



HITSUJI

GAMEI

ILLUSTRATOR:

KAREI

AFTER-SCHOOL

DUNGEON  
DIVER:

LEVEL GRINDING  
IN ANOTHER  
WORLD





HITSUJI  
GAMEI  
ILLUSTRATOR:  
KAREI

AFTER-SCHOOL

# DUNGEON DIVER:

LEVEL GRINDING  
IN ANOTHER  
WORLD



AUTHOR:  
**HITSUJI  
GAMEI**  
ILLUSTRATOR:  
**KAREI**

4

AFTER-SCHOOL

# DUNGEON DIVER:

LEVEL GRINDING  
IN ANOTHER  
WORLD







**KUDO AKIRA**

A high schooler who can travel between Japan and another world. A mage with a rare affinity for purple magic. He's at that age where he's very interested in all things erotic.


**ELDRID**

A Tail girl and resident of another world who was saved by Akira. Proud of her tail. She's also strong.

**CARBUNCLE**

A creature that happens to follow Akira around. Loves Akira's mana and Churu cat treats.





**"This will  
definitely taste  
delicious with  
shoy sauce."**

**She was right; shellfish always  
went well with soy sauce.  
This is the law of the universe.**



# Table of Contents

1. [Cover](#)
2. [Color Illustrations](#)
3. [Extra Floor: Adventuring with Eldrid?](#)
4. [Floor Twenty-Eight: Those Who Are Ruled by Soy Sauce](#)
5. [Floor Twenty-Nine: Taking a Walk with Miguel](#)
6. [Floor Thirty: Rescuing People in Distress and Whatnot](#)
7. [Floor Thirty-One: To the Dungeon with Carbuncle](#)
8. [Floor Thirty-Two: Dillon's Revenge!](#)
9. [Floor Thirty-Three: An Incident During Helping-People Week](#)
10. [Floor Thirty-Four: Emergency Directive? Overcome the Mystery Porridge!](#)
11. [Floor Thirty-Five: The Horror, the City of Verdigrisy Smoke!](#)
12. [Extra Floor: My Childhood Friend May Be a Glutton](#)
13. [Extra Floor: The Evil Old Man at the Guild](#)
14. [Floor Thirty-Six: Where the Rabbits Hang Out](#)
15. [Epilogue: Natural Honey vs. Commercial Chocolate](#)
16. [Afterword](#)
17. [Bonus Textless Illustrations](#)
18. [About J-Novel Club](#)
19. [Copyright](#)



## Extra Floor: Adventuring with Eldrid?

“Whoa, so cute...” breathed Eldrid.

The Tail woman was usually gallant and cool, but she became weak at the knees when it came to cute things. I recalled something similar happening when we’d been playing with Chorus Seals in the Submerged City and when she’d hugged Walker Rabbits. Why was she in this state? She was staring at the animals in the display cases at a pet shop. Her ears were flapping, and her tail was wagging, but those features were only visible to me. She was completely smitten by the lovely rabbits (the small kind), chinchillas, and hamsters.

Instead of her usual knightly garb, Eldrid was wearing modern clothes today: a high-neck knit top and a pair of denim pants that suited her quite well.

“The rabbits in this world are so small,” she noted.

“I’m used to the rabbits here, so I was surprised when I saw the ones in your world,” I said.

“Yeah, I guess they’re really big compared to these.”

“Yup.”

As Eldrid looked around the store, her expression shifted as if a realization had hit her.

Seemingly conflicted and somewhat sad, she said, “I kind of feel bad for them, trapped in those cramped little boxes.”

Her mood visibly fell as the words left her mouth. Her ears lay flat against her head, and her tail drooped, both of which were only visible to me. Tails were easy to read; their ears and tails gave away their emotions.

“Yeah, pet shops may look nice, but they’re places that buy and sell animals. I hear some pretty terrible things happen behind-the-scenes at a lot of them,” I said.

“I don’t know how I feel about that,” said Eldrid.



“Same, but it isn’t like we can do anything about it.”

“Seeing how they’re still in business, I guess there’s a demand for it.”

“Yup. It’s an easy place to start for people who want to own a pet,” I said. “I just hope they end up with a nice owner and happily live out the rest of their lives.”

We left the store as we talked in hushed voices, then we began walking around town again.

“Your world is really interesting,” said Eldrid. “The technology is so advanced, and there’s so much more here in terms of entertainment.”

“I think your world is fun too,” I said.

“You think so? I think there’s way fewer things to do for fun in my world.”

“I guess that’s why they say the grass is always greener on the other side.”

“What grass?” she asked, confused.

“It’s just a phrase that means other people’s things tend to look more attractive,” I explained.

Eldrid clapped her hands together and said, “Oh, I get it.”

Feeling envious of other people’s belongings was only natural. Of course, this didn’t only apply to objects but also environments, situations, and all sorts of things that could invoke envy and jealousy. “The lottery of birth” was an idea in the same vein, I guess.

Anyway, you surely knew why and how we’d gotten here, but I’d explain just in case. I was in Japan with Eldrid today. Why? Well, we’d been talking about hanging out for some time, so we were following up on that promise and going around town together. That was why we’d met up near the Divers Guild earlier this morning...

## §

“I-I’m ready!” said Eldrid.

She must’ve hurried here judging by the way she was out of breath.

Of course, she was wearing an outfit totally different from her usual knightly



garb. She was properly dressed up, and she looked quite cute. The sword on her back was charming—well, maybe not. It was kind of scary, but apparently, you needed to carry a weapon around even when going out for fun.

“Oh! Your ears and tail look even nicer than usual. Lustrous, even,” I noted.

Eldrid seemed pleased that I’d noticed. Her expression brightened, and she said, “Yeah! I used the brush you gave me the other day!”

“Glad to hear you’ve been using it,” I said.

“Of course! You went out of your way to buy it for me!”

“But you know, you’re gonna have to change your outfit,” I said.

“What? Why?”

“You’ll see when we get there.”

“Get there? Oh, you said we’re going to the place you’re from, right?” asked Eldrid.

“Yup. Just follow me,” I said.

I led us from the Divers Guild entrance to the statues of the gods at the square, which was one of Freida’s go-to meeting spots. This place was always busy, and on the holidays, it was so packed it could even give a certain mouse’s amusement park a run for its money. It seriously made me think Freida may have a population density problem.

“You wanted to come *here*?” asked Eldrid.

“Yup,” I replied.

“Wait... Don’t tell me you live...” she trailed off, sounding rather disturbed and her expression concerned. She clearly misunderstood the situation.

“No, no!” I said quickly. “I’m not a homeless person living in the public square!”

“But you said you’re gonna show me where you live, then you brought me here. Not that I’m complaining or anything! Everyone has their own living situation. I mean, it wouldn’t bother me if you slept on a straw mat out here! I’d want you to bathe regularly though!” said Eldrid.



“Stop trying to make me homeless, will you?! I do bathe every day, and I don’t sleep on a straw mat!” I protested. But I was having a hard time convincing her after bringing her out here. “I’m gonna prove it, but first, I need you to hold my hand.”

“What?! You want me to hold your hand?!” she said.

“Yeah. And hold on tight, please.”

“Oh, okay...”

Eldrid took my hand hesitantly. I could tell she was feeling uncertain from the way her ears were standing straight up.

“Time to activate my magic!” I called out.

“Huh? What magic? Akira, what are you—”

“Just trust me. Here we go!”

And that was how we’d left Do-Melta and ended up where the gods were just a minute ago.

This time, we arrived at a library. It was quite a sight with its countless bookshelves and stacks of books that couldn’t fit on the shelves. God had clearly moved while I was in Do-Melta because earlier, he’d been in that white space as usual. Maybe he always spent his Sundays reading around this time.

“Oh? Hey, Akira. Welcome back,” said God.

“I’m back as promised, and my friend is with me!” I said.

“‘Friend’? Hmm, right,” he said as he nodded to himself and smiled knowingly. He then pointed at me with both index fingers and said, “Oh, Akira, you dirty dog! I gotta say I’m impressed.”

“Dirty dog? I mean, my friend here is a Tail, but what do dogs have to do with me?” I asked.

“Don’t worry about it. I already knew you’re like that anyway,” he said.

I looked at him, confused, but he just let out a resigned sigh. It was as if he was having trouble explaining something to a young child, but I didn’t have enough information to reach a conclusion.



Eldrid was stunned in the meantime, not able to process everything that was happening. She surely didn't expect to visit a god today. What's more, he wasn't just any god but (presumably) the greatest god of them all, Ameithys himself. Her surprise was pretty understandable.

She finally snapped out of her daze and bowed as she knelt down on one knee.

"Ah! Lord Ameithys!" she said.

"Hmm," he nodded.

It seemed she, too, knew who he was at first sight. Had she seen him before? Well, there were statues that looked just like him, so I supposed everyone in Do-Melta knew what he looked like. Celebrities didn't get any privacy, I guess.

"Lord Ameithys, I thank you for your daily blessings," said Eldrid reverently.

"Very well. Continue to keep your god's word and promise, and live a fruitful life," Ameithys responded in a dignified manner.

*Whoa, he's glowing. This god comes with a backlight feature.*

"Akira," said Ameithys, "you know you said that out loud, right? Comments like that can really kill the mood. Anyway, just think of it like an option at a car shop or a set piece on a stage."

"Sorry, I couldn't help it— Anyway, I noticed everyone says that greeting to you," I said.

"Well, of course. I'm a god, after all."

"Right. Yes, of course. I understand that, but still," I said.

Eldrid shook me frantically as she said, "H-Hey! Akira, don't talk to Lord Ameithys like that!"

"Huh? Oh, well, this is how we usually talk," I replied.

"No, no, no! Show some respect! This is blasphemy! *Blasphemy!*"

"O-Okay..."

She was clearly upset. Scrael had a similar reaction last time too. Everyone was crazy reverent of him, though *they* were probably the normal ones.

“Akira is Japanese, so I don’t really blame him,” said God. “They think of gods and Buddha as familiar beings.”

“I do put my hands together in worship at household kamidana shrines, at Buddhist altars, and toward my oshis. Should I change my attitude?” I asked.

“Nah, don’t worry about it. Just be yourself,” he said.

“Thank you.”

I put my hands together as a show of respect, Japanese style. It was a gesture that originated in Asia—India, to be more specific. God was pretty open-minded about the method of prayer we wanted to use.

Eldrid walked up to me and whispered into my ear, “So...what’s going on here?”

“The thing is, I’m actually from another world. I’ve been visiting your world by passing through God’s place here,” I explained.

“R-Really? I mean, it isn’t that I don’t believe you, seeing how we’re in the presence of Lord Ameithys himself. So that’s why you have his blessing— Wait, that means—”

“Oh, Eldrid, let’s not talk about that, okay?” interrupted Ameithys.

“As you wish,” replied Eldrid. She then seemed to have remembered something and knelt before the god again, her expression grave. “P-Pardon me! There’s something I’d like to ask of you!”

“I know what this is about,” he said.

“You...do? Well, of course you do. So—”

“Sorry to say, but I can’t help you on that one.”

“B-But why?!” asked Eldrid.

“That’s the rule,” replied God. “We’ve decided long ago to not intervene more than necessary.”

“Is there no way you’ll reconsider?” insisted Eldrid.

“No. Your dad asked me too, but I simply can’t get involved.”



They seemed to be talking about something important.

Eldrid fell silent and looked at God pleadingly, but he only shook his head.

*So Eldrid's dad has met God before?*

I'd heard it was pretty common for other races to meet their gods, but considering Eldrid was a Tail, I would've assumed her dad would've been visiting his own god. I wondered what the backstory was there.

"Anyway, keep your chin up," said God. "It might be against the rules for me to say something like this, but it isn't as if your issue won't be resolved."

"Is that true?!" asked Eldrid, perking up.

"Yup, so don't worry about it too much. I'm sure someone will help you."

"Yes... Yes, Lord Ameithys!"

Eldrid seemed to be going through something rough, but God's words had reignited her fighting spirit.

"What are you guys talking about, El? What did you ask of him?" I asked, not able to help my curiosity.

"Well, it's, uh...complicated," said Eldrid.

"Yeah. I'm afraid I can't tell you anything from my end," said Ameithys.

*So even God isn't gonna tell me. Well, I guess it's a private matter. I get that.*

God smiled gently at Eldrid. "Anyway, go have fun today."

"Y-Yes, I will," she said.

"Oh! There's something I need to talk to you about," I said to God.

"Ah, right. You mean her clothes, ears, and tail, right? I'll take care of them," he said as he cast a spell.

"Huh? Whoa!" said Eldrid. Her ears and tail turned invisible (or so I assumed), and her clothes changed into a high-neck knit top and a pair of denim pants. Her tail stuck out from above her butt, so I figured there was a hole there.

"There isn't anyone in Akira's world who looks like Tails, so— Huh?" said God as he noticed Eldrid's reaction.

“M-My ears and tail...” she said with tears in her eyes as she dropped to her knees.

It was the quintessential pose of despair. Her features seemed to have disappeared to her, though they were still faintly visible to me. The people of Do-Melta really were proud of their race’s distinct characteristics. She looked absolutely devastated just like last time with Scrael. God seemed a bit taken aback too.

“Th-This is a trial for me to overcome! I can do it!” she said to herself.

*Huh? Trial?*

“The clothes are a gift from me. Yeah!” said God as he made a peace sign with his fingers. He was quirky as usual.

“Okay, let’s get going then,” I said.

“All right, bring it on! I’ll beat anyone who stands in our way!” said Eldrid.

“No, El. We’re just gonna hang out and have fun.”

“I know. I’ll beat them up while having fun.”

Eldrid was acting weird now that her ears and tail were invisible to her, and I was starting to get worried. Was she panicking because her precious pride and joy were gone?

“Take care. Oh, and don’t forget to bring something back for me,” said God.

“Sure. We’ll see you later!” I said.

I mentally prepared a list of gifts for God as I teleported into my own world with Eldrid.

## §

It took no time before we arrived in modern Japan in my room, which looked like any other typical high school boy’s room. My parents weren’t home, so we didn’t have to worry about them—not that anything would’ve been different if they were around.

Meanwhile, Eldrid seemed to have recovered from the confusion of losing her ears and tail. She seemed interested in my room and its furniture, and she



spent some time looking around curiously. She kept herself busy poking things and picking them up as she wandered around.

“This world really is completely different from ours,” she noted as she stared at my room’s walls. There, she found a home appliance that could be considered a modern essential. “What’s that?” she asked.

“That’s the AC,” I said.

“A-C? What’s that?”

“It’s for adjusting the temperature in the room,” I explained.

“Really? That sounds useful for hot summer days.”

Tails, like Eldrid, had fluffy ears and tails, so summer heat must’ve been especially hard on them. I’d seen cats and dogs with long fur get summer haircuts because of this. Though, Tails only had fur on their ears and tails.

I closed the curtains and turned the lights on and off, and even that seemed to impress Eldrid.

“Wow! I wonder if my world will become this convenient too as technology advances,” she wondered aloud.

“Probably,” I said.

“The bed sure looks soft,” she said, then sat her butt on it and bounced a few times. She had a childish side that reared its head every once in a while.

I picked up the TV remote and said to myself, “Let’s see if the weather forecast is on.”

I turned on the TV and changed the channel, which happened to have the weather report on. The forecaster confidently assured us it would be sunny all throughout the week, which meant we wouldn’t have to worry about any sudden rain. The weather would be perfect for going out.

Eldrid stopped bouncing on my bed and looked at the TV with a puzzled expression. “What’s that?”

“It shows other locations with the power of technology,” I explained.

“Huh. I wonder how it works?”

“Let’s not sweat the details. That was the weather forecast.”

“Weather forecast? They know what the weather is gonna be beforehand?” asked Eldrid.

“Yup. They’re usually spot-on too.”

“That sounds nice. I don’t like getting wet, so knowing what the weather is gonna be would be really helpful.”

She seemed quite impressed. Weather forecasting wasn’t a thing in her world, and I’d heard their weather changed based on the will of the gods, so things like weather maps would be useless over there. It’d probably be more likely for them to have a program that went like “Here’s the report on the moods of the gods today,” though the complete disregard for privacy might be a problem.

As I browsed through the channels with my remote for a while, I heard a newscaster’s voice, then the screen changed to a hero broadcast. Kaijins holding an avant-garde vase appeared on the screen.

“I see you’re still up to no good, kaijins!” called out the hero.

“No good? We’re just selling vases on the street! We’ve done nothing wrong!” replied one of the kaijins.

“Don’t give me that! You take advantage of people’s emotional weakness and force them into buying your wares at exorbitant prices!”

“N-Now hold on! Wait just a minute! All we did was put a slight premium on the prices! ‘Exorbitant’ is a bit dramatic!”

“There’s nothing ‘slight’ about it! You’re guilty of fraud and violation of public order and morality!”

“S-Stop! We haven’t committed any violence! What kind of hero attacks someone who isn’t resisting? You cruel, heartless monster!”

“Silence! Take this! Big Bang Smaaash!”

“Nooooooo! He isn’t listening! Someone call the police! Aaaaaah!”

The poor kaijin was hit with a ball of fire before he exploded. Yup, it was just



another peaceful day in Japan.

Eldrid stared at the screen blankly. The violence aside, the hero had blasted the kaijin with absolutely no intention of hearing it out, so I couldn't blame her. It'd been a surprising development even for me, and I was already familiar with heroes.

"What was that?" she asked.

"A hero of justice defeating bad guys," I said.

"Just to make sure, the ones holding those weird vases were the bad guys?"

"That's right."

"I-I see..."

"There have been a lot more kaijin appearing lately, so maybe the heroes have been told to resolve things more quickly," I said.

Eldrid seemed perplexed for a while, but then she stared at the hero as if drawn to him.

"He's strong," she said.

"Yeah. Very strong," I agreed.

"He's small, though," she added.

"D-Don't say that to his face, okay?!"

I didn't even want to say what had happened to the last kaijin who'd uttered those words. It was now treated like a forbidden word, and it was considered taboo even among kaijins.

After we browsed through the channels for a while longer, I turned off the TV.

"Well, I'm gonna go change. Wait here," I said.

"Right."

I quickly got dressed and returned. Eldrid stared at me and blinked, but I was just wearing a normal sweater and a pair of pants.

"That looks good on you," she said.

"Well, I did pick it out because I like it."

“Why don’t you usually dress like this? Your usual outfit is kind of weird—I mean, unusual.”

