

賀東招二

Illustrator
なかじまゆか

02



あま

ぎ

A m a g i B r i l l i a n t P a r k

アマギブリリアントパーク



ファンタジア文庫

DISCLAIMER: The work translated here is the legal property of its original copyright holder. It is translated here without monetary incentive solely for the purposes of promoting domestic interest in the work and improving personal language proficiency. Should the work be licensed for English translation or upon request by the original copyright holders, please stop distribution of this document at once.

Please send any and all comments to nanodesuadmin@googlegroups.com



甘城
Brilliant Park
 Brilliant Park
パーク
#02



Oh, my apologies... I was in a rush, you see...

What's with the blood stain...?



The biggest problem Amagi Brilliant Park faced was a lack of manpower, and just when they opened a recruitment drive for part-timers...



Tiramie

A mascot of Amaburi.
The fairy of flowers.
There isn't anybody
inside of him either.

Moffle

A mascot of Amaburi.
The fairy of sweets.
Of course, there is
nobody inside of him.



Kanie Seiya
The acting manager
of Amaburi.
Otherwise, a normal
high school student.

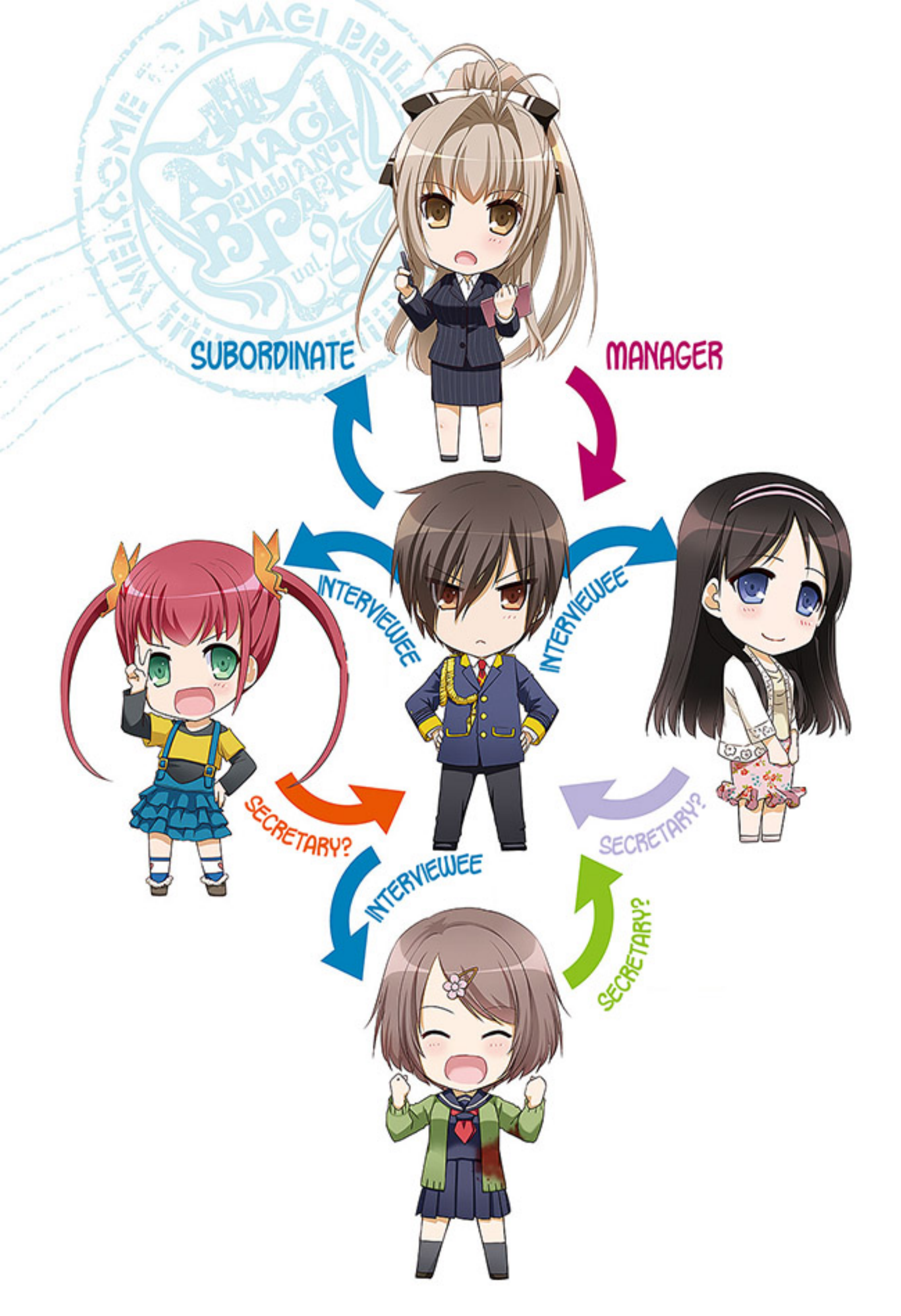
Sento Isuzu
Head Secretary of
Amaburi.
Also, the only person in
the secretariat.

Macaron
A mascot of Amaburi.
The fairy of music.
There is nobody inside
of him.



From a business perspective, we really should be acting a little more yuri in a bath like this.





Prologue

By resorting to causing a fire at a stadium, Amagi Brilliant Park was saved from its imminent closure.

The events that led up to this point had been rather (un)fortunate, though the park's safety had yet to be guaranteed.

And as he embarked on a brand new semester of high school, Kanie Seiya, the acting manager of Amagi Brilliant Park, began his arduous work of ironing out the problems neglected during his 2-week stint.

Some of the problems he faced included the enormous debt that resulted from the aggressive 30 yen campaign, the dip in number of guests due to the increased ticket price and the cast members' conceit after avoiding the threat of the park's closure.

Furthermore, though Seiya had bought more time for Amagi Brilliant Park; the fundamental problem remained unsolved. Amagi Brilliant Park was still the same old 'pathetic theme park', and they had until next March to attract another 600,000 visitors or they were doomed. Along with that, there was no way his stadium trick would work twice, meaning that he had no choice but to tackle this next obstacle with brute force.

In short, despite the fact that it was only April, none of them could afford to slack off.

For now, the most pressing issue he faced as the acting manager was—

Chapter 1: We're Lacking in Manpower!

Part 1

"We're lacking in manpower!"

It was the first week of April, and Kanie Seiya raised his voice as he announced this in the meeting room.

The people sitting behind the cheap tables that were placed around the room were important representatives that kept Amaburi afloat. One would imagine them to be wearing suits and formal attire, but that was not the case.

In fact, a big proportion of the attendees were creatures with heads taking up a third of their height, taking up forms resembling rodents, horned dragons and all sorts of fanciful creatures. These were also the real cast members who came from a certain magical realm. All of them were returning Seiya's comment with unpleasant expressions on their faces.

"We're lacking in manpower," Seiya repeated. "To be honest, we're lacking in many resources, but the manpower shortage is especially evident in all departments of the park, such as maintenance, F&B and even cleaning. We urgently need more staff!"

Yet, in contrast with Seiya, who was tightly clenching his fists, the representatives in the room maintained an apathetic composure.

“Actually, we should have been hiring staff for quite a while now, but...” Sento Isuzu muttered. She was dressed in a red uniform.

The royal guard of Maple Land had since been appointed as head of the secretariat.

“But we’re not! Think of this, Sento. I’ve appointed you as the head of the secretariat, but just how many people are there in this secretariat? Let us hear it!”

“One.”

“There you have it, guys! Only one! Well...I guess there isn’t much use of a second secretary, but that’s beside the point. What’s important is that an increasing number of departments are becoming one-man shows! Also, where’s our head of security? Ookuro!”

“Ah yes, over here.” Ookuro from the security department raised his hand. He was not a resident of Maple Land, and neither were the other old security guards rotating night shifts with him.

“What’s the strength of your department?”

“We have four people, two of which are part-timers.”

That meant that only one person would be on duty in a three-shift schedule.

"This too! This is all the manpower we have to cover 500,000 square meters of land! Are you guys crazy? What would happen if some nutso carrying a knife jumped onstage? Do you think Ookuro would be able to manage that by himself!?"

"Please leave that to me, Kanie-kun. If worse comes to worst, I'll do anything it takes to stop the attack, even if it means jumping in as a sacrifice."

"Stop the attack, huh. Mind telling me, what would he do after that? Obviously, he'd move on to another target and you'd be too busy swimming in your own blood to stop it! Ridiculous!"

"I agree."

Scratching the back of his head and smiling (in frustration), Ookuro sat back on his seat.

"Don't worry about it, *fumo*. If it came to that, I'd kill him without hesitation," said Moffle, the cast leader of the park. The lead mascot was wearing a fancy hat and bowtie, and had a physique that resembled a wombat or a rodent of some sort.

"Then what would happen next? The next day's newspapers would be inking 'Amagi Brilliant Park's Lead Mascot Kills Man on Impulse' in bold! How are we gonna attract any guests then?"

"We'll still attract some, *fumo*. I'll become a hero, after all."

"Your job is to please the guests, not murder them!"

"Come to think of it, you're right, *fumo*."

Ignoring that rat who did not seem to understand his point, Seiya continued, "This isn't just about security. We're severely short on manpower in various departments. If we resort to borrowing help from cast members onstage, our service quality is sure to take a dip. We can't let that happen."

"In short, recruitment?" Isuzu asked.

"Yes."

"Even when our budget is essentially zilch?"

"We'll find a way around that. Hey, what's up with that face? Don't worry, I'll think of something regarding our finances."

Truth be told, this was a measure that carried a lot of risk. Nonetheless, he had to put on façade of confidence.

“So actually, I’ve already set up a recruitment drive. We’ve begun receiving applicants for various roles, and the interviews will take place starting next week. All members are to prepare themselves for this!” declared Seiya.

“Can we recruit enough staff members with such short notice...?” Isuzu wondered. Her remark was not of sarcasm but of genuine concern.

“I’m not sure myself. But we won’t know ‘till we try.”

“I guess you’re right...”

Right after, Tricen, the head of public relations, spoke. “Kanie-san’s right. We might even score a talented individual among the prospective employees! Maybe...just maybe...even a cute babe...or a hot chick...or a pretty lady... This is just like a PC game! The male cast members will be delighted!”

“Cut that crap and graduate from your gaming delusions. I feel offended as a Western-style gamer,” Seiya said with a frown.

“My my, so you’re one of *those* people, I see. You know, the shy type who would waste their trip to Akiba with karaoke and shopping for electronics, but splurge on 18+ games on Amazon.”

"I'm not exactly a big fan of 'artificial people'...and hey, I'm a high schooler. I don't play those things."

"My apologies...but well, what I'm saying is that there might be people among the prospective employees who are gunning for your beautiful secretary's position."

"Don't be stupid. Hey Sento, why don't you say something to educate Tricen over here?" Responding to Tricen's statement in disbelief, Seiya turned to Isuzu.

She nodded at him, thought for a brief moment and replied, "You're right. If they were more qualified than me, I'd gladly step down from my position as head of the secretariat."

The room's atmosphere became tense.

Must you be so serious all the time? Seiya considered hurling that comment at her, but stopped and sighed. That's just the way Isuzu was; unable to understand when people were joking. He decided not to jest and risk hurting her feelings.

Seiya had heard Isuzu was a royal guard from Maple Land, the founder of Amaburi. He didn't know much about the realm of magic, but apparently she was an elite amongst the guards. Then again, it became clear that even people like her had their shortcomings—

"...Forget it, moving on..."

Amaburi had heaps of problems waiting to be addressed. Seiya began going through each and every one of them, knowing that they were equally important. Isuzu did not exhibit any strange behavior for the rest of the meeting.

Part 2

That night, after the meeting, Sento Isuzu had a peculiar dream. For some reason, she was together with Seiya working at the HR department, and the interviewees were all pretty ladies.

The first one up was a relatively mature-looking lady who had a very motherly appearance. She was taller than Isuzu and had a very well-proportioned physique.

(I'd like to work as your secretary.)

The woman said this as she faced Seiya.

(It may not look like it, but I am a certified grade 2 secretary. I'm sure I can be of use to you.)

Hearing that, Seiya leaned back and grinned, seemingly impressed.

(Wow, is that so? You're hired. I hope you'll satisfy me with your...attributes.)

Isuzu wanted to question his judgment, but couldn't muster the courage to do so. She opened her mouth in an attempt to speak, but nothing came out. It was just like trying to speak while floating in the vacuum of space.

Seiya hammered the seal of approval onto her application form. However, the woman did not leave. Instead, she walked over to Seiya and snuggled against his left shoulder.

(Good girl. I can feel your curves pressing onto me. This is such a “pressurizing” interview, hahahaha!)

(Oh my, Kanie-san. I’m digging your bulges too.)

(Oh shucks, you flatter me. Hahahaha!)

Noticing Isuzu’s glare, Seiya smirked.

(What are you waiting for, Sento? Call the next person.)

Isuzu reluctantly walked out and invited the next person into the room.

The next applicant was a lively female high schooler. She had chestnut hair and her big eyes gave off a cheeky impression. Furthermore, her complexion seemed very healthy, something that could also be interpreted from the size of her breasts.

(Umm...Pleased to meet you! I am applying to be your secretary!)

The girl said with an expression so nervous, it was commendable for her to even say anything.

(T-This is the certificate of my basic grade secretary qualification! I-I hope this will suffice!)

So even she has a basic certification?

Despite Isuzu's frowning, Seiya grabbed the seal of approval yet again and slammed it on her application form.

(Hired! Come on over here and rest your tits on me. Hahahaha!)

(O-Okay!)

The girl circled over and hugged on to Seiya's right shoulder.

(Now that's double the "pressure"! Hahahaha!)

(Nice going, Kanie-san!)

(You're handling this very well!)

Just what are these three doing... Ah, I just want to shoot them away and go home.

After another round of loud laughter, Seiya ordered Isuzu to “call the next person in”.

Soon after, a female elementary school student with long and black hair walked into the room. She had a tiny figure and innocent eyes that sparkled with youth.

(Let me be your secretary!)

The girl glanced at Seiya and the rest with pride forged from naiveté.

(I’ll take over you incompetent lot and rebuild the park. What are you waiting for? Hurry and hire me!)

(Hmph, hired! Now, lie on my lap!)

(I guess I have no choice. But just this time, okay?)

She walked over to Seiya and leaned back.

(The weight on my lap is splendid! Beat that, triple the “pressure”!)

(Nice going, Kanie-san!)

(You're holding on well!)

(Geez...what a troublesome fellow...)

Having gathered a team of replacement secretaries, Seiya laughed once again. Isuzu attempted to speak to him regarding this strange situation she was in, but all she could do was open and close her voiceless lips like a dying fish. Seiya and the three girls looked at her in disdain.

(Hey, Sento. Why are you still here?)

Said Seiya.

(In case you haven't realized, I no longer need you. You can leave now. Go serve that princess Latifa as a side character or something.)

Don't mess with me, there's no way I'd do that—

Right after that, she fired a round through the roof, and woke up.



She was holding on to her musket that was embellished in gold stripes and ivory. For some reason, there was a bullet hole in her ceiling.

Isuzu was lying on her bed in the park's dormitory. Beams of light trickled through the holes in the gypsum board, causing Isuzu to inadvertently squint.

So it was all just a dream. Isuzu came to realize that as she came back to reality.

The three beautiful secretaries were all fictional characters. Nonetheless, they felt like an embodiment of something that she could never be, no matter how hard she tried.

The man responsible for that mess was also just a product of her imagination. There was no way that could have been Seiya. Isuzu knew him all too well; he was definitely not a person like that. Nevertheless—

"Mm..."

She got up from her bed, still holding her musket.

The muzzle-loader "Steinberger" passed down from her ancestors was a magical weapon that was bound to her body and soul. As such, Isuzu was able to bring out her weapon as long as she had exposed skin. She always chose to bring her weapon out from underneath her skirt because the exposed skin around her thighs made the weapon easy to access.

Putting that aside, Isuzu had never once before shot her musket while sleeping. *To think that I'd actually get so worked up over a dream...*

She checked her clock and realized it was only a little past 6 in the morning. Isuzu considered sleeping for a little longer, but she was already wide awake. Resigning herself to staying awake, she parted with her bed and went to take a shower.

Isuzu had told Seiya many times that she felt like dying if she did not take at least 3 showers a day. While she wouldn't actually die as a result, her statement was certainly no exaggeration.

After removing her underwear and throwing it to the side, Isuzu stepped in and submerged herself in the hot water.

Drops of water trickled down from her skin, creating tiny ripples in the bathtub upon impact with the surface. Isuzu stared blankly at folds in the water and wondered. *Why did I have such a dream?*

The answer gradually surfaced in her consciousness. Dreams like this were a result of a person's insecurity. *Just what could I be insecure about?*

Was it the lack of manpower? That would have been understandable.

Furthermore, Isuzu had spent a considerable amount of time managing the theme park and even resorted to violence when the cast members did not cooperate.

Despite that, her management did not generate any visible improvement, creating much resentment among the cast. In the end, they had to rely on Kanie Seiya, one of the people of the land and the Oracle's chosen one, to save the park. Of course, Isuzu was eternally grateful to Seiya, but his actions certainly caused her to feel disgraced.

But then again, that doesn't really matter. Isuzu had already accepted the fact that she might be recalled back to Maple Land at any time. She was unable to fulfill her duty, after all.

Squatting on the bathtub, Isuzu showered herself with some warm water.

Even if it were due to my shortcomings, that alone shouldn't have caused a dream like that...

Or perhaps it was jealousy? Could Isuzu be jealous of Seiya's ability to somehow gather so many guests in the short time frame given to him? *No, I don't think that's it either...*

Truth be told, Isuzu held a great admiration for Seiya's skills. If she weren't as dense and serious, she would definitely have praised and hugged him while crying in joy. But she hesitated. In the end, Isuzu could not bring herself to do it.

If not jealousy, then what?

Or perhaps, could it be... *No, no, no...not a chance.*

Holding that thought back, Isuzu briefly shook her head and turned off the shower.

I have to do something about this. Isuzu could not afford to harbor such feelings. No way at all. Firstly, Seiya would definitely laugh in disbelief. Anyone who found out would probably mock her too.

Telling herself that, Isuzu grabbed a clean towel and dried herself. As always, she put on her knee socks first; her underwear came after. Isuzu had unknowingly picked up this habit from a very young age without any particular reason.

Right then, Isuzu recalled the incident at Seiya's place.

Seiya had stepped into the bathroom while Isuzu was putting on her clothes right after stepping out of the bath. Despite that, Isuzu had merely showed what the people of the land would call a "poker face".

Nonetheless, the lack of reaction hadn't meant that she was perfectly all right with it. After all, Isuzu was the type who would retain her composure when facing many challenging situations. She could not even guarantee a flinch if a bomb were to explode right next to her.

After putting on her underwear and blow drying her hair, Isuzu brushed her teeth and looked into the mirror. She tried to make some facial expressions.

Her lips and eyelids barely moved, resulting in an awkward attempt at a smile that could not be discerned from a frown, and vice versa. In the end, she was still hopelessly bad at expressing her own emotions.

Isuzu put on her formal lip gloss and squeezed her lips together. The motion of her lips was impressive and brightened the dull look of her face.

She tried it once again but it ended in failure, with her lips warping into a "∩" shape.

Part 3

The food sold at Amaburi's staff canteen (called A.M.) sucked.

Nobody knew why the canteen was called A.M., and its menu had remained unchanged for three years. It consisted of only three dishes: some weird smelling gyudon, messy spaghetti, and chicken curry.

Of course, the chicken curry was just as awful. The carrots and onions were hard and cold, while the partially uncooked chicken that was insufficiently seasoned with curry powder gave off a nose-stinging odor.

One could say that it was hard to mess up curry, and yet the chefs in A.M. had actually managed to succeed in doing so. Perhaps the cast members could earn some extra money on the side by marketing their "World's Nastiest Curry".

As punishment for being shaken up by that dream, Isuzu went ahead and bought a coupon for the chicken curry (though the main reason was due to its cheap price tag of only 240 yen).

"Woah, I never knew that there were people who actually eat the curry here, *ron*." A voice came from behind Isuzu as she reached down to pick up her change of 260 yen from the ticketing machine.

She turned around to find Macaron standing behind her.

Macaron was an adorable mascot with white fur who resembled a sheep. He was a veteran cast member working at “Macaron’s Music Theatre” in “Sorcerers’ Hill”, one of Amaburi’s areas.

“Good morning, Macaron.”

“Good morning, Isuzu-chan. Just curious...are you really gonna eat that, *ron*?”

“I’m eating this because of personal reasons...and also because it’s cheap.”

“R-Right... But take care, *ron*. Wanipi once tried some, and he had fire coming out from both ends. He ended up facing dehydration and was administered an IV at Amagi Hospital, *ron*.”

Isuzu wondered why the hospital didn’t conduct an investigation to determine the cause of it, but decided to put that thought aside and moved on.

She exchanged the coupon for a tray of chicken curry and brought it to one of the tables.

The canteen in the morning was quite packed, with more than half of the patrons being cast members living in the dormitories.

Isuzu was one of those, for she stayed in the female dormitory. As such, she ate the majority of her meals in the staff canteen. If she recalled correctly, Macaron lived in the male dormitory, whereas his sidekicks Moffle and Tiramie had rented cheap apartments outside of the park.

Each of the cast members had their own preferences, and Isuzu had no reason to be nosy about this.

“May I, *ron*?” Macaron approached and sat opposite her. One would only need to look around and examine the large crowd to find his actions natural. Isuzu nodded blankly.

Macaron had gotten the fried fish set meal, one of the dishes that were moderately edible in the canteen. If Isuzu hadn’t had that dream, she would probably have gotten it as well. Compared to Isuzu’s chicken curry, the fried fish set meal was 480 yen.

Nonetheless, it was still pretty pathetic of her as an elite royal guard of Maple Land to be hesitating between the two dishes.

“This is our first time chatting over breakfast, isn’t it?” said Macaron.

“You might be right.”

“You know, you’re always eating by yourself. It gives off an unapproachable aura, *ron*.”

“You think so?”

“But then again, it can’t be helped given your circumstances, *ron*.”

“You’re right.”

Isuzu had served in the imperial regiment of Maple Land before coming over to manage the park last year. People essentially viewed her as a young and elite bureaucrat from the capital who was dispatched to their park. As such, she wasn’t exactly welcomed when she first joined Amaburi, and she had faced difficulties in solving their problems.

And so despite the liveliness and harmony among the other cast members in the failing park, Isuzu ended up being isolated.

“Am I disturbing you or something, *ron*? My bad.”

Realizing that Isuzu had been saying nothing but vague replies, Macaron quietly continued with his meal. He ate a slice of brie and sipped on some miso soup.

Isuzu never intended for this to end up being so awkward. She simply didn't know how to respond to what others said, so she was unable to start a conversation.

Who would have thought that a royal guard from Maple Land would turn out like this?

Isuzu had certainly not wanted to ignore others, but it always happened that way. In the end, everyone concluded that she was just a dense stickler for the rules who imposed her beliefs on others. Chances were that Macaron was feeling the same way too.

I just need to try harder next time.

So she thought, but it never turned out any different.

Isuzu tasted a mouthful of curry in silence. It was just as she'd expected: the half-cooked chicken gave off a foul smell and tasted horrible.

"Isuzu-chan..." Macaron began, "when the food tastes disgusting, say 'it's disgusting!' with your heart and soul, *ron*."

Instead of following his suggestion, she maintained her straight face and nodded. "You're right."

“Like this, *ron*.” Macaron demonstrated with a dissatisfied “Meh!!” sheep growl.

“I’d always thought you were keeping your distance because you were the manager, but do you have some kind of problem communicating, *ron*?”

Isuzu twitched ever so slightly at Macaron’s bullseye. Before she could say something to defend herself, Macaron raised his arms and interrupted. “I knew it, your overthinking is impairing your ability to talk with others, *ron*. You should do something about this.”

“...”

Isuzu hesitated yet again.

Is this the part where I should tell him to mind his own business?

She didn’t exactly have a close relationship with Macaron in the first place. Furthermore, while his statement was valid, it wasn’t something one would want to hear first thing in the morning. Isuzu was well aware that Macaron must have been speaking out of good will, and that ignoring his advice and worsening her relationship with her colleagues wouldn’t be wise. But if she did as he said, wouldn’t Macaron take it as a sign that he was allowed to keep being bossy towards her?

Not knowing how to react, Isuzu ended up reusing her template response, “You’re right.”

Hearing that, Macaron frowned in resignation. “That’s just mean, *ron*. And here I was, genuinely worried for your sake! Oh hey, it’s Kanie-kun!”

“Hunh?” Hearing that, Isuzu turned to look at the canteen’s entrance. All she could see was the silhouette of a random cast member who was making his way out.

She turned back to face Macaron. He had a stiff posture and was averting his gaze. “My mistake, *ron*.”

“...I see.”

Slightly suspicious of his behavior, Isuzu had another spoonful of her curry. She felt something crunch. Isuzu dismissed it as a grain of uncooked rice and swallowed.

She had a sip of water and continued with her meal, oblivious to the fact that Macaron was watching her every move. He clenched his hoof under the table out of Isuzu’s vision, and silently exclaimed a “YES...!”

Part 4

Because it was a weekday, Isuzu headed for Amagi High.

Isuzu had originally enrolled in Amagi High to recruit Seiya, so there should have been no need for her to continue going to school.

However, Latifa Fleuranza, the manager of the park whom Isuzu deeply respected, had said, “I heard that Kanie-sama went through much trouble to save our park. As such, the least we can do to repay the favor would be to ensure that school goes smoothly for him. If possible, please watch over him from now on.”

