers I'd added during our long journey.

"Wh-when did you make all this?"

Arisa stared at me in disbelief, but I grinned in response.

"Oh, you know. Just in case, I figured."

With that, I took off from the deck.

Opening the map, I looked at the ring-shaped tidal waves and decided to start with the outermost areas.

Taking a shortcut with the seal stones I'd placed around the islands like stepping stones, I arrived just outside the ring of tidal waves.

On the horizon, I could see the enormous waves coming closer.

Instead of using "Skyrunning," I chose "Flashrunning" to charge toward them.

Right now, I had to prioritize saving time over my clothes or a little burn damage.

I had to get back before Arisa and the others did anything crazy.

## Floating Island Lalakie

***Rei here. During the good times, it might be hard to realize what an important treasure time can be. The memories of those happy days still warm my heart.***

When I was young, I thought Lalakie was the happiest place in the world.

I was showered with love from my kind father, my admirable mother, and my gentle aunt, who looked exactly like her, and my every need was served by the homunculus servants and the magic machines. In those days, I wanted for nothing.

The town looked so peaceful when I watched from the Queen's Tower, and on the day of the yearly parade, everyone was all smiles from morning till night.

Art and music constantly filled my days with all the color I could dream of.

It was hard to say when a shadow began to fall over those peaceful times.

"...This kingdom is corrupt. Your extravagant feasts and luxurious clothes are paid for by the misery and exploitation of the humans who live on the ground."

The person who told me this was a violet-haired boy who I found collapsed in the Lalakie natural park.

He wore a tattered flight uniform over his stick-thin frame, but an intense fire still burned in his eyes.

The boy was gravely wounded, but I sheltered him and tended to his injuries, wanting to hear more about the world outside Lalakie of which he spoke.

"Kurou, do you want to destroy Lalakie?"

"No. I only want to free humanity from the tyranny of the gods."

"Tyranny? No, it's divine protection. Isn't it?"

"It's tyranny, Reiaane. We're just sheep on a farm owned by the gods, nothing

more. And you Lalakie people are the shepherds—no, maybe you're specially bred sheep made to taste better—”

Unable to bear Kurou's contempt for the gods, I slapped him in the face.

But he simply smiled at me with a soft expression in his eyes, like he was looking at a naive child, and murmured as if to himself: “Reiaane, I want to give everyone...a world where they can live their own lives freely.”

That was the last time I ever got to speak with him.

The next day, the shack where I'd been hiding him was destroyed; all that remained was its foundations and the broken fragments of magic machines and battle golems.

I think it was the following year that it happened...

The year when the Dogheaded Demon Lord raised an army against Lalakie in the far reaches of the continent and began Lalakie's final battle.

In the midst of the chaos, the kingdoms of the ground became estranged from Lalakie at the demon lord's bidding as well, and the smiles of the Lalakie people faded as they found themselves at the center of the war.

But the long days of battle eventually reached an end.

Thanks to the grace of the gods, the Dogheaded Demon Lord and most of his kin were sealed away. My mother and her sister weakened the final one, the Sea Lord, and my father and I used Lalakie itself to seal the Sea Lord at the bottom of the ocean.

When my father took me to escape from Lalakie, I remember crying as I called out for my mother and aunt.

But the heretics caught the floating ship on which my father and I fled, and I was separated from my father and brought to an underwater shrine to serve as part of an evil magic device.

I didn't know what happened after that, for my memories were interrupted there...

The next things I remember are Nana's embrace and Satou's kind smile.

I held the happy memories of Satou, Nana, and the others close to my heart as I followed the girl called Yuuneia down a long corridor.

And in the area at the end of the corridor, I was reunited with my father.

“At last you have returned, Reiaane. Have you gotten smaller?”

My father had become a skeleton.

The girl next to me waited like an eager puppy for Father to speak to her, but he gave her no words of praise or even thanks.

This was the observation deck of the Queen’s Tower at the center of the floating island Lalakie.

There was no ceiling or supports, just a view of all of Lalakie.

“You look quite a bit different yourself, Father.”

The last time I’d seen Father, he was a normal half-ghost man.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a tentacle rising up at the edge of Lalakie like an enormous tree.

“Why have you broken the seal on the Sea Lord?”

Father and I had sealed the Sea Lord ourselves, carrying out Mother’s final wish.

“Why, you ask?”

And yet, Father now flew into a fury at my words.

“Have you forgotten the words of your mother, my beloved wife, the final queen of Lalakie?! ‘Return Lalakie to the skies’—that was her final wish!”

*...No, you’re wrong.*

“Mother had no time to say such a thing. When she failed to control the Sea Lord, her soul was shattered.”

“What is this nonsense...?”

The Sea Lord could not be controlled by our fragile hands.

“Is it not you who has forgotten? Mother wrote in her final will and testament that if she failed, she wished for us to use Lalakie itself to seal the Sea Lord.”

Father had been the first one to read her will, not me.

“Ridiculous! She said to ‘return Lalakie to the skies.’ I am sure of it—”

“Father, who has convinced you of such a lie?”

It must have been the same individual who turned Father into a horrible undead monster.

A demon lord, most likely, or a greater hell demon.

From the corner of my eye, I saw Yuuneia gaping in disbelief.

“F-Father, who was the person who came to you before in a yellow cloak? The one who said ‘indeed’ after every sentence!”

“Silence! This is no time for an artificial puppet to interfere!”

Yuuneia, the *homunculus* girl, leaped toward Father, so I held her back with an embrace.

Since she had no one else to love her, I resolved that I should do so.

For what little time I had left to live, at least.

“Who was that person, Father? Was it even a person?”

“How dare you speak of my ally in such a way! The yellow-clad mage made Lalakie even stronger and even controlled the giant monster fish Tobkezerra before my very eyes!”

*Tobkezerra? The demon of the skies that controls the northern seas?*

It would be impossible for anyone to defeat the giant monster fish that *not even* the sky dragons could touch, never mind control it.

“Surely that was an illusion?”

“It was not, difficult as it may be to believe.”

But if that was true, then couldn’t this person defeat the Sea Lord for us?

When I asked this, however, Father looked at me like he was a child whose lie had been discovered and who flew into a rage as if to cover it.

“That would be indebting myself to my ally! Allies must always be on equal footing!”

Father brushed his cape out imperiously.

Immediately thereafter, a thunderous boom and a terrible quaking rocked the platform.

“Aah!”

The girl cried out in surprise, and I held her close.

“Sister, look!”

The glowing Heavenslight Protection dome above us was being struck by eight enormous tentacles.

A gigantic eye emerged at the edge of the floating island. A compound eye, like that of an insect.

“...The Sea Lord.”

The eye was filled with unmistakable hatred.

Its rage and resentment must have swirled around and multiplied while it was trapped at the bottom of the sea for nearly an eternity.

“Excellent. In this rage, it will surely swallow any poisonous bait we offer it.”

By *poisonous bait*, Father no doubt meant the girl called Yuuneia and me.

His own eyes were full of madness as he laughed down at the Sea Lord.

“We shall engrave the rune of domination in Yuuneia and the rune of operation in Reiaane.”

The girl turned pale at Father’s horrible declaration, but she nodded and shed her shrine maiden clothing for the magic circle engraving.

“I shall be the bait to catch the Sea Lord, and my sister shall be the linchpin to command it—that is the only way, isn’t it, Father?”

She nodded again, as if trying to convince herself, watching my father with a tremulous gaze.