“Everyone seems to think so. Is it really that strange?” I wondered.

“It doesn’t really suit you,” she said.

They were tough critics. It seemed the safari style looked odd to the residents of Do-Melta.

“Anyway, let’s go outside,” I suggested.

“Yeah! Let’s go! I can’t wait!” she replied enthusiastically.

We were about to leave the room, but then I realized something.

“Oh, one sec, El,” I said.

“Hmm? What’s up?”

“Uh, that thing on your back...”

“My sword? What about it?” she asked.

“Well, I was hoping you’d leave it in my room.”

“Huh? But what if we run into trouble?”

“Don’t worry, that rarely ever happens,” I said.

“Hmm... Okay,” she said hesitantly.

Despite that, she kept glancing over at her sword. Maybe she was feeling reluctant, or she was feeling anxious going to an unknown place without her trusty weapon.

“You know, maybe I should bring it after all? We never know what’ll happen,” she said.

“Nope. The police will arrest you if you walk around with a weapon. Well, they’d probably let you go because you’re a minor, but the whole day would still be wasted.”

“I see,” she said, visibly disappointed. She really was easy to read.

“Besides, if we do get in trouble, you still have your claws,” I pointed out.



“Yeah, but I prefer my sword,” she said.

The sword presumably had much higher firepower. But she had that crazy special technique called the Woof Buster, which she’d used a while back, so it wasn’t as if she’d even need her sword. Anyone she’d encounter in Japan would be reduced to dust with one hit of that attack—which meant I couldn’t have her using it here.

Eldrid kept glancing back behind her until we left my house.

First things first, we needed to get some breakfast. Come to think of it, neither of us had eaten this morning, so we definitely needed to get some food in our stomachs. I’d treated Scrael to an unagi bowl, but I wasn’t sure what to get for Eldrid. It would’ve been ideal if there was a place that served braised pork on a Sunday morning, but since there wasn’t, I figured I’d take her to some chain restaurant.

Eldrid made low surprised noises at the cityscape and cars driving by, then her expression grew intense.

“Akira,” she said.

“Yeah? What’s up?”

“What kind of dungeon is that?”

I said nothing. This was my second time being asked that here, so I knew what she was talking about without even looking. Everyone from the other world seemed to assume the entrance to the subway was a dungeon entrance. I mean, we’d technically be diving underground through there, but still.

“And no one’s even carrying weapons!” Eldrid went on. She really thought people were going down there to fistfight.

“El, El. That isn’t a dungeon,” I explained.

“Really? But everyone’s in a rush, and they have this intense look like they’re going into battle.”

“I guess they’re heading into a battlefield of sorts, especially because it’s the weekend.”

It was Sunday, yet some people were heading to work wearing suits. I really

couldn't blame them for looking so frantic. Adulting seemed hard—and scary.

Anyway, we moved on and found a burger shop nearby.

“Oh? Sandwiches?” asked Eldrid.

“Hmm? Those are burgers,” I said.

“But it's stuff between two pieces of bread, right?”

“Yeah, but...”

I wondered if there was something lost in translation. Hamburg steaks supposedly originated in Hamburg, and it inspired hamburgers in America. Meanwhile, there were theories that the word “sandwich” could be traced back to the name of some earl or city. Hamburgers were patties between pieces of bread, which could be considered a type of sandwich. Maybe I'd look into it later. I had the power of Google and Yahoo backing me, so I could look it up with ease.

I decided to have Eldrid sit and wait while I went to buy some food.

“Oh yeah, are these chairs okay for you?” I asked.

“You mean my tail, right? Yeah, no problem,” she said.

“Yeah. I was wondering if certain types of chairs were uncomfortable for you.”

“Some can be, yeah, but I just need to move my tail toward the side by my leg like this.”

I'd assumed a stool would be more comfortable for her, but she seemed to be fine.

As I left to order, I suddenly felt a strange sense of déjà vu.

“Wait... Didn't something like this happen before?” I wondered aloud.

I couldn't quite put my finger on it, but I faintly remembered having left someone behind just like this while ordering food.

While I was ordering a few burgers, I heard a couple of guys trying to flirt over where Eldrid was sitting.

“Hey girl, you alone?”

“Wanna get some tea with us?”

By the time I remembered, it was too late. Eldrid was getting hit on. What kind of pickup line was that, anyway? I would’ve expected them to ask her to hang out with them or go somewhere quiet to talk or something. Maybe they needed to get some tips from a real pickup artist. Anyway, Eldrid wasn’t Scrael, so I figured it’d be fine. I kept glancing back while paying for the food and found her ignoring them as if they didn’t exist. The two guys were gesturing with their hands and talking her ear off, but she just looked annoyed with her chin resting in her hand. I could see her irritation in how she was tapping the table with her finger. It was actually painful to watch. I had to get over there and end this.

*Hurry with my change, please.*

The pickup artist wannabes lost their patience and raised their voices.

“Hey, we’re talking to you!”

“Look at us, damn it!”

They should’ve just given up as soon as she ignored them.

Clearly irritated, Eldrid turned her head toward them and said, “What?” Her voice was cute yet threatening, which should’ve been contradictory.

One glare was enough to leave them completely frozen in fear. I supposed they’d been hit with an intense and murderous metaphysical force that could only be controlled by high-level Divers. Of course, no commoner in the modern world stood a chance against it, and they could’ve easily been knocked unconscious. When I looked more carefully, I saw they were sweating bullets, and their faces went pale, then ashen. That couldn’t be healthy. It made me wonder if Scrael’s solution could’ve been considered more peaceful.

I got my change and order number then sprinted over to Eldrid.

“S-Sorry for the wait!”

“No problem!” she said with a smile that made me wonder where all that malice had gone.

My apology wasn’t just directed at Eldrid. I immediately asked the two guys,



“Are you okay?”

“Ah, eh, uh...” they stammered.

“Helloooo? Snap out of it.”

“A-Ah... Oooh, ehh...”

It was no use. They seemed to have forgotten how to talk, and only unintelligible noises came out of their mouths. This was bad—I had a feeling it’d lead to PTSD worse than if they’d gone to war. I gestured for them to leave while Eldrid was still in a good mood, and they scrambled away.

Meanwhile, Eldrid was pouting a bit.

“What was with those jerks?” she said.

“They go around hitting on girls. Lots of them around here. Aren’t they in your world too?”

“Not the kind that raises their voices like those two,” she said.

“The people here don’t have a sense of danger...” I said.

Besides, Eldrid usually carried a massive sword with her. She may be cute, but there weren’t a lot of guys who’d casually hit on a girl like her. One wrong move and there was a nonzero chance they’d be cut in half.

The food I’d ordered eventually arrived: cola, fries, and various types of burgers.

“I got different kinds. This one’s teriyaki, and this one’s a cheeseburger,” I said.

“Can’t go wrong with cheese,” said Eldrid. “Never heard of ‘teriyaki’ though.”

“Oh, can you eat onions, by the way? It won’t make you sick or anything?” I asked.

“Onions? I can eat them fine, why?”

“Never mind then,” I said.

I thought there was a chance she couldn’t eat them because of her ears and tail, but it seemed that wouldn’t be an issue. I mean, I figured it’d be fine

because she was mostly human, but it never hurt to make sure.

I handed Eldrid a teriyaki burger, and she quickly unwrapped and bit into it. Her mouth was surprisingly small for the amount of enthusiasm that went into the bite.

“Oh! This is good!” she said excitedly.

I was glad she liked it. She continued digging into the burger with a smile on her face.

Suddenly, she paused and looked at my burger.

“That one looks good too...”

“Wanna try some?” I offered.

“Can I?!”

I peeled back the wrapping and handed her my burger, and she took a bite.

“Oh! This one’s good too!” she said, her smile even wider.

I decided to start eating too, then I realized something. “Oh...we’ve— Never mind.”

“Hmm? What’s wrong?”

“N-Nothing. Don’t worry about it,” I said and took a bite.

Of course, it tasted just exactly the same as it usually did.

After we checked out the pet shop and ate, we arrived at a small local amusement park. I’d used to occasionally visit this place with friends, but with me adventuring all the time, it’d been a long time since I’d last come here.

Today, the park was busier than I’d expected, probably because it was a weekend. Everyone was here with their families, but the place wasn’t so crowded that we wouldn’t be able to enjoy ourselves normally.

“Whooooa! What *is* this place?!” exclaimed Eldrid as she noticed all the attractions she’d never seen before.

Her eyes shone with wonder, her ears flapped, and her tail wagged so hard she looked like she was about to take off into the sky. I couldn’t help but

wonder what would've happened if I'd taken her to a certain mouse's kingdom instead, but I was glad she seemed to be into this park.

"Everyone's riding on those things," she observed.

"Yep," I said. "People come here to have fun."

"I like that!" she said with a dazzling smile.

These rides must be especially interesting for her since horse-drawn carriages were pretty much the only ones available in Do-Melta.

Suddenly, Eldrid slapped my shoulder with even greater excitement and said, "Over there! Akira, look! Look!"

"What?" I asked.

"I wanna check out that stall!"

"Stall?"

I looked over to find a food stall selling freshly cooked chicken legs. Eldrid's eyes were positively sparkling, and she was so amped-up she looked like she was about to bolt off at any second. She reminded me of a puppy trying to contain itself in front of a new toy or a snack—well, maybe she was one. She really seemed to want that chicken leg. Glancing over at her face, I could see her fangs peeking out of her mouth. She looked like she was about to go feral, and I wasn't sure if she'd listen if I told her to wait.

"L-Let's go get it," I said.

"Yeah!"

We walked over to the stall, and Eldrid dropped a bomb with a big smile on her face. "I think I'll start with ten for now."

"Huh?" The worker at the stall and I said in unison.

She'd said it as if we'd walked into a bar and ordered beer to start off the night. I had no idea where she was gonna fit all that food, but the way she'd said it made me think she could eat way more than ten with ease.

The worker stared at her wide-eyed, and Eldrid hurriedly corrected herself. "Ah! N-Never mind! I meant..."



We were relieved that she seemed to have reconsidered. As the worker and I tried to convince ourselves we'd misheard her the first time, she spoke up again.

"I'll take five!" she said.

"Huh?!"

"Huuuh?!"

Eldrid had attempted to be conservative and failed miserably. In fact, it was even more shocking that five was what she considered conservative. She seemed to have realized her mistake when she noticed our stunned silence and tried one more time.

"T-Two please..." she said quietly with her head down, her face red with embarrassment.

She must be very passionate about chicken legs considering how she still didn't want to order just one. We'd just had burgers not long ago too. Maybe there was a bottomless black hole or something in her stomach.

"I'll take one, please," I said timidly.

"Y-Yes, of course! Three legs, coming up!" replied the worker.

We'd both sounded pretty awkward, but who could blame us? We'd just encountered a situation that would normally be unthinkable. It took all our effort for us just to act like nothing had happened.

Eldrid looked embarrassed for a while, but she immediately perked up once the food came. I handed her a smoked chicken leg and a teriyaki chicken leg, which she dual-wielded. She could've been a tribal warrior if she'd started dancing then—not that she'd do that though. Actually, a certain someone I knew had done something like that with soy sauce.

"Let's eat," I said.

"Yeah!" said Eldrid, all traces of her earlier embarrassment now gone. She only had eyes for the chicken legs now.

I bit into my chicken. The skin was nice and crispy, and juices overflowed as my teeth sank into the thigh. It was nicely seasoned and tasted delicious.



“Awooooooooooooo!”

I probably didn’t need to explain my shock of hearing that howl from beside me. The somewhat-concerning sound from Eldrid had startled me, but I told myself it was just a thing Tails did and tried to move on. I don’t wanna think about it too much, so I avoided looking directly at her.

“It’s sooo good!” she yelled.

She really loved the chicken legs judging by how she was more enthusiastic than when we’d had burgers earlier.

“This one tastes just like the sandwich from earlier!” she added.

“Yeah, that one’s also teriyaki flavored,” I said.

“Teriyaki, huh. Teriyaki, teriyaki... Okay! I’ll remember that!”

She seemed to be a big fan of teriyaki.

We munched on our food for a while, then Eldrid found something else that caught her interest.

“‘Live shows’? What are those?” she said, gesturing at a bulletin board.

“Huh, looks like something’s happening at that stage,” I said.

On the bulletin board was information about a surprise event happening at the amusement park soon. Details about the actors weren’t included since they were supposed to be surprises, but I figured they’d be local performers. This sort of thing was pretty common.

After we finished eating, we decided to go around checking out the attractions, starting with the go-karts.

“Whoa! Whooooa!”

Eldrid’s showed pure surprise as she got into the two-person go-kart. Go-karts were an easy way for her to get the car-riding experience since she wasn’t allowed to drive without a license. She was nervous at first, but she started ramping up the speed once she realized that she drove pretty well.

“This is so fun!” she squealed.



“H-H-Hey! Careful! Drive safely, please!” I said.

“Woo-hoo!”

Maybe it was because her level was so high, but that little bit of speed didn’t scare her at all. I desperately tried to get her to follow traffic rules, but she calmed down just enough to not bother others and kept driving at a high speed.

She’d ended up loving the go-karts, and we spent a pretty long time riding them before we moved on to the next attraction.

Next up was what I considered the main event: the roller coaster.

“We can’t drive this one, huh?” said Eldrid.

“Nope. It’ll just move along the rail on its own. Make sure you hold on tight,” I said.

“O-Okay!”

And we were off. The roller coaster plummeted, then zoomed around in different directions.

“Whoa!” she yelled.

“Are you okay, El?!”

“Heh, this is nothing compared to fighting a Storm Raider! It’s actually pretty fun!”

“Oh, I see...”

She was talking about the boss monster in the Floating Garden at depth level 48. I wondered what it was like to battle one. Had she jumped on its back and tried to hold on as it’d swung her around like this? Had it been like riding a roller coaster? It must’ve been a difficult fight.

Next, we got off the roller coaster and went to a haunted house, but Eldrid seemed thoroughly unimpressed.

“Huh. That was nothing compared to the City,” she said.

“You shouldn’t compare it to a place where *real* ghosts appear,” I pointed out.

“I know, but still.”

The haunted house had a theme of an abandoned school, but since Eldrid wasn't from this world, she was completely unfamiliar with the setting and was having problems getting immersed. To her, the only creepy part about it was that it was set in an abandoned building; there were way more of those in Do-Melta than in Japan.

"The puppets popping out to scare us was one thing, but I could easily sense the humans trying to approach us," she said.

"That's right! I forgot about those otherworldly metaphysical powers!"

Some people in Do-Melta, like Eldrid, could sense things like malice and the presence of others. Of course a haunted house wouldn't be scary for a level 48 Diver with such powers.

"I absolutely hate Haunters though," I said.

"Don't talk about those things!" said Eldrid.

It seemed I wasn't the only one who wasn't a fan. Haunters were virtually impossible to detect and appeared behind you out of nowhere. Also appearing on the same floor were Slenders, which I hated just as much. I wanted to eradicate every last one of those two monsters.

We left the haunted house, and Eldrid said, "Huh? The chicken leg stall is gone!"

"Oh, that stall moves around the park throughout the day," I explained.

"I'm gonna go get more," she said.

"What? Hold on—"

By the time I turned around, Eldrid was gone. She'd sped off like the wind with her breakneck level 48 speed. I waited for a while, but she never came back.

I went to look for her, but all I found was the chicken leg stall. I didn't find her among the families lining up to buy food, nor did I find her eating on a bench nearby. She was gone, nowhere to be found. She'd gotten completely lost.

“Heeey! Akiraaa! Hellooo!” I called out. “No good. I lost him.”

I’d messed up. I’d wanted more chicken legs so badly that I’d gotten separated from Akira and lost sight of him. The temptation of the chicken had been far too strong. It’d been tender and perfectly seasoned; even the bone had had a nice texture to it. I hadn’t been able to help myself. That stuff would be popular in my world too. And if it wasn’t, I’d buy them all for myself.

*Well, I guess in the worst-case scenario, I could just wait at the entrance.*

Apparently, the people of this world had a method of contacting each other over distance with something called a “cell phone” or a “smartphone.” Only Akira had one though, and it wouldn’t work unless we both did.

I chewed on the chicken leg bone I’d bought earlier as I walked around looking for Akira. That was when I noticed a commotion nearby and walked into a venue where people gathered. There seemed to be some sort of event happening, and the crowd was full of excited kids. They were going on about wanting to see a special move and whether kaijins would appear today or not, but I had no idea what they were talking about.

“Hmm? This must be that show we were talking about earlier,” I said to myself.

The performance did seem to match what I’d seen on the bulletin board. On the stage, there were actors in strange coats talking to the audience.

“Wait, those are the guys I saw on Akira’s TV,” I exclaimed.

Among them, I recognize the small red one who’d blasted the weirdly shaped human with a giant fireball. They were wearing different colored scarves, so it was easy to tell them apart.

The woman with the pink scarf said to the kids, “Thanks for coming to our event about peace today, everyone!”

“Let’s all learn about peace together!” said another.

But the kids seemed completely uninterested in learning about peace.

“I don’t wanna learn,” one complained.

“Do a special move!” said another.



“I wanna see you deploy!”

“We’re *not* deploying! Sheesh, they all sound like Aki...”

The performers seemed to have been there to speak about peace, but a handful of the boys were complaining to the red-scarfed girl and giving her trouble. She looked like the most popular one out of the group.

I got closer to the back of the audience, then a giant catlike stuffed animal approached me.

“Whoa! What the?!” I blurted.

“I’m Meowdine! Let’s be friends!” it said.

“Huh?”

“I’m Meowdine! Let’s be friends!” it repeated.

Something felt strange about its voice as if it wasn’t coming out of the animal’s throat.

“R-Right...” I said, not sure how to respond.

The animal handed me one of the balloons that was tied to its waist.

“Th-Thanks,” I said.

“Let’s defend peace together, everyone!” it said.

“Uh...”

“Death to modified kaijins!”

Our conversation hadn’t made any sense from start to finish. What was this thing anyway? It looked like it was supposed to be a cat, except it wasn’t cute at all. Kids were gathering around it and saying disturbing things like “Die, Meowdine!” and “Drop dead, you piece of trash!” Soon enough, they started hitting the defenseless stuffed animal too. It seemed kids were rascals no matter what world they were from.

While all that was going on, I stared blankly at the performers on stage and noticed a strange-looking creature approaching from the venue entrance.

*The heck is that?*

It looked like a monster, but something told me it wasn't one. It looked like a bipedal cow that was wearing a distinct outfit. This world really was full of the strangest things.