Latifa had already lost all memories accumulated from the past year, so she didn’t remember anything about Seiya’s contribution. Even so, Latifa was still royalty of Maple Land, so Isuzu had to comply. Hence, Isuzu continued attending school in the new semester as a second year student at Amagi High.

However, something strange happened when Isuzu bumped into a classmate in the corridor.

“Good morning, Sento-san. You seem pretty down today. What’s wrong?”

The girl who greeted Isuzu was considered one of the leaders in class, and she would attempt to speak to Isuzu once in a while. She must have been concerned with Isuzu's unapproachable attitude, and tried to start a conversation as a way of reaching out a helping hand.

Normally, this was where Isuzu would end the conversation by saying, "It's just your imagination," but today she responded with something a little different.

"You're right, I'm pretty depressed today. I had a nightmare, ate disgusting curry and even got lectured by my colleagues. Furthermore, my workplace isn't doing very well and the staff has not been up to standard lately. I can't help but worry about meeting this year's minimum visitor count."

Having said that much, Isuzu forced her lips shut.

The girl was taken aback by Isuzu's unusual reply. "I-I see, must be tough on you."

"I know, right? And, for better or for worse, my manager, Kanie-kun is also way too capable. Of course, I'm not exactly jealous of him, I'm just afraid I'm not meeting up to his expectations as his assistant, and—" Using both hands, she cut herself off, attempting to cram her words back down her throat.

What am I saying!? Isuzu had never once done something as absurd as rambling to strangers about her problems at work.

“Erm, I don’t...understand what you’re—”

“This has nothing to do with a person of the land like you, so just forget what I said. Otherwise, I might have to use my Stein—mm!!!” She covered her mouth again, which started talking on its own, resulting in an awkward silence.

“U-Uhh, Sento-san...?”

“...Excuse me.”

Saying just that, Isuzu turned around and fled the scene.

*

“Hey Macaron, by the way...” Tiramie started, during the break in between performance rehearsals, “...have you tried that heartsleeve fruit I gave you awhile back?”

The two of them were in block 2 during the morning. While block 2 was labeled as a building, technically it was nothing more than a 3-story-high structure that served primarily as a place for dance rehearsals for stage performances and parades. The current rehearsal was being conducted in a classroom-size area that had one wall lined with mirrors.

While Tiramie and Macaron were taking a breather, Moffle was busy directing the cast members assigned to the performance.

“One, two! One, two! Good, then turn at this point, *fumo!*”

Moffle pointed his paws at them as he gave out the cues.

“One, two! One, two! Too slow again! Why do you guys keep missing the beat at this part? That delay will cost us our customers!”

Because of the lack of manpower and resources, Moffle had been juggling his regular work and choreographing the dance crew for a very long time. While he usually wasn't very good at this, this time around, it was clear that he was stepping up his game. “You guys got it, *fumo!*? Right after the ‘one’, you need to make preparations in anticipation for the ‘two’! Let’s do this slowly. One, and, two. Got it? From the top now, *fumo*. Turn around...and, one! Lower yourselves a bit and... Two!”

Despite their clumsy attempt, the dancers managed a synchronized move.

“Yeah! That’s it, *fumo!* All right, let’s ramp up the speed. Ready, one...two...okay! One, two! Good job, *fumo!*”

Tiramie and Macaron gazed at Moffle who was busy guiding the dancers and smiled.

“Moffle’s changed quite a bit, don’t you think, *mi*?”

“I guess you could say his teaching style has become a lot gentler, *ron*.”

Moffle had been really worked up last year, scolding and insulting the dancers without restraint with comments like “You guys had one job, *fumo!*” and “You losers have no talent, *fumo!*”, resulting in a dance crew that was bigger than their morale.

Moffle’s change in attitude could largely be attributed to the extension of the park’s deadline, allowing his own mind to be at ease for a bit.

“Back to the topic, *mi*. So how was the heartsleeve fruit?”

Macaron gave a “meh” without shifting his gaze. “The heartsleeve fruit, huh? I tested it out this morning, *ron*.”

“Ho ho...”

“I was afraid to be the guinea pig, so I secretly got Isuzu to eat it, *ron*.”

“That’s even more cruel, *mi*.” Tiramie snarled, knowing its effects all too well.

The heartsleeve fruit.

This mysterious magical fruit grew in the mountains behind Tiramie's homeland.

Those who eat it will find themselves answering truthfully to any question posed at them. Its duration of effect differs for every individual, lasting anywhere from a few hours to half a day. By the way, it is said that it gives an amazing flavor when cooked with chicken, onions and soy sauce. (Of course, don't do that with people you dislike.)

"It's okay, *ron*. Heartsleeve fruits are legal."

"...Macaron, I gave you the fruit to help you draw out the truth from your ex-wife, not for pranking Isuzu-chan, *mi*."

"Even then, I ought to test its effectiveness at least once. It's just a pity that Isuzu-chan already left for school, *ron*."

"My, that's a shame, *mi*. I really wanna ask how often she flicks her clip, *mi*."

The phrase "flick the clip" was a term in Maple Land that referred to a specific action. Long story short, this coarse word carried indecent meanings similar to one of Maple Land's phrases "Puff Yourself!" Of course, due to its nature, its actual meaning shall be omitted.

“Dude, Isuzu-chan would definitely kill you later if she heard that, *ron!*”

“Don’t worry, I’ll spare you two the wait and kill you right now.”

The two mascots turned around, only to be greeted by Isuzu who was still wearing her Amagi High school uniform. She was wielding her musket and one glance at her expression was enough to tell how much trouble they were in.

“OH SHIT—!!!”

And so Isuzu began her massacre with “Pain Bringer,” slaughtering the two of them one bullet at a time.

Part 5

On that very same day, Kanie Seiya had skipped school and remained in Amaburi. He was having a bland consultation with Ashe, the head of accounts, about strategies to bring the park's finances out of the red.

"Here's what I think..." Ashe began.

Her tanned skin, long ears and two horns were of demonic beauty. The otherwise human-like figure in her twenties was wearing a plain suit that masked her physical endowments.

Seiya heard that Ashe was not born from Maple Land but some other magical realm, and that no mortal could match her in knowledge of economics. She was also one of Tiramie's sexual harassment targets, and she'd nearly beaten him to death because of it (nothing surprising there, Tiramie never learned his lesson).

That said, her several years of service as the head of accounts and her efforts in balancing Amaburi's sheets had certainly left her in a state of gloom.

"The 30 yen campaign last month invited financial mayhem. Even if we're able to solve our manpower issues, we're still lacking many other resources. At this rate, we'll be wringing our accounts dry."

"You have a point there..." Seiya said in an unhappy tone of voice.

“We just have to pray that they’ll let us defer the payment. I honestly don’t see how we can continue without restructuring the organization of the park.”

“That’s easier said than done.” Seiya let out a sigh. “We don’t even have the manpower needed to restructure. Say, you think Maple Bank would lend us a hand in this...?”

Maple Bank was the bank of Maple Land, one of the organizations with interest in the survival of the park. Of course, it could be said that they were only concerned because Latifa’s fate was tied with the park’s.

“They can’t help.”

“Why?”

“For various reasons. There’s the depreciation of the yen because of quantitative easing, the structural reforms in the Maple Land’s royal palace, along with the policy by the American Federal Reserve Bank to prevent intervention from banks of magical realms. It’ll be a long explanation, shall I go ahead?”

“Forget it. You’ll bore the hell out of the readers.”

“Understood. In any case, that is not an option.”

“I see...” Seiya understood. “First things first, we have to get enough to tread water through the month. I’m thinking of using our last resort...”

“So it’s a bank robbery this time?”

Hearing that, Seiya shot a glance at Ashe. She was a smart one. Ashe must have had a rough idea about the connection between the park and the fire outbreak at Kajinomoto Stadium.

“I’m not putting you at fault for this,” Ashe replied carefully.

“After all, we have shared interests in the survival of the park. Even so, it’d be great if you don’t do anything crazy.”

“Why, thank you for your consideration, though I can’t guarantee we’ll see eye to eye forever. But of course, theft is out of the question.”

“Well, that’s a relief.”

Right then, the phone on the meeting table rang. It was Ookuro from the security department.

“What’s up?”

“Hey, Kanie-san. Uhh...we have an issue in block 2. It seems like there’s a scuffle between Isuzu, Macaron and Tiramie there.”

“The three of them fighting each other?”

“More like a one-sided lynching by Isuzu against Macaron and gang. Do you mind helping us out here?”

*

When Seiya arrived at block 2, the execution had already concluded.

Macaron and Tiramie were dead.

To be precise, they weren’t dead per se, but they might as well have been. Macaron had face-planted the mirrors in the rehearsal room, leaving radial cracks throughout the glass. Tiramie had fallen flat on the floor and a trail of blood next to him read “murderer has big tits”.

Isuzu stood in the middle of the room heaving in anger. The dancers who witnessed the scene shivered in fear in the corner.

“...They should have been in the middle of a rehearsal. Where’s Moffle?”



“I’m not sure myself. It looks like he noticed the commotion first and tried to stop them but there’s no sight of...oh wait, there he is.”

Security officer Ookuro looked out of a broken window. Moffle could be seen hanging unconscious on the branch of a sakura tree that grew outside block 2. Moffle’s weight was slowly dragging the branch down, causing it to crack and splinter in agony.

“...What happened?”

I can already guess that the three of them were playing pranks on her like usual.

“Revenge...” Isuzu replied. “They made me eat a heartsleeve fruit and even wanted to ask me dirty questions...”

“Dirty questions?”

“How often I fl—!!” Isuzu forced her mouth shut with all her might, but that did not stop her incessant thoughts from manifesting as gagged noise.

“Sento...?”

“D-Don’t worry about it.” Isuzu heaved a deep breath. “I went to school all day, thinking that I might as well get some attendance credits even though you weren’t coming, though the truth is that I can’t be at ease with you after having such a dream last...—!”

“...? I don’t get what you’re saying, but thank god this happened backstage; we’d dead meat if our guests saw this. Come over to the administration building after you’ve cleaned up this mess, we’ve got job interviews at 1.”

“I-Interviews!?”

Isuzu’s posture straightened like her musket, with eyes wider than its muzzle.

“What’s wrong? Problem with that?”

“A big problem! I’m being forced to speak my thoughts so who knows how big of a problem it’d be if I went for the interview! I might start whining about the welfare or the terrible mannerisms of our mascots, deterring them from accepting our offer, and if worse came to worst, I might even talk about these unexplainable feelings I have for yo.....—!” Again, Isuzu gagged herself up and pinched her nose, resulting in an incoherent sentence that ended abruptly.

“Are you okay?”

“Not at all. Let me take a sick leave so that I can rest at home, or I might cause even more trouble for you, not as the oracle’s chosen one, but as an ordinary ma...—!”

“What’s wrong with you? You keep ending your sentences with ‘mmm’...”

“Like I said, the heartsleeve fruit has—!!”

Seiya no longer knew what was happening, and settled with an assumption that it was just an allergic reaction to pollen.

“If you’ve got the strength to wreak such havoc, you must be absolutely fine. Don’t be late.”

“Please, just let me take the day off—”

“No can do. You’re one of the ones in charge of selecting successful candidates, so how can we conduct this interview without your presence?”

“But—”

“No more buts! I expect to see you there at 1, and I’ll fire you if you don’t turn up, you hear me?” Seiya turned around and left without saying anything further.

Part 6

Seiya heated the packet lunch he bought from the convenience store and hurried back to the office for some tea. The fact that it was his lunch break, which was rather short, did not give him an excuse to skip his routine checks on the park.

Because the guys from the security department weren't exactly tech-savvy, Seiya had no choice but to access the security camera footage from yesterday through the LAN on his own notebook. Originally, he wanted to view them at his own convenience at home or in school, but he gave up after getting strange errors and security issues on his smartphone.

If possible, Seiya would have loved to have an IT engineer on the premises to solve minor issues like this, but again, the park could not afford such a luxury.

The footage depicted the deserted state of the theme park during a typical weekday. That stood to reason, since it was April and all theme parks throughout Japan should be facing a similar situation now.

The cast members were also beginning to lose their drive. They had to do something about this soon, preferably—

“You're right, we should start targeting the elderly during this period of the year.” Lunch break had ended and Seiya grumbled to Moffle, whom he had bumped into at the corridor.

“Mofu. Of course, fumo.”

It appeared that the injuries Mofle had sustained were not that serious, despite him losing his consciousness. 30 minutes of rest in the infirmary and a dose of his favorite croquettes was enough to get him back in tip-top shape, after which he flew over to the administration building for the interview.

“...Though I must say, we are indeed starting to get more elderly guests lately, fumo,” Mofle continued with a displeased expression.

April was considered the start of a new year for working adults and students, with both parties struggling to get accustomed to their new lifestyle before Golden Week. Until then, not many youth would sour their relationships by taking leaves of absence to bring their friends and family to come here.

And so whoever wanted to avoid ridiculous queues in popular theme parks would strike on weekdays during this period, where they only needed to wait less than five minutes to hop on popular rides like the one featuring a certain archaeologist character holding a certain bullwhip. #Trivia. (Though, for the record, that probably wouldn't be considered as such.)

And because of that—

Seiya had decided their target demographic to be the elderly, who had nothing to do with the start of a fiscal year.

Right after Seiya made up his mind to continue as the acting manager last month, he began working with homes and shelters for the elderly. He handed out discount coupons, drafted a pricing scheme for big groups and even added lightly-seasoned onigiri, miso soup and warabi mochi to the snack shop's menu, which were all popular dishes for the elderly.

And thanks to that, they were on track to set the highest record for visitors in April in many years. (Of course, it was nothing but a fraction of the visitors in March with the 30 yen campaign.)

"Young or old, guests are still our guests. Welcome them without complaints, you hear me?"

"Okay, okay, *fumo*. I just don't think we can click with them..."

"Ah..." Seiya could relate all too well.

He recalled going on a solo vacation to Gunma prefecture last summer, where he met an old lady at a rustic hot spring whom he could not carry a proper conversation with. Conversations went back and forth like "I came for a vacation from Tokyo." "Oh my, what an excellent company to work for." And when he asked, "I heard that this village will soon get submerged as a result of the dam construction," she shot back a bashful "No, no, that's absurd." Seiya had never understood the reason for that.

Why were the miscommunications between the old and the young so extreme?

“If our problems ended at that, it’d still be all right, *fumo*. But no, they also tend to make ridiculous claims! They make a big fuss out of a stumble, and we’ve even received lawsuits for minor sprains, *fumo*!”

“The heck...”

“There was even a sick ol’ man who interrupted Muse’s performance by stretching his arms out wide and beckoning her to come over. Old people these days have bad manners, *fumo*. They throw cigarette butts everywhere and cut queues.”

“...For real?”

“Of course, there *are* polite ones among them who are fun to hang around with, but a majority of them are really messed up. Particularly those from the post-World War baby boom—”

“Hold it right there; let’s just keep it at that,” Seiya waved his hands and stopped him before he could get into another convoluted topic.

“Fine. So...which posts are today’s interviewees applying for?”

“Everything.”

“Mofu?”

“Each sector received applications, but the total number we got was far less than we’d expected. I originally planned to split them into three days, but from the looks of it we’ll be through them in one.”

“That’s pathetic, *fumo*.”

“You’re one to talk. Don’t be so glum, we might get more next week.”

The interviews were to be held in the third meeting room, 3rd floor of the administration building.

The two of them entered the building and sat down with their backs against the window, flipping through the CVs that Isuzu had laid on the table beforehand. A little later, Isuzu entered the room dressed in a suit with a dark grey jacket and a tight skirt.

“You’re late, Sento.”

“After I came out from the shower, you see, I spent 10 minutes pondering over my attire as your secretary. I was deciding between pants or the tight miniskirt that’d reveal more of my legs, and ended up going with the latter. That’s so that you’d keep your eyes from the female applica—mm!!” Isuzu covered her mouth and crouched.

“Why do you keep covering your mouth...what’s wrong with you today?”

“Kanie-kun, you’re quite the dense one, aren’t yo—mm!!”

“What? Ah, whatever. Do as you please.”

Seiya took a quick glance at the clock and clapped his hands together. “Let’s begin. Call the first person in.”

The cast member from the Public Relations department nodded and walked out of the room.

The interviewers consisted of the three of them—two high schoolers and a mascot. The applicants had to deal with it since these three were indeed the most important stakeholders of the park.

“Hey Moffle, wait a sec.”

“What’s up?”

“What happened to your Lala Patch?”

“Oh, that. I forgot it, *fumo*.”

“The heck...”

“I left it in my locker, *fumo*. Should I go and grab it?”

The Lala Patch was a magical charm given to the cast members of Amaburi. It was a talisman of the size of a 500 yen coin with the upper body of a goddess carved on it. The mascots would be perceived as normal human beings if they wore one, and despite how useful and precious its effect may have seemed, it was actually a regular commodity sold in Maple Land.

The cheapest one went for the equivalent of 980 yen, though those were made in a Chinese magical realm (no implication intended) and might explode, so buying those was discouraged.

“We’re the interviewers, in case you haven’t noticed. There’s no way we’d be taken seriously given that we’re two high schoolers and a suit actor.”

“Hmm... I guess you’re right, but they’re gonna have to get used to it sooner or later anyway, *fumo*.”

“True...”

“We don’t have time, *fumo*. Let’s just go with this.”

“You sure about that?”

And just while saying that, the door to the meeting room opened.

Part 7

The first applicant who entered was a mature-looking woman.

“Pleased to meet you.” She gave a fine bow of respect and sat on her designated seat.

The woman had thin eyelids, and her long black hair fell over her suit that did not fit, and her jacket creased as if to cover her seemingly well-nourished bust.

Heh, she’s showing no signs of tension and she was able to start the session with a warm smile on her face. +2 points. Furthermore, she doesn’t seem to be particularly affected by the presence of a strange mascot in the room. She’s seems pretty composed. +1 point.

Moffle folded his arms and threw himself back in his chair. For some reason, Isuzu was blinking in disbelief and muttered “From...my dream...?”, but Seiya couldn’t connect the dots, so he just left her as is.

“Pleased to meet you too, Adachi Eiko-san,” Seiya said while flipping through her CV. He was in charge of asking the questions while the other two observed. “Firstly, thank you for applying.”

“Likewise, thank you for having me today.”

Having settled the pleasantries, Seiya went ahead and checked what she had applied for.

“Okay, so your preferences are: 1)“Attraction” Cast Member, and 2)“Entrance” Cast Member. Truth be told, these two require a lot of guest interaction. Do you have any related work experience?”

“Yes. Up until last month, I was working for a talent agency.”

“Wow. Which talent agency, may I ask?”

“It’s a pretty obscure one...called Quatro Produce.”

As she said, Seiya had never heard of it.

But to be fair, there were easily hundreds of talent agencies out there. The one she mentioned was probably like a model agency or something. He’d heard that many working for talent agencies couldn’t renew their contract because of poor work performance or prolonged absence.

At any rate, her pride might get in the way and worsen relationships between other cast members. -1 point.

“I take it you don’t know about it?” Eiko said with an apologetic smile for the trouble he was having responding to her words.

Looks like she has a tactful side to her as well. +2 points.

“Ah, my apologies, I don’t follow many talent agencies... By the way, what kind of service does your agency provide? Modeling? Or perhaps escort service?”

“The one I work at makes films.”

“I see, what kind of films?”

“AVs.”

“...Sorry?”

“...Eh?”

“...Mofu?”

“AVs.”

An awkward silence ensued, with the legs of three chairs smacking the floor in perfect synchronization.

Eiko remained calm on her seat despite their adverse reactions.

“Uh...T-T-That’s a...rather...t-t-tough job, huh...”

“Indeed,” said Eiko with a pleasant smile.

“Uh...just to confirm again, an...AV, you say?”

“Yes. I’ve done about ten of them.”

“T-Ten!?”

Seiya may have been in charge of the interview, but he was not able to contain his disbelief and his voiced wavered as much as his body.

F-For real? Like...the actual AV and not some Advanced Vehicle or whatever? You mean...this gentle woman who managed to captivate even the great Kanie-sama? This...pure and innocent woman who was basically the ideal neighbor of any teenage boy? For such indecent videos... How could that be...what universe could have possibly put these two together?

Thoughts like these caused Seiya's imaginary world inside his head to crumble.

Isuzu tensed up in shock, and Moffle hit Seiya's sides with his paws.

(Seiya...Seiya!)

(W-What...?)

(Ask what her stage name was! I wanna know, *fumo!*)

(You know I can't ask her that, right!?) Seiya hissed back.

He turned to face Eiko, who was still smiling at them, "Ah, p-pardon me. I-I have to say, you have some unusual work experience...please give us some time to think about this..."

"No problem, I get that quite a lot..."

This time her smile revealed a tinge of sadness. It was a smile that made one want to protect her in exchange for dark, shady favors that could never be said aloud.

"But don't worry, I'm used to it."

“M-Much obliged.”

Right then, Moffle continued whispering to him.

(Seiya!)

(W-What do you want?)

(Get yourself together, *fumo*. An interviewer obliging to the interviewee?)

(B-But...)

(You’re the boss here. Now go and ask her stage name and debut title!)

(Shut the hell up!)

Having said that, Seiya still wasn’t sure of how to follow up with the questions. The possibility of his questions being taken as sexual harassment had to be carefully considered.

Example 1)

'You're a university student, am I right?' might be taken as...

→“What do your classmates think about you? I'm sure they all look at you with lecherous eyes, huehuehue...”

Example 2)

'Your hourly rate will be 750 yen during your probation period. Is that okay?' might sound like...

→“Your pay will be pretty low, are you really okay with that? Well, depending on your...'performance' you might get more...'tips', huehuehue...”

Example 3)

'Oh, you enjoy horse riding as a hobby, I see?' could possibly be construed as...

→“Oh my, you must have excellent horses to ride on, eh? Don't worry, I'm a one-of-a-kind breed, why don't you try me? Huehuehue...”

(No way can I say that!)

Cold sweat began trickling down Seiya's temples.

Eiko cleared her throat and awaited his questions.

The air in the room became tense.

What should I do... Let's see if our female interviewer can help with this situation. She wouldn't get shaken by things like this after all, so she'll probably be able to help.

He tore his gaze from Eiko to look at Isuzu.

“...”

Her face was pale and she was covering her mouth as always, shivering ever so slightly.

“S-Sento?”

“Mm—!!”

Isuzu looked up and moved her arms to reveal her mouth that was wide open and ready to shout. She grabbed Seiya by the ear and leaned forward.

“Ouch! Hey, what do you want...?”

Isuzu inched her lips closer to his ears, sucked in some air and said,

(Kanie-kun, I’m already on the brink of insanity right now, so don’t expect any help from me. First off, this applicant looks exactly like the one in my dream last night. Second, you seem to be very impressed by her conduct. Lastly, you even got that worked up after hearing about her work experience...mm—!!)

(W-What?)

(I don’t want to say further; from the looks of it, the heartsleeve fruit’s effect has yet to wear off. You’re an exceedingly talented person, yet at the sight of her bust and knowledge of her work experience, you got all wobbly inside. I can’t help but feel disappointed and insecure that you might replace me with her—) Once again, Isuzu squeezed her nose and groaned.

“Mm—!!”

“S-Sento...?”

She face-tabled for a moment and sighed. Ignoring everyone’s gazes, she dropped her shoulders and exhaled, “Ask...her reasons for applying...”

“G-Good idea. I like it.”

At least it won't make me sound like I'm sexually harassing her.

(Mofu. Her stage name, fumo!)

(Shut your trap!)

Seiya cleared his throat and began. “My apologies, Eiko-san.”

“No worries,” replied Eiko in her usual professional manner.

“I'm sorry for the wait. Well then, can we hear your reasons for applying?”

This is something I'd really like to know. Why would one who holds a job in such a lucrative industry want to work in a damned theme park?

“Actually, you see...” Eiko took a brief moment and pondered over this as she looked at the ceiling with her index finger on her lips. The sight was one that could have taken any man aback.

Just what was on her mind that required that much consideration before telling us? Seiya thought of using his magical power, the one granted to him by the princess of Maple Land.

(No...)

Now was not the time. This should be used if an important event occurs when and if she gets accepted to work for Amaburi.

Thought the person who never used his grenades in games.

(...Ugh.)

Isuzu scowled at Seiya, presumably because she saw through his every motive.

Nah, I doubt she's sharp enough to tell that much.

A while later, Eiko began to speak. "...I was simply not cut out for the job, to be honest. Of course, it's not that I hated it or anything, it's just that I'd prefer seeing my customers' smiles up close, so I applied here."

"R-Right."

“Did I say something wrong?”

“N-No, of course not.” Seiya struggled to keep his watery eyes in order.

Why must such a fine lady be...why...I don't get this world anymore.

The phrase “not that I hated it or anything” dealt critical damage to his soul.

So you didn't dislike your previous job, huh... For some reason I'm shattering inside. Seriously...why...

Anyway, I'd better get myself together.

Seiya regained his composure and continued. “Thank you very much. We will contact you on a later date regarding the outcome of your application.”

Part 8

After Eiko left the room, Moffle protested, “Why didn’t you ask her stage name!? What kind of man are you? You should just die in despair, *fumo!*”

“Why don’t *you* go hang yourself in despair, huh!?”

“Heh, just you wait and see, *fumo*. I can keep myself hanging without dying!”

“What are you, an arrogant prick or a masochist?”

“*Mofu...*” Moffle ignored Seiya’s comment and flipped through Eiko’s CV. Using his phone, he had snapped a picture of her and sent it as a message.