But Father didn’t even spare her a glance.

“Father, no.”

“What’s this?”



“Yuuneia cannot capture the Sea Lord. I will go.”

“N-no, I can do it! I am your younger sister, after all.”

The girl looked desperate.

But it wouldn't work. What Father was trying to do now was the same thing that my mother and my aunt Yuuneia tried and failed to do long ago.

A slight improvement in the runes would make no difference against this opponent.

Besides, the person serving as bait to be swallowed by the Sea Lord faced certain death. I couldn't allow this poor girl to take that role.

“If we do it the same way as before, it will not work. Please trust me.”

“Sister...”

Attempting to control the Sea Lord would never work, no matter what.

Gear-shaped magic circles appeared at the feet of both the homunculus girl and myself.

“Very well. Go on, then.”

There was no hesitation in Father's cold words.

My once-kind father was long gone.

Ample magic power flowed into me from the Queen's Tower, and I changed from my low-magic youthful state back into my normal adult form.

“<Engrave.>”

I dropped my ethereal clothes, and Father issued forth a mad-sounding command.

Cursed runes crept up around me from my feet, wrapping my skin in almost unbearable discomfort.

“A-aaaaah!”

As a similar curse set in over the girl next to me, she let out a shriek of pain.

“<Engrave!>”

When my father gave the command again, the curse on my body took the shape of runes and began to engrave itself on my skin.

*Nnngh...*

Horrible rage and despair flowed through me, making the earlier discomfort seem like nothing by comparison.

My vision wavered, beginning to lose all color.

At this rate, I would be consumed by the poisonous curse.

*Larva.*

Suddenly, Nana's voice came back to my mind.

I felt my heart grow a little lighter.

"I—I won't give in."

Drawing on the warmth of my memories with Nana, Mia, and the others, I fought off the anger and despair brought on by the curse.

"Just you wait, Sea Lord! Soon you shall bend to my will!"

My father's laughter echoed across the Queen's Tower.

The Sea Lord rose up on top of the floating island, tilting the entire island with its weight.

Watching through my dark, warped vision, I was reminded of my aunt's and my mother's final moments.

*...I know what I saw back then.*

At first, the control was successful.

But it didn't last long before Aunt Yuuneia was absorbed into the Sea Lord and utterly destroyed.

So everything would rest on the moment I had control.

I would force the Sea Lord to tear out its own core, destroying itself for good.

If I could just defeat the Sea Lord, then Satou could take care of the rest.

That mysterious person would surely be able to undo the curse on my father

and help the girl who shared a name with my aunt Yuuneia find happiness.

*I'm sorry, Satou. This is my choice.*

“<You’ve done well to withstand this much, Reiaane! Now for the final step! <Engrave Linchpin>!>”

At Father’s words, the poison of the curse flowed into me like a torrent.

*...It’s no use. No one could withstand this.*

My warm memories were flooded by the poison, and the curse swallowed up my heart and began to break it into nothing— “STOPPPPPPP RIIIIIIIGHT THEEEEEEEERE!”

A familiar voice shouting in Shigan drew my darkening gaze.

On the other side of the Heavenslight Protection, I saw a flying ship coming closer.

*Is that Arisa...?*

“Larva! I have come to rescue you, I declare!”

“Mm. Here.”

Nana? And Mia, too?

The warmth flooded back into my failing heart, and colors returned to my vision.

“Hmph. I do not know how their voices are reaching, but their impertinence is in vain.”

Their voices were coming through the hair ornament Satou gave me.

The glowing dome of Heavenslight Protection clashed against the flying ship’s defensive barrier, sending up sparks of blue and white.

“Nothing can break through the Heavenslight Protection given to us by the gods.”

Father scoffed at the flying ship.

“Don’t underestimate master’s cheat barrierrrrrrr!!”

“Arisa, activate screw mode, I request.”

“All riiiiight! Witness our drill powerrrrrr!”

The barrier wall in front of the ship began to spin like a drill.

“Liza, hit the afterburner!”

“Understood, activating rear propulsion amplification device.”

The smoke emitting from the back of the ship suddenly grew more intense.

“This is the perfect chance to say it! Our drill is the drill that will pierce the—”

Arisa’s words were cut off as the Sea Lord launched giant ice and water spears at the Heavenslight Protection.



The spears broke on the barrier, the shock wave blowing the flying ship away like a leaf on the wind.

“Utter foolishness.”

Father was wrong. Thanks to their intervention, I was able to keep control of my senses until the end.

“It is done now, yes?”

“Yes, Father.”

With a wave of my arm, I created new ethereal clothes around my body.

I wrapped myself in the outfit of a shrine maiden honoring all eight gods.

Lending a hand to Yuuneia as she staggered, I picked up her clothes and put them back on her.

“Go, Reiaane.”

I stepped onto the thin pier that stretched from the Queen’s Tower, ending outside the Heavenslight Protection dome.

It was plenty wide enough for me to walk, but my legs still trembled at the sheer height.

Yuuneia, now linked to me magically, followed behind me.

*TWAAAAAKZWOOOOOWN!*

A horrible, chest-piercing sound sent a tremor through my body.

I heard Yuuneia collapse behind me.

One of the Sea Lord’s enormous tentacles was waiting at the end of the pier. Its tip split off into smaller appendages, wriggling like a sea anemone.

“I can’t let you do that, Seafoooooox!”

“All five mounted Magic Cannons are ready for discharge! Firing now!”

Arisa’s scream was followed by Lulu’s high-pitched voice.

A rapid succession of blasts assaulted my ears as red spheres struck the Sea Lord’s tentacle and exploded, tearing holes through it.

*TWAAAAKZWOOOOWN!*

The Sea Lord's roar reverberated.

The cannons were definitely hurting the monster.

But they cost too much magic to be fired over and over for long. Given the small size of the flying ship, no doubt those shots were its last.

"Tama, Pochi!"

"Reloooooad?"

"I'll show you how fast I am, sir!"

As the ship circled in the sky, I could see Liza, Pochi, and Tama working on the cannons.

"The Holytree Stone engine's bluecoin battery replacement is complete, I declare."

"Lulu! We've finished switching the Magic Cannon barrels, too!"

"Mm. Charged."

"Fire the next round!"

Another onslaught of cannon fire rained down on the tentacle.

By the end, one of the Sea Lord's tentacles had been torn off completely.

"Amazing..."

It was so unbelievable that I couldn't help a murmur of admiration.

"Yeeeeeeeeeeeeees! We're just getting started, guys!"

Arisa's words made a smile tug at my cheeks, but it vanished when I noticed the Sea Lord in the corner of my vision.

"Arisa! Ruuuun!"

"...Huh?"

A giant magic circle appeared above the Sea Lord, practically blotting out the sky.

In the next second, a water hammer huge enough to split the earth crashed

down on the space where the ship had been.

“Arisa... Nana...”

There was no way they could have survived such an enormous blow intact.

If its hull had been made of orichalcum or the branch of a World Tree, perhaps the ship itself would have been all right. But even then, the people inside would have been crushed into a paste.

I couldn't stop the tears that began to flow over my friends' all-too-sudden deaths.

*Arisa, Nana, Mia...* I engraved each of their names on my heart, trying to will myself to fight through the despair for their sakes.

But it was no use—the sadness was too deep for me to stand.

“Oh man, we almost ate it there.”

...*What?*

“This is no laughing matter, Arisa!”

After Arisa's remark, I heard the light sound of a fist bopping someone on the head and Satou's scolding voice.