"I'm the beef giblets kaijin, Tripetaur!" it yelled. "Moo! I'll slaughter you all, heroes!"

*Oh, I get it. It's a pervert, a megapervert that isn't right in the head.*

"Is it real?"

"Seriously? I should post this to TikTok!"

"Yay! We get to see their special moves!"

The crowd was actually enjoying the turn of events. I didn't know why, but they weren't acting like they were in any danger at all. I started to wonder if this was part of the show, and I wasn't sure what I should do. While I was standing there bewildered, the audience started running away toward the edge of the venue with the event staff leading them. It was as if they were all used to it. Maybe this really was part of the performance after all.

I was a step behind everyone else in fleeing, and the pervert walked up to me.

"All right!" it said. "First, I'm gonna take you hostage, moo!"

"What?"

This was my second time today glaring at someone. One look was enough to make the pervert flinch in fear.

"G-Glaring at me isn't gonna do anything, moo!"

I glanced downward without a word. Its lower half was pretty pathetic compared to its muscular upper body.

"Your legs are trembling," I said. "What are you? A newborn calf?"

"Wh-What? Why? I'm a modified kaijin, damn it! How am I getting humiliated by a commoner like you?!"

"Because you're weak. Duh."

"Y-You call me *weak*?!" the pervert spat with boiling rage.

It directed its unbridled hostility at me, which told me it wasn't actually part of a show. I was glad to clear that up because it'd been pretty confusing. I had no choice, so I reached toward my back—and didn't find my trusty weapon there.

*Oh, that's right. I don't have my sword...*

I'd left it at Akira's house. This was exactly why I carried a sword with me. Yet, I had to follow this world's rules.

"I'll rip you into bloody shreds for mocking me, moo! Eat my Machine Gun Hooves!"

The pervert held up its hooves menacingly, and I heard voices calling out to me from behind.

"Look out!"

"Run!"

The voices distracted me for a second, and the pervert made the first move by closing in on me while repeatedly thrusting its hooves. I'd missed the timing to evade the attacks, so I reflexively swiped with my claws without thinking. They sliced apart its hooves and cleaved the asphalt in their trajectories, leaving giant claw marks in the ground.

"Aaaaaaaaah!!! What did you dooo?!" screamed the pervert.

"Oh, my bad. Didn't mean to do that," I said.

The pervert was the one who'd started it. It wasn't my fault. But I really hadn't meant to do that, so I couldn't help but apologize.

As the pervert rolled around on the ground in pain, I heard a gallant voice from behind.

"Are you okay?! Leave the rest to us!"

"I mean, I'm fine. I can handle it on my own," I said.

I was here to have fun, so I didn't want to cause a fuss. Eventually, I decided to back down and move to the edge with everyone else.

"Okay, everyone! It's just one kaijin! We'll make short work of it if we all gang

up on it!”

“Leader, I don’t know if ‘gang up’ is the best way to put this... The kids are watching.”

“Yeah, that isn’t a very heroic thing to say.”

“Really? Okay then, surround it and mercilessly beat it to a pulp! Beat the living daylights out of that thing!”

“That’s even worse!” said the woman in the pink scarf and the boy in the yellow scarf in unison. It looked like they weren’t all on the same page.

“That isn’t fair! Aren’t you gonna fight me one-on-one, moo?!” protested the kaijin.

“Of course not! And don’t give me that. You tried to take a hostage just a minute ago!”

“Y-You’re supposed to be heroes of justice, and you’re gonna gang up on me, moo?! In front of the kids too! You should be ashamed!” said the kaijin.

“I don’t know about other heroes, but our motto is ‘Justice must always win’! Don’t try to pull the ‘What about the kids?’ card on us when you came in here intending to cause harm!”

The heroes started fighting the pervert, and they really did surround it and start attacking mercilessly. Yet, the pervert curled up defensively and waited for a moment to strike back. It seemed to be charging up its power. At this rate, Yellow Scarf was gonna get hurt.

“Hmm.” I chomped on the chicken leg bone I’d been chewing and broke off one end, sharpening its tip to a point, then I threw it at the pervert as hard as I could. The ground beneath my feet sank and cracked under pressure, sending debris into the air. The full power of my level 48 throw sent the projectile slicing through the air, and it hit the mark right on the pervert’s head.

“Aaaaaaaaah!!!”

I heard the pervert’s soul-shattering scream, but whatever. Those “hero” people seemed strong, and they’d surely take care of the rest.

“Take this! Buuurniiiiing Smaaaaaash!!!”

I heard a deafening explosion behind me as I left the event venue. I heard people saying things like “Yay! A special move!” and “This will go viral for sure!” but I had no idea what they were talking about.

§

“Huh, so that event was a hero show,” I said.

After searching all around the amusement park, I’d managed to regroup with Eldrid again.

“Yeah, a pervert appeared midshow, but things worked out in the end,” she said.

“A pervert?” I asked.

“It was a talking cow monster thing.”

“Oh, one of those... They really do appear everywhere.”

And so, I got a pretty good idea of what had happened. Why did modified kaijins appear whenever I brought guests to this world? And apparently, modified kaijins were perverts to people from the other world for some reason.

“What kind of heroes were performing, by the way?” I asked.

“I wasn’t really listening to their names. What were they called...? Oh, they all wore different colored scarves,” said Eldrid.

“Oh, were they the ones on TV this morning?”

“Yeah, them!”

*Oh, no way. We almost ran into each other.*

“My friend is part of that group, so maybe I’ll go say hi,” I said.

“Your friend?”

“Yep, my childhood friend.”

We decided to head over to the venue so I could see my friend. I walked up to one of the staff members who were cleaning up.

I asked, “Excuse me, do you know where the heroes who were performing here just now went?”



“Oh, they just finished up and left.”

“Dang, so we just missed them,” I said.

The staff member smiled pleasantly at Eldrid and said, “You were amazing earlier. Are you part of another hero team, by any chance?”

“Huh? No, I’m not,” said Eldrid shyly.

“Really? But come to think of it, you don’t look like you’re in any hero team I know of,” said the staff member. They seemed to be looking at Eldrid’s head and waist for some reason.

“Did something happen here, El?” I asked.

“It was nothing. I just saw that the yellow one was in danger, so I threw my chicken leg bone right through the weirdo’s brain.”

*Eek.*

“That doesn’t sound like ‘nothing’ to me,” I said.

“All I did was throw something.”

“I guess that’s level 48 strength for ya...”

Dealing fatal damage to a modified kaijin with just a throw was incredibly impressive. She could probably use anything and everything in the environment as a weapon like a character from a certain battle manga.

As we continued talking, a realization hit me. “Do you feel like we’re being watched?”

“Are we?”

“Yeah. Well, more like *you’re* being watched.”

The people around us were staring right at Eldrid. That wasn’t all that surprising considering she was a good-looking woman, but there was something odd about the way they were looking at her.

We started glancing around, perplexed, then Eldrid suddenly yelped like a cat that got its tail stepped on. I looked at her, confused, then noticed a boy around five years old standing behind her—with her tail in his hand.

“It’s a tail,” he said. “This lady has a tail coming out of her butt.”

“Huh?” I looked at him, shocked, but Eldrid had a bigger problem to worry about.

“N-No... Don’t...touch me there...” she whimpered.

Her tail seemed to be her weakness. She went weak at the knees and helplessly leaned on me for support. She was like that certain vegetable alien race before they trained their tails.

*Does that mean...*

“D-Did the illusion wear off?!”

That was the only explanation for her tail being visible. This was bad. Were God’s godly powers not enough, or was there some other reason? I had no idea, but it was clear as day that this could end very badly if we didn’t do something.

“Hey, let go! Let go of that!” I shooed the boy, then helped Eldrid to her feet.

“The magic wore off... What do we do?” she asked.

“I-I-I’ll do something about it with my magic!” I said.

“Uh...is it really *that* big of a deal?”

“Remember what God said? People in my world don’t have tails!”

Everyone probably assumed she was in cosplay or something, but observant people would likely catch on. Eldrid wasn’t wearing the kind of outfit that could cover up her ears or tail today, so we had to figure something out quickly.

“Let’s take cover somewhere for now!” I said.

“R-Right!”

I grabbed Eldrid’s hand and hid us behind some cover.

“U-Uncanny Illusion!” I called out, quickly casting a spell to make her ears and tail invisible.

*That should do it. Phew.*

Then I realized I’d made a terrible mistake.



“Whaaat?!”

“H-Hey! What did you do, you jerk!”

I was in such a panic that while I turned Eldrid’s ears and tail invisible, I’d made her clothes and underwear vanish too. She was completely naked, and I could see her delicate bits.

*Oh jeez.*

I gulped audibly. I stood there frozen stiff (in more ways than one), but Eldrid wasn’t having it.

“You! Y-Y-You! The hell are you standing there and staring for?! Fix this!” she yelled.

“I-I’m s-s-sorry! Um, I shouldn’t stack another spell in cases like this, so—”

“H-Hurry up, damn it! Someone’s coming!”

“Aaah! Wait, wait, wait!”

The footsteps were getting closer by the second. This was really bad.

Eldrid inched closer to me to avoid the approaching danger, and I backed away to avoid laying hands on her. Suddenly, we both lost our balance and fell to the ground.

“Oof!”

“Hng!”

Eldrid had landed on top of me. I thought something like this had happened before, but I had no time to think about that.

“Dispel! And Uncanny Illusion! Phew...that should do it,” I said with a sigh of relief.

I’d removed my illusion spell, then recast it properly. That had been a disaster, but Eldrid was back in her original state—except she looked terribly embarrassed.

“Um...” I said awkwardly, but she turned away from me.

“Jerk,” she said.

“Sorry! I’m so sorry! I should’ve paid more attention!”

“Well, I know you didn’t do it on purpose, so it’s fine,” she said.

Despite that, I continued to earnestly apologize. It might have been an accident, but it was an awfully careless mistake nonetheless.

Eldrid didn’t say a word.

I wasn’t sure what to do, so I decided to change the subject. “S-So, there’s something I wanna ask you,” I said.

“What?”

“Uh...well, it’s about the thing you were talking about with God this morning.”

“Oh, that,” she said.

“It sounded pretty serious. What was that about?” I asked.

“Yeah...” she said, then hung her head slightly. “It was about my family.”

“Your family? What happened?” I asked. The subject seemed to be important to her.

She fell silent. It wasn’t that she refused to talk, but it was more like she wasn’t sure how to phrase it. It must’ve been a complicated issue since she’d brought it up with God.

After some time, Eldrid finally spoke. “It was about my mom; a lot has been going on with her. But things haven’t been going well for me or my dad because of her.”

“Sounds like there’s no easy solution,” I said.

Eldrid had spoken hesitantly, struggling to find the right words. The heaviness of the conversation must’ve been too much for her.

Scratching her cheek, she said, “Anyway, I’ll talk to you about it eventually.”

“Let me know if you ever need help. I’ll be happy to do what I can,” I said.

“Really?”

“Of course.”

She looked at me for a moment, surprised, then her expression brightened.



“Okay! When that time comes, I’ll be counting on you!”

“Sure!”

Her smile had returned. We were here to have fun, so I was glad to see her being positive again.

Afterward, we did another round through the amusement park again and enjoyed all its attractions. Then...

“Two chicken legs—no, three chicken legs, please!”

It went without saying that the food stall vendor and I were once again shocked by Eldrid’s bottomless appetite.

## Floor Twenty-Eight: Those Who Are Ruled by Soy Sauce

I, Kudo Akira, had once again casually stopped by the Divers Guild as if I were visiting a friend's house on the way home from school. I'd sat on a chair and chilled for a while sipping on some juice, then I'd taken my time considering heading out into the dungeon.

I was enjoying a certain well-known beverage that claimed to be made from one hundred percent pure oranges when I saw Scrael approaching from the food pickup area of the dining hall. Her silver ponytail was bobbing back and forth as she glanced around and stood on her tiptoes, seeming to be searching for an empty seat.

It was evening time, just before the dining hall got busy with everyone coming in for dinner; yet, it was also just around the time when Divers began to get back from the dungeon, so the seats were starting to get filled already.

There were people taking a break after rinsing off at the washing area, laying out their spoils for the day on a table while discussing how to split them, holding meetings for night dives, stopping by the guild just to chat, and even having their supper—most Divers were terrible with following regular schedules. In other words, it was right before rush hour here.

Getting a better look, I noticed that the Long-Ears emissary I'd met a while back was also with Scrae. She was wearing a hooded cape to protect her from the sand, yet I caught glimpses of her eyes from under the hood. She, like Scrae, was holding a tray with a steaming food container on it. They seemed to be eating together.

"Hey!" I waved.

"Oh, Akira," said Scrae in her usual flat tone, her long ears perking up as she noticed me. She walked toward me right away with her emissary friend in tow. "You haven't left yet?"

“Nope. I thought I’d take it nice and slow today,” I said, then turned to her friend. “It’s been a while. Hello.”

“Mm-hmm,” nodded the emissary.

“What are you eating today?” I asked them.

“This bad-tasting porridge,” said Scrae.

“Dubious raw materials,” said the emissary.

“Oh...” I said, immediately understanding what they were talking about.

It was supposed to be porridge. Somehow, its ingredients were a mystery, yet for some reason, this shady dish was still being served at the dining hall. Supposedly, it was made with some sort of grain, but the true identity of that grain was unknown with only a small handful of people privy to it. The Mystery Porridge was one of the guild dining hall’s top three disgusting dishes—and yes, that was the actual name of the porridge; this contributed to why I was skeptical of the naming sense of the people from this world.

Anyway, the porridge tasted, well, absolutely horrid. It was bad. Putting it lightly, it was pretty much vomit, and air bubbles popped up out of the steamy, grainy, sloppy goop. At least it didn’t have that sour vomit smell, but it was just like puke in every other way. This thing lulled victims into a false sense of security with its lack of odor, yet, like some sort of poisonous mushroom, it inflicted terrible suffering on anyone who ate it.

As an aside, one of the other two infamous disgusting dishes was Nasty Soup, which was made with the greens that Walker Rabbits were always munching on—the same one that Instructor Seeker had eaten in a struggle after he’d weighed the unpleasant bitterness against his hunger. Yet, it was popular among some circles, and some rookie Divers could even be seen chasing Walker Rabbits around to fight over their greens. They tasted just as bad as you might imagine though.

The third and final dish was the most dubious of all: the Mystery Steak. There was no telling what kind of meat it was, so I’d never even had a taste of it before. It was a pretty big chunk of meat offered for cheap, so I figured it was some sort of shrimp-flavored insect or meat-flavored rubber. I’d bet five million

perica that I was right.

“Why the Mystery Porridge?” I asked.

I was genuinely curious because Scrae made more than enough to afford better food. She knew how to manage her finances, unlike gambling degenerates like Instructor Seeker. She surely had savings even at the end of the month when others tend to run low on funds.

“My village is in need, so I only keep the bare minimum and send back the rest,” said Scrae.

“I see,” I said.

“I do it for shoy sauce.”

“Ah, I see.”

The Long-Ears village seemed to have officially decided to produce its own soy sauce, and she was helping fund the project. Come to think of it, I’d indeed handed her the recipe a while back.

“You didn’t have to get the Mystery Porridge though, did you? That seems a bit overkill,” I said.

“I’m willing to put up with it for the sake of shoy sauce,” said Scrae.

“Shoy sauce for everyone,” said the emissary, raising her arms in the air.

I’d never imagined Long-Ears would end up loving soy sauce that much. They were so addicted that they wouldn’t be satisfied anymore by just pouring some on their hand and licking it. It was like a drug to them.

I couldn’t help but wonder about the porridge. “Can you really stand eating that stuff?” I asked.

Scrae looked down at her bowl with a sour expression. “To be honest...I’m regretting it.”

“It’s worse than I imagined,” agreed the emissary. “I suspect Divers who can eat this without throwing it back up have tremendous willpower.”

I’d heard that it tasted so bad it left a vivid imprint on one’s psyche, yet some people even had strange cravings for it when they became high-ranking Divers

later on. I'd personally seen Divers in such a state of derangement many times. They all had weird looks in their eyes as if they'd been hit by a Hypno Eye's beam.

Scrae strengthened her resolve and brought her spoon into her mouth.

"It tastes awful..." she muttered, then hung her head.

Her friend then scooped a spoonful of the porridge into her own mouth. "Oof..."

It was so bad she'd nearly spit it out. Her eyes were tearing up from her retching.

This part of being a Diver was hellish. I decided to lend them a helping hand in escaping this nightmare.

"Why don't you put some soy sauce on it?" I asked.

"We can't waste shoy sauce like that."

"Shoy sauce is precious and should be used on better food. Pouring it into this slop would be blasphemy."

The two seemed to be in agreement. But if that would be considered blasphemy, I couldn't help but wonder how many people in Japan had been sinning in their eyes. Some people (not Divers) even drank it straight out of the bottle.

Anyway, the emissary girl sure was talkative today. She hadn't been able to speak Common Tongue very well before, so maybe she'd been studying. She wasn't quite fluent yet, but her accent wasn't noticeable anymore.

Suddenly, we heard someone say loudly, "Whoa, check out what they're eating. What are they, broke?"

"What kind of Long-Ears eat that crap? They must be really bad at diving."

"Ha ha ha!" they laughed mockingly while looking in our direction.

"Hmm."

"Ugh."

Scrae and the emissary were visibly annoyed. I couldn't blame them. Those



Divers looked like they were far lower in rank than Scrae too. Had they not heard of her even though she'd been climbing up the ranks at an incredible rate? That was highly unlikely. She was the only Long-Ears Diver in Freida as far as I knew, and Silvertail, with her iconic silver ponytail, was quickly becoming one of the most famous Divers around. In other words, these Divers were simply jealous.

But Scrae's emissary friend was having none of it, and she let a bit of her malice seep through. Unfortunately, I was the first victim to feel its effects since I was closest. Even though I hadn't done anything, I felt my stomach and nads tighten, which felt pretty awful. I wished she could contain these effects in a specific direction.

Scrael pumped the brakes and said to her, "Stop."

"But..." protested the emissary, yet Scrae shook her head.

"They're just words. You'll have to endure it," I agreed.

"But I can't stand Scrae getting disrespected like that," said the emissary.

"I get that, but still," I said.

I couldn't blame her for getting upset, but there'd be no end to it if we'd gotten violent over such a minor issue. Not to mention, constantly beating people up for saying rude things would negatively affect one's rankings too.