“Hey, don’t just go around taking pictures of things. Who did you send it to?”

“Tricen. He knows a lot about AVs so I asked if he recognized her picture, *fumo.*”

Seiya had just learned another of Amaburi’s dark secrets—that the head of publicity was actually such a pervert.

“The hell is wrong with you people...”

“Well, all that’s left is to wait, *fumo*.”

Was he even able to discern from such a small photograph? All AV’s were pretty much equally hot, anyway.

For the second time, Isuzu scowled at him as if reading his thoughts.

“So you aren’t going to lecture him? Or maybe you’re secretly interested in knowing her stage name too, pervert.”

“...! Would you mind not saying impolite things?”

“But it’s strange...I never knew you had such interests. Or maybe you aren’t satisfied with my—!!!!”

Isuzu gagged herself and face-tabled again. Seiya took a step back after watching her torture herself to such an extent.

“S-Sento...?”

“D-Don’t worry about me...”

Hasn't her behavior been really strange today? I'll never understand her. She said earlier that she's feeling sick, but this degree of mental instability is on a whole new level.

Moffle's phone vibrated briefly.

"Just got a reply from Tricen, *fumo*. Ah...*fumo...fumo...*" Moffle nodded while reading the contents displayed on screen.

"All right. Let's move on to the next person, *fumo*." Moffle declared as he closed his phone.

"Did...you get it?"

"Get what?"

"H-Her...uhh...Eiko-san's..."

"Yeah, we got her stage name, *fumo*. What about it?"

"N-Never mind..."

“We even found her label and highest rated videos, *fumo*. Tricen’s the man. Anyway, let’s move on.”

Seiya watched as Moffle sneered and took out the next applicant’s CV.

This rat, so he’s not gonna share his findings, huh? He knows I can’t ask about it and intends to move on...this rat’s got balls!

“We’re gonna rent the DVDs and enjoy them with some sake, *fumo*. It’s gonna be a blast!”

“Tch...”

“You wanna know, *fumo*? You know you wanna!”

“Y-You know I don’t care about that stuff. Next! Call the next guy in!” Just like a general in a galactic battlefield, Seiya lashed his right arm out and ordered the cast member.

Meanwhile, beside Seiya, Isuzu made an unexpected remark. “I wanna know, Lord Moffle. Tell me...—!!”

“W-What!?”

Moffle looked at her with sparkly eyes. “Hoho, our royal guard actually had such interests, *fumo!* I wanna know why you want it, *fumo.*”

“I-It’s not that I want to shame her or anything. I just want to know how she’s able to get the attention of the guys...mm—!!”

How many times had this been? Isuzu covered her mouth and slammed her face on the table once again.

I’m actually starting to get worried about her now.

“Hey...are you okay?”

“Not at all!” Isuzu laid a palm on her hurting forehead and looked at him with eyes on the brink of tears. “You see, since elementary school, I could never get myself to speak up, even in class when I needed to use the toilet, so I held it in...mmm—!”

Just when Seiya considered calling the ambulance, there was a knock on the door and the next applicant entered the room.

“Sorry for being late!”



Part 9

The next applicant was a high-schooler.

The energetic young lady had short chestnut hair and big sparkly eyes.

She filled her flushed cheeks with a deep breath, blowing it out to calm herself before stepping in front of the interviewers.

“Nice to meet you! I am Bandou Biino!”

She has a very clear and outspoken voice. +2 points.

Seiya heard Isuzu mentioning something about this being ‘...another one?’, but he decided to ignore it and let her be for today.

Bandou Biino was wearing her school uniform with a khaki cardigan. According to her CV, she was a first year high school student in the same town as Seiya.

She has a refreshing look and a good sense of style. She’s got an aura that brightens the mood of those she approaches. +1 point.

There was just one problem—

“Uh...let me ask you something, Bandou Biino-san.”

“Sure!”

“What’s with that blood stain...?”

The area from her left abdomen to her waist was stained in red. The crimson fluid was beginning to creep onto her cardigan.

-200 points.

“Oh, my apologies...I was in a rush, you see...” Biino said in embarrassment as she tried to cover the blood-stained area.

Wait, this isn’t something to be embarrassed about...and neither is this a matter of being in a rush or not...

“A-Are you injured?”

“Ah, it’s okay, I promise! This is nothing, really!” Biino frantically waved her hands in denial. The blood that came splashing on the floor from her fingers spelled “ominous”.

Seiya was taken aback, Isuzu widened her eyes and Moffle tilted his head as he attempted to assess the situation.

“I’m okay, really...”

One look and they could tell she wasn’t. Her breathing was becoming erratic and her legs were shivering ever so slightly. She was losing her consciousness along with her blood.

Seiya had thought that Eiko was an impressive applicant, but this Biino was outstanding in her own way.

“Maybe you could start by telling us how you ended up with that...”

“I-It’s okay...! I don’t want to make excuses for coming late! Please just...*cough* let me *cough* continue...!”

Come on, don’t go spewing shōnen manga tropes at me. Not wanting to give excuses is admirable, but for now we need to know the cause of her injuries.

Seiya whispered a “What should we do?” to Isuzu.

(I don’t know. All I’m concerned with is whether that girl is appealing to your...mm—!) After saying those strange words, Isuzu once again...(see above).

Screw this shit. I'll just leave her alone for now.

In turn, he turned around and whispered the same question to Moffle.

(That's probably a stab wound, *fumo*. I'd say she's lost about a liter of blood, and should be passing out within 10 minutes or so.)

They couldn't afford to sit back and do nothing.

"C-Call the ambulance!"

"N-No, don't do that!" Biino exclaimed. "It's just a light injury! I don't want to cause any trouble to Amagi Brilliant Park just because of this. I'm...banking everything on this interview...so..."

Seriously...banking even her life on this lame park...

(But that's some spirit she's got there...wait could this be...kagebara?) Moffle shuddered as he spoke.

Kagebara was a form of seppuku done by samurais in protest against their own lord.

But then again, that wasn't something worth doing for a part-time job interview. She'd die even if they hired her.

(I don't think so...)

(I guess you're right. Oh?) Right then, Moffle's smartphone on the table rang.

(The security department's calling, *fumo*. Hang on a sec.) Moffle used his paws to pick up the call.

Meanwhile, Biino pleaded to Seiya while struggling to remain standing. "P-Please. Just start the... *cough* interview..."

A streak of blood came trickling out from the corner of her mouth.

Moffle momentarily took the phone away from his ear to tell Seiya, (She appears to have some internal bleeding as well, *fumo*. We'd better hurry,) before getting back to the call.

(How should I even...)

"Please, hurry! Ask me questions while I'm still conscious!"

“O-Okay,” Seiya nodded at her menacing request. He whispered to Isuzu to “call the ambulance” and began faking an interview.

“Okay, so...your working hours will start at 4 during w-weekdays. You’ll be operating on a closed shift basis—”

“*Cough!*”

“A-Are you following?”

“*Cough!* I’m...fine with that...”

Biino nodded, covering her mouth with her bloody hands.

“W-We’ll go faster then. Next, your choice of roles. Guest Control and Merchandise Cast. Why did you choose these?”

The role of a Guest Control cast member was similar to a tour guide, whereas merchandising would mean working as a salesperson at the shops in Amaburi. Both of them required extensive customer interaction.

“Yes. *Cough* T-That’s because I like... *cough* seeing s-smiles on their...faces...”

Despite having a pale face drenched in cold sweat, Biino managed an unbecoming smile. Only a mortal enemy could smile at this sight.

“Also if you were to get drafted into the child-care department, your probationary period would be doubled compared to other sectors. Is that okay?”

“N-Not a problem at all. *Cough* I really love...seeing kids smile!”

Her expression became more horrifying than ever. If she ever worked in child-care, 100 out of 100 children would cry in terror.

“N-Noted.”

Any further questioning would not help in their decision-making. All that was left was to leave her to the medical authorities.

“We’ll contact you with the outcome of your application at a later date. L-Let’s just focus on stopping the bleeding for now.”

“Please don’t do that!”

“Just be quiet and let us help you!”

“S-Sorry...but I still have many...*cough* things to impress you with...”

“Erm...” Seiya was still traumatized by the sight of Biino gasping for air. Moffle, who had just ended his call, tapped Seiya on the shoulder.

(What is it?)

(The guy from the security department called, *fumo*. He said there was a strange incident at Amagi Station earlier. Some weirdo stabbed a female high school student...)

(Hey...!)

(It appears that they apprehended the culprit, but the victim said she was fine and fled the scene on her bike, *fumo*.)

(I-I see...)

(It’s making the news headlines, *fumo*. The security officer called to let us know just in case.)

Seiya had a better picture of the whole situation now.

Insisting on an interview despite being the victim of a slasher was an admirable act. +1 point. But I'd appreciate if she could consider the trouble imposed. -100 points.

Nonetheless, tending to her injuries was now their top priority.

“Bandou Biino-san. I can feel your passion and drive from your actions. I cannot guarantee anything, but consider yourself hired in advance.”

“T-Thank you so... *cough* much!”

“We took the liberty of calling the ambulance earlier, so please get in. And hey, don't go spacing out on me now...give me a break...”

Seiya stood up and went over. Biino had begun to slip off her chair and landed into his arms.

“I'm sorry...” Laying in Seiya's arms that were becoming soaked in blood, Biino repeated the same words over and over.

“Hasn't the ambulance arrived yet? Let's bring her out to speed things up. Hey Moffle, quit playing with your phone and help out!”

Seiya raised his voice at Moffle who was still busy talking on the phone.

“Wait, *fumo*. It’s the guy from the security department.”

“Seriously...”

“I never...intended to be late for the interview...”

“I-I got it, you were spectacular back there.”

“There’s one more thing...that I need to apologize about.”

Suddenly, the door to the meeting room swung open.

The one who entered was a masked, half-naked man holding a kitchen knife that was dripping with blood.

“W-What on earth...?”

“Fuu...fuu...”

The weirdo was wearing a pair of briefs and had a stocking on his head, which was surprising because despite that he was managing deep heaves.

Could this be the next applicant? No way, no one in their right mind would come for a job interview dressed like this—

“Seiya, Seiya!”

“W-What?”

“The security dude wants to tell you that the criminal has yet to be caught, *fumo!*”

“What did you say...!?”

“Also, a strange man just intruded our park, *fumo!* They were too freaked out to even raise the alarms...”

They turned to face Biino, who nodded at them.

“My apologies... That’s my brother...”

“Your...b-brother!?”

“He didn’t want me to get a part time job, you see...”

And so he stabbed you? Seriously? And why is he staring at you so intently...this is some serious obsession gone wrong!

“Fuu...fuu...” Still panting heavily, the man took a step towards them.

“Okay, calm down. Let’s talk this over, no bloodshed needed.”

“Fuu...fuu...” He held up the knife.

“Oh shit uh... You really intend on stabbing the great Seiya? It would be humanity’s loss, and I’m pretty good in combat, you know. But then again I’ve never had an actual fight...but that’s a minor detail. I’m really strong, I think... Prepare yourself!”

“You gotta be pretty thick headed to have the time to spew such things, *fumo*.”

“Shut up! He’s striking!”

“Fu—!”

The man started swinging his knife as he ran over. Seiya was his first target.

“Woah woah woah!!”

Seiya used his body to protect Biino and held up the pipe chair as a shield.

A huge impact followed.

The knife penetrated the back of the chair. A few centimeters more and Seiya would've grown a head shorter.

"You punk...!" Seiya twisted the chair and kicked the man away. He staggered a few steps back and lost grip of the knife.

"Hey guys, do something!"

With that, Isuzu drew her musket and drilled four Pain Bringers into the man. She tag-teamed with Moffle, who followed up with a one-two punch and a swift uppercut.

"Fuu—!"

He flew up, just missing the ceiling before crashing to the ground. Moffle turned his back towards the mess and wiped his paws with a piece of a handkerchief.

The half-naked man could no longer move.

“*Mofu*... He’ll be on a liquid diet for a while, *fumo*,” Moffle proclaimed in pride, having said one of the top 100 catch phrases every man should say in their lifetime.

“Seeing you lot makes me feel like a mercenary camp would suit you guys better than to this park.”

Part 10

The arrival of the ambulance and patrol car caused a fuss in Amaburi.

After being questioned by the investigating officer and others, the matter was finally settled and they left the park around 8, long after the park's closing hours.

"How did that escalate so quickly..." Seiya muttered to himself as he cleaned the blood stains with a mop.

"We were supposed to carry out a normal interview and go home... How did we end up with an AV actress and get caught up in a stabbing incident at the same time...?"

"Seriously, *fumo*... We even had the victim as our applicant..." Moffle commented as he wiped the walls with some Quicle sheets.

"That damned cop. Almost charged me for attempted murder. It's self-defense, I tell you. Self-defense, *fumo*!"

"Any normal person could tell that snapping someone's jaw is overkill, even in the name of self-defense... But you're right, looks like he's really gonna have to live on a liquid diet for a while."

“Hmph. Maybe I *was* a little excessive, *fumo*.”

“You were just too overpowered. Go and reflect on your actions, for god’s sake.”

“*Mofu...*”

The investigating officer had confirmed that the weird man was indeed Biino’s brother. He was definitely not right in the head for him to be interfering with his sister’s matters to such an extent. Apparently this wasn’t the first time he’d done such things, and it had finally come to this.

It certainly wasn’t something to laugh about, yet this incident could be said to be rather amusing.

“What’s gonna happen to Biino-san, *fumo*?”

“God knows. I definitely don’t wanna get involved with her ever again.”

“*Mofu*. But she was really interested in working here, you know?”

“Wait, what...? You seriously want to hire her?”

“I didn’t say nothin’, *fumo*.” Moffle looked away and went back to cleaning the wall.

“... Sento, what do you think of her?” Seiya turned to ask Isuzu, who had just came back with a bucket of water.

“You mean whether or not we should hire her?”

Her “mm!!” reflex was starting to wear off, but Isuzu remained careful when picking her words. She’d occasionally still cover her mouth with her hand.

Nonetheless, her strange manner of talking lingered enough to make the conversation with the investigating officer extremely awkward. No doubt it must have been difficult for him to take any of her explanations seriously...

“Yeah. You’re in charge of the selection after all, so I’d like to hear your opinion.”

“Let’s see...” Isuzu considered for a moment. “...Logically speaking it’d be a no. But she has a knack for dealing with bizarre situations that tend to occur often onstage. I mean, she was even able to keep up a smile despite being stabbed by her brother. She has the passion as well, so she’d make an excellent cast member with ample training.”

“Hmph...” She actually gave a sensible response for once. It was during times like this where her analytical judgment came in handy.

“Besides, I’m sure she’ll be a perfect partner for you given her excellent—!”

Hearing that, Seiya and Moffle shrugged.

“...Looks like some of the fruit’s effects are still here. If possible, try not to talk to me...”

“Fruit...?”

Hearing that, Moffle hammered a fist on his palm and nodded. “Ah, that figures, *fumo*. So they made you eat a heartsleeve fruit, and that’s why you slaughtered them?”

“Yes...”

“Well, I’m sure they didn’t mean it, *fumo*. Please forgive them.”

“No, they definitely did it with ill intentions. I’ll never forgive those two.”

I don’t know what this thing is about, but it sounds like Isuzu’s strange behavior is related to this fruit thing.

“What’s up with that? So you’re saying your mumbling at the end of your sentences are also a result of the fruit?”

Moffle and Isuzu averted their gazes as if trying to avoid the question.

“W-Well, I won’t put it *that way, fumo.*”

“It’s just something like mixing juice with alcohol. Don’t worry about it...”

These two had absolutely no intention of explaining the situation. Realizing that any further questioning would be pointless, Seiya went back to the topic.

“Okay, whatever. That’s enough for Bandou Biino. What about Eiko-san? What do you guys think?”

“Why did you attach a -san to her name?”

“Tch...”

“At any rate, I don’t think there’s a need to worry about her past experiences hurting our image. The demographic for her previous job is completely different from ours. Also, her personality is one that will definitely bring a smile to any guest’s face. She’s sure to be a fine front-liner.”

“Seconded, *fumo.*”

“However,” Isuzu continued, “That doesn’t mean there’s no risk involved. Adachi Eiko’s past job could potentially cause some friction in the park. It’s also clear that Bandou Biino does not come from a very well-off environment. Her working here might invite some trouble.”

Hearing that, Moffle and Seiya nodded in admiration.

“...What’s that supposed to mean?” questioned Isuzu.

“Ah, nothing. Never knew you could reason so well.”

“I don’t get it, *fumo*. If you had such a good eye for people, why don’t you channel it into your socializing skills and stop pointing your musket at people?”

“Yeah! You were like that when you first came over and ‘invited’ me for a ‘date’!”

Hearing those remarks thrown at her, Isuzu’s glare became demonic. She appeared to be on the brink of drawing the musket out from her skirt. “If you’re gonna screw with me any longer, I’ll consider you my enemy...”

“There, you see? That’s precisely the problem!”

“Violent women aren’t trendy these days, *fumo*!”

Seiya and Moffle retorted as they began to seek shelter behind the tables.

“Tch...”

Having been told that much, she couldn't bring herself to carry on. Isuzu gave up the thought of shooting the two of them.

“...My, my. Anyway good work today, *fumo*. I'm gonna check on my sweet house and head back. Drop me a mail if there are any plans to hold another interview tomorrow.”

The commotion brought about by Biino had resulted in the interviews being cancelled midway. As such, they had postponed the appointments of the remaining applicants until a later date.

With Moffle having left the room, only Seiya and Isuzu remained. They continued cleaning the place in silence.

About 2 minutes later, someone stepped into the room.



“Uh...Erm—...”

“?”

“Is this the venue for the job interview?”

The girl who just entered looked like an elementary school student. Her twin tails and big eyes matched her clothing, and it wouldn't be weird to see her carrying a school bag.

“You are...?”

“Chuujou Shiina. I applied for a job here, sorry for being late,” She said in a timid voice.

“Something came up, so we postponed the interview. But either way we're not hiring you.”

“E-Eh!? Why?”

“Because of labor laws. We can't hire elementary school kids.”

“Huh, but I'm...”

“The exit’s the other way. Thanks for your interest.”

After getting shunned by Seiya, Chuujou Shiina walked out disheartened.

“It... didn’t happen that way in my dream. Just what’s been going on recently...?”
Isuzu muttered to herself.

“What the hell was that... In the first place, why is an elementary school student coming for the interviews? Weren’t you the one who shortlisted the candidates?”

“The shortlisting...of candidates?” An imaginary light bulb lit above Isuzu’s head.
“That’s it! That dream must have been due to my reading of the various application forms, resulting in such a weird...mm—!”

“Not again...”

“Ugh...I’m sorry.” Isuzu muttered while panting.

“But I’m certain there were no mistakes. That girl is a high schooler. She may not look like it but in fact she’s a first year student in Amagi High.”

“What? Shit...” Seiya ran out of the door and examined the hallway. There was no sign of her.

“Why didn’t you tell me earlier!?”

“I wanted to, but my thoughts got the better of me.”

“Damn. Looks like we’re gonna have to send an official letter of apology for the miscommunication, huh.”

“Though seeing your attitude towards her, I doubt she’ll want to work here anymore.”

“It doesn’t matter. That’s a different thing altogether.”

Isuzu’s expression blanked out at Seiya’s earnest response. “I see...”

The room-cleaning ended soon after. The two of them returned the cleaning tools and went back to their own office.

After grabbing their belongings, Isuzu said, “Kanie-kun.”

“Hm?”

“I’m well aware of your concerns...”

Seiya did not understand her random topic of conversation. “Concerns? What concerns?”

“Both you and Moffle were talking about my social skills back there.”

“Oh, that.”

As they paced through the empty hallway, Isuzu continued, “I don’t really understand it myself. I’m able to stay perfectly calm when I’m just observing people, but I falter once I have to take part. And that has resulted in many blunders on my part, some of which I don’t think I’ll ever be able to atone for...”

Seiya recalled hearing that Isuzu had served as the acting manager before he did. She put a lot of effort into her job but ended up driving the park into a corner.

It was until about 2 weeks before the deadline when Isuzu had run out of options. Then, Seiya came to the rescue and created a ‘miracle’. The comparison was one-sided; the current manager who saved the whole theme park against the former manager whose contributions could not even be seen. Furthermore, she was currently serving as his secretary. Seiya came to realize that this must have placed her in quite a tough and demoralizing position.

Unfortunately, Seiya could no longer use his magic powers on Isuzu.

“Assessing someone’s traits and actually communicating with them are two completely different things. Don’t let that get to you.”

It wasn't a completely alien concept to grasp. It was the equivalent of saying how the skills needed to be a pitcher and a batter were completely different.

Yet, Isuzu remained silent for a brief period before smiling a little. She was like a teary child who had found her mother. Seiya had never seen her with such an expression before.

"Kanie-kun, you're a cruel one," said Isuzu. "I've always thought that I'd be able to accept the difference in our capabilities and move on, but you never cease to amaze me. I really envy you, Kanie-kun, and that's why I cannot hide my feelings for yo—!!"

What? Is her "mm" rubbish still going?

"Hey, pull yourself together!" Seiya said as he watched Isuzu smack her head against the windows of the hallway.

"The fruit's effect has yet to wear off..."

There was no way Seiya could have maintained a straight face after hearing her thoughts.

Nonetheless, he now understood that even people like Isuzu had her own internal conflicts.

Then again, it's understandable for people to doubt themselves when facing such an OP dude like me.

“Don't worry, you're not the only one who envies my talent. I'm not bothered by it one bit.”

“Kanie-kun...you need to get off your high horse. Those condescending eyes of yours would churn anybody's stomach,” Isuzu said with a grimace.

“But I can't help it. I *am* superior, after all.”

“May Goddess Libra smite this infidel...” Isuzu said with a sigh, as she adjusted the strap of her bag.

Part 11

After discussing with each other their schedules for tomorrow, the two of them separated.

Isuzu went back to Maple Castle while Seiya headed for the staff entrance. He still had work to do, a good bit of it being emails, so he decided to bring them home to work on them.

Seiya exited through the gate and walked towards the bicycle parks. He'd recently gotten into the habit of cycling to work because he often had to work long after the final bus had departed. Thankfully, his house was in the same town, so even if he took his time, it wouldn't even take him 30 minutes to make the trip.

"Oh, good evening, Kanie-san."

A cast member who was heading for the bus stop greeted him. After responding with a "Yo," he hopped on his bike and began to pedal.

It was April, so nighttime was still quite chilly. Seiya used one hand to raise the zipper of his clothing as he rode down the streets. He eventually entered a hilly and forested road that headed straight to the center of town.

"Now, how should I deal with this..." He said it so low that the wind whipped away any trace of his words.

Of course, Seiya wasn't that stupid, nor was he that dense. He was well aware of the fruit that Isuzu ate and its effects. Similarly, he remembered the words that Isuzu had said before every "mm". His analysis of the situation had returned only one conclusion—

Yeah, that should be it... Though it's ultimately just conjecture... Is she actually interested in me as a member of the opposite sex?

Seiya would have been thankful if she'd been her usual quiet self. But because of the fruit, Isuzu, who normally never showed any emotion other than rage, was forced to speak her true thoughts.

And because of her words, Seiya had enough of a reason to believe that she was harboring at least some kind of feeling towards him.

The biggest problem here, however, was that Seiya's heart rate bumped up a notch when he realized this.

Normally Seiya would have shrugged it off with a "not another one of these stubborn suitors again...", but this time, that was not the case. This was one of the rare times when his heart throbbed painfully.

To be sure, there were several problems that would arise from this:

First, I am ultimately still her direct superior.

Nothing like this should be happening between a superior and subordinate, or in this case a manager and his assistant. Any traces of affection would only taint his judgment, and that could create doubt (and other problems) among the other staff members. Having a colorful relationship between a secretary and a manager (acting) was out of the question.

Second, what would happen to Latifa?

Of course, Seiya and Latifa weren't attached or anything, but they *did* share a kiss, and that was honestly the first time Seiya had ever felt any sense of attraction towards the opposite sex. Most likely, she had probably long forgotten about the event, but that memory stuck in Seiya's head like lipstick sticks to the mouth. Any further advances with Isuzu would result in...a sticky problem.

Last, what if this was all just my imagination?

Though unlikely, there was a chance that Seiya had made a fatal oversight and read this all wrong. What if she replied with "You seem to be mistaken..." or "Sorry, but I actually find you kind of creepy..."!? Seiya would never be able to recover his composure and pride from that. He'd rather throw himself off the ledge of Maple Castle and die.

But I don't wanna die...

"Ugh..."

The road descended and a van overtook Seiya from his side, leaving a gust of cold wind in its wake.

He was approaching a junction. Seiya applied the brakes and stopped in front of the traffic light that had turned amber.

Right then, a huge tank lorry came roaring from the side of Seiya's field of vision. Its speed was no joke; scary things might have happened if he hadn't braked promptly.

What if this was a sign? Seiya thought as he clutched his brakes.

It's decided, then.

Amber light it is.

Amber, the color of restraint. Let's just pretend I heard nothing today. Yeah, I'll play the dense and insensitive guy who is unaware of the fruit's side effects, and not read so much into this.

Seiya decided to stick with that plan for the time being.

His mind became at ease the moment he came to that decision. It would have been great if he had somebody to confide in, but unfortunately Seiya was a loner.

Right then, Seiya felt a vibration in his back pocket. It was most likely an email.

“...!”

Thinking it was another spam mail, Seiya took out his phone and checked the contents. While it was not something worth being shocked over, Seiya’s breathing stopped for a brief moment, bewildered. It was a message from Isuzu.

He clicked the icon.

“...I knew it.”

Another work-related message.