Looking up, I saw the familiar sails rising toward me.

In the blink of an eye, the flying ship ascended in front of the pier where I had fallen to my knees.

“Honestly. I wasn't exactly expecting to have to teleport the whole ship the second I got back with the Return spell.”

Standing on the deck, Satou ruffled Arisa's hair for a moment before turning toward the tower.

Those dark, gentle eyes settled on me at once.

Breathing a sigh of relief when he saw me, Satou broke into a warm smile.

“Sorry to keep you waiting, Rei.”

My body was lifted gently into the air.

I floated along like a feather on the wind until I was gently placed on the deck



of his flying ship.

“I hope we didn’t worry you.”

His tone was so light and wonderfully ordinary that I couldn’t bear it—I flew into his arms and wept like a child.

But there was no sadness in those tears.

They filled my heart with warmth, like rain in the middle of a sunny day.

## Final Showdown

*Satou here. I think it's noble to carry out the final wishes of the departed, but not if it comes at the expense of the living. Wouldn't our lost loved ones prefer us to live happily?*

"<Reiaane! Have you forgotten your role?!>"

In her adult form, Rei's smile froze when she heard the Skeleton King shouting from below.

"<...Your role?>" I asked.

"<Yes, to control the Sea Lord and destroy it from the inside.>"

"<Sacrificing yourself in the process?>"

Rei didn't answer, but I could tell I'd hit the mark.

"Don't worryyy?"

"Master will take care of the rest, ma'am."

Tama and Pochi struck goofy poses. They were probably trying to cheer Rei up.

"Mm. Safe now."

"Larva—no, Rei. Please trust our master, I request."

"<Mia, Nana... But the Sea Lord is no ordinary monster.>"

Rei shook her head stubbornly.

"No ordinary monster? Is it stronger than a giant monster fish or a fully grown dragon?" Arisa asked casually.

"<...It's around the same scale.>"

"Well then, it won't be a problem."

"Agreed."

Liza and Lulu nodded sagely, and Rei finally began to look hopeful.

“<You really think you can take care of it?>”

“<Of course.>” I nodded. “<I was just waiting for everyone to convince you.>”

My Light Magic spell Condense was already on standby.

Meteor Shower was my first thought, but that would probably cause a lot of collateral damage, so I decided to hold off.

“<You utter fools! Even the floating island Lalakie could not defeat the evil Sea Lord with all the blessings of the gods. You think a single ship stands a chance against it?!>”

The Fear effect inflicted by the Skeleton King’s voice made my comrades quake in fear, but I simply shrugged.

“<Sure I do.>”

With that, I turned toward the Sea Lord, which was still pounding on the dome of the Heavenslight Protection.

The dome of light was still intact after the water attack.

“It’s over, Sea Lord.”

I moved away from the ship so that the shock waves from my attack wouldn’t hurt my friends, then selected Laser from the magic menu.

“Have fun with the Flame Lord and the Sky Lord in the underworld, pal.”

The 120 Lasers I produced combined into one via my Condense spell, speeding downward to graze the outer edge of the floating island.

Piercing the dome of light instantly, it bounced directly upward.

“<A sword of light...>”

The person who murmured this elegant name for the concentrated Laser was Yuuneia, who’d returned to the Skeleton King’s side.

With an eye-searing flash and a strong smell of ozone, the Laser sliced right through the dome and the Sea Lord alike.

The neatly cut halves of the Sea Lord slowly began to fall toward the water.

Grabbing its lifeless tentacles with Magic Hand as they slid off the dome, I popped the entire Sea Lord into Storage.

A corpse that big would cause collateral damage just by falling into the sea.

“<All done.>”

Turning back, I saw that Rei’s mouth was hanging open.

In fact, everyone but Liza and Tama was reacting more or less the same way.

Come to think of it, Liza was probably the only one who’d really seen me go all-out in battle before. It was a little strange that Tama wasn’t surprised, but that was probably her usual easygoing attitude.

“<Thank you, Satou. Now my mother and aunt have been avenged.>”

When I returned to the deck, Rei thanked me with an embrace.

For once, the iron-wall pair didn’t declare me “Guilty.”

“<...Why?>”

A bitter voice reached us as if from the depths of hell.

“<Why? Why? Why?!>”

It was the Skeleton King, his arms shaking with rage.

“<Why did an anomaly like you have to be here right now?!>”

“<...Just luck, I guess?>”

It was an honest answer, but that seemed to only increase the Skeleton King’s rage.

“<Why weren’t you here when my wife, Reiaane, sacrificed herself?!>”

I glanced at Rei, and she said that he meant her mother.

Confusingly enough, Rei’s mother was evidently named Reiaane as well.

“<I wasn’t born yet when Lalakie sank into the sea twenty thousand years ago.>”

That was probably sometime before the Jomon period—ancient history.

And even if I had been there at the time, it’s hard to say whether I would’ve

saved Lalakie when they were ruling the land with an iron fist.

Although I would've at least saved the royal sisters from sacrificing themselves, of course.

"<Yuuneia, control Reiaane and kill him.>"

My "Keen Hearing" skill picked up on the Skeleton King growling a low order to Yuuneia.

Still embracing me, Rei suddenly wrapped her hands around my neck.

"<S-Satou, my body is moving on its own...!>"

Rei was trying to resist, but her hands were moving against her will.

Looking down at her, I saw a bewitching valley of—I mean, a suspicious rune formed around her by miasma.

Really, it was too bad that using "Miasma Vision" turned everything black-and-white.

"<I can't stop—my hands won't listen to me...,>" Rei whispered in despair.

"<It's all right, Rei.>"

It was hard to speak, so I addressed her using the Telephone spell.

"M-master!"

The others looked afraid, so I reassured them with Telephone as well, then started teasing apart the miasma around Rei with my hands.

My trachea was too closed up to breathe, but I was able to supply my lungs with air directly from Storage, so it wasn't a problem.

"<Impossible! He's trying to undo my rune?!>"

The Skeleton King had noticed my plan. In the corner of my monochromatic vision, I could see him flying into a rage.

"<No! I won't allow it! Yuuneia, activate the sacrificial rune! Destroy that demon along with Reiaane!>"

"<...D-destroy my sister?>" Yuuneia hesitated.

"<What are you doing, Yuuneia?! Did you not hear my orders?!>"

The Skeleton King turned on her, and she flinched, cowering.

Her wide eyes wavered among fear of his wrath, adoration for her sister, and conflict over her impossible orders.

Yuuneia looked tearful as she glanced between the Skeleton King and Rei, then lowered her head silently.

“<Do it now! You fool!>”

The Skeleton King towered over Yuuneia, and she slowly raised her head.

Her expression had been frail as she looked at Rei, but now Yuuneia’s eyes glittered with defiance as she set her jaw.

“<...I—I won’t do it.>”

Her voice was soft and thin as she rejected her orders.

“<Yuuneia...,>” Rei whispered tearfully, still gripping my neck.

Silently praising Yuuneia’s bravery in my mind, I focused with all my might on undoing the miasma.

My vision filled completely with darkness, obscuring my view of what was happening around me.

“<What was that?>”

“<I won’t let her die for no reason.>”

“<You useless brat!>”

I heard the Skeleton King strike Yuuneia and a chorus of anger from my comrades, followed by the sounds of Fire Rods and Thunder Rods shooting.

The girls must have started attacking the Skeleton King for hitting Yuuneia.