"Divers need to know restraint," said Scrae.

"Fine..." The emissary relented.

I looked at the Divers and said, "They must feel real superior seeing someone with a higher rank eating such plain food."

To be honest, seeing their smirking faces as they showed off their grilled meat and purposely talked about how delicious their food was did annoy me too. It wasn't as if their meal was particularly lavish either. I wanted to tell them that they should bring something from the high-end restaurant upstairs if they were gonna brag.

Suddenly, Scrae rose from her seat.

"Actually, I'm gonna punch a hole through them," she said.

She'd reached her limit. That was way quicker than I'd thought.

"Now, hold on," I said.

"Don't stop me, Akira," said Scrae.

"We don't want to cause bloodshed over this," I insisted.

"Long-Ears are a prideful race. There are times when we just can't back down."

*Over food?*

"What happened to having restraint?" I asked.

"I've reached my limit."

"Hold it in. Restrain yourself," I said calmly.

"Grrr..." Scrae puffed out her cheeks.

She looked adorable, but that was beside the point. Those two idiots were on the verge of eating an Efflux Wave or some crazy martial arts move and ending up as corpses with holes through them.

*What do I do? Do I just let this play out?*

It wasn't my problem if those Divers got what was coming to them, but I couldn't have Scrael causing trouble over something so meaningless. I had to do something.

"Yeah, I'm gonna impale them," affirmed Scrae.

"One hit, one kill. Destroy their bodies. Extinguish their souls," said the emissary, also rising from her seat.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa..." I said.

That sounded pretty scary. This was no joke. Bloodlust exuded from the two members of the powerful Do-Meltan warrior race, and the bystanders subtly moved further away to avoid getting dragged into trouble.

As for the two Divers who'd started all of this, they were completely oblivious to what was going on. In the Divers Guild, stupid people were weak without exception. I mean, there was no way any human who mocked and antagonized

Long-Ears would be strong.

As Scrae and her friend stepped forward to reduce the two dummies into pools of bloody pulp, I called out, “Come on, you should think this over.”

“No. I can’t hold it in anymore,” said Scrae.

“They need to apologize,” her friend said.

*Okay then, how about this?*

“Well, that’s too bad. If you refrained from attacking them, I was gonna give you two the ultimate soy sauce dish,” I said out loud.

Scrae’s ears twitched, and the emissary’s hood shifted as she came to a sudden halt.

I continued, “Since you can’t hold back, I guess I’ll have to eat it by myself. I have no other choice, really.”

“Actually, I was just thinking of stopping,” said Scrae.

“Kudo Akira is a god,” said the emissary.

They both spun on their heels and ran to me. They were so easy. What happened to the pride of the Long-Ears? Apparently, it was so fragile that it vanished with a little soy sauce. And was that all it took for the emissary to consider me a god? That could probably be considered heresy.

The two immediately returned to their seats and inhaled their porridge, leaving their bowls empty. They writhed around for a moment from the awful taste, but it was clearly a small price to pay for food with soy sauce in it. Long-Ears had guts, I had to give them that. They chugged some water to cleanse their palates, then stared at me expectantly. It wouldn’t take a psychic to predict what would’ve happened if I’d told them I lied about the ultimate dish. They’d surely go berserk—those Divers who’d mocked them earlier would be ripped to shreds, then I’d be strung up as a punishment.

I pulled out a cassette stove from my Dimension Bag along with a small frying pan. I also took out some soy sauce, butter, and the main ingredient: an extrabig 1,850-gram can of a certain food.

As I laid everything out on the table, Scrae asked, “What’s in the can?”

“Corn,” I replied.

“Never heard of it. Have you?” she asked her friend, but the emissary shook her head.

Come to think of it, I’d never seen corn in this world. Even the steak I’d had a while back had only come with mushrooms and potatoes. Maybe it just wasn’t in Freida but existed somewhere else in Do-Melta.

“Remember corn soup? This is what it’s made of,” I said.

“Oh! I like corn soup. This is gonna be good,” said Scrae, the excitement in her eyes growing stronger. She seemed to have finally remembered the god Knorr.

Seeing her reaction, the emissary’s excitement visibly grew too.

“Cone soup! Cone soup!” chanted Scrae with anticipation, but I noticed her pronunciation was a bit off.

“It’s actually ‘corn soup,’” I corrected her.

“That’s what I said,” she said.

“Hmm... You try saying it, Mei,” I said—Mei was the emissary’s name, by the way.

“Cone soup?” she said with the same pronunciation as Scrae.

“Whaaat?”

Maybe Long-Ears were afflicted with a curse that prevented them from saying certain words correctly. They could speak fine otherwise, so why did they have difficulty with “soy sauce” and “corn soup”?

“So, what are you making?” asked Scrae.

“This is corn with butter and soy sauce,” I replied.

“Butter and soy sauce...” she repeated.

“Cone...” said her friend.

I heated the frying pan and threw the butter on it.

“The butter smells good,” noted Scrae, and Mei nodded repeatedly.

As the butter melted, I tossed the corn in and added even more butter. An

appetizing aroma filled the air, but I wasn't done yet.

"Don't tell me...you're adding shoy sauce now?" asked Scrae.

"Yep."

Scrae had already tasted butter and soy sauce with steak, so she knew what was up.

I poured soy sauce in a circle over the frying pan, enhancing the fragrance even further.

"Woow!"

"This is bliss..."

Scrae and the emissary were displaying dreamy looks as if they'd been transported into another world. I just hoped that world wasn't Valhalla.

The two girls' eyes were glued to the sizzling frying pan, and drool came out of the corners of their mouths. Their eyes and heads followed as I moved the cassette stove left and right. They were acting pretty cute and funny.

I quickly tossed the contents in the frying pan, filling our entire corner of the hall with the smell of heated soy sauce, butter, and charred corn. Soon enough, people around us were starting to stare at us as they smelled the aroma.

"Whoa, what is that? I don't remember *that* being sold here."





“I sure haven’t seen it before...”

“It smells so good... Damn, it’s making me hungry.”

The two Long-Ears could hardly contain their excitement.

“Shoy sauce and butter supremacy.”

“Shoy sauce! Shoy sauce!”

The only humans who’d be excited about corn with butter and soy sauce these days were probably preschoolers and elementary school kids. But considering this was the first time it was introduced to this world, I couldn’t blame the two girls. They seemed to have completely forgotten about the Divers who’d tried to get a rise out of them earlier.

I laid out a mat on the table, placed the frying pan on it, then handed each of them a spoon.

“Can we start eating?” asked Scrae, and the emissary stared expectantly.

“The plate is very hot, so please be careful. And make sure to mix well before eating,” I warned as if I were a server at a restaurant.

They nodded vigorously, then shoved their spoons into the food. They mixed it around for a while and started digging in.

“Mmm, mmm!”

“Om nom.”

Scrae chewed her mouthful of food, then her ears twitched.

“It’s sweet and yummy!”

“So good... It’s so good...”

They went back to munching away immediately after giving their opinions. The emissary was in a trance and didn’t seem like she could even think straight. It was as if her hand was automatically moving her spoon. I felt like I was watching a zombie shoveling food into her mouth without any conscious thought whatsoever.

I figured they were gonna need a lot more, so I brought out another frying

pan and started working on another batch.

“Here’s some black pepper,” I said as I handed Scrae some.

She added it to the corn, then scooped a spoonful into her mouth.

She looked at the Divers who’d been mocking her earlier and sneered at them. “Amazing,” she said triumphantly.

The two Divers rose from their seats.

“You little shit!” said one of them.

“You pickin’ a fight?!” said the other.

They’d exploded with anger even though they were the ones who’d antagonized the girls first. Pretty unreasonable if you ask me. Not to mention, their anger was directed at me for some reason.

“Huh? Why me? This doesn’t make any sense,” I said.

“Like hell it doesn’t!” said one.

“Yeah! This is all *your* fault!” said the other.

“Seriously?”

Maybe they were blaming me because I was the one making the dish, which was pretty ridiculous. They didn’t realize I’d actually protected them from danger. I wanted to charge them a hundred million yen for the trouble, but they wanted to repay me with a knuckle sandwich instead.

The two Divers cracked their knuckles as they approached me, and Scrae and the emissary perked up at the sound of their footsteps. The girls had wanted to brawl in the first place, so they were quick to react.

I sighed, disappointed that it’d come to this anyway.

“Hey, you lot,” said a voice out of nowhere.

“Huh?” said one of the duo.

Behind the two Divers, another group of Divers had appeared. They were very well-equipped with high-quality gear too—as well-equipped as Miguel’s team or even better. It was clear at a glance that they were a high-ranking team.

“Who the hell are you guys?! You trying to get in the way—”

“Yes, we are,” said the newcomer, cutting off the troublemaker.

The proud-looking young man standing at the head of the group unleashed a wave of malice that rivaled even Scrae’s and the emissary’s. It was so powerful that it was starting to make me feel dizzy even though I was standing far away. Of course, the two troublemakers standing right in front of him bore the full brunt of it and immediately fell unconscious. It made me wonder why I’d put all that effort into making corn with butter and soy sauce, but at least no one had gotten beaten bloody.

I tried to thank the newcomers for the help, but the young man walked right up to me and said, “Hey, you.”

“Yes?” I asked.

I had to look up at him because he was much taller than me. He was kind of scary too—not his face but his overall presence, I guess. He had that distinct high-level aura about him.

I began hearing people around us whispering things like “He’s from Order of the Black Dawn...” and “It’s Crimson Lance.”

Sure enough, he was carrying a big red lance on his back as his moniker suggested. And if I recalled correctly, he was a superfamous officer of Order of the Black Dawn, one of Freida’s three major teams.

“Are you Kudo Akira?” he asked.

“Oh, yes, I am. I’m sorry,” I said.

“Why did you apologize?”

“Uh, I just felt like I should, so I kind of apologized out of reflex,” I explained.

Apologizing was like a self-defense mechanism for us Japanese. I couldn’t help but apologize whenever an incident like this occurred. It was pretty much ingrained in my people.

Crimson Lance suddenly grasped my hand and said, “I don’t know how to thank you enough for inventing honey potions.”

“Whaaat? Huh? Oh...”

It was all so sudden that I couldn't process what he'd meant at first, but then I figured he must be an Adorner. They were the only ones who had reason to thank me for making the honey potions.

Looking closer, I noticed he was wearing a cool monster hide wrap around his waist. It was pretty rare too and befitting of an officer of a major guild.

“I didn't know you're an Adorner,” I said.

“Yes, and I'm one of the many who are less worried about injuries thanks to you,” he said, then took a bag that one of his teammates had been carrying and placed it on the table. “This is from my country's chief. It contains a letter of appreciation and gifts for you as thanks.”

“Huh?”

Crimson Spear pulled things out of the bag one after another, each of them looking quite expensive. There was a letter as he'd mentioned, some sort of medal, and a bunch of other stuff. Maybe it was because I was a plebian, but receiving all of these things made me feel apologetic.

“I dunno what to say. Thank you,” I said.

“No, we're the ones who should be thanking you,” he said, then sincerely thanked me again.

I'd been getting words of appreciation like this from Adorners a lot lately, including Reverie from Miguel's team and the guy from that laid-back Diver team.

As an aside, I felt like Adorners would eventually get in trouble for drinking honey potions even when they weren't injured, claiming that they didn't have any other sweets left. I could definitely see that happening. I couldn't shake the feeling that I'd unleashed something quite sinful into this world.

The emissary looked up, her mouth full of corn and her eyes sparkling with wonder. “Wow, Adorners are showing him so much appreciation,” she said.

“Yes, Akira is amazing,” affirmed Scrae.

The emissary stared at me with awe and respect as she muttered, “Kudo Akira

is a god after all.”

I wondered if that was disrespectful to the real gods, but Scrae was nodding proudly for some reason.

As I finished receiving the letter and gifts, I noticed Crimson Lance was glancing at the corn with butter and soy sauce. It must’ve stirred his Adorner appetite.

“Would you like some?” I offered.

“Ah! Are you sure?!” he said, looking kind of excited.

“Of course. We still have plenty,” I said.

“Th-Then, yes, I’d love to join you if you don’t mind,” he said.

He looked a bit embarrassed that I noticed him glancing at the food, but those thoughts seemed to have gone out the window when he smelled the food. He dug into the food with vigor along with Scrae and the emissary.

I ended up treating the other members of Order of the Black Dawn to some corn with butter and soy sauce too, and my 1,850 grams of corn was depleted just like that. Their appetite really was something else.

What had happened to the two rowdy Divers, you asked? They’d been somewhere on the ground earlier, but they’d disappeared before I knew it. I didn’t care enough to find out.

## Floor Twenty-Nine: Taking a Walk with Miguel

Today, I happened to run into Miguel at the guild's main hall. It'd been a while since I'd last seen him. I usually went to the dungeon in the afternoons, and he in the mornings, so sometimes there were long stretches when we didn't see each other at all.

Miguel was his same old self. He had fluffy blond hair, a handsome face, and droopy eyes. He was also wearing bulky shoulder armor that made him look like he was ready for a dive anytime.

As soon as he saw me, he raised his hand and said, "Oh, hey, Kudo."

"What's up, Miguel?" I asked. "By yourself today?"

"Yep. Everyone else has plans today, so I'm just killing time."

"I see."

We chatted casually like usual and updated each other on what we'd been up to and where we'd been to in our dives. We decided to go on a walk for a bit—in the dungeon, the Forest, to be exact. Some people might think we were crazy for going on a walk in the dungeon, but the Great Forest Ruins at depth level 5 was so easy that it might as well be a park. That sentiment applied to anyone who was high-level, not just us.

Walking through the Forest felt nice. Although it was a low-depth-level floor, we were still in the dungeon, so we had to remember not to let our guard down completely. On this floor was a forest area that had been moderately thinned out and a spacious grassland area. The forest was denser deep into the floor, but the area near the entrance was perfect for a stroll. There wasn't any real danger here as long as we kept an eye out for monsters. In my case, I had to beware the danger of having my hat stolen by Walker Rabbits.

"So, yeah, about Reverie..."

"Come on, Miguel, enough about your love life. You're gonna make me puke," I complained.



“But you haven’t puked yet, so we’re still good,” he said.

“I do feel kind of sick—sick of listening to your crap.”

“Heh heh. Jealous?” he asked.

“Yes. Get smushed like a frog and die.”

No matter how much I cursed him with my words, Miguel just laughed it off, completely unaffected. Guys who could get girls seemed to be protected with a powerful blessing that warded off curses with ease.

As we continued talking, we were met with a strange sight: a group of Walker Rabbits stampeding through the meadows. They were running so hard they left a huge cloud of dust in their wake. It was a bizarre and possibly dangerous spectacle.

I tugged on Miguel’s sleeve and asked, “Hey, Miguel. What’s going on over there?”

“Huh? Oh, that. Some idiot must’ve messed with the rabbits. They’re rounding up their friends to settle their score.”

“Whoa, they’re retaliating with that big group? Scary.”

We weren’t just talking about twenty or thirty of them; I could tell at a glance that there were nearly a hundred rabbits. I had no idea where they’d all come from, but this was pretty scary. They must’ve called in their entire squad to get some payback on some poor fool.

“Man, it’s been a while since I’ve seen this happen, but it sure is something,” said Miguel.

“So, this has happened before...?”

I was shocked to hear him say that as if it wasn’t a rare sight. The rabbits were weak individually, but even I wouldn’t be able to deal with a horde that big. They were super resilient, and with their huge frames, they could cause quite some damage with their tackles. Not to mention, they were really heavy; they could easily crush a human if they piled on top of them like a ball of honeybees.

Divers generally followed the Bunny Conservation Rule set by the guild, so it was highly likely that whoever set off the rabbits was a beginner—which meant

their level would be low, and even rabbits could pose a threat to them. I could imagine there being some ancient saying about never messing with rabbits or that the wrath of the rabbits was like the wrath of the land itself. It would've been perfect if their eyes glowed red. Himalayan rabbits did have red eyes, but I digress.

"Oh yeah, what about that unauthorized conservation group? Do they do anything at times like these?" I asked.

"You mean the Bunny Lovers Club? Probably nothing, unless someone makes a report," said Miguel.

"Really? I thought they'd be hiding in the dungeon and keeping an eye on the rabbits, but I guess not."

"I don't think so..." said Miguel, averting his eyes.

*Why do you sound so unsure?*

The Bunny Lovers Club was a strange organization of this world. Presumably, it was a group about watching and admiring Walker Rabbits, but the truth about it was shrouded in mystery. It kind of gave me cultish vibes though. Eldrid was a member, so maybe I'd ask her about it next time. Though, I was afraid she'd take me to a café and say something like "I know someone who can tell you more about it," and a club official would show up and take me to one of their branches, trapping me in a room that I can't leave until I become a member. That wouldn't happen...would it?

Suddenly, Miguel winced as he noticed something. "Yikes, there's a black one too. What did they do?"

"Oh, you're right. What's special about the black ones?" I asked.

"Normal rabbits are weak, but those ones are strong. They go around hunting heads."

"What, are they like a certain vorpal kind of bunny that appears in dungeons or something?"

"What are you talking about?" asked Miguel.

"Never mind. I guess head-hunting rabbits are a thing everywhere."

Rabbits in dungeons seemed to be strong no matter what world they were in. Besides, the ones I was thinking of were white instead of black, and they were the size of normal rabbits.

“The black rabbits are more docile, and they rarely ever come out unless their friends are in danger. I heard decapitated hunter heads were everywhere back when hunting rabbits was popular for a while,” explained Miguel.

“Sheesh.”

That sounded terrifying. Maybe the guild’s conservation rule was there to protect Divers instead of the rabbits. This world could be incredibly savage out of nowhere sometimes. How did the topic of decapitated heads come up when we were just taking a leisurely stroll?

“I guess there’s a lot we still don’t know about the dungeon,” I said.

“You’re right about that,” agreed Miguel.

“Yeah, like secret routes and that new floor with the hot springs.”

“What new floor with the hot springs?” he asked.

“Sensei took me there a while ago. I haven’t reported it to my receptionist, by the way.”

“What are you doing, man? You have a duty to report these things.”

“I caaan’t heeear youuu,” I said with my hands over my ears.

Miguel sighed. “Does such a place really even exist?”

“Yep. You can go there directly from the Forest. The trek there is kind of rough though,” I said.

“It must be pretty bad if you think it’s rough.”