The mail reported the schedule for tomorrow, linked to an email of apology to Chuujou Shiina and gave extra details on today’s interviewees, Adachi Eiko and Bandou Biino. The contents were bland and concise.

Seiya typed a short reply: “Noted. See you tomorrow.”

The traffic light turned green, and Seiya continued making his way down the two-lane road. Just then, he felt another vibration. He stopped his bike and checked his phone.

“Sorry about today. As always, thank you.”

How was Seiya supposed to interpret her message that didn't even take up 10 words? He spent the rest of the night pondering over that message, but never came to a conclusion.

*

Isuzu stepped into the sky garden, kneeled on the stone floor and said, “Your Highness. First Royal Guard Isuzuruha Centollusia has returned.”

“Thank you for your hard work, Isuzu-san.” Latifa shifted her attention from the birds on the tree she was singing with and smiled.

The sky garden was located on the highest floor of Maple Castle and stood true to its name. Its bushes and flowers bloomed and danced to the tempo of the gentle winds and disco moonlight.

And in the corner of this very garden stood a young maiden. She had blonde hair and transparent white skin that matched her long dress.

“Please come in. I've prepared some tea.”

“Understood.”

Sento Isuzu...or rather, Isuzuruha Centollusia had a rather complicated relationship with Latifa.

Latifa Fleuranza was the Queen of Maple Land whom she had sworn allegiance and respect to. There was nothing wrong with that.

The problem was that she had been serving the 14-year-old Latifa for more than 10 years now.

Isuzu recalled her 3-4 year old self having her first audience with her highness in the imperial garden, where she bobbed with a curtsy saying "Pleased to meet you, Isuzu-san." Latifa was 14 back then.

The next time they met was much later, when Isuzu was 16.

She had long outgrown Latifa, and this time her "Pleased to meet you, Isuzu-san" sounded like she was addressing a senior.

Needless to say, her loyalty remained unwavering, but whether she should be treated as a younger sister or an older sister was killing her. How should she conduct herself when they got the chance to speak in informal situations?

Furthermore, the events today had given Isuzu a brand new quandary.

(Your Highness...)

If I may ask...

What do you think of Kanie Seiya?

Intermission 1: First Staff Dormitory, Winchester

Macaron's room, the room where the Adachi Eiko Movie Marathon was supposed to have been held, had a grim atmosphere.

The AV discs that Tiramie had happily brought back showed a cover girl that did not resemble her one bit. Tricen had mentioned that her stage name was "Anjou Erina", but this mature and married woman was a little too fat.

Macaron had been preparing some canned beer in excitement, but when he saw this, it gave him goose bumps.

"H-How did it end up like this, *ron*?" Macaron asked, seemingly annoyed.

"*Mi*... I looked through all the rental and sales shops but this was the only one I could find," said Tiramie, who was still panting after having returned from his expedition. He had sifted through so many DVDs that his pupils had lost their sparkle.

"I guess Tricen had his info mixed up, *fumo*..." Moffle commented. He mixed some hot water with his shochu¹ and hung his head in disappointment.

¹ Shochu: A Japanese distilled alcoholic beverage.

“But how can that be...is Tricen really that cock-eyed? The inaccuracy of his search could win him an Olympic medal, *ron!*”

“I phoned him just now, and he said that his phone must have stretched the image I sent him. That’s some lousy model he has there, *fumo.*”

“Then try sending it again! He should be able to—”

“I did, *fumo.* But right afterwards, he told me he had given up. Guess he doesn’t know her stage name either.”

“Screw this shit!” Macaron slammed the can of beer on the table.

“Calm your furs, *fumo.* You’ve never actually met her in person, so what’s there to be so frustrated about?”

“But you sounded so hyped when you met her earlier, *ron!* It’s like you found someone of a totally different level from the ones in our park! Do you understand how it feels to miss this unreal opportunity!?”

“Well...”

“You and Tricen are useless, *ron!* How are you going to compensate for the disappointment you’ve caused?”

“Tch, so I’m on the same level as Tricen now, huh?”

Seeing the two of them getting worked up, Tiramie tried to break the tension.

“Hey guys, quarrelling won’t solve the problem, *mi*. Let’s just watch this anyway. This DVD might be a 480 yen wagon sale product, but that doesn’t mean we should toss it, right?”

“Just throw the damned thing away, *ron*! It’s useless!”

“*Mofu*... She’s a little too big for our tastes, isn’t she?”

Hearing their remarks as they pointed at the package, Tiramie gave a “*Mi*? Oh really? This is my type, though.”

“Wha—”

The two of them shuddered in fear upon realizing the depth of Tiramie’s tastes.

*

In the end, the three of them did not watch the video Tiramie bought. Instead, they watched one from Macaron’s collection, named “Black Hawk Down”.

The heavy atmosphere among the three persisted for about 30 minutes before the show started to get exciting. The US troops stationed in Somalia were under assault, and bullets showered the battlefield. This was further intensified by the 6.1 surround sound system in Macaron's room.

"Aw yeah, this movie is awesome, *ron*! This is what all zombie movies should be like!"

"Huh? This is a war movie, *fumo*."

"No, it's a zombie movie, *ron*. Even the writer Satou Daisuke said it. The Somalia troops keep comin' no matter how many magazines you deplete."

"I see, so these are zombies, *mi*."

"I cry every time I watch Gordon and Shugart die, *ron*. Also, I believe this was the movie that brought the Springfield M14 rifle's popularity. It's an awesome weapon, you know? It's just that the youngsters hated the wooden stock and ancient vibe it gives. And so they did a really good job changing it to a synthetic polymer stock and added picatinny rails, giving this rifle more punch—"

And so the three of them continued with their discussion on the weapons shown while soaking in both the thrill of war and their tears of loss.

Intermission 2: Second Staff Dormitory, BT

On that very same night, Isuzu secretly sent an email to Adachi Eiko.

“I am the manager’s head of secretariat. If possible, may we know the stage name you used for your previous job? We require this information in order to reference your previous employer. Please be assured that your personal information will be kept in strict confidentiality.”

While it may be true that she told herself never to speak of this to anyone, the other contents of the email were blatant lies. Isuzu couldn’t help it; she already had a day’s worth of embarrassment with Seiya to deal with, the least she could do was quench her curiosity on this matter.

She received the reply almost instantly.

It contained her stage name, the titles of her previous works and some pleasantries on today’s interviews.

Isuzu replied with, “Thank you. We will inform you of your application results at a later date,” and looked at the contents.

The title was “Gather Round, Boob Freaks! Sucky☆Sucky Paradise!”

Boob Freaks? How appalling. And what is this 'Sucky Sucky Paradise'? Makes me feel sick to the core. This world is so broken.

Isuzu shivered a little upon realization that there were people of the land out there who were able to think of names like these.

Because typing that title out on her keyboard felt disgusting, Isuzu decided to copy-paste it into her search engine. Several links to DVD downloads were generated. There was a YouTube video link too.

“...?”

Wait a minute, shouldn't videos with titles like these be banned on YouTube?

At any rate, she decided to confirm the content of the video. She mustered the strength to click her mouse button.

A video of what seemed to be a livestock farm began to play, bringing along a soothing country BGM.

An ewe was breastfeeding her lamb, who was desperately sucking on her nipples.

“Oh my! Look at that lamb! It must be really, really hungry!”

An off-video narration could be heard.



It was Adachi Eiko's voice.

“Sheep are just like us humans, who usually only give birth to one baby at a time, so this is a very precious moment for her! She'll take good care of her baby all the way, so let's hope that it becomes a strong and energetic sheep!”

After the narration ended, the scenes of various lambs drinking their mother's milk continued.

“All lambs love their mother's milk! They'll drink lots of it until they're able to feed on grass by themselves.”

The screen went black for a moment.

Next up was a scene of pigs feeding their piglets.

“Wah—! There are so many piglets! One...two...three...it looks like there might be more than ten of them competing for their mother's milk! Hey everyone, don't push each other, sucky sucky!”

The next scene was about calves, narrated by Adachi Eiko.

After that was hamsters, once again narrated by Adachi Eiko.

The following scenes contained dogs, horses, cats, even wild animals like monkeys, elephants and other rare species of mammals that use breastfeeding were featured.

The video ended at about 20 minutes.

Isuzu stared blankly at the screen, trying to process what she had just watched.

“In other words...Animal Videos (AV)?”

Chapter 2: We're Lacking in Funds!

Part 1

There were three things that Latifa Fleuranza enjoyed every night.

First, she enjoyed cooking croquettes for the guests who would visit the park the next day.

Second, she enjoyed singing with the birds in the sky garden.

And lastly, she enjoyed bathing.

The fragrant plants soaking in the hot water gave off a light aroma. Although Latifa Fleuranza could not see, she did not need any help from others, for she had memorized where everything in the bathroom was. For some reason, the memory reset earlier this month had not included her muscle memory.

Nonetheless, Latifa had stopped using the bath since last week. She no longer had the luxury to heat water for the bathtub, since any excess gas and water used would be a waste of resources and ultimately, money. She had also heard that the staff dormitories had begun limiting the usage of gas to heat their bathing water too.

As such, Latifa brought a kettle of boiling water from the kitchen all the way to the bathroom, and poured it and some cold water into a small washing tub to control the temperature. She took off her clothes and cleaned herself with a towel and soap bar, using the remaining water to rinse herself.

Latifa could only wash her hair once every three days, which could not be considered a luxury.

“...”



Still shivering, she hurried to the dressing room and grabbed a towel to dry herself. She was cold and miserable, and she really hoped she could have a nice, aromatic bath.

But then Latifa caught herself, and reminded herself not to have thoughts like that. Everyone was trying their best, and hopefully *he* could create another miracle.

“...K-choo!” She sneezed lightly, continuing to search for her undergarments.

*

Sento Isuzu was using a nearby public bath because her unit bath was unusable. Besides, she could not bring herself to enjoy such a luxury when Her Highness was suffering.

The public bath she entered was 50 years old.

The décor inside resembled the Showa era. The white tile and walls had paintings of Mt. Fuji on them, and the dressing room had an old swinging electric fan. Coffee milk in glass bottles could be seen in the glass refrigerator.

Isuzu had been using her unit bath every day since she came to Amaburi, so the sight of this bath shocked her.

“Hey, Isuzu-san...” Muse, the fairy of water, had come to the bath with Isuzu. She spoke in a polite manner.

“It’s my first time here. Mind guiding me?” asked Isuzu. Muse, in turn, went ahead of her and pulled her in.

“Hey, Isuzu-san, you’ve been staring at that Keroyon¹ frog-shaped wash bowl for quite a while now. You know that does nothing, right?”

“...”

Isuzu, who was stark naked, snorted as she continued gazing at the wash bowl. “Do you think they’re selling this?”

“Here? Probably not. I saw it at Tokyu Hands a while back, though. You’re interested in these kind of things, huh?”

“No, I just feel that using these to advertise could be a good idea, and I kind of considered buying it because it’s cheap...”

How about printing “Amagi Brilliant Park” on a simple wash bowl and distributing them to nearby baths? We could even add pictures of the lead mascots.

¹ Keroyon is the name of a frog character in a Japanese TV show in the '60s

“You’re always thinking about work, huh. Don’t forget that it takes quite a bit of effort to ensure the printing doesn’t dissolve in the water. It wouldn’t be cheap.”

“I see...”

No matter what they came up with, it would all come down to cost in the end. It seemed like they had to give up on this idea as well.

Isuzu returned to her usual gloomy attitude and returned the wash bowl. She walked towards the bath and placed her bath towel in the hot water. Just when she was about to get in—

“H-Hey wait...Isuzu-san!”

“What’s the matter?”

Muse grabbed onto Isuzu’s shoulders and picked the towel up out of the water. “Putting your hand towel into the bath is prohibited! Fold it nicely and rest it on your head. Also, you should only enter the bath after scrubbing yourself clean, since others are using the bath too. Otherwise, it’d be unhygienic, right?”

“Unhygienic...?”

Indeed, the park's financial position had resulted in her being only able to bathe once a day. Isuzu hadn't had a chance to bathe in 22 hours and 32 minutes, so she couldn't argue.

She had endured not being able to bathe every 8 hours like usual, but both her body and soul were wilting. How was she supposed to accept the fact that Muse just implied she was dirty?

"H-Hey, don't make such a sullen face. Anyway, let's wash up. Over here!"

"..." I only wanted to get in the bath..."

Muse brought a rather disappointed Isuzu in front of a mirror, and Isuzu sat down. She wrapped up her soap bar with a hand towel and began to scrub until foam came out. Not wanting to break any more of the unspoken rules in the public bath, she watched Muse's every action and mimicked them.

I see...so you start by cleaning the right leg, followed by the buttocks and the hips. After that, you carefully scrub the toes on your left leg in small, circular motions.

"I-Is something the matter?" Feeling Isuzu's intent stare, Muse couldn't help but stiffen.

"Nothing. Please continue."

“I would if you weren’t staring at me like that... Wait, don’t tell me you’re into yuri?”

The whole of Muse’s body flushed and contorted in front of Isuzu, who remained silent.

“W-Was that why you invited me? I’m honored, but...I don’t think it’ll work. Having my bare body stared at like that, I...”

“...”

Muse suddenly switched to a neutral tone of voice as she continued. “Honestly, I’ll freak out; I’m not into these things, after all.”

It sounded just like the kind of “one more time and we’re through” warnings given when students in all-girl schools groped their friends to tease them.

Despite that, Isuzu’s gaze did not waver one bit. “...I see. I don’t know what you’re talking about, but please, continue. Otherwise, I won’t be able to enter the bath.”

“Oh, so *that’s* why you were looking at me like that...my bad. But there’s no need to be so intrusive. Just clean yourself like you normally would.”

“Understood.”

Because Isuzu wanted to get in quickly, she began to scrub her body briefly and rapidly. Seeing that, Muse let out a sigh.

A while later, she called out to Isuzu again. “But then again, Isuzu-san. From a business perspective, we really should be acting a little more yuri at a bath like this.”

Muse suggested this based on some logic from an unknown industry.

“...And what’s this ‘yuri’ thing you’re talking about?”

“You know, just like how I got all flustered when you were looking at me, or being all close and touchy and saying things like ‘Woah Isuzu, your skin is so pretty~’ or ‘Really? Your skin makes me wanna tease you more. Take that!’.”

Isuzu paused, and gave Muse an icy stare. “I never knew you had interests like that...”

“Woah, coming from someone who did *that* to me earlier? You just betrayed my expectations of you!”

“I don’t get it. Doing that would just be a hassle for both of us. Anyway, let’s talk after we get in.”

“Hey, that’s mean. I just—”

Isuzu interrupted her with a wave of her hand. “I’m going in,” and made her way to the bath. She looked around to check if there were any hostile responses. It appeared that she had the green light this time.

As instructed, Isuzu placed her wet towel on top of her head.

“Ah...” It had been a long time since she’d felt this good. This had to be the origin for the phrase ‘to sink deep into one’s heart’. Indescribable feelings of happiness enveloped her whole body like the water.

Perhaps there were kappas in Isuzu’s bloodline? The ecstasy she felt when she placed the moist towel on top of her head could be proof. Maybe her favorite food being cucumbers had to do with this, too?

At any rate, this was the best sensation she’d felt in a while.

“Sadly, I doubt we can use public baths like this often,” Muse said upon following Isuzu into the bath.

“Yes, you’re right...” Isuzu gazed at the ceiling high above and sighed.

“We’re lacking in funds. At this rate...”

Part 2

Isuzu and Muse paid for the use of the public bath. At the same time, Latifa had just rinsed herself with cold water, sneezing. Meanwhile, however...

Moffle, Macaron and Tiramie were enjoying a luxurious massage at a spa.

“Ah— So... goooooood... That hits the spot, *fumo*.”

“Yeah...put more force into it... More...yeah, that’s it, *ron*.”

“Hey auntie, I like your style, *mi*. Let’s exchange numbers!”

Said the three mascots, who moaned in pleasure on the massage table.

Including the 2,500 yen basic fee, the cost for the massage amounted up to 7,000 yen. That was an absurd amount even for an above-average salary man.

“Hey, stop it~ Don’t tease me like that!”

The woman massaging Tiramie’s back blushed and smiled. Her act was certainly spectacular, as good as one of those deceptive weight-loss product commercials on TV.

“Hey, I’m serious, *mi*. Give me your mail address. LINE is fine too.”

“Be careful of this guy, *ron*. He’s a playboy.”

“He’s right, *fumo*. You don’t want to lose your family, do you?”

Said the three of them, who in turn burst out laughing.

Unfortunately, the woman already had a husband, and two kids in high school. Although she had no interest in having any sort of relationship with Tiramie, she still appeared to be pleased with his flattery. The other masseuses laughed along with them and left the room.

“...Aw yeah, that was great, *ron*. What’s next?”

“Mm, the sauna and massage was awesome, *fumo*. Now, let’s have some...”

“Beer and yakiniku, *mi*! Kalbi! Kalbi!”

“Kalbi! Kalbi!”

“Kalbi! Kalbi!”

The three of them shouted “LET’S GO!!”, and headed for the classy yakiniku bar located within the spa.

By the way, the reason the mascots could afford all this was thanks to the Satsuki Sho horse racing event. Tiramie gathered the information, Macaron did the analysis and Moffle provided the capital. The details of their stunt shall be omitted, but to say the three of them had evenly split their roles would be apt. And because of that, the insane 300-yen-a-piece kalbi was no longer a problem for their wallets.

“I’m so glad to be alive, *ron*. I haven’t had food like this in ages!” exclaimed Macaron as he gulped down his beer.

“I won’t deny that this is fun, but I can’t help but feel a little guilty for indulging in this, *fumo*.”

“*Mi?* Why?”

“Because of Amaburi’s funds, *fumo*. I heard that we’re taking huge losses due to the events in March.” Moffle lamented this, as if taking partial responsibility for the situation that the park was facing.

“What’re you saying, Moffle? Now’s not the time to worry about work, *ron*.”

“Anyway, let’s dig in, *mi!*”

“I guess you’re right, *fumo*.”

And so with renewed spirits, the three mascots clinked their beer glasses together and enjoyed the kalbi to the bottom of their hearts, all without sparing consideration for Latifa, Isuzu, Muse and the other cast members who were suffering.

“Ah— This is the best, *mi!*”

“Aw, yeah! *Ron!*”

Part 3

The following week in a meeting room in block 1—

“I have bad news today,” Seiya lamented. “We’re severely lacking in funds. If we don’t find a source of capital soon, we might not even be able to afford your wages.”

Starting with Isuzu, a majority of the members present sighed a dismal “I knew it...”

On the other hand, the three mascots, Moffle, Macaron and Tiramie, who were sitting at a side of the room banged on the table and sprang out of their seats. To be precise, only Macaron and Tiramie were guilty, as Moffle had already anticipated Seiya’s announcement and merely closed his eyes while folding his arms, going “*Mofu...*”

“We’re getting no pay? Did you just say we’re getting nothing, *ron!*?”

“That’s unheard of, *mi!* It’s just too much!”

The two of them were already blanched when they exclaimed.

“Quit complaining, you two. Raising your voices ain’t gonna raise our funds,” Seiya muttered.

“But...but I have a lot of overdue bills, *mi*! My phone bill, utility bills, even my credit card bills...they’re all banking on this month’s pay!”

“Same here, *ron*! I only have enough savings to allocate 500 yen a day until payday! What should I do after that!?”

Moffle furrowed his eyebrows after hearing their plight. “What are you guys talking about, *fumo*? Didn’t we just earn some money last week?”

“We earned money? Since when?”

“We won the Satsuki Sho, remember? We split our profits of 150,000 yen and even went for a celebration, *fumo*.”

That caught the attention of the other cast members who brightened up, giving comments like “Wow, good for you!”, “How did you guys do that?” and “Maybe I should give it a shot too!”

“ ... ”

However, Seiya frowned. Mascots who were supposed to bring joy to young kids were gambling and indulging in ostentatious spending? That'd kill their reputation if word got out.

“Macaron and Tiramie, what are you two whining about? I mean sure, we did go for a tiny celebration but surely you guys should have some leftover money to get through a few months, *fumo*.”

Hearing that, the two mascots fell silent with mischievous smiles on their faces.

“I blew it all on pachinko, *ron*...”

“I spent it all in lingerie pubs, heh...”

There's gotta be a limit to how stupid these two can get...

Realizing they were in the hot seat, the two of them struggled with their excuses.

“B-But I *did* win in the first round, *ron*! And so I thought I had some remaining luck from the horse racing and decided to continue...”

“T-That babe in the lingerie pub was feeling down 'cause she didn't have enough nominations, and I just lent her a helping hand, *mi*!”

“Whatever, just quit complaining.”

“Okay...”

Isuzu’s musket silenced the two mascots.

“...Back to the topic. At any rate, we have no money now. We might end up being overdue on our bills and wages to our cast members, which might eventually lead to our closure. We’ll try to give enough for your personal expenses, but you should be prepared to have your wages delayed, or even cut.”

Hearing that, Ashe raised her hand. “But, manager, aren’t the new part-timers starting work this month? How are we going to explain the situation to our current staff? Hiring new staff and pay cuts don’t go together...”

“We absolutely need the extra manpower.” Seiya said, resolute in his stance. “They’ll come in handy once we get over our financial lull period. I will not negotiate on this matter.”

“But we’re finished if we delay the payments further anyway. This attitude is just like a one-man admiral who is the first to sneak away like a mouse when his ship is about to sink...wait, I didn’t mean you, Moffle-san.” Ashe waved her hands at Moffle, who gave a strange expression.

“...My apologies. I should have discussed this in private. Things will sour if other cast members hear about this.”

Ashe was right. Amaburi may have been a lame and boring theme park, but that in itself did not justify the delay in payments. Even the rumor of such plans would be detrimental, possibly even wasting their efforts throughout March, just like a popped soap bubble.

“I understand your concerns, but if it eventually came to that, we have no choice but to accept it. Of course, I have faith that the members present here would not spread the word about the state of our park; there’s no benefit in doing so anyway.”

“...”

The room became silent. Seiya’s phrase “I have faith” must have resonated within the cast members’ hearts.

“Also, I have something I need to discuss with everyone today. Currently we need about 25,000,000 yen, and another 25,000,000 in two weeks. Does anyone have any ideas to share?”

The atmosphere became tense when the members heard the amount of money required. That sum was as hard to earn as winning a Satsuki Sho or getting big returns through pachinko games.

“Any idea will do. Just bring up whatever comes to your mind.”

Macaron raised his hand. “Uhh, let’s go to pachinko together.”

“Rejected. Others?”

“*Mi*. What about horse racing?”

“Rejected. Let’s not resort to gambling, shall we?”

“*Mofu*. Let’s rob a convenience store.”

“Rejected. Assuming one store gives us 50,000 yen, we’ll have to rob 500 of them to get the required money.”

“Then what about banks?”

“Rejected. No robberies either.”

“*Mofu*. How about Multi-Level Marketing?”

“Don’t say that with that expression! And MLM’s illegal. Anything else?”

“I know, we should open a red light theme park!”

“We’d be violating the law.”

“Sell erotic doujin merchandise.”

“Will they even sell? And we can’t earn 25 mil through just that.”

“Erotic figurines.”

“Are you even listening to me?”

“Dakimakuras.”

“Stop suggesting perverted things.”

“Handshake tickets.”

“Do people even want to shake hands with you guys?”

The stream of proposals and outright rejections continued for a whole hour. Despite that, nothing good came out of the discussions.

“Seiya...I doubt we can just fish out a strategy to earn 25 mil out of the blue like that, *fumo*,” said Moffle. He was exhausted from listening to all their ideas.

“Tch... To be fair, though, I never thought we’d think of *anything*...”

Hearing that, the cast members became worked up.

“If you knew that all along, then why even bother consulting us, *mi!*? I’m bad with money!”

“Shouldn’t Seiya be the one in charge of coming up with a plan?”

“Yeah! We’ll leave this month’s miracle in your hands!”

Hearing such comments coming from the cast members, Seiya bit his lip. *Aren’t their expectations of a 850 yen-per-hour high schooler a little too high?*

By the way, 850 yen per hour was Tokyo’s minimum wage. Seiya did not really care how much he earned as long as he was working, but this was clearly too much.

Seiya wanted to voice his displeasure, but not a word of complaint came out from his mouth. If he were to shout “Don’t rely on a person like me!”, they might really never do so again.

Isuzu who was sitting next to Seiya tugged the sleeve of his shirt, (Kanie-kun...)

(What?)

(Should we bring up the Mal-Mart plan we've been thinking of?)

(Don't. I want the staff to take some responsibility and think of a plan themselves.)

(I see...)

Isuzu returned her gaze to her notebook computer and continued typing up the minutes of the meeting.

"Oh wait, *ron!*" Macaron suddenly smacked the table and stood up.

"There's Dornel's Cave, *ron!* Dornel's Cave!"

"Ah *that, fumo.*" Moffle nodded his head as if remembering something. However, the other cast members were clueless about the aforementioned cave.

"What's that?"

“A cave in the 2nd park, *ron!* Only the older cast members know the urban legends about it!”

The 2nd park was a separate piece of land that occupied the southern corner of Amagi Brilliant Park. There were plans to develop the area during the economic bubble, but they were halted due to financial constraints, leaving unfinished infrastructure scattered throughout the area.

The only building complete was the huge stadium used for the soccer match last month, but nonetheless the cast members continued to call the area the “2nd Park” out of habit.

“And is this cave you speak of an attraction or something?”

“Nope. It’s a legitimate cave that existed in 2nd park’s forest long before they made Amagi Park, isn’t it?”