In the event something did happen, I used the Signal spell to alert the figurehead golem Scarecrow to strengthen the ship’s defenses.

Then, as I was undoing the miasma, I noticed there was something different about it.

The first time I’d done this, the miasma had stuck to itself and formed puzzle ring-like knots, but this time it created a straightforward structure like a magic

circle. I could probably detach it much more quickly than I expected.

Working with the expert speed of an artisan, I quickly undid the miasma forming a rune around Rei.

Her fingers slowly loosened their grasp on my neck.

> **Skill Acquired: "Remove Curse"**

> **Skill Acquired: "Reverse Curse"**

> **Title Acquired: Riddle-Solving Master** > **Title Acquired: Exorcist** I didn't know if you could call what I'd just done an "exorcism," but at least I'd gotten some skills out of it.

Normally, I would've gotten these the first time I removed the miasma from Rei, which proved that the miasma this time was a little different from before.

The two skills looked pretty useful, so I quickly added some points and activated them.

Once my vision turned back to normal, I found the Skeleton King staring up at me as if in shock.

At first, I thought he wasn't doing anything, but he was actually in the middle of a magic chant.

".....■■■■■■■■ **Summon Wraith Knights Onryou Kishi Shoukan!**"

Six ghostly mounted knights appeared around the Skeleton King.

The horses and riders alike were transparent, as if they might take to the air at any moment.

These wraith knights were all level 45. They must be the Skeleton King's aces in the hole.

"Remote Arrow should do it, right?"

I produced the maximum amount of Remote Arrows, sending twenty homing in on each knight.

The wraith knights took off at once, flying around frantically above Lalakie like fighter planes trying to dodge anti-aircraft missiles.

Their high speed in the air probably had made them a serious threat to land-bound people in ancient times.

“<I-impossible! Dancing Javelin?! But that’s an advanced Practical Magic spell of the highest order! And in such enormous quantities?! How can someone of level thirty use such a technique?!>”

Watching as his wraith knights fell to my arrows one by one, the Skeleton King bellowed with rage.

I was sure he wouldn’t believe me even if I told him that it was just the lesser attack magic Remote Arrow.

“<You haven’t won yet! I’ll sacrifice the fragment of the queen’s sister from this useless doll to summon the God’s Servant!>”

“<F-Father?!>”

The Skeleton King grabbed Yuuneia by the hair and lifted her up, reaching a skeletal hand toward her chest.

Her stamina and magic gauges began rapidly decreasing; he must have been draining her life force through her hair.

“<Yuuneiaaaaa!>”

Rei’s anguished cry echoed across the Queen’s Tower.

Enveloped in a black glow, the Skeleton King’s hand plunged toward Yuuneia’s heart.

“<That’s as far as you go.>”

I was on them in an instant with “Flashrunning,” catching the Skeleton King’s hand with my own before it reached Yuuneia’s chest.

I’d placed “Spellblade” on my palm, so my hand was unharmed.

“<Wh-what’s this?!>”

Crushing the Skeleton King’s other arm, which was grasping Yuuneia’s hair, I delivered a restrained kick to his torso before he could react.

The Skeleton King rolled across the floor before crashing into a pillar.



“<Y-you saved me, demon?>”

Despite the fact that I'd rescued her, Yuuneia still seemed to think of me as the “black-haired demon.”

“<Would you mind using my name? It's Satou.>”

Using my new “Remove Curse” skill, I promptly undid the rune that was wrapped around Yuuneia. It went much more smoothly than when I didn't have the skill.

“<There, all done.>”

Once the miasma was removed, I released Yuuneia slowly.

“<Oops, careful there.>”

Yuuneia staggered, so I hurriedly caught her.

Even with the miasma gone, Yuuneia's face still looked pale, and her status condition read **Weakened**.

It was probably because so much of her life force had been sapped by the Skeleton King.

“<Accursed black chains! Rend them apart and drag them to eternal hell!>”

The Skeleton King yelled some nonsense, and the shadows below us turned into swirling black miasma, forming black chains that zipped toward us.

I produced Claidheamh Soluis from Storage and put magic power into it, slicing up the black chains near me with a single swipe.

“<Dance,> Claidheamh Soluis. Protect the ship.”

The Holy Sword left my hand, flying around to purify the chains with blue light before they could reach the flying ship.

That was one convenient weapon, all right.

“<Letting go of the Holy Sword will be your undoing!>”

The Skeleton King gave a triumphant cry, and more black chains appeared at his feet, charging toward me like tentacles.

“<We're doomed...>”

Yuuneia trembled in my arms.

“<Don’t worry—I’ll keep you safe.>”

I delivered a magic-infused kick toward the black chains, and they stopped short, almost as if avoiding my foot.

*I wonder...*

“<Turn back, black chains!>”

I shouted and waved my arm, and the black chains all sped back toward the Skeleton King.

It must have been my new “Reverse Curse” skill at work.

“<I-impossible! Why are my runes turning against me?!>”

The chains broke through the shadow barrier protecting the Skeleton King and started breaking his bones as well.



“<A-at this rate, I’ll be finished. Yuuneia, my beloved daughter, come to me...>”

Covered in wounds, the Skeleton King called to Yuuneia in a wheedling voice.

She immediately tried to break free from my arms, but this was undoubtedly a trap, so I held her fast.

“<I can save myself if I absorb your life force. There are plenty of homunculus life cores just like yours in the underground workshop. I can create a new Yuuneia at any time. So give me your life now!>”

What a selfish request.

Yet, Yuuneia still seemed to feel familial love for him; she reached out toward the Skeleton King, her eyes filled with tears.

Suddenly, a stone bullet shot past us.

“<Impossible!>”

The stone broke through the Skeleton King’s rib cage, sinking into the glowing bloodred core within.

“<Rei...aane... How could you strike me...?>”

Turning around, I saw Rei crying, poised as if she’d just released a magic spell.

She must have used her topaz ring to fire that bullet.

“<It was Mother’s final wish. She wanted me to stop you if you ever strayed from the path of humanity...>”

The Skeleton King’s bones crackled and splintered, turning into ash.

“<But I am immortal...the ruler of the great skyfolk... It cannot end...like this...>”

The king’s skull crumbled into ash, and his crown fell to the floor with a hollow *thud*.

“<Farewell, Father. Worry not—I will soon join you...>”

Rei murmured a disquieting promise as she watched the Skeleton King disappear.

The latter half was so quiet that only my “Keen Hearing” skill was able to hear it.

“<Thank you, Satou. Thank you, everyone.>”

Turning toward us, Rei smiled almost unnaturally.

“<Satou, please take me to the Queen’s Tower.>”

I nodded and carried her with Magic Hand.

“<The Sea Lord has been defeated, and my father has passed on. Now all that remains is for me to sink Lalakie back to the bottom of the sea and activate its self-destruct mechanism so that it does not fall into the wrong hands, and the world will be safe at last.>”

Rei gave a faint, martyr-like smile.

“<Please take care of Yuuneia for me. Father was only using her. The floating island Lalakie and I will atone for all their sins.>”

“<S-sister...don’t leave me... Take me with you!>”

Yuuneia reached out her hand, and Rei clasped it gently.

“<No, you must go with Satou. You still have a future of your own.>”

Yuuneia shook her head tearfully.

If this were a story, maybe it would have a tragic ending like that.

But apparently, I wasn’t the only one who wouldn’t let that fly.

“Arisa Kiiiiick!!”

Arisa’s clumsy flying kick hit Rei squarely on the rear.