“Yeah. It’s a pretty high-level floor too. Do you wanna go check it out?” I asked.

“Sounds good, let’s go.”

“The monsters there are super strong, so be careful.”

“They are? Are they stronger than the Four-Armed Goat we fought?” asked

Miguel.

“Honestly, I was able to solo the goat, so these monsters are probably easier.”

“Using you as the baseline doesn’t really help.”

“What else am I supposed to do?” I asked.

We chatted for a while longer as we headed toward the Paradise Hot Springs.

After passing through the Misty Border, Miguel looked around with a straight face. “No way... It really exists.”

“I thought the same thing when I first got here. This place isn’t even on the rumored secret routes, is it?” I said.

“No, it isn’t. It isn’t even on route seven or eight.”

More routes I’d never heard of before. The so-called secret routes really did seem to exist. It made me realize I really was still a novice.

Miguel looked around and said, “Seeing a weird forest like this reminds me of the Forest Sharks.”

“‘Forest Sharks’?” I asked.

This time, it was a monster I’d never heard of before. I mean, I could more or less guess what kind of creature it was, but I had to ask.

“Yeah, it’s a type of monster that appears on the secret routes,” explained Miguel. “They roam around a forest looking for prey.”

*What? Do they have feet or something?*

“So, are sharks that swim in water called Water Sharks, then?” I asked.

“Huh? What are you talking about? Why would a shark be able to swim?” asked Miguel.

“What?” I couldn’t hide my surprise at his question. “Um, Miguel, what do you mean by that? Elaborate.”

“I mean, sharks are flying creatures. Haven’t you seen the Sky Sharks in the Submerged City?”

“Well, yeah, I have, but...”

*Sure, I've seen flying sharks in both the Submerged City and in a movie before, but...I dunno. Am I in the wrong here?*

"I've seen swimming ones in the Submerged City too," I said.

"A swimming shark?" asked Miguel.

"Yeah, it was really big."

"Are you talking about a whale? They do kind of look alike, but their features are way different."

"Huh?"

How should I put this...? I felt as if I could no longer tell Oda Nobunaga's real gender because I'd played too many mobile games, or I'd become an alchemist who could no longer tell the difference between chestnuts and sea urchins. My common sense was getting all jumbled up.

I was still confused when we sneaked through the floor, then I spotted a familiar silhouette deep in the forest.

"Over there," I pointed out. "That's the superstrong monster I mentioned earlier."

"Huh. Looks like fighting it up close would be tough," said Miguel.

"It curls up into a ball and rolls at you really fast," I explained.

"That's...an interesting attack method."

"No kidding."

According to Sensei, it might have been my fault that it'd turned out this way. I still remembered her warning and had been careful about it ever since.

"Anything else I should know?" asked Miguel.

"I only ran into that once the last time I was here, so I don't really know."

"I see. Judging by what I've seen so far, maybe there aren't many monsters on this floor."

"You think so?" I asked.

"I haven't seen traces of them around, though there could be more of them

further in,” said Miguel.

He’d been analyzing our situation the entire time. No wonder he was a high-rank Diver.

“So, are you gonna report this place?” he asked.

“I was thinking I should get permission from Sensei first since she’s the one who found it,” I said.

“What? Does she own you or something?”

“I can’t disobey her. Not if I value my life.”

And so, we’d left the Paradise Hot Springs and returned to the Great Forest Ruins. We stopped by a nearby safe point to take a small break. There, I laid down a mat to sit on and opened my Dimension Bag.

“Okay, time for a meal,” I said.

“Can’t wait to see what we’re having today,” said Miguel.

“You’re already assuming you’re gonna mooch off me, huh.”

“Of course. You always have the best food,” said Miguel, waiting for me to give him something. I considered holding out because I felt like I’d be admitting defeat if I just did what he wanted, but I decided that would be pointless.

I thought about what to eat, though I only had limited options on hand.

“All right, I’ll make some instant noodles,” I said.

“‘Instant noodles’?” asked Miguel.

“Yep.”

I took out a cassette stove, an aluminum pot, three bags of old-fashioned soy-sauce-flavored instant ramen, a plastic bottle of tap water, some toppings, and some seasoning.

Miguel picked up a bag of noodles curiously and asked, “Are you gonna cook something? This is a lot of stuff.”

“If you consider this cooking, it’d be an insult to chefs and housewives everywhere,” I said.

“You think so? I think any food-making process that involves work can be called cooking.”

I supposed he wasn’t wrong.

I boiled the prescribed amount of water in the aluminum pot, took the noodles out of the bag, and threw them in. Then I ripped open the soup stock package and poured the powder into the pot. I added green onions and chashu pork that I had in a storage container, and the dish was complete. I readied two bowls and a ladle for the soup, then handed Miguel a fork.

“Smells good,” he said.

“Right?” I said. “Oh, and here’s some black pepper, ramen pepper, grated garlic, chili oil, and sesame oil. You can adjust the taste as you like.”

“Huh, there are so many options.”

I portioned out the ramen into the bowls as steam and an appetizing aroma rose from the piping hot soup. Ramen from restaurants were great, but instant noodles were also good in their own way.

“Oh, this is good,” said Miguel.

“You like it?”

“Yeah, this soup is delicious. Will these toppings go well with it too?”

“Everything here will go well with it. Just be careful not to add too much.”

I dug into the ramen too. I probably should’ve used four bags of noodles. At this rate, we were gonna finish it in no time.

Meanwhile, Miguel was experimenting with the various condiments. He put another small portion of ramen with one of the condiments into his bowl and gave it a try, then he repeated the process with each of them one by one. Everyone loved changing up the soup flavor to suit their own tastes.

“I like the black pepper. It’s fragrant, and it has a nice accent that gives the noodles a slight kick,” he noted.

“Uh-huh.”

“The garlic is amazing too. I want to dump the whole bottle in my bowl.”



“Yeah, everyone loves garlic. Adding heaps of garlic is a guilty pleasure of mine,” I agreed.

“These oils add a nice fragrance too. ‘Chili oil,’ right? This one’s spicy.”

“Yep. Can’t go wrong with chili oil in ramen.”

“I can’t decide which one I like the most...” he said.

I couldn’t either, so the best solution was to just eat however one felt like at the time.

“This is nice,” said Miguel.

“Yeah, it’s pretty fun just hanging out and taking it easy like this.”

“Agreed. It’s important to take some time to relax. Gives us a chance to think back on things.”

*I wonder what he has to reflect on.*

“How are things, anyway? You guys aren’t burning yourselves out, are you?” I asked.

“Nah, no need to worry about that. To be honest, we wouldn’t even care if our ranks went down, unlike other teams.”

“Weren’t you saying you guys can’t get complacent because there have been more up-and-coming teams lately?”

“Well, that’s true, but I’d be a failure as a leader if I let that blind me and put my team in danger. I haven’t been here all that long, but I’ve already seen that happen to way too many people.”

He was right. I’d personally seen a good number of teams make that very mistake. Miguel had been a Diver longer than I had, and he was observant of his surroundings. I was sure he’d seen his fair share of teams bite off more than they could chew.

“Our two jobs as Divers are to get home safely and make a steady income. That’s the mindset you develop as long as you keep working hard. Aren’t you the same?” he asked.

“Yeah. You shouldn’t be going into the dungeon to get injured or go on grand

adventures,” I agreed.

“Exactly. Anyway, I guess we *do* care about our rank, but the question is ‘Where do our priorities lie?’” said Miguel, then he raised his bowl and sipped his soup.

“What do you wanna do with the money you make?” I asked.

“Me? For now, I wanna get a home for me and my friends to live in.”

“I remember you mentioned that once.”

“I want a place where we can all gather and get rowdy. Doesn’t that sound fun?” he asked.

“Yeah, it does.”

Miguel’s goal was surprisingly ordinary. I imagined most adults dreamed of buying a house and throwing a home party with their friends. It gave me a strange sense of familiarity toward him.

“What about you?” he asked. “You said you wanted to level up, but I’m sure there’s a reason why.”

“Hmm? No, not really. I just wanna get stronger,” I said.

“You always do that,” said Miguel, pointing at me with his fork. “You always brush it off when I ask you that question. There has to be a reason why you wanna get stronger. Why?”

I fell silent.

“Come on, don’t you think it’s about time you told me?” he said, his expression serious for once.

“I really do wanna get stronger for the sake of getting stronger. That has always been true,” I said.

“I see... But you’re not trying to become the strongest or anything, right?”

“Nope. But I wanna be strong enough that I won’t lose to bad guys,” I said.

“Bad guys, huh.”

The world was full of bad guys—in plain view and lurking behind the scenes.

Getting strong so I could beat those guys was just being well-prepared.

I stayed quiet for a while, and Miguel put his fork down.

“Anyway, that’s enough questions for today,” he said.

“Oh? I thought you wanted to know more.”

“Can’t say I’m not curious, but there’s no need to rush. You can talk about it more when you feel like it.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

He must’ve figured it was a difficult topic for me and was being considerate. Miguel was perceptive like that.

And so, my conversation with Miguel had ended there. We finished the rest of our ramen and headed back to the main hall. No particular incidents or troubles occurred, but I liked this kind of adventure the best.

# Floor Thirty: Rescuing People in Distress and Whatnot

Dillon Frost, a novice Diver, was at a safe point in the Misty Hills at depth level 8. He was at a loss for what to do.

“I’m such an idiot...” he muttered.

He couldn’t count the number of times he’d lashed out at himself like this. He’d let himself get overconfident just because he’d still been in good health before entering this floor. Why hadn’t he researched and prepared more beforehand? Why had he assumed he could make it through with his shoddy equipment? He wasn’t sure how long he’d been looking around at the entrance of the safe point, but he couldn’t bring himself to talk to the other Divers. Yet, he couldn’t move away from the safe point, so he just stayed there in resignation.

The Misty Hills was considered one of the Gandakia Dungeon’s low-level floors. It was on route one just beyond the Great Forest Ruins, and its depth level was 8. In other words, Divers who were level 8 or higher could presumably get home alive from there even if they were to lose an arm or leg in the process. As soon as one stepped through the Misty Border into the floor, they’d be greeted with seemingly endless meadows, albeit with limited visibility due to the fog. The bumpy terrain, in addition to the fog, made seeing ahead difficult, and monsters would often jump out at Divers seemingly out of nowhere.

Divers in teams could coordinate with each other to navigate the floor without issues; however, Dillon was there solo, and he was as green as he could be, with his Diver career having started only a few days ago. He knew practically nothing of conventional dungeon-diving wisdom, nor did he have the necessary skills to get by. He might have been able to brute force his way through if he’d come from a line of career fighters, but he was just a third son from a desolate farming village to the north of the kingdom. Perhaps he wouldn’t have been desperate enough to earn his daily wage as a Diver if his family had been

wealthier, but there was no point in thinking about that now. A third son of a farmer had no choice but to leave his home and set out on his own. The farm would be inherited by the eldest son, so even if he'd been allowed to stay, all he could've hoped for was to earn enough to keep himself from starving. If he didn't earn enough for it to be worth keeping him around, he'd end up being sold off or kicked out of the house anyway. In the end, he'd been sent away from his home and village so his family would have fewer mouths to feed.

Dillon had been sent away with a meager sum of money under the assumption that he'd have no problem doing physical labor. He wasn't particularly big, but he was blessed with a resilient body. He was also physically stronger than his peers because he'd worked harder than others: he'd been fetching water, working on the farm, and exterminating vermin around his home. Despite that, he'd obviously end up starving if he couldn't find a job to begin with.

There, he'd found a ray of hope: becoming a Diver. He'd known of their existence from bedtime stories since he was young. He'd heard of the den of monsters known as a dungeon, which was located in the great city at the center of the world. He'd also heard of heroes known as Divers, who earned riches by acquiring rare materials only available in the dungeon. It was said that making one's own fortune was possible there if one played their cards right, and Dillon often imagined himself achieving such a futile dream. It didn't take long for him to decide to try his luck in Freida. The few belongings he'd been given in his village were insufficient for fighting monsters, so he'd purchased a chest protector and shin guards as bare minimum defensive equipment to start up with.

His plan had been to focus on gathering foodstuffs and other items native to the lower levels for the time being, but he'd ended up overextending himself. Just because he'd been able to dive in the Great Forest Ruins without issues, he'd decided to proceed to the next floor, the Misty Hills. Of course, he stood no chance against the monsters stronger than him, and he'd run for his life into the safe point, sacrificing his water and food supply in the process.

The monster-warding crystal stakes glistened serenely. These stakes, which could be found all around the safe point, had been purchased by the Divers

Guild from Divers and then refined by specialists to be installed throughout the dungeon. They required regular maintenance because they deteriorated over time, but it was thanks to these stakes that Divers could delve into the dungeon with confidence. However, at that moment, this safe point was nothing more than a prison to Dillon. If it was here to protect Divers from outside threats, he found it to be no different than the bars of a prison cell.

“I’m hungry...” muttered Dillon.

He hadn’t eaten anything since morning in order to save on food costs, but hunger was still manageable. His stomach might have been empty, but all he had to do was to endure. Compared to the harsh winters of his village, half a day without food was nothing.

His only issue was getting back home safe; there was no guarantee he could make it back without running into a monster, and making it back to the Great Forest Ruins while hungry and exhausted would be no easy task. Not to mention, it was difficult to detect incoming monsters on this floor, so he could be ambushed at any time. Now that he’d discarded his belongings, it was highly unlikely that he’d survive another encounter. There were other Divers at the safe point now, so he might make it back alive if he asked for help—help that would come at a cost. They’d likely demand money or the materials he had on hand as payment. He barely had anything on hand to offer, so he wanted to avoid giving it up if at all possible.

“I guess it’s either that or death.”

His stomach growled.

The wise choice would be to ask for help as all would be over if he died. Once he made it back to the Forest, he could start from scratch again.

There were quite a few Divers at the safe point, perhaps around two dozen in total. There were two teams and a person who seemed like a solo Diver among them.

One team appeared to be a group of veterans. There were eighteen of them, all clothed in expensive-looking equipment. They had an air of confidence about them, and even a novice like Dillon could tell they were quite skilled. He eavesdropped on their conversation and found out they were proceeding on to

the next floor, so they'd surely turn down a request to help him get back to the Great Forest Ruins.

The other team was more poorly equipped than the first, and their levels didn't seem very high. However, they'd been glancing at Dillon and giving him condescending looks from time to time. Perhaps they were mocking him behind his back or sizing him up to see how much they could get from him if he asked for help. The last thing he wanted to do was to talk to them.

Finally, there was the solo Diver. He stood out from the others as he was wearing a strange outfit unlike the other Divers. He wore no obvious armor, and he looked like an ordinary person with a large backpack on his back. Dillon recalled seeing others carrying backpacks like him, but they'd always been following a team around. The solo Diver was around Dillon's age or perhaps slightly older. There was a softness to his face that made him seem like a stranger to violence. There was an air about him as if he wouldn't even harm an insect. For some reason, he wore an expression that made him seem even more troubled than Dillon. The boy glanced at him repeatedly, then groaned as if struggling to make a decision. Eventually, he seemed to have reached a conclusion. He nodded to himself, then approached Dillon.

"Uh...hey there, are you hungry? Would you like some of my food?" he asked, offering the salvation Dillon needed.

## §

I visited Do-Melta after school pretty much every day unless I had plans to hang out with my friends. It wasn't that I didn't have many friends; everyone just had things to do. I didn't have too much free time or anything—well, maybe I did, but that was beside the point.

Anyway, I checked the contents of my backpack as usual, then I used the teleportation spell God had taught me to warp into God's place, which I'd been using as a waypoint between the two worlds.

I arrived in a room that looked like a study. I usually ended up in an empty white space, but the waypoint often changed like it did today. This told me that the waypoint wasn't a specific location but wherever God happened to be at the time.



Of course, by “God,” I was referring to Ameithys the Purple. He looked like some middle-aged dude with a blond beard. He had chiseled features, and there was a wildness about him that reminded me of Robin Hood. Looking at him head-on, I perceived a somewhat severe impression from him, but he always had a listless expression that cut down his solemnity by half. It was kind of a shame, really.

Even in his study, God was lazing about as usual. He was flipping through a book while lying upon a big pile of books. I was lost for words for a moment, impressed by his incredible balance, but then I realized I had to say hi.

“Hello, God. I’m off to Do-Melta again,” I said.

“Oh, is that you, Akira? Good to see ya. Be careful out there,” he said with a wave of his hand.

“I will!” I said as I waved back.

It was such a casual, mellow conversation that it really was like talking to some guy in my neighborhood. I did appreciate that though because I preferred that to being uptight with him.

Suddenly, God seemed to remember something. He set his book down and looked at me. “Oh, that’s right. Akira.”

“Yes? What is it?” I asked.

“Have you noticed there have been a lot of people getting stranded in the dungeon lately?”

“Yes, it’s been getting more common,” I said.

“As it starts getting colder now that summer has passed, the number of Divers looking to earn a daily wage has increased,” he explained.

“Ah.”

It made sense. Those who failed to secure a harvest in autumn gathered in Freida in search of income. With the Divers Guild here in Freida, there were opportunities to get money quickly. Even if one didn’t have the proper equipment for a dive, they could hang around the Forest, gather some resources, and head home without taking on too much risk. Of course, even

that required a certain amount of skill.

“Anyway, I wanted to ask you to help them out, even if it’s just a little bit,” said God. “Oh, you don’t have to go out of your way to do it. If someone looks like they could use some help and you have the means to do it, it’d be nice if you give them a hand.”

“Oh, sure. No problem at all,” I said.

“Okay, then. Thanks!” he said with a friendly smile and waved.

I’d always noted how laid-back he was, but I was starting to wonder if he’d acted that way on purpose to put me at ease.

I was feeling appreciative when he started talking to the roof of the study, or rather, into the void above. “Hey, honey, my ears are itchy. Can you clean them for me? Aw, come on, I want you to do it. You’re my wifey, aren’t you? Come on, honey.”

*Never mind. He’s just like this naturally.*

He was talking to his wife, who was who-knows-where, and begging her to lay his head on her lap and clean his ears. I’d had enough of their lovey-dovey couple talk, so I decided to get the heck out of there.

Not long after, I made my way to a safe point in the dungeon and ran into someone who clearly needed help. He was about my age—no, probably a bit younger than me—and he had short ginger-orange hair and handsome features. On his body was an old leather chest protector that didn’t fit him, and his only weapon was a hatchet. His equipment was rather shoddy, and he wasn’t even carrying a bag, which was considered essential for solo Divers.