Amagi Park was the name of the park that was on this piece of land before Amaburi was built. It managed to garner much popularity from people living in Tama during the Taisho¹ era before it closed in the ‘70s. And it was during the ‘80s when Maple Land bought the area and transformed it into the Amaburi of today.

“How will this cave solve our financial problems?” Isuzu asked.

¹ Taisho Era: 1912–1926

Moffle gazed far away into the distance and began, “More than ten years ago, there was a fairy named <Dornel>—”

“What a pretentious name...gives the impression of an old, heavy weapon.”

He even used <> symbols, just like how these were attached to Full Metal Panic names like <Arbalest> and <Laevatein>.

“Don’t change the topic of the story, *fumo!* ...One summer night, <Dornel> was drunk and brought his friends to the 2nd Park, probably for a test of courage or something. The group headed for the depths of the cave.”

“By the way, Dornel was the fairy of flowers 2 generations before me,” said Tiramie.

“Oh yeah, forgot to mention that *fumo*. Back to the topic...the group of friends Dornel brought with—”

“Cut to the chase!” Seiya interrupted.

“But this story has a mystery in it, *fumo!* Without preamble, there’s no effect...”

“Whatever, get to the point.”

“...Apparently there’s a treasure chest in that cave, *fumo*.” Moffle reluctantly revealed.

Part 4

This was the information Moffle and Macaron had:

The cave was located inside the slope of a valley in the remote jungle at the 2nd park. Supposedly, it used to be an air-raid shelter built during the Pacific War.

One fine summer night, Dornel and his friends happened to be chatting about the cave. They had also heard the rumors about it being an air-raid shelter, but they found it difficult to believe—why would there be a need to build one when there’s no one to evacuate within close proximity? Perhaps it wasn’t a bomb shelter, but the remains of something far greater?

Dornel and friends then went on an expedition to discover the truth behind the cave.

“All the intel gathered thus far is true, *fumo*. Macaron and I were with him then, after all. I opted not to go because I had a rehearsal for a parade the following day. Looking back, I really should have stopped them back then...” Moffle said.

“And what happened after that?”

“Dornel never came back, *ron*.” Macaron answered.

It was said that Dornel's two companions were found in a corner of the 2nd park two days later, half-dead and covered in wounds and dirt from head to toe. They were so worn out they couldn't even speak a word.

After the two recovered, they both claimed that there was a labyrinth inside that cave. The three initially entered in a semi-drunken state and ended up being lost and assaulted by monsters and traps.

After frantically searching for the exit in an attempt to escape while drinking puddle water for survival, they ended up in the deepest part of the labyrinth. They saw a treasure chest guarded by a huge dragon who looked at them with eyes that flared as brightly as its breath—

“A dragon, you say?”

“Yeah, a bona fide dragon.”

“Not another one of those fantasy stories...”

Seeing Seiya's expression of disbelief, Moffle frowned.

“I personally find it hard to believe too, *fumo*. But anyway, that was their claim.”

“And then?”

“Dornel ended up being caught by the dragon, and possibly could have been eaten, *fumo*. The other two managed to escape in one piece and found their way to the surface.”

The cast members of Amaburi organized a search and rescue team who ventured into the cave in question, but met a dead end several meters into the cave.

“It was a really old cave, yet there were no traces of anything abnormal, *fumo*. We searched everywhere, but couldn’t find the entrance to this labyrinth.”

“And so we had no choice but to give up the search... Dornel remains missing to this day.”

—And that was all the information they had.

“...Okay, so you wasted all that time just to tell me about the claims of a treasure chest by some drunken fools?” Seiya’s head began to hurt.

“*Mofu*. I guess you can put it that way...but more importantly—”

“*Mi*. I’ve brought it!”

Tiramie entered the meeting room, still panting. He had left the room momentarily after Macaron whispered something into his ear.

Tiramie was holding on to a small and rustic old wooden box.

“What’s that?”

“It’s one of the items kept in our commemorative storage, *fumo*. The storage contains all sorts of things, from photos to trophies, that Amaburi has obtained throughout its 30 years of history. The memorabilia generally doesn’t hold any monetary value, but this one is different; it pertains to Dornel’s cave...”

Moffle took the box and opened it.

“One of the two mascots who escaped the labyrinth held this coin in his hand, *fumo*.”

There was a big golden coin in the wooden box. It had a strange design that they’d never seen before, and its size was slightly bigger than a typical 500 yen coin.

“It’s a coin used in the magical realm Schubert, *ron*. I’d say its value might be about 100,000 yen now, given its 100-year-history.”

“Huh...” Seiya used a handkerchief to pick up the coin, glaring at it.

On the other hand, Tiramie got the shock of his life and shouted, “100,000, *mi*? Why didn’t you say that earlier!? I would’ve run off with it!”

“That’s precisely why I didn’t tell you, *fumo*! And hey, Seiya, give it back.”

“Tch...”

Moffle took the coin from Seiya, carefully placed it back into the box and covered the lid.

“It is said that there are heaps of coins like this in the labyrinth. If the rumors turned out to be true, our bank account would leap several digits, effectively wiping away any trace of financial problems, *ron*.”

“*If* it were true, *fumo*. We’ll never know unless we find out for ourselves.”

The “Dornel’s cave” conversation ended there. In the end, the meeting concluded without any solid ideas that could tackle the financial problem.

Part 5

“Kanie-kun. I...hope you didn’t believe what Moffle and the rest said yesterday...”
Isuzu asked Seiya the following day while they were traversing a footpath in the 2nd park.

It was slightly past noon. The mild sunlight of spring and the chirping of birds made this the perfect picnic area for those who strolled into the woods.

“Not exactly...but the money was real, wasn’t it?”

“You’re right. I am no connoisseur, but even I know that was legal tender.”

“I highly doubt the existence of such a treasure box, but I’m certainly concerned about the existence of these coins. The thought of having an M.I.A. cast member disturbs me too, so I’d like to at the very least check that cave out.”

Isuzu stared at Seiya from the side intently, as if trying to discover his true motives. There were also traces of anticipation in her eyes.

“Hey, quit staring at me.”

“This isn’t the first time you’ve used vague reasons to come to the park, the previous one being a ‘preliminary check on the stadium’.”

“Don’t get your hopes too high. We’re not going to be able to reverse our situation with a trip to a cave.”

“...I know.”

“And right after that, we’ll check the whole park. We won’t succeed in our negotiations if there are problems with it, after all. We ought to confirm its state before the meeting later.”

Seiya and Isuzu had an important business meeting to attend at 4 today. The meeting was kept in absolute secrecy, so very few staff members were aware of it, including Ashe. Even then, Ashe was only told about this a day before the meeting. Seiya had taken more than 2 weeks off from school in order to make rounds checking every inch of the 2nd park and to prepare for the meeting.

“You think they’ll really accept this?”

“We can never be too careful. Who knows, there might be a fatal problem here that we’ve yet to discover. You might want to focus on our work instead of questioning me.”

“...Understood.”

With that, the two continued their walk through the woods without saying anything further.

Seiya was wearing a pair of jeans and a thick shirt, coupled with some hiking shoes and work gloves. He had changed into this rugged outfit before coming here, given that they might be stepping into mud and encountering obstacles. Likewise, Isuzu wore a safari shirt, some hot pants and jungle boots. They certainly looked like they were visiting something far more treacherous than a park, perhaps an unexplored territory in Africa or South America.

Throughout the journey, Seiya could not set his mind at ease. After all, he *was* together with Isuzu deep in an uninhabited forest.

Putting the awkward interview drama aside, the fact that Isuzu's hot pants had let Seiya notice her beautiful thighs did not help either. He had originally said he was going alone, but Isuzu insisted they go together because she was his secretary.

"Say, Sento..."

"Yes?"

"Could it be that..."

Could it be that you actually wanted to go with me, just the two of us?

Seiya visualized himself asking that in various ways. With a straight face? In a teasing manner? Or maybe in a 'what do you think tomorrow's weather will be?' tone? Nonetheless, he could not imagine himself doing any of those properly.

“...Never mind, forget I said anything.”

“I see. Would you mind not talking to me if you have nothing to say?”

This. I don't even...

“We should be reaching our destination soon. ...There it is.”

The 2nd Park may have been huge, but ultimately it was just a segment of the theme park. They arrived at their destination in less than 10 minutes.

There was a small opening by the slope, concealed by some trees. The entrance to that opening was fenced, with a discolored signboard reading “Do Not Enter. Authorized Personnel Only.”

“I see it...but wait...”

They could see some figures crouching in front of the fence.

“You're late, *fumo*.”

“We've been waiting for centuries, *ron*.”

“Hurry up and let’s get going, *mi!*”

‘The Three Mascoteers’ spoke in lethargy. Cigarette butts, empty PET bottles and convenience store packaging was littered around them.

Such terrible manners. They’d better clean this up later.

“I’m pretty sure we’re open as per usual today, so why are these punks over here? I don’t remember giving them permission to loaf around.”

The three of them scowled.

“Says the acting manager who came ‘without a reason’, *fumo.*”

“We’re really busy too! But we didn’t have a choice since Isuzu-chan requested this...”

“We’re here to help you, *mi!*”

Seiya tore his gaze from them and looked at Isuzu.

“Sento. What’s the meaning of this?”

“You know what happened to Dornel, don’t you? On the off-chance that we do get trapped in that labyrinth, a couple of guards could come in handy. We can’t risk you losing your life, after all,” Isuzu answered in earnest.

“Like I said, I didn’t come here to go treasure-hunting. I’m just concerned about this cave and came to check on it. Okay, think about it, let’s assume we actually do get into danger. Guards? *Them*? These guys can’t even save their own lives.”

Hearing that, the three retorted.

“Hey, that’s mean, *mi!*”

“Ignore him that’s what all the young and naive kids say, *ron.*”

“I’m Cus D’Amato’s last disciple¹. What are you, Seiya? An idiot?”

Seiya shrugged, waving his hands saying “Okay, whatever, suit yourselves.”

“It’s just a random cave, but if you really wanna tag along then do whatever you want. You guys have wasted enough time already.”

¹ Cus D’Amato was also Mike Tyson’s boxing trainer.

Seiya was mentally prepared to just take a quick look around the empty cave and end the exploration with nothing found. Then, he'd spend the journey back lecturing these busybodies.

"Let's go. Open it up for me, would you?"

Isuzu nodded, and inserted a key into the padlock, unlocking it. She pushed the creaking gate open and the five of them walked in.

"Seriously...? I'm just doing a preliminary inspection and I need 4 escorts?"

They confirmed that the opening in the slope was indeed a cave with an entrance that was cleanly wrapped by tall grass growing around it. The cave's entrance extended for about 10 meters, but ended with a dead end.

"There you have it, nothing in here."

Moffle and gang whipped out their pocket flashlights and began to inspect the walls. "It really looks like some sort of air-raid shelter. Maybe the missing members got burnt to death? Or maybe the lack of oxygen caused them to faint or hallucinate...?"

"There's a hidden switch, *mi*." Tiramie said.

“What?”

“Look at this pebble, see?”

There was a small 100 yen sized pebble buried in the rocks. Tiramie placed his ears on the wall and tried to move it.

“I see...it’s camouflaged, *mi*. This is the switch and that’s the lever. If I follow the sequence: up, up, down, down, left, right, left, right, B, A...”

“Only people in their 30s will understand that joke, *ron*.”

“I-It opened, *mi*!”

With a sudden loud roar, the wall began to slide open. It was, in fact, a hidden door.

“How could such a ridiculous...”

With Seiya completely dumbfounded, the three mascots exclaimed.

“Nice, Tiramie! You’re really good at stuff like this, *fumo*.”

“You once got arrested for breaking into Maple Bank, didn’t you? So that’s the skill of a Maple Land prison escapee, *ron*.”

“Heh, you flatter me!”

So this guy has a criminal record!?

Seiya had tons of questioning to do, but his attention was diverted to the long passageway that extended deep into the cave. The passage had a slight bend and continued into the darkness.

“It’s an underground labyrinth, *ron*! The rumors were true!!”

Part 6

It appeared that Seiya had gotten himself mired in a series of unfortunate events.

It also seemed that the story of Dornel's cave wasn't a joke, either. Even if they were to dismiss the possibility of a hidden treasure chest, there was no way they could turn around and go back without exploring this cave.

Let's just sneak a peek...

Everyone shared the same opinion, and ventured deeper into the cave with great caution. The cave was wreathed in complete darkness, but they were able to see properly thanks to the flashlights they brought.

"Pretty strange..." Isuzu muttered as she kneeled on the floor.

"What is?"

"There's hardly any dust...a little too clean for a decade-old uninhabited cave."

"You're right."

Right then, there was a loud roar coming from behind. They turned around, only to see the hidden door closing on them.

“...!”

Tiramie, who was the closest to the door, tried to make a run for it. But it was too late; the thick piece of rock had sealed their only exit.

“We’re trapped, *mi!*”

“What on earth? Our escape path’s been blocked!”

“It’s all right, *ron*. It’s a standard scene in both horror and archaeology movies. Let’s just hope it ends the “archeology” way...”

“Yeah, we’d be corpses if it were horror, *fumo.*”

“Where’s the panic, guys? And hey, Tiramie. Can’t you open it for us!?”

Tiramie searched the surroundings for a hidden switch like before, but this time, to no avail.

“I don’t think so, *mi*. It looks like this door can only be opened from the outside.”

“Shit...”

They should have had one person stay outside. Now they couldn't call for help, and the worst case scenario would be ending up like Dornel.

“Since it's come to this, I guess we have no choice. Let's press forth.” Saying that, Isuzu summoned her musket. This time, however, her 'musket' appeared to be equipped with picatinny rails and tactical lights. Seiya didn't have the time to question the things she had brought, so he quietly followed.

The five of them walked through the dark tunnel and ended up in a hall the size of a classroom, though its height was about 2 stories tall.

“Another dead end, huh?”

“No, take a good look...there's a huge door ahead, *fumo*.”

Seiya had not noticed it earlier due to the darkness, but there was in fact a huge stone door in front of them. The door had ominous decorations and cryptic runes written on it, and a sculpture of a demon or evil spirit was carved in its center.

“I've never seen this strange figure before.”

“It looks like a relic from Schubert. This is probably one of the gods that were worshipped then.”

The imperial state of Schubert was a different magical realm from the Maple Land that Moffle and Isuzu lived in. It is believed that Schubert was the parent organization of Cosmic Studio in Osaka.

“Schubert...hearing that name itself gives me the feeling they’re bad news.”

The name of that state gives me the creeps, along with its god ...

“Actually, not really, *fumo*. They actually like chuuni designs and have agriculture and forestry as their key industries. Also, their tempura is awesome.”

“Doesn’t sound like an imperial state at all...more like some hot spring...”

“Back to the topic: we won’t be able to continue unless we open that door. There should be some sort of switch somewhere...”

Just when Isuzu began pacing around in search for something—

Laughter boomed throughout the room, sinister enough to weaken one’s pulse.

“W-What was that!?”

“I-I’m scared, *mi!* I’m scared!”

“So horrifying, *ron!* It’s just like...Alien Baltan from Ultraman...”

“Cut that crap!”

With the five still in shock, the eyes of the demon-like figure gave an eerie blue glow. “I am the one who guards this realm!” The figure spoke in a solemn and dignified manner, exerting a threatening aura upon them.

“All you infidels who dare step into my labyrinth, abandon all hope if you venture beyond this door! If you think you can withstand the wrath of God, then come hither!”

The stone floor began to rumble, and 7 sarcophagi could be seen rising from it.

“Holy crap, that’s cool, *mi!*”

“So these are retractable? Seems gimmicky, *fumo.*”

“I should get some to decorate my house, *ron.*”

“This is the part where you guys should be screaming in horror...”

Each of the sarcophagi bore different coats of arms. From left to right , they said, “Fire”, “Wind”, “Gold”, “Earth”, “Flowers”, “Water” and “Thunder”.

“I bequeath unto you seven elements; follow your heart’s desire and choose! You shall be blessed with...a magical weapon!”

They froze in shock for a brief moment.

“Wait, so I get a weapon once I choose one of these, *mi*?”

“Yeah, pretty much. At least that’s what I got from that.”

“This sequence of fire, wind, gold, earth, flowers, water, and thunder is a little different from the usual sequence, don’t you think, *fumo*? Wasn’t it just wood, fire, earth, gold and water?”

“Just like in Ninja Captor!”

“Not another one of your old jokes...”

“Follow what your heart so desires and choose!” The figure commanded again. It felt like they were being rushed, so Seiya went ahead and chose.

Seiya walked up to the center one that said “Earth”. Isuzu went for “Water”. Moffle grabbed “Lightning” at the corner, Macaron got “Gold”, and Tiramie, “Fire”.

The “Flowers” and “Wind” sarcophagi remained, but since there were only 5 people they had no choice but to leave them behind.

“Bring your newly-chosen magical weapons unto me!”

The lids slid open, revealing a weapon in each of the chosen sarcophagi.

Moffle, who chose “Lightning”, got a stun gun. Macaron’s “Gold” issued a golden bat, and Tiramie got some Molotov cocktails.

“100,000 volts, that’s some heavy duty stuff I’ve got here, *fumo.*”

“A golden bat, huh. A modest way to kill people, *ron.*”

“The riot police’s gonna have a hard time dealing with my Molotovs, *mi!*”

The three mascots said in an unusually hyped up tone.

“I expected the weapons to be more like magical swords or whatever. To think that they’d give us weapons for murder...”

It’s like we’re preparing for a gang fight or something. Really spoils my reputation.

“Why’d you get a shovel, *fumo*?”

“This can literally only be used for the soil... Couldn’t they have modified this, at the very least?”

“Isuzu-chan, what weapon did you get, *mi*?”

“This...”

Isuzu held up a standard bottle, downhearted.

“There’s some liquid inside this. And the label says ‘Pepee’. A potion of some sort, I suppose?”

“...”

All three mascots were dumbfounded.

“What’s wrong? Do you recognize this label?”

“O-Of course not...”

“Strange, *ron*. How is this a weapon?”

“But then again, this could be a killer if used properly, *mi!*”

All three mascots gave evasive comments.

“Huh? I don’t get it.”

“You can Google it if you want, nobody’s gonna stop you, *ron*.”

“The designer of this labyrinth’s such an asshole, *mi*.”

Seiya happened to be clueless as well. And so he raised his eyebrow and asked, “You guys sound strange. So is that poison? Or some sort of healing potion?”

Seiya's question drowned in the sudden loud roar. The door in front of them was opening, the sarcophagi were also sinking back into the ground. The mood became grim, signaling the beginning of their adventure.

"Press forth, brave ones. May your weapons guide you!"

Beyond the door were several stone paths branching into the distance.

"What do we do, Kanie-kun?"

"Don't look at me...we've got no other choice but to proceed, anyway. Let's go."

After all, they had just lost their only means of escape. Now, the only problem was: what kind of obstacle awaited them that could possibly require the use of these weapons?

Part 7

The five of them continued deeper into the labyrinth. Whenever they came across a crossroad, they struggled with making decisions.

“Let’s turn right.”

“No, dude. Turn left.”

As a result, they resorted to having Isuzu throw a stick, and going in whichever direction the stick pointed to when it landed.

“Right this time.”

“Copy. Hey, hurry up, I wanna get back home in time for the titan show, *fumo*. Walk faster!”

“Hey, quit pushing me!”

“It’s so dark, *ron*. I can’t even see my own feet! Hey, I just stepped on something soft...”

“I smell something strange, *mi*. Not foul-smelling, per se, but...”

Right then—

With a slicing sound, a large blade shot out of the walls and headed their way. The blade was at the height of Seiya's neck, and came so swiftly it drew a crescent in its trajectory.

“!!”

The poor souls in its path were Macaron and Tiramie. The blade barely missed the tip of their heads before disappearing into the wall, making them feel as if they had just been targeted by a Grim Reaper's scythe.

“Wha...”

If the two of them had been as tall as human beings, they'd have certainly been butchered. Everything happened so swiftly that they needed some time to process what had just happened.

The two of them fell onto the ground, traumatized.

“W-What the hell was that?” Seiya asked.

Moffle went ahead to inspect the wall. “It was a trap, *fumo*. It activates once a pressure plate on the floor's been stepped on.”



“I knew at least that much! But what the hell...we’d be down to three men if it had hit...”

“Indeed. How dangerous, *fumo*.” Moffle said without any trace of panic. After all, Moffle was a former soldier trained to handle absurd situations. The only problem was that this ex-soldier took the form of a short rodent mascot.

“*Mofu*. Let’s take some time to regroup and calm ourselves down. Hey Tiramie.”

“*Mi? Mi?*”

“You and I shall be the vanguard, *fumo*. We’ll focus on reporting the spotted traps and removing them.”

“R-Roger, *mi!*”

“Macaron, you be the rear guard, *fumo*. Watch our backs.”

“Got it, *ron*.”

“Isuzu will be at the center. You’ll guard our baggage, *fumo*.”

“Yes, sir.” Isuzu brought out her musket and held on to Seiya’s shoulder on high alert.

In the midst of their military-esque formation, Seiya questioned. “Hey, wait a minute. I don’t care how you position your formation, but I’m doubting your definition for the word ‘baggage’. Are you saying that *I* am the baggage?”

“Less chat, more hat, *fumo*.”

“No, I can’t possibly let this slide. Are you really intending to call me, the cool, multi-talented hunk, baggage? You’re talking really big for a tiny rodent, my friend!”

“Tch, don’t call me a rodent, *fumo*. Just so you know, I’m only protecting you because you’re needed to run the park!”

“I don’t need protection from you! You guys always look down on us people of the land like you’re some big—”

In the heat of the moment, Seiya took a step forward, and the floor made a “click” sound.

“Wait. Another click?”

A rumbling sound could be heard, and some machinery could be seen moving at the end of the tunnel.

“Holy shit! Kanie-kun, what on earth did you step on, *mi!*?”

“Well, it felt like I stepped on something...but...”

The rumbling gradually turned into tremendous roaring, making all of them cower in fear. Looking back at where they came from, a huge boulder could be seen charging towards them at a speed and force that would knead them all to dough.

“Awesome, *ron*. We entered the archaeology route!”

“How can you still be so calm about this!?”

“Run, *fumo!*”

“Woah!! Run!!”

All of them ran for their lives. They no longer had the time to care about their formation or anything. And as they fled carelessly, they activated countless traps.

Arrows came flying toward them from all directions.

“Mi!!”

Parts of the floor opened to reveal pits.

“Ron!!”

Suspended ceiling traps fell, trying to crush them.

“Mofu! Mofu!”

It was every man for himself. Everyone dodged, evaded, jumped around at such miraculous timing that they managed to avoid most traps.

“Kanie-kun, maybe you should rest for a bit.”

Isuzu encouraged Seiya while running around dodging projectiles and avoiding obstacles with ease.

“Me? Rest? This place wants us dead! How am I supposed to— WOAHH!”

A flying circular saw came their way. The two of them barely evaded it and watched it bury deep into the wall. Right then, another spiked wrecking ball came swinging at them.

“Holy crap!”

It's too close. I can't dodge it in time. Seiya thought as he embraced the last second of his life. However, at that very moment, Isuzu made a mad dash, pushing Seiya clear.

“Sento!?”

She managed to evade the wrecking ball by just a hair. However, the spikes had hooked into her shirt, tossing her several meters in front.

“...”

Isuzu tumbled to the ground, which slid open to reveal another pit. Completely caught off guard, she was suddenly unable to be seen as she plunged into the abyss.

“Sento!!”

The pit closed. More traps were coming their way. Moffle grabbed on to Seiya, who was about to dive in, and made a run for it.

“Let me go! We can't leave her behind...!”

“We’ll save her later!”

“She fell into the pit! We need to save her quick—”

“Just shut up and run, *fumo!*”

Being dragged by Moffle, Seiya turned around and retreated.

*

By the time they regrouped, only three people remained: Seiya, Moffle and Tiramie.

“Macaron just disappeared all of a sudden, *mi...*” muttered Tiramie.

“Shit! We’ve been had, *fumo*. We don’t even know the way back.” Moffle said in frustration.

“Sento...” Seiya murmured and sighed. *She sacrificed herself to save me...and because of that...*

“Leave your worries and mourning for next week, *fumo*.” Moffle spoke. “Focus on getting out first. We can borrow some heavy-duty equipment to tear down the place and uncover the truth behind this labyrinth later.”

“I know...but...”

As Seiya struggled to pull himself together, Tiramie inspected their surroundings.

“It doesn’t seem like there are any more traps here. We must’ve gone to a deeper level of this labyrinth, *mi*.”

“*Mofu*. Why do you think so?”

“I can read the designer of this place like a light novel, *mi*. He must’ve been a lazy-ass who only wanted to cut on maintenance and labor costs. That explains why there aren’t any traps like mists and explosions that would require resetting.”

“I see...”

Tiramie, who rarely said anything intelligent, had just demonstrated some keen analytical skills with confidence. Perhaps the rumor about him having once broken into a gold vault was true?

“The traps that have been used so far were rather predictable and appeared to be designed only to incite fear among us. Normally automatic traps are enough to clean up the majority of the people who enter. As for the problematic few who survive...”

Tiramie made a difficult expression.

“They finish ‘em with brute force, *mi*.”

“Brute force, you say?”

It wasn’t long before loud shouts began to echo throughout the area. An army of creatures could be seen approaching them from the other side of the path, or battlefield, to be precise.

These heinous creatures had pig heads and bodies of demi-humans. Judging by their appearances, ‘orc’ was probably the most appropriate description. These orcs wore hide armor and wielded weapons like clubs and choppers, just like your stereotypical RPG. Their anger could be seen from the steam that came from their snorts, and their cries were full of rage directed at the three.