I had carried her and the others along with us using Magic Hand, since they looked like they had something to say.

“<What? Arisa?>”

“Really, this is the problem with you sheltered princesses!”

“<But, Arisa, I...>”

Rei shrank from Arisa’s accusing gaze.

“There will be no buts about it, I declare in Arisa’s place.”

“<Nana...>”

“Mm. Reckless.”

“<You too, Mia?>”

Nana and Mia stepped in, and Tama and Pochi stood off to the side, cheering the girls on by waving fans—most likely provided by Arisa.

Lulu and Liza were preparing a bed for Yuuneia.

I entrusted Yuuneia to Liza and looked on as Arisa tried to convince Rei.

“Why would you sacrifice yourself after we’ve already resolved all the problems?”

“<If we leave Lalakie here, someone is sure to try to use it for evil.>”

“That doesn’t mean you have to die with it, though!”

Arisa was right, so I let them have it out.

“<...But you saw the history recorded on the slates, didn’t you? We skyfolk have done horrible things that the people of the land could never forgive. The royal family of Lalakie must atone.>”

If you asked me, the blame shouldn’t fall on Rei when she didn’t personally do anything wrong.

And the people who were to blame were long dead.

Arisa seemed to feel the same way, shrugging and rejecting Rei’s words.

“That was twenty thousand years ago, wasn’t it? Even the elves from that generation are gone by now, so I’m sure nobody but the high elves even remembers what happened.”

“<But...>”

Rei was too consumed with guilt to listen to Arisa’s reasoning.

Instead, Arisa grabbed Rei’s hand and dragged her over to me.

“Master! Give her a hug.”

I didn't really understand, but I complied with Arisa's request and embraced Rei gently.

"<Wait, Arisa? S-Satou, let go of me.>"

"Squeeze harder, master!"

Rei's adult form was very curvy, so this was a little embarrassing.

"<A-ah, Satou...>"

At first, Rei struggled with beet-red cheeks, but eventually she lowered her head and calmed down.

"Looks like she's calmed down now."

*I guess Arisa's plan was to physically reassure her.*

"Physical affection is the only way to go with these daddy-issue types."

*...Or not.* Luckily, the second half of Arisa's muttering was quiet, so Rei probably didn't hear it.

"If you go down with Lalakie, you're not solving anything but your own self-satisfaction. It won't help anyone or make anybody happy. Talk about zero upsides."

"<Arisa...>"

Rei lowered her eyes sadly at Arisa's slightly harsh words.

"<She's right, Rei. There are still lots of fun things to see in this world, so let's see them together.>"

I tilted Rei's chin up gently and spoke as delicately as I could.

"<Besides, if you die, Yuuneia will follow you.>"

"<He's right. There's no point in a world without you in it, Sister.>"

"<Yuuneia...>"

I released Rei and led her over to Yuuneia's bedside.

"<Let's... Let's both go on living, Sister.>"

"<Yuuneia!>"

Yuuneia sat up, and Rei wrapped her arms around her.

“I wish to participate, I declare.”

“Mm, me too.”

Nana and Mia embraced the two sisters, and the other girls piled on for a big group hug.

“Is this a gaaaame?”

“No pushing or you’re out, sir.”

A few of them didn’t quite seem to know what was going on, but it made Yuuneia and Rei smile through their tears, so that was fine with me.



## Epilogue

***Satou here. Sometimes, a crisis that threatens the entire world might be closer than you think. But if possible, I'd like to leave that kind of thing in the hands of superheroes and such and spend my days happily in a peaceful world.***

"Master, I brought you some tropical fruit juice."

"Thank you, Lulu."

As I was resting in the shade of a tree, Lulu brought me a glass garnished with a slice of fruit.

She was wearing a daring swimsuit that matched the island setting, but after half a month's stay, she seemed to be accustomed to it.

Once she'd handed me the glass, Lulu went back to the beach, where the rest of the group was playing the watermelon-splitting game.

This was the central island of Lalakie, the place we'd first come to in this territory.

I turned back to the conversation I'd been having before Lulu approached.

*"So you don't need any more help from the elves, Satou?"*

The person I was speaking with was Aaze, the high elf of Bolenan Forest.

Normally, the Telephone spell worked only within the range of a large city or so, but when I used it, it could easily reach the far-off Bolenan Forest.

*"No, that's all right. Thank you for your help with setting up the barrier."*

*"Of course! You did so much for us when you were in Bolenan."*

After the incident, we sank Lalakie back into the sea, removing the Blazeshine Sword and the elemental jewels from the towers on the Sealtower Islands to restore it to its initial camouflage state. However, Rei was still worried that an

outsider would attempt to use it for evil purposes again.

So in order to prevent that, I asked the elves of Bolenan to put up a Wandering Ocean spell around it, creating a barrier that would make it impossible to approach.

I felt bad about contacting them after so long just to ask a favor, but Aaze and the others were happy to help put up the barrier.

As thanks, I went back to Bolenan Forest with the Return spell and made them a feast with the bullet tuna. Surprisingly, they even liked the sashimi and sushi. Those elves really had sophisticated palates.

While I was there, I also asked the elf chef Nea if she could make chocolate from the cacao fruits. I tried making it myself, too, but apparently, I wasn't doing it right, because it didn't come out very good.

Additionally, while we were making the barrier, I stopped at the islands around Lalakie to plant some Treant seeds. With that, I had just about met my quota.

*"When are you coming back to visit again? Errrm, that is... Nea said she had some questions about 'chooklat,' and Kiya wanted to discuss some magic tools with you."*

Even through the Telephone spell, I could tell that she was too bashful to say what she really wanted to say.

*"Are Nea and Kiya the only people waiting for me?"*

I took a slightly hurt tone, mostly to tease Aaze.

*"Of course not! I'm sure Lua and Hiya want to see you, too... And so do I."*

*Yessss!*

I wanted to jump up and pump my fists in the air, but instead I took care not to sound too eager in my response.

*"Miss Aaze, I'd be happy to come see you every day if that is what you wish."*

*"Thank you, Satou. But I'm sure that would be difficult, so once in a while is fine. But, well...if it's not too much trouble, I suppose it'd be nice if we could*

*Telephone, um, most days, at least...*

Oof. She was so cute, I wanted to zoom over to Bolenan right away and kiss her on the spot.

*“Yes, anytime—”*

“<Master Satou! I used too much magic power in training. I need more magic! Should I take off my swimsuit?>”

Yuuneia came running across the beach and dove toward me, her gloomy demeanor completely cleared away.

From the way she was cozying up to me now, you would never guess that she used to call me a “black-haired demon.”

Yuuneia was reaching to undo her bikini top, so I quickly stopped her.

“No, you can keep your swimsuit on.”

*“Satou? What do you mean, ‘keep your swimsuit on’?”*

*“No, Miss Aaze, it’s not what it sounds like.”*

“Yuuneia! Master is *my* master. You must not call him ‘master’ so lightly, I insist. It is dangerous, and forbidden, and unfair hogging, I report.”

“<Aw, my sister already told me not to try to hog him. Anyway, Master Satou, please give me some magiic.>”

“Master! It is not fair to only supply Yuuneia with magic, I entreat. Supply me with magic, too, I request.”

Nana grabbed the shoulder straps of her one-piece swimsuit and pulled it down to her belly button.

She was still facing me, so I got to see her ample twin peaks dancing around rhythmically.