“He looks like he’s in trouble...” I muttered to myself.

I could hear his stomach rumbling as he glanced around at the other Divers. Judging by his lack of belongings, he must’ve discarded everything he’d had while fleeing from a stronger enemy, leaving him stranded with no way to get home. Seeing him like this was painful.

*He seems younger than me. Seeing how poor his equipment is, he must’ve come here to make a living with nothing but the clothes on his back...*

I'd overheard people at the guild reception area saying this was pretty common. Many people had been driven out of their communities to reduce the number of mouths to feed, and they'd turned to Freida in hopes of earning money. I'd been told not to bother with them because there'd be no end to it, but I'd been asked by God to help out. I couldn't just ignore someone younger than me who was obviously in trouble; the guilt would've eaten me alive if I'd just left without doing anything. And so, I decided to talk to him.

"Uh...hey there, are you hungry? Would you like some of my food?" I asked.

"Huh?" he said.

"Oh, I won't ask for anything in return. I'm not looking to take money from someone younger than me," I said as I sat down next to him.

He took a moment to recover from his surprise, then asked, "Um...are you sure?"

"Yeah, I have more than enough food. Well, what do you say?" I said, showing him my bag as I gave it a shake.

"Y-Yes, please!"

He'd spoken with such enthusiasm that I thought he was about to bow down to me on his hands and knees. He must've been so anxious and afraid. I knew how it felt to be all alone in a foreign place.

Suddenly, a deep voice said to us, "Hey."

"Yes?" I said as I turned to the speaker.

There stood the leader of one of the two teams resting in the safe point, his face gaunt and sickly looking. He looked as exhausted as Instructor Seeker, and the rest of his companions were in a similar state. They all were wearing such poor-quality equipment that even those of the Lizard Skins in the Yellow Wall Vestiges were better. They reminded me of starving hyenas or snakes. I felt bad for them.

The sickly person ignored me and approached the stranded boy. "You want help, right? We'll help you."

"Actually, this person has already—"

“How’s this brat gonna help you?” he interrupted. “We can escort you all the way to the exit, and at an affordable rate too.”

“I don’t know...” said the boy.

“What? I said we’re gonna help you!” yelled the sickly person. He’d come in after I’d already offered help, tried to force his services onto the boy, and snapped when the boy refused to accept it. He was a terrible negotiator, to say the least. If he really wanted to offer help, he could’ve tried sweet-talking him for a while longer, but he was abysmally bad at this.

I really didn’t want to deal with this. I could already tell he planned to demand an exorbitant fee when it was all said and done. It would be something stupid too, like one hundred million yen or something.

“What a pain in the ass,” I said, unable to keep my mouth shut.

“Huh?” said the sickly person.

“Oh! Don’t mind me. I wasn’t thinking you’re a pain in the ass at all! Not even a little bit.”

“You... You obviously *do* think that!”

“What?! How did you know? Are you a mind-reading psychic or something?” I asked.

“You literally just said so yourself!” he roared.

He was right on cue with that punch line. He should’ve been a comedian or something.

“There are always people like them who prey on other Divers instead of monsters,” I said to the stranded boy. “And they’re always weak and pathetic without exception.”

The sickly person put his hand on the hilt of his sword, his veins bulging with rage. “You wanna try me?”

“No, thank you,” I said. “I don’t like fighting.”

Although I’d politely declined, the man seemed unwilling to listen. His malice was palpable. He looked as if he was about to swing his weapon at any second,

but I was already prepared. I'd been putting up a lightning barrier between us the whole time, so he'd either come in contact with the barrier and get electrocuted or give up and walk away. It wouldn't work if he was so skilled that he could break through my barrier, but if he was that strong, he wouldn't be preying on the weak in the first place. They could've gone for a short dive at a high-level floor and made ten times the profits instead of wasting time here. Not only was this method inefficient, but their reputation would also go down the gutter. Absolutely nothing good could come of it.

Sure, there were strong psychos out there who simply liked hurting the weak, but I'd heard their kind had been wiped out a while ago, and hardly any of them existed now.

Although I was a coward, I didn't feel very scared today, mainly because my opponent and his companions looked so unhealthy. Even as the man threatened me, I could only feel sorry for him because he looked so pale. Their not having a scary face was also a pretty big factor.

They probably weren't making any money at all and hadn't been getting enough food or sleep. They really were pitiful, and thinking about it pained me. Still, that didn't give them an excuse to extort others.

I had to stand my ground here. I had to prove that even a coward like me could fight back as long as my opponent's face or aura wasn't scary—and don't tell me that wouldn't be solving the root issue.

I was ready to slide my magic staff out of my sleeve when someone spoke from behind the sickly-looking gang, not to me but to them.

"Hey," said the voice.

"Huh? The hell do you—"

When they turned around, the members of the veteran team that was also in the safe point were glaring right at them.

"If you're looking to start a fight here, we'll take you on first," said the leader of the veteran group.

"What?!"

I hadn't expected them to come to the rescue. As I was thanking them and singing their praises internally, the leader stepped forward and got in the sickly man's face.

"Well?" he asked.

"Th-This has nothing to do with you!" protested the sickly man.

"Maybe not, but I'm not letting this happen on my watch."

"What? You think you're a hero or something?"

"Just shut up and get out. Unless you want to be thrown out of here. Your choice."

"Ugh..."

The veteran team's members were probably around level 25 to 30, and those of the group that was messing with us were around level 15 at most. The veteran group was clothed in equipment for serious Divers too. The sickly group stood no chance.

While the veteran leader glared them down, the other members of his group waved at us as they stood behind him. They seemed really friendly. In response, the stranded boy and I bowed our heads in gratitude.

Eventually, the sickly team fled the safe point. The veteran team called after them, saying things like "What kind of idiot tries to scam a child?" and "Next time, we'll call up the others and beat the crap out of you!"

*Who are they calling a child?*

"Thank you," I said to the veteran team's leader.

"Don't mention it. Oh, but they could be waiting for you on the way home, so be careful. Actually, I guess there's no need for you to be careful with the likes of them. Ha ha ha!" laughed the leader, then he left the safe point with the rest of his team.

He seemed to know I had my magic staff hidden in my sleeve. It was no wonder they'd survived long enough to be veteran Divers. They'd stepped in as soon as the sickly team started messing with the boy who needed help, so they might have planned to talk to him if I hadn't done it first. There were bad

people among Divers, but there were good ones out there too. Knowing the world was a kind place warmed my heart.

“They were so nice,” I said.

“Yes, they were,” agreed the stranded boy, visibly relieved the ordeal was over.

I sat down and started boiling some water. While I waited, I took a bottle of water out of my safari bag and handed it to him.

“Here, have some water,” I said.

“Th-Thank you. Um, how do I—”

“You open it by twisting the cap counterclockwise like this,” I gestured.

“Got it.”

The boy was amazed by how clear the water was, and he started chugging it with enthusiasm. He then paused and breathed “It’s delicious...” before letting out a sigh of relief.

I then took a cup of noodles out of my bag, removed the film, and started cooking it as I introduced myself. “I’m Kudo Akira. Kudo is my family name, and Akira is my first name.”

“Oh...I’m Dillon, Dillon Frost,” said the boy.

“Nice to meet you, Dillon.”

That was a pretty cool name. Since he was from this world, he was probably Dillon from a village named Frost.

*He could be a main character with that kind of name.*

“Did you just start dungeon diving, Dillon?” I asked.

“Yes. I came here to earn a living after leaving my village.”

“Ah, thought so.”

That was exactly what I’d thought. Having grown up in modern Japan, I considered the idea of being kicked out to reduce the number of mouths to feed absolutely horrible. He was so young, yet he’d come here all on his own

and put his life in danger to try and earn a wage for himself. I respected the effort, and it made me realize just how blessed I'd been.

"But why are you here without anything to eat?" I asked.

"I used to hunt animals in my village, so my level was high enough for the Forest. But I got carried away," explained Dillon.

"Ah, you thought you'd be fine going a little deeper. Then you ran into a monster that was stronger than you thought, and you managed to flee here by using your belongings as bait."

"That's right..." he admitted.

"So you were doing this sudden-death style IRL," I said.

"Sudden what?" asked Dillon.

"Never mind. Don't worry about it."

Dillon really was in a heap of trouble. It wasn't just because he was nearly starving but also since it would've been over for him if he'd been attacked by a monster even once. Playing in sudden-death mode in video games was fine, but diving that way in real life was no joke. It'd take a huge toll on your mental health.

"Sensei is a demon; Sensei is a demon; Sensei is a demon..." I muttered.

"A-Are you okay?" asked Dillon, concerned.

"Oh, sorry! Don't mind me, ha ha..." I said, realizing I'd been talking to myself. I had to keep it together.

The stainless steel camping kettle let out a high-pitched whistle. The water had finished boiling. I opened the lid of the cup noodles halfway and poured in the hot water.

"Just a minute. It'll be ready soon," I said.

"O-Okay...?"

Dillon was clearly confused. As a resident of Do-Melta, he had no idea what cup noodles were. He was probably wondering why I'd poured hot water into a strange container.



“Are you out here alone?” asked Dillon.

“Yeah, I am. I usually dive solo.”

“And you’re fine all by yourself?”

“Yep, I’m a mage. See? Here’s my staff,” I said and showed him.

“So that’s why,” he said, understanding immediately.

He must’ve figured a mage could handle themselves. Though, solo diving wasn’t recommended, so even a mage could get scolded for doing so.

“By the way, are you injured at all?” I asked. “I can heal you while we wait.”

“Oh, I’m okay. Just a few scratches, if anything,” he said.

“You should at least clean your wounds then. You don’t wanna get tetanus.”

“Tetanus?” asked Dillon.

“Leaving open wounds dirty isn’t good. You should wash it when you can,” I said as I took a two-liter bottle of water out of my Dimension Bag. “Use this to clean off any dirt.”

“B-But this water is so clean!” said Dillon.

“Oh, don’t worry. It’s just tap water, not mineral water. Go ahead. Clean your wounds,” I said.

Dillon was hesitant to use such clean water that way. He poured just a tiny bit of water at a time to clean himself, but he wasn’t making any progress at all, so I took the bottle and dumped the water onto his wounds.

After we were done cleaning his wounds, Dillon started getting restless. He couldn’t help but notice the fragrance emanating from the cup noodle container.

Once three minutes had passed, I removed the lid completely and handed the cup to Dillon.

“Here you go,” I said. “Be careful; it’s hot. Oh, and here’s a fork.”

“Ah, wha— Huh?” he said, looking back and forth between the fork and cup in confusion.

All he had to do was to use the fork normally, so I wasn't sure what the holdup was.

"Oh, that's why," I said to myself.

He'd never used a fork before. I'd heard that in this world, people in farming villages generally still ate with their bare hands. He'd probably seen a fork before but never used one personally.

"You use this fork to catch the noodles like this," I said.

I showed him how to use the fork, and he awkwardly carried some noodles to his mouth.

"This is good!" he exclaimed.

"Yeah, that's usually how people react when they try cup noodles for the first time," I said.

He was enjoying it so much that he inhaled the noodles despite them being piping hot. I recalled how delicious cup noodles had tasted when I'd been younger, before my palate had become more refined. Though, fancier cup noodles still tasted delicious to me even now that I'd gotten used to high-quality ingredients from the dungeon. Dillon had probably been exposed to only a narrow range of flavors until now, so his tongue wasn't used to food with such rich flavor. Cultural differences could be a factor in whether someone liked certain dishes or not, but in his case, practically anything was gonna taste good.

Dillon continued wolfing down his food, then suddenly paused as if a realization had hit him. "Um...are you sure it's okay for me to have such delicious food?"

"Hmm? Oh, don't worry about it. I wouldn't have given it to you if I needed it, right?" I said.

"I suppose you're right," he said, looking grateful. He was so moved that he was starting to make me feel guilty.

Dillon eventually finished the cup noodles down to the last drop of soup, then said, "Thank you so much. I don't know how I could thank you enough."

"It's fine. I've been asked to help people when I can, so I'm doing just that."

It was God who'd made the request, but I didn't feel the need to mention that part.

"Uh, well, here you go," he said, offering the loot he'd been hiding in his pocket.

He must've been protecting it with his life even though he'd discarded his food out of necessity. It was his way of thanking me.

"No need," I said.

"But—"

"Don't take this the wrong way, but at my level, I can easily get something like that if I wanted. Besides, do you think that's worth as much as what I've given you?"

"No..." he said.

"Right? So feel free to accept what I've given you as a token of generosity," I said.

In truth, I'd only given him what amounted to two hundred and a few dozen yen. It was so cheap that it wasn't even worth what he was offering in return.

Now that things had calmed down, I had to do something for him as his senior. Just like that time I'd helped Scrael, it'd be irresponsible of me if I'd just helped him and left him out to dry.

Seeing me sitting upright, Dillon seemed to sense that I was about to say something important, and his expression grew serious.

"Dillon, I know I'm in no position to say this as a solo Diver, but you really shouldn't be out here by yourself. If you just started diving, you should try to find a team to join or hire a guide or something," I said.

"I didn't know how to do any of that, and my receptionist told me it could be more trouble than it's worth if I ended up talking to a bad team...so I thought it'd be better to go by myself," replied Dillon.

"Ah, so that's why."

It was kind of a pain for new Divers to join a team. This wasn't like online

games where you could just introduce yourself and join some team right away. Running into other Divers by chance was the only way to find new members, and age differences with potential teammates could further complicate things. On the other hand, joining a team that was already established would also be difficult because of the level gap, and most of them would turn down a newbie unless they had the capacity to take care of them. Plus, Divers weren't always good people like the folks from that veteran team, and I'd heard of people getting scammed when trying to join teams. When I'd first arrived, Lion-Maru had taken care of me and introduced me to Instructor Seeker, who was a dungeon guide, so I'd been super lucky.

"I heard you can make pretty good money solo if you can farm in the Forest, so I thought I should get some proper equipment before joining a team," said Dillon.

It was true that one had better chances of being accepted into a team if they at least looked the part. There were a lot of people out there who got scouted by Diver teams that put a lot of effort into finding promising rookies. Those teams pretty much never talk to me though.

"Asking this may sound rude, but what level are you?" I asked.

"I'm level 7," he replied.

"The Forest sounds about right for you then. If you put in some effort there, you should be able to get some decent gear. But you're gonna have a hard time on this floor."

It was quite common for novice Divers who could handle the Forest to overestimate their abilities and step into the Misty Hills. It was the same mistake that Ashley and Instructor Seeker had warned me time and time again not to make.

Although he might be able to get some equipment with hard work, I still thought he should find some allies to dive with. Dillon couldn't use magic like I could, nor did he have a stock of potions in case of emergencies. There was a possibility—no, a very good chance that one slipup could mean the end for him. Still, I knew making friends in an unfamiliar land was difficult.

I looked at him and noticed he was starting to withdraw into himself. Maybe

he was starting to think coming to Freida was a mistake.

*Maybe I should be the one to help him.*

“Y-You know, I wouldn’t mind diving with you every once in a while,” I said.

“Are you sure?”

“They do say even chance meetings are the result of karma,” I said.

There couldn’t be any harm in offering a little help. I mean, God had told me to, so I’d put in a formal complaint if there was harm in it.

I continued, “But I can only dive in the afternoons if you’re fine with that,” I said.

“Yes, of course! Thank you!” he said, bowing his head enthusiastically.

“Anyway, I think it’s about time we get out of here,” I said.

“Are you offering to walk me out of here? But you’ve already helped so much...”

“I’m already involved, so I can’t just leave you stranded. I’ll see this through to the end. I was about to head home for the day anyway.”

The last part was a lie, but he wasn’t getting home by himself, so I had to walk him out.

And so, we’d returned to the Great Forest Ruins, aka the Forest, and farmed there for a while. We were gathering loot for Dillon—not for me—since I wanted him to have some financial buffer. He’d be in a much better spot once he earned enough to get some equipment and feed himself for two or three days. I’d gotten a lot of help when I’d first started out, so I was just paying it forward.

We’d gone around weeding herbs for a while, then arrived at a route in the Great Forest Ruins where monsters appeared often. We were now facing a Monoceros Deer, the cash-cow monster of the Great Forest Ruins. It looked like a large dark doe with a single large spiral antler growing from its forehead. It was a relatively weak monster out of the ones that could be found in the low-level floors like the Great Forest Ruins, the Misty Hills, and the Infinite Gray Castle; its horn was worth a pretty penny, hence its status as a cash cow. The

horn's value arose from the fact that it could be refined to make a wide variety of things from weapons to armor ornaments.

The deer only attacked by charging forward with their horns, and they'd become completely vulnerable to attacks if they charged into a tree or bush and got stuck. Not to mention, they were incredibly aggressive by nature and would attack anything that came into sight. What a poor, dumb animal.

I'd seen one charge at a Walker Rabbit, which was generally harmless unless provoked, and the deer had ended up getting a thorough butt whooping. A Walker Rabbit had practically no attack power, yet it'd beaten up the Monoceros Deer with one hand while munching on a leaf. Even a dog would bite someone who messed with it while it was eating, so that was well deserved for the Monoceros Deer. Anyway, although Monoceros Deer could be beaten up by even the rabbits, which were known for being weak, I couldn't exactly call them harmless because there'd been people who'd gotten injured trying to fight them.

Dillon's experience dealing with harmful animals in his village seemed to be paying off, and he was defeating the deer without too much trouble. He stood in front of a thick tree and waited for the Monoceros Deer to charge at him, then dodged out of the way. Once its antler was stuck in the tree, he repeatedly struck its neck with his hatchet. It was as simple as that.

"Looks like you can handle Monoceros Deer without problems," I said.

"Only because I'm fighting them one-on-one. Plus, you've been helping me," replied Dillon.

"That's true," I said.

I'd been keeping other Monoceros Deer at bay with my magic so Dillon could fight them one at a time. They might have been weak, but he could be in trouble if they surrounded him. It wouldn't be good for him or me if I took care of everything for him though.

"Oh, I know! Do you mind if I try out a generic spell I made recently?" I asked.

"A spell?"

"Yeah, check it out. Double Strike!" I called out, casting my very own original

spell.

Double Strike was, simply put, a spell that allowed the target to attack twice at once. A standard attack, whether it be a sword swing, a punch, or a kick, would each count as one strike. I'd wondered if adding an extra attack to single strikes, like in RPGs, would be possible, so I'd come up with this spell.