“This is what I meant, *mi*. Take a look! They don’t seem to be in a mood for negotiation!”

“I see, *fumo*. This is indeed a dungeon, after all. We’re bound to encounter things like this...”

“Guys, at the very least try to sound like you’ve got some adrenaline in your veins, will you? What’re we gonna do now, when we’ve only got three people!?”

“We’re gonna have to fight, *mi*.”

“We’ll find you a corner to shiver in, *fumo*.”

“Tch...”

The two mascots readied themselves. Before Seiya could say anything in his own defense, they were assaulted by the orcs who charged at them with their weapons held high.

“INCOMING!!”

And so the battle began.

Moffle entered the fray with a war cry. He took quick and nimble steps and landed countless strikes on their foes. The orcs began collapsing one after another.

“Take that, *mi*!”

Tiramie tossed in a Molotov, setting the area ablaze. The orcs went amok and Tiramie ran in to land some sneak attacks. If this were an RPG, he would have dealt critical damage.

“Goddamn it! How did this escalate so quickly!?”

Seiya, wielding a shovel, was tasked with smacking the enemies Moffle and Tiramie defeated.

“Hmph, you’re doing a good job yourself, *fumo*.”

Moffle snorted, as he KO-ed several more enemies.

“You’re doing pretty well for a rat, too. Wait, where’s your stun gun?”

“Huh, stun gun? That’s a woman’s thing; It’s no match for my hooks, *fumo*.”

“I-I see...”

“More of them are coming, *mi*! I’m gonna feed them Molotovs! This will be your grave, *mi*!”

Tiramie's lines were heroic, but considering these were said by an adorable dog mascot, this set a bad example for children.

Despite their one-sided onslaught, the enemies kept coming. Now, instead of just orcs, stronger mobs such as trolls, golems, and even slimes and ropers were in the mix.

"These mobs are cliché, but so strong!"

Seiya was starting to get exhausted from the fighting. Not giving him any chances to escape, the roper assaulted Seiya with its tentacles. Thankfully, Moffle's right punch managed to defeat the roper just in time, otherwise Seiya might have become a victim of tentacle play.

"Just who in the right mind would take guys as their victims, *fumo!*?"

"It'll be a big commotion if it were Isuzu-chan, *mi!* Imagine her getting wrapped in tentacles and going 'IYAAAA!'"

"People will swarm over here just to see that."

"The next wave's coming, *fumo!*"

Once again, the next wave contained a new type of mobs, including those that looked like terribly oversized ostriches, white lightning dragons and black panthers.

This is bad. Like, REALLY bad.

“Retreat! This is becoming a battle of attrition!”

“Pull back! Pull back, *fumo!*”

Seiya and gang escaped in the midst of confusion.

Part 8

After falling into the pit and rolling around in the darkness, Isuzu landed in a room, semi-conscious.

I wonder if he's all right. I did push him away, after all. What if he ends up getting hurt? I'd have injured one of the most valuable assets in our park! Not to mention he's my...

“Ugh...”

As Isuzu thought to herself, she noticed some people entering the room. They gathered around her, and started hissing amongst themselves.

(Been a while since we got a human—)

(Wait, isn't she from Maple Land?—)

(Either way, we can't just let her go like that—)

Isuzu felt herself being carried by some sort of stretcher. From the blurry shadow on the wall, she noticed that they were tiny—no taller than an average child.

With that, her consciousness faded away. She remained unconscious for a while before waking up, this time on a worn-out bed.

“Where...am I...?”

Isuzu found herself in a small room with stone walls and sturdily locked iron bars.

Isn't this a prison cell?

“So you noticed, huh? Isuzu-chan.”

She turned around to find Macaron sitting next to a wall in the same cell.

“I fell into one of their traps, too. Looks like *they* brought both of us in here, *ron*.”

“Who are *they*?”

“God knows, *ron*. There were a bunch of mole-like dudes, and they didn't look like cast members of Amaburi, either.”

“I guess that means they aren't inhabitants of Maple Land.”

Isuzu sat up and shook her head for a bit. Though she wasn't hurt much apart from some bruises, Isuzu felt terrible. After all, the prison cell stank and was terribly dusty, making her want to take a shower right away.

"It's been more than ten years since anybody came here. I don't get how could there be anyone living in this labyrinth."

"Neither do I, *ron*. I'd understand if this were some dungeon in a magical realm, but it's unlikely, since this is still on our turf."

Saying that, Macaron pulled a cigarette from seemingly nowhere and lit up with a Zippo lighter. He was smoking his usual Marlboro.

"At the very least, ask for permission before you smoke in front of my face."

"Oh, my bad. Mind if I smoke here?"

"Yes."

"Hah, then that's too bad." Macaron continued puffing away on his cigarette, with no intention of stopping.

Throughout Isuzu's year-long stint in Amaburi, she never understood what was wrong with Macaron.

To be fair, Isuzu despised the attitude of many cast members. And while Moffle and Tiramie seemed to always end up causing trouble wherever they went, they could be pretty reliable at times. Macaron was different, though. He seemed to find pleasure in pissing her off.

Or maybe it was because he was mature enough to be unaffected by Isuzu's hatred? He was a divorcee and had a child, and all.

Macaron gave a snide snicker, sucked in a couple of puffs and tossed the cigarette to the floor, extinguishing it with a good step. It might have seemed cool if it were done by a rugged man, but the fact that a sheep mascot did it ruined the effect.

"Geez, at any rate, we can't just sit in here for the rest of our lives, *ron*." Macaron got up and walked to the iron bars.

"The bars are locked by a normal padlock, *ron*. Now if only Tiramie were here...getting out would be so much easier..."

"Got any useful tool on-hand?"

"Zilch. Just my wallet, my phone and keys to my house, *ron*."

And as Macaron listed the items in his possession, Isuzu drew her musket from under her skirt and drilled a bullet into the padlock.

The shriek of the broken padlock echoed throughout the cell.

“That works.” Macaron whistled in appreciation. “Good job. Let’s go, *ron*.”

Despite Isuzu’s musket having made quite the racket, they got out of their cell only to realize there was nobody in sight—not even a single prison warden.

“This is strange...”

“Maybe they were distracted by Seiya and the others? They must’ve sent some backup over there instead, *ron*.”

“But even then, it’s weird that there wasn’t even an alarm or anything of the sort.”

“Hmm...”

There were about 20 cells lining the corridor, leading up to a dead end. There was a metal door on the opposite end.

Looks like that’s our only way out.

However, after taking a few steps, they heard coughing sounds from a cell 3 units away from theirs. It was then that they realized they weren't alone.

“Hmm?”

They snuck towards the cell and took a peep.

The first thing they noticed were 3 LCD monitors. They then found a desktop PC, Blu-ray recorder and some gaming consoles lying around. It looked like a tablet PC had been tossed on top of the bed, which ruined the focal point of the various 1:3 shoujo and 1:144 gundam figurines. There was a shelf on one of its walls that was full of DVDs, manga and game discs, and posters of idols and pro wrestlers covered the rest of the wall.

Facing the monitors with its back to them was a mascot-like creature that sat on an elegant chair.

“Holy crap, that's an Aeron chair, *ron*! Popular among the manga artists and producers.”

“Something like that being in a prison cell isn't something to be envious about...”

The cell that this mascot occupied had been completely transformed into an otaku-friendly habitat. In other words, to a woman like Isuzu, this was precisely the type of room she did not want her future boyfriend to have, let alone sleep in.

Furthermore, the floor was littered with plastic bottles, speaking volumes about the mascot's slovenly character.

"What're you doing here? It's not time for dinner yet, *neru*."

The mascot hesitantly spun his Aeron chair to face its visitors, revealing its weasel-like appearance and khaki fur. It was certainly a mascot whom Isuzu had never met in Amaburi before.

"A-Aren't you Dornel!?" Macaron exclaimed.

Dornel. The mascot who went MIA after entering this labyrinth. The survivors claimed he was caught by a dragon and swallowed whole.

Dornel narrowed his eyelids in suspicion. "Hmm, you're Macaron, right? The new guy at the music theater."

"Dude, that was like years ago, *ron*! I'm a veteran now!"

"You're right, seems like it's been quite a while since I came here, *neru*."

Dornel stretched and shook his body.

“You’re Dornel, right? Just what are you doing at a place like this?” Isuzu asked, and Dornel pointed at the LCD monitor behind him in response.

“Oh, I’m checking out some blogs discussing why light novel titles are getting so damn long these days, *neru*.”

“That’s not the point...you’ve been missing for more than a decade now. What have you been doing all this while?”

“Uh, I don’t mind explaining, but before that, who are you?”

“I’m Sento Isuzu, the acting manager’s secretary. Now talk.”

“Fine. As you can see, we’re being held captive here, *neru*.”

“Here? For so long!?”

Isuzu and Macaron were dumbfounded.

“Yeah. The rule’s that one cannot leave this place unless his companions come to save him. Nobody came, so I just waited. After a while I got bored and asked for internet, and so I kept myself busy with games, anime and gunpla building, *neru*.”

“For 10 years?”

“Yeah! And speaking of which, I’m hungry...”

Dornel reached out and grabbed a telephone receiver. “...It’s me. Mind bringing some snacks over here? Some Kara Mucho chips and oolong tea will do. Oh, and 3 cups, *neru*.”

Dornel put down the telephone and waddled his way to the two of them, opening the barred gate separating them and beckoning at Isuzu. “Hope you don’t mind the mess, but come on in.”

“Why isn’t this cell locked, *ron*?”

“What are you talking about? If it was, it’d be a pain.”

“...”

Macaron and Isuzu were mentally prepared to rescue Dornel with brute force, but ended up entering his “prison cell”, utterly disappointed. They pushed away some empty Amazon cardboard boxes and found two chairs, which they proceeded to sit on.

“Hey Dornel, you do know that you’re considered M.I.A., right? To be honest I thought you were dead, *ron!*”

“Yeah, well...I guess that’d be the case, huh?” Dornel responded in an easy going manner.

“Look, spending decades in a cell like this isn’t normal, *ron*. And people were worried sick about you! Why didn’t you at least contact us to say you’re fine?”

“Uh, I originally just wanted to take an extended break, *neru*. But then I realized this was the ideal lifestyle for me. The new MMO I’ve always wanted to try out just entered its beta testing phase too, and I got so engrossed with it that a year just passed without me noticing.”

“What’s an MMO?” Isuzu, who was clueless about games, asked.

“It’s a type of online game, *ron*. Now that I think about it, there were quite a lot of time-consuming games like that back then, huh...”

“And after a year had passed, I no longer had any will to contact anyone, *neru*. You see, this place is perfect for me; I never have to worry about food, and I can get almost anything I want via delivery...”

What a scumbag...

“I see... MMOs are dangerous, *ron*. Narukawa-san also wasted years playing Lineage 2.”

“Who on earth’s that?”

“But it’s strange, *ron*. How are you still able to talk or socialize after spending a decade in isolation?”

“I don’t know, either. Maybe ‘cause I got popular in games by choosing female characters?”

“Seriously...?”

“At any rate, I’m okay with being this way, so once you’ve had your tea please return without me, *neru*.”

“Return? We’re allowed to leave this place...?” Isuzu and Macaron asked.

“I guess? I’ve never tried, though.”

“In the first place, what is this labyrinth, anyway? I heard you called for some tea and snacks...those must be the people who provided your games and consoles, aren’t they? Can you explain this to us?”

“Ah, that—”

Just then, a mole-like creature entered the cell, carrying the tea and snacks Dornel asked for. “I’ve brought the things you requested, *mogu*.”

“Thanks.”

It was a lot like what would happen at a karaoke bar, where refreshments were being served to Dornel. Isuzu and Macaron merely watched, dumbfounded.

“We’re...guests...?”

Part 9

Seiya, Moffle and Tiramie managed to get a breather at one of the corners of the labyrinth.

They exhausted all their energy running from mobs, evading boss rooms, stumbling onto hidden traps, and even solving timed mini-games like stone door puzzles.

They'd somehow managed to lose the mobs that were pursuing them earlier, but there was no guarantee that they'd be safe for long.

“Oh god...I've never stupidly swung a shovel like this in my life... Hey, you goddamn yakuza members, in case you hadn't noticed, I'm your frickin' manager! A white-collar worker!”

“A white-collar worker getting paid 850 yen an hour!? Don't screw with me, *fumo*. You're better off cleaning gutters,” Moffle snorted. Seiya knew Moffle was a tough one, but even he couldn't conceal his panting for breath.

“A gutter-cleaner, huh. That job would fit you, too. You're a gutter rat, after all.”

“Guys...stop quarrelling at such a weird time, *mi*. I'm bad with Hollywood movie lines...” Saying that, Tiramie sifted through his pouch.

“This is bad: I’m out of Molotovs, *mi*. Is there any chemical fertilizer here? If we could just get some flammable nitric acid we’d be able to make more...”

“You’re the fairy of flowers, aren’t you!? Don’t say stuff like that.”

“Yeah, but...I still wanna try blowing shit up and say something like ‘that’s some filthy fireworks we’ve got here’, *mi!*”

“That, coming from someone who said he sucked at Hollywood movie lines, *fumo.*”

“A-Anyway, let’s confirm our present situation.”

Seiya slammed his shovel into the ground and used it as support to get up.

He glanced at his watch; it was slightly past 2:30. *This is bad, the meeting’s gonna start in an hour and a half! That’s something that’s way more important than some stupid cave exploration!*

“I doubt anyone had the time to memorize the path we took, so we don’t know where we are. But maybe if we knew our cardinal directions—“

Seiya whipped out his smartphone and fired up his compass application. Moffle snuck a peek from the side.

“*Mofu*... So this is north... That means we’re...I don’t know, *fumo*.”

“Damn, if only I downloaded a pedometer app before entering...wait a minute...”
Seiya narrowed his eyelids as he scrolled through the available WiFi networks. *How could there be WiFi at such a secluded place like this?*

There were two available networks: “mogmog001” and “mogmog002”. The reception wasn’t weak either, standing at 3 bars. Unfortunately, both of them were password-locked. That was strange, considering they were deep down in a cave of some sort. Perhaps there was an air duct nearby that allowed for reception in here?

“Nope, I don’t see any vents, *mi*,” Tiramie said as he examined the area. Meanwhile, Seiya tried entering random passcodes to see if he could connect, but to no avail.

“If we could just connect to this hotspot, we’d be able to call for help and confirm our location...”

“Hey, Tiramie. Can’t you do something about this, *fumo*?”

“I’m no hacker, *mi*.”

“Damn...”

They were so close to finding a means of escape. And now, the option of contacting people outside had to be struck from the list. Seiya checked his watch again. Their attempt had cost them 5 minutes.

“You’ve been checking your watch rather frequently, Seiya. Anything urgent, *fumo*?”

“There’s a meeting I can’t afford to be late for...”

“Look, we’re stuck in this labyrinth trying desperately not to die, *mi*. And here you are thinking about work!? There’s gotta be a limit to how much of a workaholic you can be, *mi*!”

Right then, footsteps could be heard on the far end of the walkway, along with jingles of metal that presumably came from weapons.

Their enemies were here, heading straight for them.

“...So they’ve finally caught up, huh.”

“I’m gonna say this one more time: I’m out of Molotovs!”

“We can’t fight them like this. Run deeper in, *fumo*!” Moffle began to sprint.

“Deeper? Anything useful there?”

“Nothing. But it’s way better than fighting them here and getting a taste of the floor, *fumo!*”

Moffle was right. Seiya and Tiramie followed Moffle’s lead and dashed away.

But what they didn’t realize was that enemies weren’t just coming from their back. Enemies could be seen chasing them from the front and sides.

“More of them incoming!”

“Suicide dash, *fumo!*”

And so, the three of them clashed with their foes, exchanging punches, kicks, parries and tosses. This, coupled with some sidesteps and dodges, got them past the mobs. Nevertheless, that did not ease the hot pursuit they had behind them.

“Goddammit, they’re persistent...!”

They crawled and tumbled around for a while before eventually breaking through a door and rushing in.

“Close it! Close the damned door!”

Moffle and Tiramie, who just had just broken in, pushed the door shut with all their might. Seiya used his shovel as a bar and locked the door in place.

“...!”

They narrowly escaped death. Right when he locked the door, the enemies caught up and banged at it furiously. The door shook violently, but it wasn't going to open for a while. At the very least, they could use their momentary safety to catch a breather.

“All right, let's run!” Seiya suggested while wiping off the sweat that had trickled down to his chin, and he was about to make a run for it.

However, Tiramie and Moffle stood frozen in place. They had their backs to Seiya, and were staring at something inside the room that they only noticed after shutting the door.

“What are you two doing? We need to use this chance to...!?”

He realized this place was far bigger than an ordinary room. Its ceiling was more than 3 stories high, and its area could cover half a school gymnasium. The walls and pillars had ominous decorations that cast eerie shadows due to braziers that lit the area. A dragon was crouching at the far end of the hallway.

It's a legitimate dragon!!

It was the size of a 10-ton truck, with stout limbs like large tree trunks covered in countless red scales. Its pair of wings were large enough to cast a shadow that could cover most of the room. The horned dragon turned slowly to face the three ice statues by the door.

“My god...what're we supposed to do now, *fumo...*” Moffle spoke like it was his dying breath.

“This is checkmate...”

They were exhausted, had no weapons, and had a group of mobs waiting to kill them by their doorstep. In front of them was the level boss that had to be defeated before they could continue.

If the devs for this dungeon had been fair, they would've at least given them some healing items and weapons before entering. And if they were nice, a save point as well.

Tiramie, who was so frightened his fur had goose bumps, turned and whispered to Moffle.

(Hey, isn't this the one from Arkhangelsk...!?)

(No, wind-class dragons are much larger...and their scales should be silver or black, *fumo*. I destroyed one of its eyes, but more importantly...) Moffle clenched his paws. (Idina should have already exterminated it.)

(I-Is that so...)

What on earth are they talking about? Seiya did not understand what the two were talking about. Well, he *did* find it familiar, but he didn't exactly have the time to ponder over this matter.

The dragon exhaled a deep breath, and spoke.

<You three...>

"It can speak! That dragon can speak, *mi!!*"

That coming from a dog mascot!! Seiya thought to himself. However, he refrained from commenting as this would just complicate things further.

<What business do you have that would be important enough to awake me from my slumber?>

The dragon's intimidating voice reverberated throughout the hall.

<I am Rubrum, the crimson dragon. Answer me, why would you rouse me from my slumber?>

(What do we do, *fumo*?)

(We have no choice but to talk, do we?)

(We're counting on you, *mi*! Managing PR is part of your job!)

(W-What!? Shit...)

Seiya glanced at Moffle, who responded with a “hurry up and do something!” face. Of course, Seiya wasn't going to rely on Moffle to do the talking either.

Seiya took a step forward and cleared his throat.

“Greetings, crimson dragon. Firstly, I apologize disrupting your sleep. However, we were caught up in various circumstances and inevitably ended up seeking refuge here, so I beg your forgiveness.”

The dragon snorted and stared back at Seiya, with eyes as big as a beach ball or a watermelon.

“Ahem...in other words, we’re lost. Two of our friends have gone missing, and if you could just tell us where they are and teach us how to get out, it’ll be a win-win for both of us. We get to go back to work, you get to continue with your sleep.”

The dragon began blowing steam out of its nose.

“Oh no, he’s angry, *mi!*”

“Actually, I think he’s laughing, *fumo.*”

The two mascots who were using Seiya as a meat shield commented.

<Win-win, you say? Don’t screw with me. You people are just here for my treasure, aren’t you?>

“Not at all! I’m just checking out this old facility in this theme park as its acting manager!”

While saying that, Seiya realized that the “treasure” that the dragon spoke of was nowhere in sight within this hall. Strangely enough, the survivors of the previous incident also mentioned about a treasure being guarded by a dragon.

“I-I’m sure you’re aware of the park above, right? We’re its staff members, you see... Whatever the reason for building this place was, dungeon-crawling within our park is definitely against the rules. If you refuse to cooperate with us, I’m going to have to let our disciplinary unit deal with you all!”

(Wait, what!? What kind of PR is this, *fumo!*?)

(Shouldn’t you be sounding less like you’re accusing them, *mi!*?)

(Shut up!)

The dragon snorted once again.

<Mortals, I don’t think you speak the truth. The people who come always try to deceive me.>

“Tch, then what about this? Here’s my park’s security pass. Believe me now?”

Seiya raised the ID card that was hanging around his neck.

<Hmph, you think you can deceive me with a pathetic piece of cardboard!? I am an ancient dragon who has traveled the worlds and surpassed the knowledge of mankind!>

“But this card’s the real thing...!”

<Mortals, I hope you’re prepared to face the consequences for trying to deceive me!>

The dragon growled. At the same time, the door behind them was kicked open and the army of mobs surrounded them, raising their weapons in preparation for battle.

“This is bad, *mi!*”

“We’re gonna have to talk with our fists, *fumo!*”

Tiramie started to panic and Moffle raised his paws. However, Seiya stopped him and raised his voice against the dragon.

“Hey, Rubrum! You said you’ve surpassed the knowledge of mankind, didn’t you? Hah! Don’t screw with *me*, that’s not something I can believe, either!”

The dragon’s growl was so terrifying that it stopped the mobs’ advances.

<Filthy mortal, what did you just say?>

“I’m saying that your surpassing of human knowledge is an utter lie! I bet I’m smarter than a cave NEET like you!”

“S-Seiya! What are you doi—mmm!”

Moffle covered Tiramie’s mouth and whispered.

(Just leave this to Seiya, he knows what he’s doing.)

(*Mi...*)

The dragon snarled, baring fangs that cast terrible shadows around the room.

<I advised you against spouting such nonsense, didn’t I? Do you want me to swallow you alive?>

“Eat me if you want! All you fat lizards just sleep and eat all day, anyway!”

The dragon began laughing and glared at Seiya. Fire was coming out with his breath.

<You’re an interesting one. Let us see how smart you are, then.>

“Bring it on! I’ll answer any question you ask.”

<Are you sure?>

“Ask anything. Astronomy, philosophy, you can even ask in whatever stupid lizard language you want, as long as the question has an answer. Oh and, if I answer it correctly, you shall release our friends and let us go. Deal?”

<Very well. You’re just showing off, anyway. If you cannot answer, however, I’m not just going to kill you. I’ll tear you and your friends limb from limb!>

“Okay. Make it quick, I’m in a rush.”

Seiya clapped his palms, and beckoned at the dragon.

“H-Hey Seiya, you’re gonna get us slaughtered, *mi!*”

While Tiramie was desperately controlling himself from freaking out, Moffle was calm and analyzed the situation. The dragon wasn’t even trying to conceal its laughter anymore, just contemplating the best dish to serve their fried bodies with.

A brief moment later, the dragon began.

<Mortal, I ask you of an ancient legend about a man said to be the god of war...>

“The holy grail of Sage Todeme Onshisho.”

Correct!

If this were a typical TV quiz show, beeps and lights would be going off and the stage would be full of applause. However, Seiya’s situation was the exact opposite—everyone was dead silent.

<I-I’m not even done with my question yet...>

“But I’m correct, ain’t I? The holy grail of uh...Sage Todeme Onshisho. Don’t make me repeat myself.”

<Ah...uh...>

“That was the answer, wasn’t it!?”

<Yes...>

The dragon lowered its shoulders in defeat.

“Mofu...”

“T-That was awesome, *mi!* How’d you do it!?”

“Hmph. That’s a trade secret.”

Seiya gave an arrogant response. He had in fact used the magic powers bestowed by Latifa back when he was first invited to manage the park. The power was a single chance to read a person’s heart. He was originally unsure whether this power would work on a powerful beast like Rubrum, but he recalled testing this on a cat and getting “*Nya—, nya—,*” and so he decided to give it a shot.

This was obviously not the time for Seiya to be saving his precious ‘grenades’. To be honest, Seiya had recently been using them to his advantage when negotiating with business partners, too.

<W-What is this nonsense!?!>

The dragon retorted.

<You people of the land should not have any idea about this question! This question was taken from the entrance exam for the Livestock and Alchemy course of the toughest university among all magical realms—Schubert Agricultural University!!>

“So that was an old exam question!?”

“That’s lame!”

While Seiya and Tiramie were hurling comments, Moffle nodded in deep thought.

“I see, *fumo*... That university’s a really famous and prestigious one that imparts secret techniques and knowledge that are never taught to outsiders. There are even courses in Maple Land’s top cram schools designed specifically to tackle its entrance exam, *fumo*.”

“Cram schools...in Maple Land...?”

“*Mofu* (Yeah). But that doesn’t mean they’ve ‘surpassed human knowledge’, *fumo*. One should be able to get in if he puts in enough effort, which means this lizard’s not that smart, after all!”

The dragon clenched its fangs at Moffle’s criticism.

<J-Just shut up, all of you! Even if this was from an old test paper, it should never have fallen into the hands of you people! I will not accept this as fair play; you three shall perish!>

The dragon gave a loud roar and bared its fangs.

“H-Hey, that’s unfair, *mi!*”

“This guy has become rather cheap for an ancient dragon, huh?”

“One should never go back on his promises, *fumo!* I’ll teach him this lesson with my own hands!”

Moffle leapt up at the charging dragon, dodging the claw that came slamming down. He dashed toward it and positioned himself right below the jaw.

He did an uppercut with a maxed out EXE drive, in a manner similar to a Street Fighter Shin Shoryuken. The only difference being the target was not a person, but a huge-ass dragon. Nonetheless, Moffle had hit one of its weak spots, causing the dragon to tumble over.

<Ugh...!?!>

Upon landing, Moffle made a cross with his arms and began charging up.

“You’re a tough one, I’ll give you that, *fumo*. But can you stand the wrath of this?”