“<Whoa, those are huge, Nana! Not as big as my sister’s adult form, though.>”

Yuuneia blithely grabbed Nana’s breasts with a childlike lack of reservation.

“My chest belongs to master, I declare.”

“Nana, please just cover up your chest. You can hold a towel over it while I’m supplying you with magic—”

*“S-Satou? C-cover her chest? Wait, does that mean it’s uncovered? Satou?”*

Shoot. The Telephone spell was picking up my half of the conversation, sending Aaze into a mini panic.

“Is someone misbehaving over heeere?”

“Mrrr. Lewd.”

Catching wind of the fuss, Arisa and Mia came over.

“<Yuuneia, you mustn’t bother Satou too much, all right?>”

“<Sister!>”

Rei was behind them, already scolding Yuuneia.

She had returned to her low-power child mode, which made for a pretty amusing scene.

“H-hey, Rei! Don’t sit on master’s lap like it’s the natural thing to do!”

“Mm. No hogging.”

“I’ll move over here, then.”

Rei shifted to my right leg, and Arisa and Mia immediately scrambled to sit on my left leg.

“Tama toooo?”

“Pochi wants to sit, too, sir.”

“Don’t cause trouble for master, you two.”

The beastfolk girls joined in the battle as well, followed lastly by Lulu, who lightly claimed my back with her finger.

That tickled a little.

*“Satou, I’ve put Aaze to sleep with Forest Magic and placed her in bed.”*

*“Thank you, Miss Lua. I’ll try to come by the tree house tomorrow morning and explain things to Miss Aaze.”*

*“That would be appreciated.”*

Aaze’s panic had made her dizzy, so the shrine maiden elf Lua, her attendant, took over the Telephone call.

It would be impossible to explain this chaotic situation in words alone.

While I was speaking with Lua, something else caught the girls’ interest, and they ran off to the beach again.

“Satou, I need to speak to you...”

Rei was the only one left, looking at me with a serious expression.



“Are you really going to stay on the island?”

Now that we’d tied up some loose ends and finished our sightseeing in Lalakie, it was time for us to leave the island.

“I am. A half-ghost cannot function in a place like Labyrinth City, where the miasma is thick. And highly populated places tend to be rife with miasma, as well.”

“<I hate to part with you, Master Satou, but my place is by my sister’s side.>”

We were standing in front of Rei’s home, saying our good-byes.

I didn’t want to leave the two of them on this uninhabited island, but their decision was firm.

After Rei told me that day that she was going to stay on the island, all of us tried our hardest to change her mind, but even Arisa’s ardent speeches and Nana’s tearful displays weren’t enough to convince her.

Wanting to at least be of some help to them, I built them some things, like a house with a Holytree Stone engine and water and sewage systems and a planting field cultivated by living dolls.

“All right. I have the Return spell, so I’ll say hello whenever I’m on my way to visit Bolenan Forest.”

“Yes, I look forward to all of you coming to visit.”

“<Come back anytime, Master Satou.>”

Rei and Yuuneia each laid a kiss on my cheek.

“Larva—no, Rei. I will come back to see you, I declare.”

“Thank you for looking after me so kindly, Nana.”

Nana and Rei hugged each other tightly.

“From Aaze.”

Mia handed Rei a Silent Bell of Bolenan Aaze had given her.

Ownership of one indicated that you were under the protection of the elves, so fairy races and people who admired the elves would treat the holder kindly.

“Thank you, Mia.”

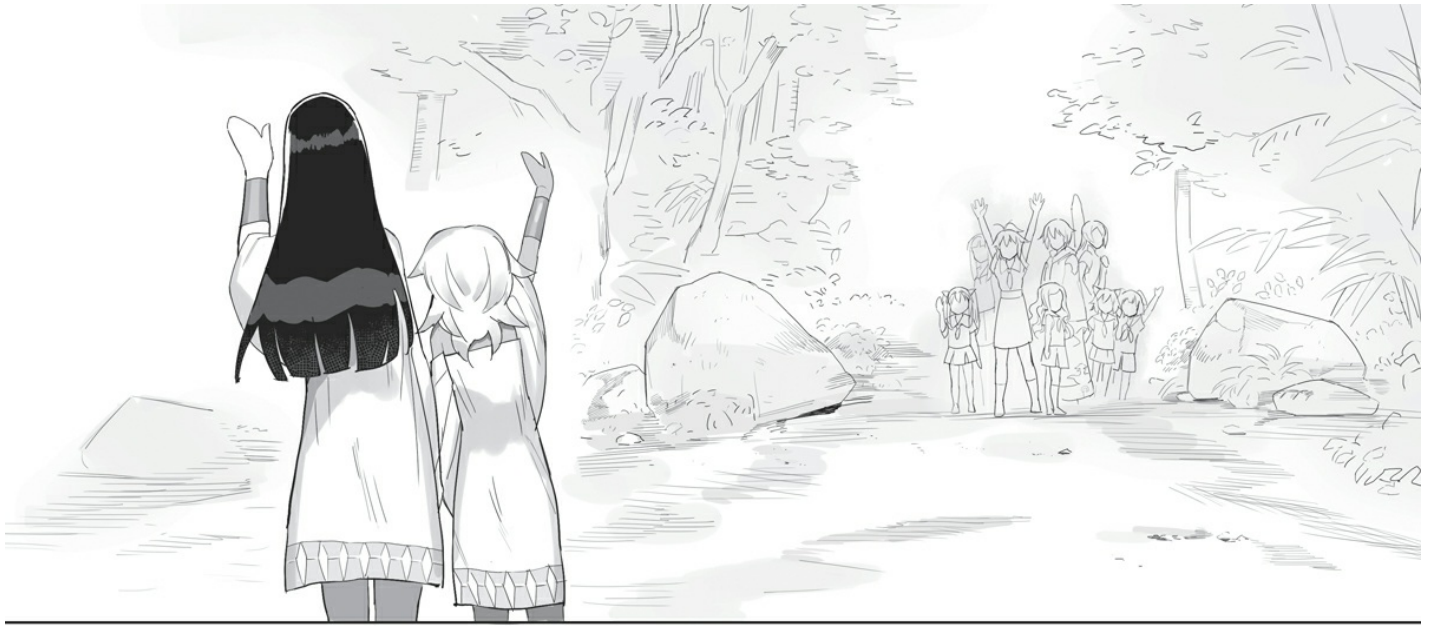
Rei reached out and accepted the bell, then wrapped her arm around Mia and pulled her into the hug with Nana. Since she had such small arms in this form, she could barely reach halfway around either of them, but it would probably be rude to point that out.

Of course, Yuuneia said her good-byes with the other girls as well.

Then, finally...

“Thank you, Arisa. It’s thanks to you that I’m able to be here smiling with everyone now.”

“Hee-hee, you’re making me bluuush.”



Arisa wasn't used to being complimented, so she lamely brushed off Rei's kind words.

"Arisa, answer her properly, won't you?"

"Lulu... Oh, all right."

With prompting from Lulu, Arisa corrected her posture.

"Rei! All I did was give you a little push, my dear. You're here because of your own strength and determination! You should be proud of yourself. No need to thank me for anything more than that!"

Arisa's rather manly declaration brought tears to Rei's eyes as she gave us the highest Lalakie thanks.

They both seemed a little embarrassed that Arisa had called Rei "*my dear*," but I decided not to tease them about it.



With that, we left Rei and Yuunea's island of Lalakie behind and turned our course toward the sugar route and Labyrinth City.

However, we were making a few stops along the way.