Soon, Dillon was enveloped in a mysterious soft light. The generic spell wasn't a strengthening one, so he probably wasn't able to physically feel the difference. Sure enough, he looked at me with a confused expression.

"Uh..." he said.

"Now, you'll be able to perform double attacks for a while! That is all!" I announced.

"Huh? Double attacks?" he asked.

"Just try attacking that one with your sword without jamming it into a tree this time," I suggested.

"Sure..."

Dillon hesitantly approached a Monoceros Deer. Doing so was probably unfamiliar for him because the standard fighting method was to wait for it to come charging. On the other hand, some people could grab its horn to hold it in place, but that was probably too difficult for him with his current level and strength. Either way, I was sure he'd figure it out.

The deer he'd targeted scowled at him and started thrashing its head and antler around threateningly. Evading a surprise attack might have been hard for him if he was below level 3, but as a level 7 Diver, he should be able to react to any sudden movements. Avoiding its attacks was relatively simple: all he had to do was to quickly move around it in circles. Seeming to know this already, he began circling the monster. The Monoceros Deer was a quadruped that couldn't turn very quickly, so it was having trouble keeping up with Dillon's movement.

As soon as he found an opening, Dillon attacked. He swung his weapon at its neck, but that wasn't enough to take it down. Blood flowing from its wound, the deer repositioned itself and was about to kick Dillon with its rear legs—but something strange happened. Suddenly, Dillon accelerated, moving far faster

than he ever had, as if he alone was moving on fast-forward. He continued to deliver a second hit, and the Monoceros Deer went down.

Dillon stood there, and he looked back and forth between his hatchet and the fallen monster in confusion. “Huh? Huh...?”

He didn’t comprehend what had just happened.

“*That* was a double attack!” I said. “This generic spell lets you do a follow-up attack on your enemies. Even if they blocked your first attack, they couldn’t possibly defend or evade the second one! Unless they also have the same ability, that is.”

“Wow! You’re incredible!” said Dillon. He seemed excited to have benefited from a generic spell for the first time.

“Ha ha, keep the compliments coming,” I said.

I was used to Sensei talking crap about me, so I wanted to have my moment for a bit. I had to tend to my mental health somehow.

And so, we hunted Monoceros Deer for a while longer, then went back to the main hall quite satisfied.

*This story isn’t done quite yet.*

## §

“And we’re back!”

Dillon and I safely returned from our farming run at the Forest and arrived at the main hall. Though, we weren’t really in any danger since we’d just been coming back from the Misty Hills.

Normally, Divers went straight to the washing area to rinse themselves after a dive. We had to clean off any blood or dirt, or the hall would be an unsanitary mess. Not to mention, not doing so would upset the receptionists, and nobody wanted that. I was fine because I hadn’t gotten dirty at all, but Dillon had been running for his life, so he was moderately messy.

As I was thinking of taking us to the washing area, I heard a dull thud as if someone had fallen on their butt. I turned around to find Dillon slumped over, his expression a mixture of relief and joy.



“I’m... I’m alive...!” he muttered.

Now that he could relax, all the tension he’d built up was released all at once. It wasn’t even winter, but his hands were trembling. This sort of thing was pretty common; people would return from the dungeon for the first time, then truly appreciate that they were alive. This didn’t just happen to new Divers but also to veterans coming back from deeper floors. The Divers around us were watching him warmly and empathetically.

Dillon eventually recollected himself and said, “Thank you so much! I thought I was done for.”

“You got lucky this time. Let’s be more careful from now on, yeah?” I said.

“Yes, of course...”

I’d gained practically no profit from today’s dive, but that didn’t bother me at all.

## Floor Thirty-One: To the Dungeon with Carbuncle

I'd heard rumors that a secret route five existed out there, so I'd set out into the depths of the Gandakia Dungeon to find it. Of course, I hadn't gotten sick or injured, nor had I encountered an undiscovered minority tribe, nor had a round boulder ever come rolling down toward me. It was said that you had to be accomplished to a certain degree to unlock this route, so beginners couldn't just access it.

This route was somewhat of an open secret. I'd heard of its existence before, but I wouldn't have known even the name of the floor if Ashley hadn't handed me a booklet about it.

"There are actually even more routes," she'd said.

"Really? I guess you're gonna give me bits of info at a time," I'd said.

"Yep. After this one is route eight. Good luck, and don't forget to bring me something."

"You just skipped a bunch of numbers. What happened to six and seven?"

My rank was low, but since I already had a track record with my past dives, Ashley had given me access anyway. I'd gone to the Paradise Hot Springs with Sensei a while back, and there were supposedly other floors like that throughout the Gandakia Dungeon that I didn't know about. But unlike the hot springs, this place had other Divers walking by. Some of the people I'd seen at the hall but never encountered during my dives were probably in secret floors like this one, though those were only a select few who had some accomplishments under their belts.

Here, we had the Rainbow Coral Seashore at depth level 13, the Snowy Jungle at depth level 22, the Giant Mushroom Homeland at depth level 28, the Ever-Raining Wetlands at depth level 32, and the Enchanted Cragged Peaks at depth level 43. The difficulty levels on this route were high overall, but they didn't seem any harder than those of route four. If I had to guess, access to this route

was limited not because of difficulty; it was probably limited to protect the vegetation and wildlife from excessive harvesting and hunting.

When I'd headed toward one of the many safe points in the Great Forest Ruins, I'd been surprised to find the secret Misty Border with a security guard standing by. They were really serious about restricting access to this place. The security guard had even told me not to mention the route to Divers who didn't already know about it. I'd wondered if they knew the rumors were already out there, but that wasn't my problem, so whatever.

Anyway, I was now at a safe point in one of the floors on that secret route: the Giant Mushroom Homeland at depth level 28. The floor name sounded as if it was joining in on a certain war between mushrooms and bamboo shoots, but there was no way this world knew about that feud. That war wouldn't happen here for at least another forty years unless I brought those certain snacks myself.

My companion today was Carbuncle, which was waiting for snack time patiently on a cushion I'd set down beside me.

"Let's wipe your hands first," I said.

"Mew," said Carbuncle as it presented its front paws.

I wiped them with a damp cloth, then I took out the bananas I'd obtained on today's adventure. These weren't just ordinary bananas though. Their sizes and shapes were the same as the ordinary ones, but they had sky-blue skin as if they'd been frozen. These bananas with an unappetizing color were known as northern bananas, and I'd gotten them from the previous floor, the Snowy Jungle at depth level 22. I wouldn't have even picked them up if the booklet I'd gotten at reception hadn't indicated that they were edible. Once I peeled them, out came a piece of normal banana flesh that I was familiar with. The sky-blue exterior had nearly turned me off already; my appetite would've been completely ruined if something colorful had come out instead.

As an aside, bananas were considered vegetables, not fruits. They should've just classified them, along with melons, watermelons, and strawberries, as fruits because this was pretty confusing.

"Here you go," I said as I handed Carbuncle a piece of banana flesh that I'd

broken into thirds.

“Mew.” Carbuncle accepted it with its front paws, then began eating.

I took a bite too and said, “This is good. I never would’ve expected it to be this good judging by its color.”

“Mew!” said Carbuncle cheerfully.

This thing was sweet and delicious. I’d heard their sugar content increases in colder regions, which would explain its sweetness. It didn’t simply rival the selectively bred bananas from my world—it surpassed them. It was even seedless, just like our bananas. This world never ceased to amaze me.

“Bananas are delicious,” I said.

“Mew,” agreed Carbuncle as it munched away.

I’d heard cats didn’t have taste receptors for sweetness, so maybe Carbuncle was a rabbit or something instead.

We continued enjoying our northern bananas, then a shadow appeared at the safe point entrance. Chances were that it belonged to a Diver. I mean, what else would it belong to? What was that? You mean the City? I hate that place. The spooky monsters there got super close to the safe points and nearly gave me a heart attack all the time. I didn’t want to encounter ghosts in real life; seeing them on TV and YouTube was enough for me, thanks. Anyway, a Diver team entered the safe point. It was a team of six humans, a well-balanced group consisting of a swordsman, a mage, an archer, a martial artist, a warrior, and more. Not to mention, they were full of good-looking men and women, and they were too dazzling to look at for a normie like me. I thought I was gonna go blind.

“Excuse me, why are you covering your eyes? Are you hurt?” asked the young man who appeared to be their leader.

“No, this is more like a preventative thing, a temporary measure until my eyes get used to the brightness,” I said.

The leader looked confused. I wished he hadn’t taken my joke seriously, because it just made me look weird. Though, I probably should’ve known this

was a weird thing to do, and that anyone would react just like he had.

I eventually removed my hands from my eyes, thinking I would've gotten used to the brightness by now— Nope, still too bright. They were sparkling. These people were living in a different world. But if that were true, I guess people like Scrae, El, Sensei, and Miguel would be living in another world too. Wait, they actually were from another world. *I'm confused.*

The martial-artist-looking person and swordsman-looking boy seemed to be injured, and they were being healed by the mage behind the handsome leader, who'd been talking to me.

I'd wonder what had gotten them. The monsters that appeared around here were Grenade Squirrels, Stink Bomb Bugs, and Murder Mantises. I had no idea why there were no fungal monsters on a mushroom-themed floor, but the monsters here had some really violent names. Stink Bomb Bugs sounded especially dangerous. It'd be pretty scary if a bunch of them appeared at once.

Judging by their wounds, I was ninety percent sure it was a Murder Mantis that had gotten them. This floor was still on the easier side, but Murder Mantises were surprisingly strong. I'd run as fast as I could for the first time in a while when I'd encountered one. They were insects, but they looked cool, kind of like certain masked riders. I'd hoped they wouldn't hit me with a Revolcane and strike a pose because I'd probably explode and die if they did.

The leader smiled at me and said, "I'm Alex, leader of team Aurora. Nice to meet you."

"Oh, nice to meet you too. I'm Kudo Akira, a Diver," I said, returning his greeting. They say greetings were important—or an absolutely crucial courtesy, even.

Alex looked around as if searching for something. There were only crystal stakes and dubiously colored mushrooms around us, so I wondered what he was looking for.

"Wait, are you alone?" he asked.

"Yes, I am. Though, I do have this little guy with me," I said, then Carbuncle raised its hand as if to announce its presence.

The mage lady who'd been healing her companions earlier crouched in front of Carbuncle and said, "I've been seeing this animal near the reception area a lot lately."

"Oh, you're right. It's so cute, everyone seems to love it," agreed the archer girl beside her. She patted Carbuncle's head, then it stood on its hind legs.

Carbuncle's anatomy was quite unusual, so it could move in all sorts of unexpected ways. I should've expected as much from a strange creature from this world.

It spread its stubby front paws and said, "Mew."

"Awww, how cute!"

"Mew!"

The girls were enamored. However, Carbuncle didn't try to drain the mage's mana for some reason.

*Why does it only drain mine? And why did it do that banzai pose? This thing sure is full of mystery.*

The two who'd been injured joined the group, seemingly all better now.

"I can't believe he came here all by himself," said the warrior.

"This is a pretty deep floor. How did he get here with equipment like that?" asked the martial artist.

"He doesn't even look worn out despite all those monsters along the way," noted the swordsman boy.

"Was that injury from a Murder Mantis?" I interrupted them.

"Yeah. You gotta fight powerful enemies sometimes if you wanna level up."

"You got hurt because you ran off on your own, Zair. You shouldn't try to solo monsters just because you think you're some great swordsman," said the martial artist.

"I thought I could take it on!"

"What made you think that? I also got hurt because of you."

Apparently, the martial artist had gotten hurt trying to protect the swordsman boy.

Anyway, I remembered that I'd seen them before. They were the dazzling team that I'd seen when there'd been trouble in front of the rankings chart. If I recalled correctly, they were supposedly a group of promising young stars recruited by the kingdom, and they considered themselves Miguel's rivals.

They didn't seem to recognize me though. That wasn't surprising considering that they'd thought I was a porter. Porters were very important in dungeons, but there were a lot of them, many of them being porters for hire. They probably hadn't registered me in their hippocampi or even their cerebral cortexes—such was the sad fate of being a mob.

I started making small talk to fill the silence.

"Do you dive here often?" I asked.

"We gained access to this place about two weeks ago, and we've been diving only here ever since."

"I see."

It was pretty fascinating that they'd already gotten the green light to dive here when they'd registered later than I had. No wonder they were known as promising up-and-comers and had been climbing up the ranks at an incredible rate. I was impressed by how much recognition they'd been getting. I wasn't, and never would be, the type to compete for a high rank or keep tabs on that kind of stuff, so I was a bit envious.

The members of the handsome guy's team sat down on the floor with a thud. They were more fatigued than I'd thought, and they looked like they wouldn't be able to get back up for a while now that they'd lowered themselves to the ground. Their clothes were pretty dirty, which told me they'd been trekking through some harsh terrain or they weren't that good at exploration. Their group looked like it was constructed with combat in mind rather than exploration too. Not that there was anything wrong with that—everyone had their own specialties.

Their group consisted of six people: the good-looking young man with an

androgynous face who seemed to be their leader, the swordsman boy, the seemingly strong-willed mage woman, the mild-mannered archer woman, the aging mercenary man, and the close-cropped martial artist guy who seemed to be having a hard time. If there was a ranking for looks alone, they'd definitely be high up on the list.

"How about you?" asked the leader. "You must've been here a good number of times if you're here alone."

"Oh, me?" I asked. "No, this is my first time here."

"Your...first time?! And you're here by yourself?!"

"Yes," I nodded.

Immediately, they all looked at each other incredulously. They all had a surprised look on their face as if they'd just seen a ghost or some inexplicable being.

*Is it really that surprising...? I guess it is.*

Though, only Divers with a decent diving track record could come here, so it shouldn't have been all *that* unusual. If I was good enough for the receptionist to approve my entry, it should've implied that I could handle a Dive here solo even if I had to flee or use items to survive.

"You must've passed the Murder Mantises' territory to get here..."

"I didn't think I could *easily* take one head-on, so I ran away," I said.

"Well, that was a wise choice."

"But there were Guerrilla Snowmen in the Snowy Jungle! What about them?"

"Oh, those? I just poured hot water on them. They weren't that strong," I said.

"Huh? What?!"

Guerrilla Snowmen were monsters that appeared on the floor before this one. They literally looked like snowmen, and they only differed from the ones I was familiar with in that they were made up of three snowballs like Western-style snowmen. I'd read in the guidebook that groups of snowmen would



suddenly emerge from the snow, and that was why they'd been dubbed Guerrilla Snowmen.

When I'd encountered them, they'd been immediately obvious—they'd had twigs for arms, some sort of bucket on their heads, and carrot noses sticking out of the snow. I hadn't been able to help myself from saying "Do you guys suck at hide-and-seek that bad?"

Anyway, I'd poured the warm leftover water from my bathtub that I'd been storing in my Dimension Bag. The water hadn't been all that hot, so it'd actually frozen around and immobilized the snowmen, rendering them useless. Blue mages were probably better suited for dealing with them than red mages. I'd zapped the ones that had managed to avoid getting immobilized, and that was that.

"But still, this floor is pretty deep."

"Oh, it's totally fine," I said. "It's nothing compared to the Night Soil Swamps or the Visceral Cave. Ha...ha ha...aha ha ha..."

My brain always shut down whenever I thought back to those places. I was sure that the light had faded from my eyes at that moment. Maybe I should've considered Lion-Maru as demon number two. I had a feeling I still had a whole lot of suffering awaiting me.

Meanwhile, team Aurora was at a loss for words, and I totally understood why. Lion-Maru and the Visceral Cave were no joke. I never wanted to go back there again, or my sanity would be chipped away until I finally went mad and vanished. Someone would find my EXP Card and retrieve it like a soldier's dog tag.

The awkwardness in the air made it difficult to touch on the topic any further, so I changed the subject. "You must all be very strong to be able to defeat a Murder Mantis."

"As elite Divers recruited by the kingdom, we have to be able to take on the likes of those mantises," the leader said confidently.

The swordsman boy turned his nose in the air and said, "Well excuse me for not being elite then."

“Don’t pout. That’s why everyone calls you a kid.”

“Shut up.”

They started arguing in the back, but it seemed to be banter between friends.

“Who dealt the finishing blow?” I asked.

“Me. I can use Tertiary Magic,” said the mage woman proudly. She seemed like the prideful type.

As an aside, this made me appreciate once again how powerful Scrae was—she truly was in a class of her own. This had nothing to do with the topic at hand though.

“Huh,” I said, unimpressed.

“Wh-What kind of reaction is that? Have you even seen Tertiary Magic before?” asked the mage.

“Yes? I mean, I personally know several people who can use Tertiary Magic. Ricky said he can use Quaternary Magic, and then there’s Mimir from Miguel’s team, Rada from that laid-back team, Elina from Endless Splendor...” I said, counting off the mages I’d met before.

Judging by the surprised looks on their faces, they were familiar with those names too. The mages I listed were all pretty famous after all. There were a few others I hadn’t mentioned, like the twins from Blessings of the Mystic Water, whom I’d met in the Evernight Meadows, and the members of Blast Fire. Yeah, there were quite a few of them. Mei wasn’t a Diver, but I was pretty sure she could use Tertiary Magic too: y’know, the emissary girl.

I didn’t even know that being able to use Tertiary Magic was something worth bragging about. Sensei had even told me “You’ll never get stronger if you’re bragging about the likes of Tertiary Magic. Get over yourself, you little weakling.” Apparently, people from this world hadn’t heard of giving encouragement through praise. My sorrow was deeper than the Mariana Trench. No one was gonna salvage me.

Suddenly, the archer girl who’d been playing with Carbuncle looked up and said, “Those are some famous veteran Divers, along with the top graduate and

the runner-up from the magic academy.”

“Ugh... W-Well, those people may be able to use Tertiary Magic too, I suppose,” admitted the mage girl.

“Of course. They all go diving in high-depth-level floors,” said the archer.

*Huh, I guess Ricky and Mimir really are famous at the magic academy.*

“What was your rank when you graduated?” the martial artist asked the mage.

“We graduated in different years, so there’s no point in comparing!” she said.

“Well?”

“I was...within the top ten,” grumbled the mage.

“And how high of a spell grade have you mastered? Can you use Quaternary Magic?” asked the martial artist.

“O-O-Of course I can! Probably! I think!”

That phrasing sounded familiar. But from the sound of it, she hadn’t actually tried it before. I’d noticed that a lot of mages had too much pride.