He focused his energy to his abdomen, and a powerful aura emanated from him. Who would’ve known a theme park mascot could do tricks like this?

“H-Hey, stop it.”

“Uwooooo...!! Eat this! Forbidden technique, DRAGON SLAYER!”

“I said, stop it.”

Seiya kicked Moffle’s back, causing him to trip forward. The aura disappeared in an instant.

“What are you doing? And there I was trying to make a micro-blackhole that’d fry the dragon with Hawking radiation!”

“Cut that Hawking radiation bullshit!”

“*Mofu...*”

“I mean, come on. Just look at that dragon.”

“Hmm?”

Rubrum was cowering at a corner, holding onto his leg in pain.

<I'm sorry, okay? I'm sorry! I got carried away!>

The dragon was behaving exactly like a typical weakling surrendering after being punched. Furthermore, the way it was shivering gave the impression that Seiya and gang were the ones in the wrong. The mobs that surrounded them took the role of bystanders, flabbergasted by Moffle's power.

"*Mofu*...I guess the first punch was enough."

<More than that, isn't it a little overkill? I even made sure my attacks missed! I admit I *might* have gone a little too far in entertaining our guests but...>

Rubrum gave a reproachful expression.

"Wait, did you just say 'guests'?"

<Yeah. You lot are the 2nd group to visit ever since 'Rubrum's Trial' was built.>

"This place is...an attraction?"

Just then, a stone door at the corner of the hallway slid open, revealing the distant figure of Sento Isuzu.

“Sento!? Are you all right?”

Isuzu walked in, followed by Macaron. An unfamiliar weasel-like mascot could be seen walking behind them.

“Kanie-kun, this might be hard to believe, but what Rubrum just said is the truth.”

Now that Seiya thought of it, he vaguely recalled coming across some documents about a plan like this. During the construction of the now-defunct 2nd park, the management were thinking of building attractions like this, similar to the construction of the stadium.

The management had designed this attraction to be similar to MMORPGs that were popular back then, in an attempt to simulate the dungeon crawling experience. Seiya could still remember the proposed name of the attraction because it sounded really lame—“Final Quest (beta).”

However, he didn’t know the details of the project. Nonetheless, it was safe to assume it got cancelled because of the sudden exhaustion of funds, just like the construction of other facilities in the 2nd park.

“Wasn’t the construction of this place cancelled? What’s it doing here?” Seiya asked Rubrum, whom he had finally identified as one of his cast members.

<To be honest, I'm just an employee working here. I don't know much about the entire place myself...>

"Allow me to explain, *mogu*." Among the mole-like creatures that sprang out of their monster disguises, the one who appeared to be their leader stepped forward. It also became apparent that their weapons were nothing but plastic, and it could be assumed the traps they faced earlier were mostly harmless.

The leader of the group had a physique of a mascot, and was wearing a cute necktie and safety helmet.

"I am Taramo, leader of the diggeries and mogmog corporation, *mogu*."

"...Sorry?"

"In other words, I represent the staff here, *mogu*."

"Right. So, Taramo. Mind giving us an explanation here? I'm pretty sure the plan for the construction of this attraction was cancelled midway, so why is this here?"

"In order for me to explain, you need to understand the history of our, *mogu*. Around 2000 years back—"

"Geez, TL;DR this for me, please."

“What? But you’d be missing out on an interesting story about elves, *mogu*. You’re a dense one, aren’t you?”

“Just get on with it. I’ll give you 3 lines.”

“We, the diggeries, possess a talent for woodwork, and so we’re often the target of capture by the various nations. 13 years ago, Amaburi’s manager allowed us to seek refuge here, documenting our acceptance as ‘employment for a new attraction’. And so we’ve lived here ever since. There you have it, 3 lines.”

The other members, aside from Seiya, applauded Taramo’s amazing feat.

“Give me a break! You guys seriously believe an explanation like this!?”

“Weren’t you the one who requested for a TL;DR, *ron*?”

“I find it easy to understand, *fumo*.”

“Seiya, perhaps you’re an idiot, *mi*?”

How did it turn out like this?

Isuzu nudged Seiya, who was just about to argue with them. She appeared to have been doing some research with her tablet PC.

“I just checked the past documents, and it looks like it’s true. Apparently the manager back then conspired with several staff members; the cash flow suggests the same, too.”

“So you’re saying this so-called ‘cancelled attraction’ was actually built and has been leeching off our funds, despite having entertained none of our guests!?”

“Your defense, Taramo.”

All eyes were on the diggery representative.

“I won’t deny that we are indebted for the construction of this place. But since then, aside from utility, we’ve not taken a single yen from Amaburi, *mogu*. We rely on our own stash of money to fund everything else.”

Hearing that, Tiramie and Macaron excitedly leapt to the front.

“Wait a sec, *ron*! By ‘your own stash of money’, you couldn’t possibly mean...”

Taramo knew exactly what Macaron wanted to ask, and nodded.

“We used to store money in this hallway, but we’ve depleted most of it already.”

“You used it all, *mi!*?”

To be fair, they’d been relying on this for more than a decade. It wouldn’t be surprising that they’ve cumulatively used tens, if not hundreds of millions of yen, considering the number of staff members they have.

I guess we came too late...

“We eventually got lonely over here, and so we went to get part-time jobs outside, like at convenience stores and restaurants, *mogu.*”

What Taramo said came off rather sad, but more importantly...

“Wait, you guys go out?”

“Yeah, quite often, in fact. There are secret exits to various places of Amaburi, *mogu.*”

“Hmph...”

“We wish to live here in peace, *mogu*. So if possible, we’d appreciate if you could just turn a blind eye to this and let us be.”

“...”

“We were summoned to the palace of Politia to build escape routes. And in order to keep it a secret, they held us captive. Of course, we weren’t going to just sit around and slave our lives away.”

“And so you guys escaped?”

“Yes. But we knew that we’d eventually be captured and sent back no matter where we went. It was then that Amaburi’s manager lent us a helping hand and offered to let us hide here.” Taramo’s pupils became watery. The other members of the diggeries could also be seen tearing up, in gratitude of the favor they received.

“And so I beg you, sir! Please spare us!”

“That’s pretty touching, *mi*. Should we just let them go?”

<Please let us go!>

Everyone was watching Seiya, hoping he'd give the green light, saying something like, "Very well. But just this once."

"Hey, Sento. By any chance, was the manager back then *her*?"

"Right on the money."

Seiya then turned to look at Moffle, who returned with an earnest expression and a nod.

"I see..." Seiya had a good idea of what was going on. He abandoned his emotions and analyzed the situation from a logical standpoint. The conclusion he came up with was—

"I can't do that."

Everyone else shouted, "EHHHH!?"

"But why, *mi*?"

"That's just too heartless, *mogu*!"

"At the very least give us an explanation, *ron*!"

As everybody closed in on him, Seiya backed away, repeating himself, “Like I said, I can’t do that, because—”

He took a glance at his watch, and realized there was no time left. He had to get back to the administration building post-haste. “I’ll explain later. Someone guide us out of here!”

However, Rubrum stood in their way, not wanting to let them go.

<I-I won’t let you guys out until you guarantee the safety of our home!>

“Moffle!”

“*Mofu!*” Moffle stepped out. In an instant, Rubrum fled to a corner, weeping.

<You didn’t have to make such a scary face! I was just trying to help them out, you hear me? So please, d-don’t hit me!!>

“Okay, that’s enough, I’m going. Moffle, help to keep watch of this place, will you?”

“Hmph, I’m not a fan of following your orders, but fine, *fumo.*”

Thankfully, Moffle appeared to have understood the urgency of the situation, and reluctantly agreed.

“Alright, let’s go. We can’t afford to be late!” Seiya followed Isuzu and ran out of the cave.

Part 10

Seriously... why must I, the head of public relations, be the one who has to do this...

Tricen sighed as he stood in front of a meeting room full of formally-suited men. He was wearing the Lala Patch that gave him the appearance of a normal human being, though that did not relieve him of his uneasiness.

From left to right, the attendees of the meeting were: the representative and head of a real estate agency, a representative from an incredibly huge bank, the director of Amagi Development and a finance lawyer. Standing in front of a group of these VIPs was enough to scare any person. However, there was one more—on the right, was the CEO of Mal-Mart.

Mal-Mart!! Isn't that the huge-ass American retail corporation that generates billions of dollars in sales!?

It appeared that this meeting would involve Mal-Mart and Amagi Brilliant Park.

Tricen was aware that Seiya, Isuzu and Ashe had been sneaking out for confidential meetings and sending out sketchy emails every now and then, but the scale of this 'magic' was clearly over the top. Just the thought of the world's biggest corporation bothering to meet with Japan's lousiest theme park would blow anyone's mind away.

(This is insane! How am I supposed to chair a meeting with this many big shots!? Furthermore, I'm monolingual, so how am I supposed to understand any of the things they say? I'm so screwed!!!)

Tricen recalled the argument with Seiya earlier this morning, who had asked him to prepare for the meeting.

(I'm just a high schooler. No one would treat me seriously in that meeting. Don't worry, just smoke something out as our 'acting' manager. Isuzu and I will help you out.)

There was no way Tricen could decline without sounding unreasonable.

It was currently 10 minutes into the meeting, which was started at 1600 hours. They'd completed their (rather awkward) exchange of name cards a while ago, and Tricen was left struggling to conjure up random topics like tomorrow's weather to ease the deathly silence.

It also went without saying that the attendees were beginning to wonder why they were even called here in the first place.

"Ahem...it seems like the low air pressure is resulting in high chances of rain in east Tokyo tomorrow. Morning will mainly be cloudy, but there's an 80% chance of rain in the afternoon. Don't forget to bring your umbrellas tomorrow! Not to mention, the temperatures will be 8 degrees below average—"

“Tride-san, can we cut to the chase already?” The head of Amagi Development interrupted. By the way, ‘Tride’ was Tricen’s public name.

The head of Amagi Development was an old man in his 70s. Looking at his fierce, bulldog eyes and thick eyebrows, no one would be surprised that he used to be a bureaucrat in the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport.

For a while now, Amagi Development had had their eyes on turning Amagi Brilliant Park into a golf course. Nonetheless, Tricen doubted they’d come today just for a showdown. He was probably a slacker who played online mahjong all day while thinking he could crush the park anytime he wanted to.

In other words, this was just another man who leached off society.

“You have gathered us all in this room for a ‘special request’, but we’ve discussed nothing apart from the weather. Let’s just get straight to the point, shall we?”

“Of course. My manager...I mean secretaries...were busy printing documents necessary for the meeting and they should be here any time now...”

However, Seiya did not appear.

Tricen had tried to contact their mobile phones countless times before the meeting, but to no avail. It was as if they didn’t even have reception.

He could have sworn he saw them in office this morning, so where could those two have gone?

He snuck a glance for help at Ashe, who could only reply with a shrug.

“We can look at the documents and notes later. Perhaps you could brief us on the whole matter at hand?”

“Very well. Allow me to share the recent achievements of our theme park—”

“Please, cut that nonsense. Everyone knows this park doesn’t have anything but spider webs.”

“Excuse me? Our park has improved drastically in an incredibly short time frame.”

“Tride-san, do you think we’re stupid?”

“Of course not...I just...”

The attendees of the meeting were becoming impatient. Seeing that, Tricen’s face turned pale. He was mentally preparing himself to do silly things like talk about his favorite pop idols when the door swung open.



“Pardon our intrusion.”

Seiya and Isuzu walked into the room, panting. The two of them had business suits and had some documents and tablet PCs in hand.

“I apologize for the delay, boss. Here are the documents you requested. Would you like to have a look before I distribute them?”

The two of them lowered themselves and handed Tricen the folder.

“Hmph. Make sure to be punctual in the future.” He grabbed the folder and peeked inside. There was nothing apart from a few supermarket leaflets.

What am I supposed to do with that!?

Sensing Tricen’s distress, Seiya took the stage and faced the crowd with a smile.

“Good day, everyone. If you don’t mind, may I handle the briefing of the situation in place of Tride?”

The people nodded reluctantly. At the very least, Seiya knew they’d listen to his words now. Strangely, it did not seem like it was their first time meeting Seiya. They even forgave his lack of self-introduction.

What on earth is going on!? Seiya, are you really gonna do this?

“Thank you. Let us begin the discussion on the sale of Amagi Brilliant Park’s 2nd park.”

Tricen would have screamed his lungs out if not for Isuzu’s choke.

Although Seiya mentioned “discussion”, most of the concrete details had already been gone through during the past few weeks. As such, this meeting eventually became a confirmation of fine details.

Amagi Development objected strongly to the sale, but it seemed like head of Mal-Mart was interested. Apparently, they’d tried to break into the Japanese market once, but failed. This time, they were looking for a good deal so they could try again. They planned to build a huge supermarket that would house many brands and products. Thus, they’d need a big plot of land.

(I get that they were searching for land. But how did you know about this?)

Isuzu asked this very question three weeks back. Seiya might have been the acting manager of the park, but ultimately he was a high school student. He shouldn’t be aware of matters within Mal-Mart.

(I originally didn’t expect to be able to work with Mal-Mart on this.)

Seiya began his explanation.

(I simply wanted to sell the 2nd park for some quick cash. Any company would do the same. I was even mentally prepared to sell it to Amagi Development for them to build a golf course, if necessary. However, at the very least I'd like the new facility to gather a lot of people.)

And so Seiya began his quest on finding an appropriate company to sell the land to. He first targeted a discount furniture shop. He traveled all the way to their main office building, walked in, and spoke to the receptionist. And from there, he managed to be hooked up with the CEO.

(I'm guessing you used your magical powers?)

(Obviously. I doubt I could manage with just a smooth tongue. In exchange for keeping the fact that the receptionist is cheating on her spouse a secret, she brought me to her supervisor. It just so happened that the supervisor had a similar affair, and so he hooked me up with his manager in exchange for a vow of secrecy. After promising not to tell anyone about the manager's previous acts of embezzlement, he introduced me to the head of the department. I must admit that the head's membership in an SM club was hard to deal with...)

(I get it, I get it. You basically threatened all of them, didn't you?)

Isuzu was appalled by how low Seiya would stoop to get what he wanted. It was only then that she was thankful she baited him to use his power on her, so that

her thoughts could never be read again. Otherwise, there was no way she could be at ease while at work.

(Your usage of words twists my benevolence, Sento. I merely took advantage of their weaknesses to gain their cooperation.)

(A.K.A., threatening?)

(Whatever. Anyway, making use of an individual's weakness isn't enough to manipulate a company. I went through all that trouble only to find out that the company had no intention of opening new branches. And so I gave up.)

Although Seiya gave up trying to convince them, he was treated to some shogayaki at a nearby restaurant.

(At least this guy knows some social skills...)

(I know, right? Nonetheless, he kept telling me to come back after I've graduated from university. I get the same response for every company I tried. There were also times I mistimed my powers. It was then I had a taste of a student's job-search.)

(So what did you do?)

(I decided to gun for the biggest shopping mall in Japan. I figured surely they'd at least set up a branch around here.)

(Did it work?)

(In the end, I realized their business prospects were pathetic. Not only were they not intending to set up any new stores, there were planning to downsize instead...)

Nonetheless, during the discussions, the manager questioned Seiya, asking if he was one of their rival company's spies.

(And that rival happens to be the Japanese branch of Mal-Mart?)

(Bingo. There was a rumor spreading around that Mal-Mart was planning on expanding to other countries. And so I rushed over to their main office in Shinjuku.)

It so happened that Mal-Mart was looking for a suitable piece of land in east Tokyo to set up a new store. In fact, they'd gotten several offers, but rejected them all because of various unfavorable factors such as high cost of land and poor traffic in the area.

(I've mocked Amaburi as a terrible theme park, but I must admit that it has its merits—especially its location.

It takes less than an hour to reach our park using public transport from Shinjuku, or about 10 minutes by car using the highway. The area around us is hilly, meaning there aren't many residential and shopping areas nearby. I'd say we have the perfect location for a shopping mall.)

And so Seiya made use of his contacts to hook up with the relevant staff and made an offer. Of course, Seiya couldn't say the talks went smoothly from there. There was an unquestionable amount of doubt concerning the abnormally cheap offer that Seiya gave. He also had considerable difficulty timing his magical power given its limited nature.

(At any rate, the negotiations on the prices are proceeding smoothly. Our biggest concern should be Amagi Development.)

Amagi Development has been setting their eyes on us, waiting to kill us for a while now. I really doubt they'll allow this deal to proceed as smoothly as that.

(They will, because they'll get a share of the profits. I bet Amagi Development's finances are about as shaky as ours.)

(I can't say the same if Takaya Kurisu were present. He'd do anything to stop this deal.)

Takaya Kurisu, who had previously been setting his eyes on Isuzu and gang, revealed his true nature a while back and suddenly disappeared.

Until now, they'd yet to figure his true intentions, but then again, thanks to his disappearance, there weren't any formidable foes left in Amagi Development.

In other words, this deal was heading to a good conclusion. They should succeed in completing the transaction as long as the two of them didn't mess anything up.

(...Are we really sure we want to do this?) Isuzu asked Seiya again, in their office on the night of their discussion.

(Deserted or not, the 2nd park is still part of Amaburi. It even houses the stadium we worked so hard to save...)

Isuzu couldn't find any more words to describe her grief.

(I didn't know you'd be so concerned about this. Don't worry, I'll talk to the cast members before we seal the deal. Honestly, though, I can't think of any other way to save our park if we don't get the approval from them...)

Seiya spoke his true feelings. He had already gone against his morals to achieve this. Nonetheless, he understood the feelings of his cast members. The 2nd park was as big as the 1st, so wouldn't selling it be equivalent to losing half of Amaburi?

(I'm sure many of them believe that one day Amaburi would get popular to the point where they'd need to use the 2nd park again. Won't your actions be betraying their dreams?)

Moffle, in particular, would definitely slam Seiya's door open, shouting "Another one of your selfish acts! I'll never approve of this!" and start a fight with him. This was the reason why Seiya had not spoken a word to Moffle about this—at least not yet.

(Revival of the 2nd park, huh? I regret to say we're years too early to even hope for this,) Seiya said.

(Our park might sink before that even happens. I remember telling them that a drowning man cannot be picky about the plank he clings to dear life on.)

(That's true, but...)

(We simply don't have the luxury of worrying about matters so far into the future, you hear me?)

(...I guess you're right...)

(Look at the bright side. If we make it through the next one or two years, we'd have a huge supermarket right at our doorsteps. I'm sure you know what that means.)

It was a win-win situation. Shoppers of Mal-Mart could hop over to Amaburi to enjoy their holiday, and guests of Amaburi could do some shopping after a day's worth of fun. This was certainly a benefit the managers of Mal-Mart couldn't ignore.

(So cut it out with that sullen face. If everything goes as planned, the park would eventually coexist with Mal-Mart, without the need for my supervision. Even if I were to leave this place, you guys wouldn't need to worry about a thing.)

Part 11

The meeting concluded smoothly, and the contract was scheduled to be signed at the next appointment the following week.

Tricen and Ashe stood nearby, completely baffled by how Seiya was able to remain completely calm throughout the meeting.

Thankfully for Seiya, who had been abused by his parents and was forced to audition in countless talent shows, this meeting was nothing.

And thanks to that, they even convinced their nemesis, Amagi Development, to approve of the transaction, in exchange for imposing a stricter condition. They now had to attract an even bigger number of guests per fiscal year, but Seiya had no choice but to accept such conditions.

At dusk, right before the park's closing hours, Seiya went to pay a visit to the sky garden. It was nearing the golden week in spring, and the flowers in the garden waltzed to the gentle evening breeze.

“Over here, Seiya-sama.”

Latifa, who had been setting the garden table, beckoned Seiya over. “You must be tired. I’ve prepared some tea I’d like you to try. Please let me know how it is.”

“...Thanks.”

Things had gotten stiff and awkward between the two, given that Latifa had lost whatever memories she had the previous year. Of course, he wasn't thinking it on purpose, but he couldn't help but feel like this wasn't the Latifa he knew. For one, she had long forgotten about their promise, about Seiya's acrophobia, and even perhaps why he was managing this park in her stead in the first place.

“I can smell our park's soil,” Latifa commented. “Were you helping out with construction or perhaps renovation today? The sun was shining very brightly today. It must have been hot.”

“Uh, kind of. Though I'd say I did some pretty 'cold' work too...”

Latifa giggled at Seiya's joke, and cast an empty gaze at his chest.

“W-What's up?”

“I can smell Isuzu's favorite shampoo too...”

“Huh? W-Wait, that can't possibly...”

Latifa had hit the bullseye. This was due to the event that happened in the elevator while the two were rushing to change for the meeting.

Isuzu's bangs and hair had made contact on Seiya's shirt as she helped fix his tie, causing much unease for him.

"Oh, *that*. You're getting the wrong idea. Isuzu was just being a busybody and helped me out a little, causing her hair to brush past briefly..."

"Fufu... Don't worry, it was just a joke. Isuzu is your secretary, after all. This kind of thing is bound to happen."

"A-Ah..." Seiya loosened his necktie as he tensed up.

Those are some sharp senses she has there. It was just a brief contact, yet she was able to detect it with ease. I'd better be careful...

"Even then, I can't help but envy her being able to always work together with you."

"What? Really?"

"Yes."

It was difficult to tell if Latifa was joking or telling the truth. Was Seiya supposed to take this as a little tease, or a hint of some sort? *I don't even know anymore...*

Seiya was able to flawlessly negotiate with a group of highly-valued grownups, yet he was completely shaken by the acts of a girl.

Latifa gracefully turned and put some distance between them, probably sensing Seiya's unease. "So how did the negotiations go?"

"Huh?"

"I recall you had an important meeting concerning the 2nd park today."

Seiya had received permission from Latifa to sell the 2nd park awhile back. She seemed rather reluctant about it, but she decided to allow it if it would improve the wellbeing of her cast members. Besides, there was no way she could have brought herself to decline after hearing Seiya's explanation.

"Oh, *that*. Things went according to plan—they gave us the green light to sell the park."

"Surely there must have been conditions imposed?"

"Indeed...they'll increase the minimum yearly visitor count. Our hot seat's just gotten hotter."

"But we won't have to worry about our funds, right?"

“At the moment, yes. More importantly, I need to talk to you about something regarding my checks on the 2nd park today.”

“Please continue.”

“We discovered something...interesting, to say the least. But it creates a brand new problem...how should I put this...”

Seiya was referring to the diggeries and the attraction they had found earlier that day. About a decade ago, the manager of the park provided a shelter for the diggeries, putting it under a guise of an ‘attraction’. The manager was none other than Latifa herself. Seiya was having a difficult time phrasing his words to minimize its impact.

“What is it? Is this something I shouldn’t be hearing about?”

“Well...imagine yourself owning an apartment that accommodates refugees from different countries. And now imagine that maybe, due to some circumstances, you’re forced to chase those people out. And then...”

“Sorry, but...I don’t understand what you’re trying to say.”

“Okay fine. I’ll cut straight to the chase.” And so Seiya gave up illustrating his hypothetical example and explained everything in detail. Latifa paid attention to Seiya’s words all the way to the very last sentence.

“So my former self had given the diggeries a place of refuge?”

“Yes.”

“And so earlier today, you decided that they could not stay there any longer?”

“You’re right.”

The “refugees” Seiya used in his hypothetical example referred to the diggeries. He wasn’t very sure about the politics in the magical realms, but the fact that they had lost their home was certain. The fact that the 2nd park’s sale had been confirmed didn’t help.

Despite that, Latifa didn’t appear to be blaming Seiya for this.

“It must have been a tough decision to make...I apologize for taking such rash actions.”

“W-Wait, please don’t blame yourself for this! That was done by the former you, anyway.”

“No, losing my memories doesn’t change the fact that I was the one who made that decision back then. I no longer remember their circumstances, but I must have sympathized with them and helped them on a whim. How should I apologize for such irresponsible actions...”

Seiya remained silent and watched Latifa put on a firm stance, though that alone could not completely conceal her wavering emotions. Unable to bear the silence, she inhaled a calming breath and muttered,

“I’m sure this is just a yearly thing, but I’m feeling as though I’m losing my own sense of identity here—playing the role as the royalty of Maple Land while being haunted by the sins made in the past that I don’t even remember. Surely I must have done some terrible things to you, too.”

“You’re simply overreacting. You didn’t do anything wrong, so don’t worry.”

“I see. Even then, I can’t seem to get the insecurity out of my mind...I’m scared...”

Seiya could never imagine the psychological burden of the void in Latifa’s memories. To be fair, people like Moffle experienced it all the time after getting drunk, but those were just memories of the night before. The decades of memories lost by Latifa were nothing short of terrifying.

“I couldn’t help but feel annoyed after hearing how I handled the problem of the diggeries. That’s just not like me. I’m sure the present me would have done a better job at settling the matter. At the very least, that’s what I’d like to believe. I can’t forgive my own actions...”

Seiya was speechless. Latifa had always been the adorable and cheerful girl in his eyes. It never occurred to him that even Latifa had her own internal conflicts.

Perhaps it was time that Seiya replaced his profile of the Latifa he met a month ago?

If he were to do that, the only reliable information he would have was that she was suffering inside.

The two of them sat in silence. Before they knew it, their tea had turned cold.

“At any rate, I’m going to have to take responsibility for the actions I made. How I do so, however, is something I need to think about...”

“Don’t worry about it,” Seiya said, “I’ll think of something. I’m sure we have some space at the warehouses they can use, if need be.”

“But they were being hunted down, weren’t they? They wouldn’t be able to hide very well like this.”

“You’re right...”