"Liquor Marquis Pendragon! You won't believe it! The Box came back! Nanashi the Hero returned it to us, just as you said!"

I stopped by the royal castle of Lalagi to say hello and was greeted by the king himself, who was practically jumping for joy.

I'd disguised myself as Nanashi the Hero to bring the Box back to them right after we sank Lalakie.

He'd looked about ready to die when it was stolen, after all.

"I'm glad to hear that. Congratulations."

"You said something to Sir Nanashi for us, didn't you, Liquor Marquis Pendragon?"

"No, I didn't do—"

"Always so modest! We shall have a three-day, three-night banquet to



celebrate your peerage ceremony! Minister! Buy up all the liquor in the castle town! We'll give it out to the people for free during the course of the banquet!"

The ministers in the castle all gleefully rushed around to prepare.

Normally, the minister of finance would be there to keep things in check, but in this case, he joined in on the merriment, checking around with his subordinates to see if they could find some extra leeway in the budget. I was a little concerned about this kingdom's future.

I went back to the inn to tell the others that we'd be staying for five days or so and to have them prepare to move into the room in the castle we'd been given for the course of our stay.

"Master, that groping bastard says he wants to show you something."

"All right. I'll go check it out."

While the others were getting ready to move, I went to the little shop they were renting to develop the new company.

"Sir Pendragon! I heard all about it! Why in the world didn't you tell us that you were a liquor marquis?!"

Rayleigh Ashinen, the marquis's son, came to greet me with a huge smile.

Behind him was a man with dark bags under his eyes and a young boy. These two were in charge of drawing up the trading business plan for the *SS Cloud*.

"Marquis, this is the business plan we've come up with. Please take a look."

"Certainly."

Ooh. It was a lot more thorough and easy to understand than I'd expected.

There were many places where numbers had been crossed out and rewritten. They explained that the original numbers were the old calculations, while the new numbers took into account the tax exemptions from my Liquor Marquis title.

Impressively enough, this business plan would keep them in the black even with the old numbers.

In the latter case, however, having only one ship was proving to be something

of a bottleneck. If they had two or three more ships, they would probably be able to keep up a more stable trade.

So, in the interest of clearing out my Storage a little as well, I made them an offer...

“Yes, I can most certainly invest in this. I’m planning on having two more ships brought to the harbor within the next day or two—would you like to use them for the company?”

“M-more ships?”

“Yes, I found some medium-size merchant ships being sold for a bargain on my journey, so I purchased a few. I thought I would sell them in Lalagi, but judging by these plans, it might be best to use them here instead.”

“Y-yes, please do! We’ll have a revised plan in the next few days.”

“I’m looking forward to it.”

I stood up to leave, but Rayleigh stopped me.

He wanted to ask if I minded that they weren’t using my name in the company title.

“No, that’s perfectly fine. You will need to fly my flag to indicate that your ships belong to a liquor marquis, but I believe you should choose the company name for yourselves.”

I wanted to remain as a shareholder, not the owner.

“All right. Then we’ll use Dragonpen Trading Company as the name. It might sound a bit too similar to the Ganika Marquisate’s Dragonwrit Trading Company, but that makes it easy to understand that both companies have had your help, right, Sir Pendragon?”

Rayleigh looked pleased with himself, so I said it was an excellent name and agreed.

I could tell that the other names he had in mind would all use my name directly, so I figured this choice was the easiest.

Since they were rewriting the plan anyway, I offered an additional amount of

money if they would collect rare products and ingredients from the southern islands.

The other two men's faces were a fascinating mixture of excitement over the new developments and despair over the additional work.

Then, after my liquor marquis peerage ceremony and a nightmarish three-day, three-night drinking party...

“Sir Pendragon, your tolerance for liquor is so remarkable that it will be spoken of in our kingdom for generations. In commemoration of your defeat of a hundred drunkards, I present you with this medallion. It is sure to serve you well in any nation or city within the sugar route.”

“Thank you very much, Your Highness.”

“May your journey be safe, and may you encounter many more marvelous liquors.”

After this very Lalagian exchange with the king, we departed from the Kingdom of Sorcery Lalagi.

Our journey went fairly smoothly from there: We visited various small nations and port cities and towns, sampling their local delicacies, and while we occasionally got caught up in little incidents and uproars, we all made it safely back into Shiga Kingdom territory.

We passed the Ganika Marquisate on the route, entered a port in the neighboring Ukeu County, and crossed the mountains to reach the port of Kiriku County on the other side of the peninsula.

This was a very large peninsula, so many travelers used this shortcut to pass through.

When we reached Ukeu County, we switched to a normal small ship, and I put the flying ship away in Storage.

Both Ukeu County and Kiriku County were small, rustic counties that centered around the fishing industry.

Despite being so similar, or perhaps because of it, their respective rulers didn't get along, but that didn't matter much to us, since we were just passing

through.

“Master, what ship are we going to take from here?”

“Don’t worry. I’ve got an idea.”

Most sailors didn’t like to let women aboard, but there were some exceptions.

I set foot in a certain shop some distance away from the rest of the port.

“Hello there.”

“If yer looking for a brothel, try the red-light district on the other side of the harbor. If yer lost, just head right along the beach that way and ye’ll be back in the center.”

The good-looking female captain barely glanced up as she waved us back toward the door.

“No, I was hoping you could carry eight passengers to the trade city Tartumina.”

“Ye can’t be serious— Ah, I see. That includes those little ladies over there, does it? Well, all right, then. Yer all welcome aboard the *SS She-Devil!*”

Thus, we became passengers on the woman’s galley ship traveling toward Tartumina.

“Look alive, ye scurvy dogs!”

“““Aye-aye, Cap’n!””””

True to its name, the crew members of the *SS She-Devil* were all women.

Many of them were young ladies wearing nothing but a chest wrap on their upper bodies, so it was hard to know where to look.

The passenger seats were right across from the rowers’ seats, so I couldn’t really turn away.

“Yer welcome to look as much as ye like, if ye like what ye see!”

“S’long as ye pay us back with some tasty ale once we get to the harbor!”

“I’d prefer rum—the cheap stuff’s fine with me!”

“I’ll happily treat you to all the ale and rum you’d like.”

The rowers laughed heartily, and I smiled in return.

Drinking seemed to motivate them as much as any sailor; their rowing became a little faster than before.

“Tartumina’s in sight now, mister. This harbor’s terrible crowded-like, so d’you mind if we take a detour to the next one?”

“Of course—whatever you think is best.”

Sure enough, since this was the heart of foreign trade in the Shiga Kingdom, there were big trade ships from all over in the harbor, with countless smaller ships moving haphazardly among them.

When we arrived at the next harbor, it was still far livelier than any we’d seen on the sugar route or even in Sutoandell.

“Hey, mister! You better join us later!”

“Yes, I’ll be sure to come by as soon as we get to an inn.”

Once we’d laid anchor, I rented an entire bar for the *She-Devil* crew to drink and eat as much as they desired.

Meanwhile, we headed to an inn that should accept demi-humans, according to the tip we’d received at the harbor chamber of commerce.

The people there were a bit gruff at first, but they changed their tune quickly when I showed them the medallion the king of Lalagi had given me.

“I can’t believe the Lalagi red silk and the Ishrallie Heaven’s Teardrops sell for so much here.”

“No kidding. The red silk sold for seven times the original price, and the Heaven’s Teardrops were more like thirty times.”

As Arisa and I chatted excitedly about our deals, we arrived at the inn, so I filled out the paperwork for our room and went back to the bar, where the lady sailors were waiting.

I left the rest of my group at the inn; I’d paid for a full course of the inn’s famous Ohmi beef for each of them.

Taking a shortcut through a sketchy part of town, I wound up near an arena.

“Viceroy! If your wife finds out that you’re going to the arena this late at night, you’ll be in big trouble!”

“Fool! When else can I enjoy time with those gorgeous young men except when Laytell is in Kiriku County?”

This lascivious conversation was between an extremely rich, noble-looking middle-aged man and an elderly butler. Four handsome young knights were flanking them in shining silver armor.

Two sentinels were guarding the path this group was attempting to walk down, one of whom stepped forward to address them.

“I’m terribly sorry, good sirs. This way lies a corrupt street used by the lowly commoners. A noble such as yourself should take care not to—”

“How dare you block my path, man?!”

The sentinel lowered his head, being almost unnaturally polite as he attempted to tell the noble in a roundabout way that only certain people were allowed down this street, but the noble refused to listen, striking the guard with his staff and attempting to force his way through.

Enraged, the other guard stepped forward to bluntly defend his comrade.

“Hey, noble! This is the path to the gladiator slaves’ waiting room. If you want to watch the fight, use the front entrance!”

“What an impolite cur. Put him in his place!”

The four knights drew their swords and slashed at the two guards, who were armed only with clubs.

*Seriously?!*

Blood flew everywhere, and the two guards hit the ground in an instant.

Come to think of it, in this kingdom, being rude to an upper-class noble often meant becoming a slave or even being killed on the spot. This sure made me miss democracy.

“Finish them off,” the noble said coldly, then walked down the path with his

butler and two of his knights.

The remaining two knights raised their swords above the fallen guards, so I decided to interfere.

“Excuse me, Sir Knights. Have these two committed some offense?”

If I let them kill these guys right in front of me, I’d definitely have nightmares later.

“Are you a friend of these mannerless curs?”

“Yes, and I must apologize for their insolence and boorish ways. Here, perhaps this will make up for your troubles.”

I slipped the knights two small pouches of gold coins.

“Hmph. Very well.”

Judging by the weight that there was gold inside, the knights nodded satisfactorily and went after their master.

I made each of the guards drink a recovery potion. Arena staff members came over to see about the commotion, so I left them to take care of the rest.

“Are these all the demonic potions you’ve got?”

“I’ve got plenty more corpse potions.”

“We’re good on those for now. How much can you have ready for next month?”

“That’s up to you, Mister Daman.”

“Don’t get smart with me, plunderer.”

Now people were trading illegal drugs? This Tartumina place seemed pretty rough around the edges.

“If we pilfer too much, Sokell will catch on to us, so let’s keep the extra side jobs to a minimum.”

My “Keen Hearing” skill picked up on some secret-sounding information from delinquent-sounding men, but I wasn’t too interested, so I just wrote down the men’s names and the nature of their offenses and delivered them in a letter to

the guard's post.

Better to leave arresting criminals to the professionals.

That evening, I ended up drinking with the sensual lady sailors until morning.

It felt a bit like a witches' gathering, but they were pretty soft in various ways, so that was all right with me.

“Ryyyye?”

“And Effie, sir!”

A few days later, I used the Return spell to go back to Bolenan Forest and retrieve our horses and carriage, much to the delight of Tama and Pochi.

Liza and Nana seemed happy to ride on a runosaur again, too.

We could have used my DIY airship to take a shortcut to Labyrinth City, but we decided to enjoy the trip in our horse-drawn carriage instead.

Besides, I wanted to test out the electric bicycle–like contraption I'd attached to the new magic carriage.

The journey wound up being fairly relaxed, without too many monster or bandit encounters.

Along the way, we stopped at the crossroads city Kelton, which was a major land-based trading point situated between the trade city Tartumina, the royal capital, and Labyrinth City Celivera. There was an incredible variety of both goods and people there.

Next we came to Furusawa, a small city halfway between Kelton and Celivera; after that, there were less and less villages, until we eventually started passing through a wasteland.

The intervals between the villages along the road grew ever larger, and it was clear that the land was far more barren out here.

“Labyrinth City is just beyond those mountains, right?”

Arisa, sitting next to Lulu in the coachman's stand, opened the hatch to talk to me.

“That's right. We're almost there.”



Finally, the carriage crossed over the mountains, and the wide basin containing Labyrinth City Celivera came into sight.

The part of the basin closest to us was covered in cactus-like plants called “veria,” dotting a wasteland that was basically a desert.

Far in the distance in Labyrinth City was a hill that contained the entrance to the labyrinth; the basin beyond that, leading up to the mountains on the other side, was populated with all kinds of plant monsters.

Beyond that mountain range was apparently a desert.

“We finally made it!”

“Aye-aaaye!”

“Now our battle really begins, sir.”

Arisa, Tama, and Pochi grinned excitedly.

*I wish they wouldn't say such ominous things.*

“Let's get going. There aren't any villages between here and Labyrinth City, just rest stops with rain coverage, and some of them don't even have water wells.”

“Okey-dokey! Let's-a go!”

With that cheerful exclamation from Arisa, the carriage set off down the hill toward Labyrinth City.

I sat back, imagining all the new encounters, sights, and delicious foods waiting for us in Labyrinth City.

It was sure to be an exciting adventure.

## Afterword

Hi there. I'm Hiro Ainana.

Thank you for picking up the ninth volume of *Death March to the Parallel World Rhapsody*!

It might already say it on the cover, but...

***Death March* is getting an anime adaptation.**

When I heard this at a meeting with my editor, my first thought was, *Not just a drama CD?!* but I was so surprised that I wound up saying, "Oh, really?" in a neutral-sounding tone.

I was jumping for joy on the inside, but it still didn't feel real yet, so I ended up only asking for extra pages for this volume and things like that while I calmed down.

I'd love to prattle on about the anime now, but I already used up most of my pages with the main story, so I'll have to move on to announcements to keep the afterword short. There will be more information about the anime on the Kadokawa Books website, so please keep an eye on that.

Announcement #1: a game adaptation. It will be distributed to all applicants for the Kadokawa Books first anniversary campaign. The deadline is December 15, so please make sure to apply by then.

Announcement #2: the survey on the Kadokawa Books official site. Respondents get to read short stories, like the new *Death March* story "The Autumn Forest," so make sure you check it out.

Announcement #3: the fourth volume of Ayamegumu's comic adaptation of *Death March* goes on sale the same day as this volume. It's full of highlights unique to the comic, so you should definitely pick it up along with the novel version if you can.

I don't have much space left, but let's discuss this volume's highlights!

This ninth volume is a completely new story that takes place in the southern seas. In order to save the white-haired girl on the cover, Satou and friends face frightening monsters, nasty pirates, and even an ancient ghost that threatens to destroy the entire world! You can't miss the climax of this one!

Of course, this is *Death March*, so there's plenty of everyday scenes, too, like enjoying the salty sea air and drinking with friendly sailors.

I ended up adding way too much content, so this one has about 20 percent more pages than usual. It's about 180,000 words long, which is a good 40,000 longer than usual.

Finally, my usual thank-yous! My editors H, K, and the new editor A, as well as shri, everyone else who was involved in the development and sale of this book, and of course all of you readers who've supported the series! Thank you all so much!

Thanks for reading all the way to the end of this book!

See you next time in the Labyrinth arc!

*Hiro Ainana*

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