The diggeries sought refuge to prevent themselves from being captured by another magical realm. If they were to demand that the park hand the diggeries over, how would they respond? They might even send troops over and invade the park. The possibilities were endless. Seiya had experienced first-hand how little a role logic played in magical realms like Maple Land.

“There’s no need to worry, *fumo*.”

Moffle, who was supposed to be keeping an eye on the attraction, called out from the bottom of the terrace.

“S-Since when were you here!?”

“Ever since silence began between the two of you, *fumo*. What are you guys talking about, anyway?”

“Okay, whatever. What happened to the diggeries?”

“I was bored, so I brought them here. Come on in.”

At those words, some of the diggeries entered the sky garden, and began examining the area and the condition of the stone floor.

“Hmm, the designer has good taste, *mogu*.”

“The one who did this stonework knows his thing, *mogu*...”

“The mortar on the walls were pretty well done, *mogu*!”

Seiya turned pale. “Hey! Don’t just bring them in here! Their presence must be kept a secret from the other cast members!”

“Really? Too late, *fumo*.”

“Tch, why did I even worry about these people... Hey, what’s that flapping sound... Holy—!?”

The loud noise came from the flapping of Rubrum’s wings as he slowly descended through the night sky.

<My apologies, but I couldn’t fit through the staff entrance. Flying here should be permitted, right?>

“Are you mad? Did you just fly across the road on the way here? What if the other humans saw you!?”

<Don't worry, I'll apologize later. Surely they'd forgive me for warming up my wings after years of inactivity, right?>

"That's not the point!!"

"It's okay, Kanie-sama. We were going to have to summon them sooner or later, anyway."

"That's true, but still—"

Hearing Latifa's voice, the diggeries turned around and widened their eyes, raising their arms in surprise.

"It's our savior!"

"Latifa-sama, I've always wanted to meet you again!"

"You're as beautiful as ever, *mogu!*"

They got on their knees and wept, doing all sorts of gestures as a form of respect and gratitude. While Latifa could not see what they were doing, their dramatic actions were easily heard. She was stunned by the reception. After all, she had just met the diggeries for the 'first time'.

“Um, thank you for coming.”

“Whatever, man. Do what you want. ...Huh?”

Seiya spotted Isuzu holding a flag that read “End of Line” behind the last diggeries clan member. Seiya thought he told her to stay behind at the administration building earlier.

“Sento, what’s up with this? Weren’t they supposed to standby in the cave?”

“Moffle has an explanation regarding that,” Isuzu replied while waving the flag.

“Fine, talk.”

Moffle cleared his throat and began. “After you left, I spoke with Taramo, *fumo*. It seems like they were being chased by the kingdom of Politia.”

“I know that much.”

After getting the diggeries to build the escape routes, they attempted to exterminate them to keep its construction a secret. This was a tactic frequently used by people of the past as well.

“Here’s the thing. Politia used to be a kingdom, but it’s now a republic, *fumo*.”

“I don’t get it.”

“My, doesn’t that mean...” Latifa placed a finger over her lips, as if she’d figured something out.

“About four years ago, the people of Politia revolted and overthrew the king, establishing a peaceful and democratic republic of beasts, *fumo*.”

“Really?”

“I believe the prevalence of social media like Facebook catalyzed revolt, *fumo*. The imperial army could not contain the violence that erupted, and thus the remnants of the former royalty of Politia can now only be found in museums.”

“Wait a sec. Doesn’t that mean the diggeries have nothing to fear?”

“Logically speaking, yes. What do you think, Taramo?”

“Indeed, *mogu*. There might still be other nations that are targeting our race, but that shouldn’t be a problem.”

“That’s a relief.”

It appeared that the Diggeries had staved off their trouble.

“We’ve been hiding in the shadows for so long, and weren’t aware of this, *mogu*. I can’t believe we just wasted 4 years... I don’t even know if I should be relieved or disappointed by this.”

“Dornel only surfed the web used by people of the land, so there’s no way he would have known about this either, *fumo*. I guess there’s no point crying over spilt milk.”

Moffle folded his arms and nodded in deep thought. Likewise, Seiya put the unfortunate event aside and swallowed his emotions.

“That’s great.” Latifa spoke in relief. “This means you guys can finally live in peace, doesn’t it?”

“I guess you’re right...”

What are we supposed to do with them now? We can’t possibly just tell them to get lost and find themselves a new home, can we? Seiya had been harboring that dilemma even before leaving the labyrinth.

The labyrinth, as an attraction by itself, was sturdily built. Furthermore, if his sources of information were accurate, they had not taken very long to construct it. Perhaps they could—

“Your Highness!” Taramo kneeled with both hands on the floor and spoke. “We are forever indebted to your benevolence! If possible, please let us contribute to our attraction!”

Taramo’s plea was followed by Rubrum’s.

<P-Please hire me too! I promise I’ll do my best to scare our guests!>

Thank goodness they made their move before I did. Now we can save the negotiations and lower their wages. How about they get the same hourly rate of 850 yen like mine? Or perhaps even the probationary 600 yen?

“Kanie-sama, what do you think? They seem eager to work for our park.”

“Right...hmm...” Seiya scratched his head and took a step forward. “I can’t do that.”

“B-But, why?”

“We’re selling the 2nd park.”

A cloud of dust flew from the ground as Moffle came dashing at Seiya in fury.
“HOW COULD YOU DO THAT!? I’LL NEVER FORGIVE YOU!”

*

After an intense tussle with Moffle was stopped by Isuzu, and getting lectured by Latifa, they finally managed to get Moffle to calm down and listen to Seiya’s explanation.

The trade-off was reasonable, and Moffle ended up having no choice but to agree to it.

In the meantime, they allowed the diggeries to stay in the warehouses and dine in the staff canteen while they built a new home. Seiya instructed Rubrum to standby at the car park, and warned him not to get spotted by other people.

Dornel, who had gone missing for more than a decade, returned as a cast member of Amaburi. However, Tiramie had already taken the role of the ‘Mascot of Flowers’, so his new task was to entertain the guests in the plaza. It appeared that Dornel would need some rehabilitation to kick off the hikikomori lifestyle.

Moffle seemed to have some choice words to say about the sale of the 2nd park, but seeing that Latifa had already agreed to it, he obediently returned.

“Your Highness! Your Highness!” Just before leaving the sky garden, Taramo took out a piece of paper and handed it to Latifa.

“You gave me this slip of paper right before we went into hiding, *mogu*.”

“Hmm? Oh, right. Thank you.”

“As requested, I’ll return this to you. Well then, we’ll be going!”

After the diggeries left, peace and tranquility returned to the sky garden.

“It looks like our staff count just shot up by about 50.”

Seiya let out a sigh of unease as he tidied up the area together with Isuzu. He took a quick glance at Latifa, only to find her firmly holding on to the note.

“Need us to read it for you?”

“S-Sorry?”

“It’s a letter to you, isn’t it? If you don’t mind, Isuzu or myself can help you read it.”



“Um...”

Latifa thought for a moment before finding the courage to hand the letter over.
“Please read it for me, Kanie-sama.”

The slightly yellowed letter had a red seal on it. Seiya carefully broke the seal and opened it.

“Here goes...wait...” He glanced through the contents and tilted his head in confusion.

“What language is this? I can’t read it...”

“My apologies. It must be one from Maple Land. Isuzu-san, can you do me a favor, then?”

“Yes, Your Highness.” Isuzu took the letter from Seiya and took a look.

“If possible, I’d like Seiya to listen to the contents too.”

“Are you sure, Your Highness?”

“Yes, please. I’ve appointed him as the park’s acting manager, so I don’t want to keep any secrets from him.”

“Understood. Then, I shall begin.” Isuzu began an ad-libbed translation on the contents of the letter:

Hello there. If you are reading this letter, this must mean the curse has yet to take effect. Either that, or a miracle occurred and you managed to remain as the park’s manager despite having lost your memories (which is a good thing, albeit unlikely. Nonetheless, I shall continue with the assumption that the curse remains in effect.)

Firstly, I must apologize for causing so much trouble for accepting the diggeries into the park.

Abandoning people in need is something I simply cannot bear to do. As such, I’ve worked with my assistant to hide the clan in the 2nd park. I’ve kept this a secret from Uncle, in fears that he might strongly oppose my actions.

Taramo, the head of the clan, is a kind and caring fellow. If possible, I hope you can treat him nicely.

March has finally come.

I've had so much fun throughout the whole of the past year. I vividly remember beginning my year feigning confidence in front of those 'strangers' amidst the suffering I faced. However, as time passed, I learned to make friends with everyone in the park.

I believe the time has come for me to bid farewell with them. Nonetheless, we will not lose. I am confident you will be able to earn back the friendships that are lost in the beginning of every April. That's because you're just like me, who has adored the world and everyone around you. Am I wrong?

I apologize for saying such things, but do your best! I know you can do it, because you're me.

Isuzu finished reading the last sentence. Only the sound of plants swaying in the wind, broke the ensuing silence in the sky garden.

"Are you okay...?" Seiya asked out of concern. Latifa managed a soft mutter.

"...This is so unfair."

"..."

"She's me, yet she's so much stronger than I am..." Latifa turned away from Seiya and Isuzu. Her hands that extended to the railings for support shivered.

“Do you really think I can become like her? Someone able to console the future me in the midst of this darkness...”

Isuzu was speechless. All she could do was watch over Latifa with sorrowful eyes.

“Hey, Latifa...” Seiya took a step forward. “Would you like me to say this gently or harshly?”

“Harshly...never mind, I’m sorry. I don’t think I can muster the courage for that. Please say it gently.”

“Okay. Basically, I believe you can do it. It’s obvious.” Seiya ended his speech abruptly.

Latifa tilted her head. “That’s all?”

“Yeah.”

“...Then what would the harsh version sound like?”

“Of course you can, baaaka.”

“...That’s it?”

“That’s it.”

Hearing that, Latifa giggled. “You’re an interesting one, Kanie-sama.”

“You think so?”

“But please don’t say that to your girlfriend. You might upset her.”

“Hah. Roger.”

Unfortunately, I’m still single. Wait a minute, if that’s the case, could what she just said have a much deeper meaning than I thought?

Isuzu stared at Seiya with a mixed expression. Not knowing how to react to it, Seiya shrugged.

“Thank you, Kanie-sama. I feel a lot better now.”

This time, Latifa’s voice sounded a lot livelier.

Moffle's Monthly Report

Because Moffle mentioned that he'd be doing some renovation for his attraction, Seiya decided to head over and check on him.

Needless to say, the attraction in question was none other than Moffle's Sweet House. The attraction involved the use of a modified water gun to shoot pesky mice that "infested" the sweet house. Guests who performed well were rewarded with prizes, and even a photo shoot with Moffle himself.

Surprisingly enough, this weird attraction had garnered a considerable amount of popularity in the park.

"It's been more than 10 years since the sweet house first opened, *fumo*," Moffle said, welcoming Seiya into the sweet house.

He was wearing a safety helmet, and an array of tools could be seen hanging on his duty belt. Adachi Eiko, who had been recently hired by Seiya, was busy running around and helping out with the renovations. It looked like Moffle had yet to learn of her stage name. Isuzu, however, seemed to know something, though she refused to give any hints.

"I figured we needed to give this house a more modern design, *fumo*. I doubt we can continue attracting guests with the same line over and over again, anyway."

"You're right, but how exactly are you going about this? We don't exactly have a lot of money."

The sale of the 2nd park had pretty much solved Amaburi's financial issues. Nonetheless, they should still be thrifty. Seiya wasn't going to approve of a renovation project that'd consume much resources.

"I know, *fumo*. I won't be changing the core concept of the attraction. We get our high ratings because of the game, after all. I'm thinking of fine-tuning various aspects of the game, *fumo*."

"Impressive. Tell me what your plan is, then."

"Firstly, we'll be changing the laser gun. Here's the prototype of the new model." Moffle handed the new model over to Seiya. While the previous model had the appearance of a water gun, this one resembled the real deal. It was heavy with a black metal finish, and cast a grim shadow on the ground. The word "SIG SAUER" was engraved on the side of the barrel.

"The heck is this!?"

"It's a P226. I used the best materials we could find within our budget, *fumo*. I've made it so that the sliding mechanism can be seen. And that's not all! A feeding ramp has been positioned such that it can be seen through the ejection port. The battery's concealed in the magazine, so they are easily replaceable.

The decogging lever operates as the on/off switch, *fumo*. Check it out, 10 points for style, *fumo*."

Seiya was dumbfounded at such a maniacal weapon.

"..."

"Once the guests score more points, we'll provide them with better weapons. We have shotguns, submachine guns, assault rifles, and if they earn 10,000 points, they get the Gatling gun, *fumo*."

Moffle took more prototype weapons out and displayed them in front of Seiya. They gave a loud *thud* when they hit the table. On top of that, he placed several strange objects that resembled rugby balls.

"What are those?"

"Anti-armor missiles. And here are the sniper rifles. They can take down a foe from a kilometer away."

"And these?"

"Neutron bombs. These are used for suicide bombings if they wish."

Just what kind of enemies will the guests be facing??? “...Looks like overkill for mice to me.”

“You’re right, of course...so we buffed the mice too, *fumo*. Come with me.”

Seiya followed Moffle into the playing area. They entered the kitchen, where Seiya recalled playing the game for the first time. Back then, the kitchen was decorated with utensils and model pastries and fruits in many bright colors. Cute, mischievous puppet mice would appear in front of him as targets ready to be shot. There was only one problem this time—

The kitchen was in ruins.

There was rubble everywhere, and fragments of utensils scattered the floor. ‘Corpses’ of past fallen soldiers lay around the area, dying the area with blood. A grim, deathly BGM was being played through the surround sound system, which occasionally delivered loud explosion sounds. Once in a while, a scream of pain could be heard coming ‘from the distance’.

“This is where mice will start to appear, *fumo*.”

With a shrill cry, the puppet mice began their assault.

“Huh!?”

These 'mischievous' puppet mice bore hatred and aggravation in their expressions, which was further shown in the crimson glow in their eyes. The mice opened their mouths, releasing lumps of flesh they ripped out of their fallen prey, and spoke.

<Another human...!>

<Kill them all!>

<Let's feast on their brains!>

The mice howled at Seiya like harbingers of death.

"How's that? 10 points for immersive experience, *fumo*. And check out what happens when they're shot."

Moffle took aim at a random puppet mouse and fired.

"GEAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!"

Blood exploded out of its interior and painted the ground even redder. The torn remains of the mouse scattered about. It was obvious that this was just a fake creature, but witnessing the scene made Seiya sick to his stomach.

“That’s how it’d die upon being shot, *fumo*. Now, here’s the biggest change we’ve made—if you somehow let even one escape...”

<How dare you! DIE!!!>

A jet of liquid gushed out of the remaining mice. Moffle had long since sought cover, but poor Seiya, who was still busy trying to process what was happening, got liquid poured all over his face.

Seiya felt a sharp pain and a pungent smell from the impact. “Shit!! M-My eyes!!”

Moffle fired some rounds to cover for Seiya who was rubbing his face, and writhing in pain.

“...they’ll counterattack themselves, *fumo*. The mice are programmed to detect the direction of the attack and strike back.”

“UGH!!! M-MY EYES!!!”

“Their reaction speeds aren’t to be looked down upon, either. Of course, this will pose a challenge to the elderly and kids, so we’ll allow them to select the difficulty before commencement. There’ll be 3 levels of difficulty: ‘Casual’, ‘Normal’ and ‘Hardcore’. However—”

“OH MY GOD!! MY EYES, MY EYES!!!”

“However, for those who feel ‘Hardcore’ doesn’t provide enough kick, they’ll be invited to try the ‘Insane’ difficulty, *fumo*. Mortals who clear it are labeled as gods, and will be given a gold nameplate and a diamond-carved medal that reads ‘Soldier’s Honor’, *fumo*.”

Paying no heed to Seiya’s squirms and flails of agony, Moffle continued his lengthy description of the details of his renovation project.

Macaron's Monthly Report

One morning, Seiya went over to inspect Macaron's attraction before the park opened.

Seiya had never once visited Macaron's Music Theater, which used to be perpetually closed. Because this posed a problem to running the park smoothly, Seiya gave Macaron a stern warning and convinced him to work every day, even if he was reluctant to do so.

Macaron's Music Theatre involved about 20 guests riding in a large gondola and touring small rooms designed to resemble the popular places around the world. Background music from each room's respective country would be played.

Before starting the journey, the announcer said: "Welcome on board the Mezzoporté! Let us learn more about different types of music from all over the world! Hold on tight!"

Famous tunes by Mozart were played in the room of Vienna, flute music was used for Istanbul, and percussion-centric tunes played with they entered the room for the Congo. As the tour progressed, more tunes were introduced. Mendelssohn's songs for Venice, rock music for Las Vegas, Gamelan for Bali, et cetera. In the final, fantasy-style room, Macaron would perform his own piece with a flute.

"...But playing the flute's boring, *ron!*" Macaron whined as he snapped his flute in half.

Macaron's Monthly Report

Because Macaron's Music Theatre was also undergoing some renovation works, cast members could be seen running around, busy with their assigned tasks. One of them was Chuujou Shiina, who had been recently hired during the interview. Seiya wasn't too sure what kind of person she was, but as long as she didn't stir up any trouble, it'd probably be fine.

"In the first place, why are we playing terrible songs like Mozart's *The Magical Flute*!? Everyone says he's a genius, but that guy's a weirdo! We need more violent music rather than Mozart, *ron!*"

"...But are you seriously thinking of implementing this in your attraction?" Seiya said, staring at Macaron in disgust.

"We're obliged to! Good music should be vulgar and crude—that's where true freedom of expression comes from, *ron!*"

"I get your drift, but what the heck is up with this place!?"

Seiya and Macaron were in the first room that was supposed to have a peaceful scenery of Vienna. Instead, the room was now designed like American side streets, with hoodlums gathering in corners to traffic drugs. Somewhere far into the distance, sirens of police cars could be heard.

A gangsta-rap BGM could be heard from the sound system.

This is our turf, we run this town; We ain't needin' no peace, so fuck off you police clowns!

"Our guests need to learn some rap and hip hop, so I remodeled this room."

"This change is too drastic! And what's with those gangsters there? They keep staring at us..."

"They're probably interested in your ass, *ron*."

"Wha—"

"Just kidding. Those guys are diggeries, *ron*. Take off your costumes and show yourselves; you're scaring our manager."

The 'hoodlums' deflated and ripped open to reveal mole-like mascots. The sight of these humans tearing themselves up was frightening to watch.

"Macaron-san, should we really continue doing such things?"

"Yeah please do, I want to depict the sick and warped beauty of the night streets, *ron*."

"Cut it out!"

"Have you learned to use the F-word? Be sure to use it as much as possible. Every sentence should contain 'Fuck' and 'Bitch' in it."

"Just stop this nonsense already!"

Tiramie's Monthly Report

Seiya was in his office, fixated on clearing the mountains of documents pending his approval, when the old telephone on his desk rang.

Seiya contained his frustration and picked up the phone, "This is the management of Amagi Brilliant Park..."

"Kanie-san, we have trouble! A cast member just got stabbed!"

Give me a break. Those guys had one job.

The call was from a part-timer in the plaza. She was none other than Bandou Biino, whom Seiya had for some reason hired after she was discharged from the hospital. She was assigned the task of crowd control and giving the guests a tour of the area.

"I'll be there in a moment. Stay calm and elaborate the situation to me. Who stabbed who?"

"Um, a guest just pulled a knife and charged over at us...and suddenly..."

"Who's the victim?"

Tiramie's Monthly Report

"Um...the...Pomeranian mascot...what's his name again...Ti...Tiramie-san!"

"Got it." He slammed the phone back down and ran out of his office.

By the time Seiya had reached the entrance plaza, things had calmed down considerably.

Cast members were restraining a woman in her 30s. Several meters away from her, Tiramie could be seen squeezing his wound and lying beside a knife that was soaked in blood.

"Mi...Mi..."

"H-Hey, are you okay?"

"It's no use, *mi*. I'm gonna die..."

This guy's a magnet for violence...I don't even remember how many times he's gotten himself hurt. Pretty unbecoming of the mascot of flowers, I'd say.

Biino came running over to Seiya, half in tears. "Kanie-san, I'm so sorry! I wasn't able to stop them in time despite being there..."

*I think this happened **because** you were there, but never mind...*

Also, I've never heard of an organization that gets two stab cases in such a short time span. Is this girl cursed or something...?

"I don't get it. Is she another one of your family members?"

"...I don't think so..."

"He deserved it!" The woman screamed as she struggled to break free.

"This scoundrel came to me saying things like 'you're my one and only', and even promised to marry me! To think he said the same thing to other women...what a filthy dog!"

"I-I didn't say that, *mi...*"

Tiramie coughed out some blood and muttered.

"I'm sorry for the wedding proposal, *mi*. But I don't even remember saying that...come to think of it, who are you?"

"We've met hundreds of times, haven't we!? You were so kind, and I bought you so many gifts...yet you give me this kind of treatment!?!?"

"I-I...don't remember you, *mi...*"

"Liar! I remember everything about us! We used to exchange morning greeting mails and even sent pictures to cheer each other on! You're terrible...I'll never forgive you! This will be your grave!!"

"*Mi...*"

"...Take her away."

The cast members brought her away from the scene on Seiya's orders.

Tiramie was all battered up, but did not appear to have sustained any lethal injuries. Seiya walked over to him and asked.

"I think I get the whole situation. Nonetheless, I figured I should confirm: is her statement true, or is she just crazy?"

"...She's probably telling the truth, *mi.*"

"So you were lying back then?"

"Mi..."

"Spill the beans."

"My bad... I probably puffed her once a long time ago..." Still bleeding, Tiramie stuck out his tongue in a mischievous fashion.

"You're a scumbag. Remain here and die a horrible death."

Isuzu's Monthly Report

Throughout the whole of last month, the park's cast members had worked really hard. As a result, they had managed to prevent the park's death, allowing them to have peace of mind.

Isuzu was no different—she no longer faced the impending dread of March, and Moffle and gang's nonsense no longer caused her head to hurt (as much).

He should be returning anytime now.

Isuzu stood at the entrance of the administration building and checked the time. It was 2152 hours.

Here he comes.

The elevator doors opened and Kanie Seiya walked out, heading towards Isuzu. He had changed to plain clothes and was carrying a worn-out bag.

Seeing Isuzu, Seiya called out, "Yo. Didn't know you were still here."

"I'm about to leave. Had some matters to settle earlier."

Isuzu's statement was mostly truthful, save for the fact that her "matters" weren't work-related, but homework.

Seiya left the building and headed for the bicycle park. Isuzu tagged along. Her dorm was in the same direction, so it was only natural.

"Come to think of it, you're living in the dorms, aren't you?"

"Yes. It's about 3 minutes away by foot."

"Hmph, that's convenient. Maybe I should rent one myself."

"I wouldn't recommend it. The guys' dorm is run-down and renovation has turned it into a convoluted mess."

"Is that so...?"

"Besides, wouldn't your aunt be worried sick if you stayed in the dorms?"

Seiya smiled wryly. "Nah, not gonna happen. She's too busy with work to even come home. In fact, I haven't seen her this whole week. Her laundry has piled up though, so she must have returned only for a change of clothes."



"I see..." Isuzu knew Seiya had a complicated family background. His parents were alive, but had divorced long ago. She doubted that they even kept contact with each other.

"Sorry, I don't mean to meddle with your personal affairs, but I think you should pay attention to your health. You've been eating nothing but instant food from convenience stores, haven't you?"

"Can't help it. I don't have time."

Maybe I should learn some recipes for him when I get back? Isuzu wondered. However, wouldn't preparing bento for Seiya arouse suspicion among the cast members? Wait, I'm his secretary, so it should be fine. But why am I thinking of this in the first place?

They arrived at the bicycle park.

Seiya's bicycle resembled one that old grannies rode, and was firmly locked by a series of chains. He tossed his bag to the front basket and began unlocking his bicycle. He managed to unlock the dial lock without even looking at it.

"How are the diggeries doing?"

"They've started work, and haven't caused any trouble since."

Calling the diggeries “masters of construction” was no exaggeration. They managed to build a facility in the main park within a few days, and had since used it as their home. They used raw materials extracted from the 2nd park in its construction, which significantly saved the expenditure of funds.

“I’m guessing they’ll be of good use?”

“Definitely. They’ll come in handy in the renovation of existing facilities.”

The increased construction speed was an excellent advantage for Seiya. Of course, renovation works would take up funds, but they had enough to last them for a while. The weather was only going to get warmer as spring progressed. Now was their chance to strike.

“We ought to attract more guests from now on...” Isuzu muttered.

“Yeah, otherwise, we’re screwed.” Seiya responded in a dull manner.

The sale of the 2nd park had resulted in one huge change in Seiya’s plans. Amagi Development had put up a surprising amount of resistance against the sale, and even after fierce negotiations, they only managed to settle with an immense condition to the contract—that the annual minimum guest count be increased.

Up ’till last year, they were free to continue service as long as they attracted 600,000 guests.

However, this year would be different.

“Can we really get 3,000,000 guests...?”

甘城ブリリアント
パーティー
ごきげん記
ながじまゆか

二ム打役
ばっかりな
気が……

狙い通りビキニアーマー
(担当M井さんリクエスト)の
勇者があらわれた！
どうする？

ご覧頂き
ありがとうございました！
2013.08 ながじまゆか

Project Leader and Translator : Sora

Supervisor : Default Melody

Editor : ramenpoodle

PDF Editor: Kuro-pi

Graphics : Aries, Daze

Image Typesetting : Castor212

PDF Typesetting : DevilHands

Translation Group : *NanoDesu Translations*