The mage woman looked upset from the martial artist’s prodding. I was never part of Do-Melta’s academic system, so I was a complete stranger to all of this talk about the magic academy.

“So, what are you all doing after this?” I asked.

“We were thinking of gathering some mushrooms, then heading home.”

“Mushrooms?!”

That word scared me, though I wasn’t sure if it was because I was a coward or because I was from the modern world. It wasn’t uncommon for people to eat mushrooms because a book mistakenly told them it was safe, and there were food poisoning cases because of that every year. To be honest, I’d been exploring this floor under the assumption that everything was poisonous. I’d warned Carbuncle not to put random things from here into its mouth, so we were fine on that end.

Speaking of Carbuncle, it was pushing my thigh with its front paws and

begging me for more bananas. So I peeled a banana and handed it over, and Carbuncle began eating it happily. *Cute.*

“Are the mushrooms here edible?” I asked.

“Yeah, we only harvest the ones that are obviously safe to eat.”

“Then...I guess there’s no need to worry.”

“If you think about it, there’s poison on pretty much every floor of the dungeon. We’ve always been careful about that kind of stuff.”

“That’s good,” I said.

Being aware of such dangers was really important. There were poisonous herbs even in the Forest. Seriously, there was poison everywhere. The dungeon was a dangerous place that wasn’t very kind to humans.

“What about you? What are you planning to do?”

“I think I’ll explore a bit further before heading home,” I said.

“You mean you’re going to the next floor? Are you sure?”

“I’ll be fine,” I replied. “The Dark Corridors is at depth level 30, and according to the booklet, the next floor won’t be all that tough. I’ll flee as fast as I can if I sense danger.”

“Um, do you mind if I ask what level you are?” he asked.

“Ah, I’d like to keep that a secret, if you don’t mind,” I said.

“Be careful out there.”

“I appreciate the concern.”

After saying goodbye to team Aurora, I went to check out the next floor, the Ever-Raining Wetlands. Needless to say, it was raining, so I turned back immediately. If I’d gotten soaked in the rain, I’d risk freezing to death at the Snowy Jungle. This was a pretty deadly combo, and it made me realize this route could be more challenging than I’d thought.

A Guerrilla Snowman stood in my way on the way home, so we got into a snowball fight; to be more specific, I threw a snowball at lightning speed and made its limbs scatter in all directions.

And so, I'd returned to the main hall.

"Hi, Ashley," I said.

"Oh, souvenir!" said Ashley as soon as she saw me.

"Huh?"

Had she mistaken me for a souvenir? She probably needed to get her eyes or head checked. I was just about ready to send her to a neurosurgeon.

I gave her a reproachful look, then she smiled at me unnaturally.

"I meant, hi, Kudo. Where's my souvenir?"

"I didn't bring one," I said.

"What?! Tsk... Lame."

"Now hold on, that's a little rude, don't you think? And can you not ask for a souvenir as soon as you see me? You're starting to make me wonder if I should distance myself from you."

"Ah, I even went out of my way to get you approval for that route. No souvenirs, huh," she complained out loud, ignoring my comment.

"You're not even listening." Resigned and exasperated, all I could do was sigh.

Meanwhile, Carbuncle hopped onto the counter and began grooming itself, unbothered by everything else going on.

"I was kidding. I did bring you something," I said.

"Good job, Kudo! I knew I could trust you!"

I said nothing. There was nothing to say. Ashley must've come preinstalled with a high-speed rotary that helped her flip-flop so quickly. Maybe it was on her arm, so maybe she could fire off a Broken Magnum like a certain king of braves.

I took a rock out of my Dimension Bag and handed it to Ashley. "Here you go."

She accepted the rock, held it in both hands, and took a good look at it.

She then looked at me and asked, "What is this?"

"What do you think it is?" I asked.

“It looks like just a rock to me.”

“It *is* a rock,” I said.

She gave me a puzzled look. “So...what’s with this thing? Is it super valuable or something? Some sort of gemstone in the rough?”

“Nope.”

“Then what’s so special about it?” she asked.

“Huh? Nothing.”

“Then it’s just a rock!” she said and threw the rock on the ground.

The receptionists on both sides, who’d been listening to our conversation, started cackling. The receptionists here all had lovely personalities.

“Listen, Kudo...” started Ashley.

“That’s for calling me a souvenir,” I said.

“Ugh...”

“Don’t worry, I did bring you something,” I said. “I know you went through some effort to get me approved, so of course I got you a gift.”

Ashley gave me a sour look, but she did deserve it. I reopened my Dimension Bag and brought out some northern bananas.

“Here you go. Northern bananas,” I said.

“Whoa, those are quite rare! I didn’t think they were something you could find on a first dive,” she said.

“They weren’t all that hard to find. I just looked around areas with the type of vegetation that was in the booklet.”

“But the booklet just had info in text. How did you know what kind of tree to check?” she asked.

“I already had some prior knowledge on that end, and bananas technically aren’t trees, they’re herbs.”

“They are?”

“Yes, at least that’s the case for the bananas back where I come from.”

With major companies like Google and Yahoo backing me, I had access to any information at my fingertips.

“Here, look,” I said and showed her an image of Carbuncle posing next to a tree full of bananas.





"I've asked this before, but how does this picture thing work?" asked Ashley.

"Ah, it's too difficult to explain, so I won't even try," I said.

"You're giving up just like that? Well, I won't try to force you."

I was glad she was understanding about this. I still wasn't gonna forgive her for the souvenir incident though.

"Oh yeah, I met the members of a team called Aurora," I said.

"Oh, that team. They've been on a roll lately," said Ashley.

"Are they that good?"

"I think they're strong. Though, personally, I think they should take a bit more time with their dives."

"So you think they've been getting risky?"

"I'm not their receptionist, so I can't say. Even if I were, I wouldn't be able to stop them if they say they're working on behalf of the kingdom."

"Do you think they're being pressured to hurry?" I asked.

"I'd assume so. They'd need to produce results with all the backing they've been getting, so I'm sure there's a sense of urgency because of that."

"That sounds like a pain."

"Accepting money comes with responsibilities, Kudo," said Ashley.

"Aren't there high-paying jobs that are really easy and chill?" I asked.

"No...and it isn't like you need one."

"Why not?"

"You've been diving in the dungeon pretty much every day," said Ashley.

"Huh? But the dungeon is fun."

Ashley held her head in her hands. She looked pained as if she were trying to communicate with someone who didn't understand her language. I mean, technically I didn't; it was thanks to God's translation powers that I could converse with her at all.

But right away, she discarded the thought of whatever had been ailing her and turned her attention to the banana in front of her.

“Anyway, are you sure I can have this?” she asked.

“Yes, it’s yours,” I said.

“Yay! Thanks, Kudo!” she said, already moving on.

Maybe you had to have thick skin like hers to make it as a receptionist. It wasn’t an easy job, that was for sure.

I planned to keep the rest of the northern bananas to share between God and me.

After completing some paperwork, I said to Carbuncle, “Do you wanna come home with me today?”

“Mew!” said Carbuncle with its paw raised.

So, we went to God’s place as usual. There, I asked him if he could keep an eye out for Carbuncle whenever I left it in Do-Melta.

“Sure. If someone tries to mess with it, I’ll drop some divine punishment on them,” he said with a smile. His tone had been so casual that you’d think he was munching on some snacks in front of the TV as he’d said it. He’d been very godly in that moment.

“Sounds kind of scary,” I said.

“Mew.”

So, I said goodbye to God and went back home with Carbuncle.

## Floor Thirty-Two: Dillon's Revenge!

I was adventuring through the Forest today—that was, the Great Forest Ruins, as I was sure you already knew by now. It was a sunny paradise full of nature, which was perfect for a daytime walk; though it was still in the dungeon, it wasn't without its dangers. If one treated their journey through it like a walk through a park as they enjoyed the sunlight peeking through the leaves above, they could end up going down from a monster ambush out of nowhere. Of course, this wasn't an issue if one's level was high enough.

Surprisingly, I wasn't alone today. I wasn't a loner anymore. I mean, I could choose *not* to be a loner any time, but yeah. My companion today was Dillon Frost, the novice Diver I'd met at the Misty Hills on route one at depth level 8. It'd been about two weeks since we'd first met. We'd promised to go on a dive together back then, and today was the day.

Dillon had been going on dives on his own, and he seemed to have started to get the hang of things. He'd told me he'd learned the basics of diving from Instructor Seeker as I'd suggested, and he'd developed a sense of caution, which was required in this line of work. Though I suspected the traumatizing experience from before was part of it too.

One major change I noticed was his appearance. His equipment was far better than what he'd had during our first encounter. He'd had a sad-looking hatchet and a beat-up leather chest protector back then, but he now had gear that met the minimum requirement for a dive that focused on battling instead of gathering resources. He would've been denied by his receptionist if he hadn't, but it was still worth mentioning.

"Okay, time for me to check your gear!" I said.

"D-Does it look okay?" he said nervously.

He looked like a middle schooler who'd come to take his high school entrance exam. I knew how it felt to take an exam for the first time, but I wasn't gonna ask him any weird questions, so he had nothing to fear.

“Starting with your main weapon! Let’s see what you’ve got,” I said.

“I bought myself this short sword,” he said as he showed me his weapon. “I use my hatchet for resource gathering now.”

So far so good. His main weapon was a proper weapon. There was nothing wrong with hatchets that were made as weapons, but the one he’d been using was a farming tool and therefore not designed to withstand extreme abuse. You couldn’t just bring anything with a blade and expect it to hold up in combat.

“Okay, now let’s see your secondary weapon. You brought one, right?” I asked.

“Yes, I got an even shorter sword with a thick blade as you suggested.”

“Good, good.”

A secondary weapon was quite important. Not only did it serve as a backup, but it could also come in handy in situations where the main weapon would be too unwieldy. If one only had a long weapon, they’d be troubled in spaces without enough room to swing it around. A compact, durable weapon served as the perfect secondary weapon for such situations. A lot of people didn’t consider this, but the extra versatility was crucial in a dungeon where the environment changed every floor. Some people even carried various weapons depending on the monsters they were going to fight.

“And another important thing that tends to get overlooked: shoes! How’s the sizing?” I asked.

“They fit great, but...” he said, then looked at me apologetically.

“What’s wrong?”

“It’s just... Are you sure it was okay to give me all that money?” he said.

“Oh, that? Don’t worry about it. Just pay me back later.”

“Thank you,” he said and bowed deeply.

He bowed with a great form, like how an office worker would do on TV. He looked like he was ready to take on the trials and tribulations of Japanese society. I wasn’t all that sure if he’d survive though.

Anyway, I'd lent Dillon some money so he could buy new shoes. The spinning and crafting technologies in this world weren't developed like those of my own world, so made-to-order clothes and shoes were very expensive. I had to do a double take when I'd seen the prices. Still, shoes weren't something you should skimp on; you had to walk a lot in the dungeon, and shoes that didn't fit properly could lead to fatigue and injury. Losing one's balance at the wrong time could lead to catastrophic results, so I'd insisted that he get some proper footwear. Even Instructor Seeker and Ashley often said a Diver should wear quality shoes. They said it so often that you'd think it was their catchphrase. Anyway, preparing such equipment was all a novice Diver had to do to drastically increase their success rate. There was no reason not to get them.

I had Dillon walk around just to make sure his shoes were fine. The size looked right, and the shoes didn't dangle off his feet or flop around, so they were good to go.

"Okay, next: projectiles!" I said.

"I got a simple sling," said Dillon.

"Good!"

Projectiles could be used as weapons or to draw a monster's attention, and some people could even use them to cause serious damage. Advanced Divers like Miguel even considered throwing-knife skills a necessity.

"Needles or knives coated with paralyzing poison would've been ideal," I said.

"That's a bit too advanced for me to handle," said Dillon.

"Yeah, I figured."

Anyone who wasn't used to handling such weapons could end up hurting themselves, so it made sense that he'd chosen a sling as a safer option. I couldn't use needles or poisoned knives either—they're too dangerous for me. That said, a sling wouldn't do much good against a swarm of opponents in the dungeon.

"I have some useful items just for you!" I said.

"Wh-What items?"

“Ta-daaa! Behold! A filled water gun, a holster, and a pair of goggles!” I reached into my safari bag and pulled out a water gun, a holster for carrying it, and a pair of casual goggles for eye protection.

Dillon stared blankly at the strange objects. “Uh...”

“It’s a water gun,” I repeated.

“A water...gun?” he asked, unfamiliar with the word “gun.”

I’d seen toys in Freida that shot out water using air pressure, but they were obviously called something else.

“If you pull this trigger, it shoots out water. It’s not actually water inside though,” I explained.

“Oh, like the toy.”

“Yeah, but don’t underestimate it!”

“Is there something special inside?” he asked. He was quick to catch on.

“It’s filled with a fluid mixed with a bunch of irritants like chili powder and vinegar. Shoot it into your opponent’s eyes, and they’ll be in a world of hurt.”

“Huh,” said Dillon, his interest piqued.

The efficacy of the irritant-shooting device had already been battle-tested. It was even effective against the Orcs in the Mine. I’d used them as test subjects a while back, and they’d let out a soul-shattering scream while writhing in pain. It’d been super effective. What? “What about Hypno Eyes?” you ask? Those weaklings were nothing. What kind of creature had its weak point fully exposed? They needed to develop some eyelids before even thinking about facing me. Actually, that’d be pretty creepy.

Anyway, monsters didn’t even try to move out of the way when I used the water gun. They were just that dumb. They had no idea what kind of hell awaited them when they rubbed their eyes after handling chili peppers. I was sure countless people, like me, perished after making peperoncini and then inadvertently touching the area around their eyes. The pain was unbearable.

Curiously, Dillon observed the water gun.

Before letting him use it, I gave him some words of warning. “Don’t ever point it at a human being. Worst case, they could go blind.”

“What?! Is it that dangerous?!”

“Surprisingly, yeah. You can easily make it with stuff you can find around Freida too. I’ll tell you how later.”

“Wow... You can even concoct poison?” he asked.

He was blowing things out of proportion. If this counted as “concocting poison,” people who went into the mountains and those all-natural farmers who didn’t use pesticides could get arrested for making something similar; they’d be violating the Poisonous and Deleterious Substances Control Law.

Dillon wrapped the holster with the water gun around his waist. This might sound kind of silly, but modern water guns like this one were designed like revolvers, so they looked pretty good. I’d also cast a spell to make it extremely durable, so I didn’t have to worry about it breaking.

“Now, let’s check your food and other items,” I said.

“Right. I brought food that’s light and portable. As for water—”

“You should be fine as long as you have some for an emergency and have the empty water bottle I gave you. We can always fill it up later.”

A lot of watering places were available throughout the dungeon. Some places didn’t have any at all, but there was water at relay points and safe points in explored areas. We even had maps marked with various points of interest, so watering places were widely known among Divers.

Dillon picked up a plastic water bottle and said, “This is so useful.”

“Yeah, I didn’t realize how convenient they’d be when I brought them here,” I agreed.

Water bottles were useful in practically any situation. It was too bad that in my world, they ended up in the recycling bin after they were emptied. However, the part that came in contact with the mouth had to be thoroughly washed before reusing a bottle, or it could cause stomachache. I’d already warned Dillon about this, so we were good on that end.

Finally ready to go, Dillon and I set out into the Forest.

I was wandering around without a care in the world, then Dillon suddenly yelled in a panic, “Th-There’s a giant monster over there!”

“Huh? A giant monster?”

“Y-Yes!” he said and gulped.

I wasn’t sure what he was talking about. We were in the Great Forest Ruins, which was a beginner area; there was no way a giant monster would be here. Maybe it was only visible to Dillon.

“It’s coming closer!” he shouted.

“Huh? Where? What monster?”

“Right there!” he said and pointed.

“There?” I asked and looked, but there was no monster in sight. “What does it look like?”

“Well, it’s about double my height,” he began.

“Uh-huh. So it’s twice as tall as us.”

“It’s furry all over with long ears and big eyes!”

“Furry, long ears, and big eyes,” I noted.

“Yes, with jet-black eyes. It looks very evil.”

That sounded familiar. In fact, I’d seen something like that the other day.

“It’s crouching in the bushes over there and slowly approaching,” he said.

“Uh...”

The monster he spoke of realized we were watching it, so it retreated into the bushes. The bushes rustled for a while longer.

“It’s about to come out,” said Dillon nervously as he drew his sword.

Eventually, a shadowy figure jumped out of the bushes—yep, it was a rabbit, the token weakling and comforting creature of the Great Forest Ruins: the Walker Rabbit.



Meanwhile, Dillon clenched his sword hilt, completely intimidated by the rabbit's size.

I'd seen plenty of monsters that were *actually* gigantic, but since rabbits weren't classified as monsters, his description hadn't rung a bell. Looking at it now, I supposed it could be considered relatively big in these parts. I probably shouldn't have been thinking along the scale of a Poison Chimera Zombie.

"I-It's coming closer!" shouted Dillon.

"It sure is," I said in an unamused tone.

"It's fast!"

"Yeah, I guess it's relatively fast," I said.

"K-Kudo?!" said Dillon, growing even more perplexed by my casual attitude.

The rabbit swung its arms back and forth as it walked toward us. It thought it owned the place because Mr. McGregor wasn't here; though, we'd probably need a six-meter-tall Mr. McGregor to handle a rabbit of this size.

I was used to seeing them, so they seemed cute to me, but Dillon's reaction was probably reasonable for someone seeing one for the first time. He hadn't even seen a small rabbit before, so it was completely alien to him.

*Hmm? What's its breed, you ask? Probably a Netherland dwarf rabbit.*

Once the rabbit got closer to it, it raised its arms high overhead, striking a pose as if it were the strongest creature on Earth, in Yujiroesque fashion. Though, I knew whatever attack it was gonna deliver from that stance would be anything but strong.

But I soon realized this one wasn't the type of Walker Rabbit that actually attacked people. Most of their basic activities consisted of walking around, munching on grass, and digging holes in the ground like European rabbits, but there were also several types of Walker Rabbits that acted differently when they encountered Divers. Some would approach and attack (harmlessly), some were friendly and would rub up on people, and some would mess with you by pulling on your belongings. I had a feeling they just really liked Divers. This rabbit must've been the type that rubbed up on people. It wasn't taking up the

Rabbit Kenpo stance by raising its paws before itself like a ghost, and the prankster types never came out from hiding. Anyway, I had to warn Dillon before he did anything rash.

“You should put your sword away,” I said.

“What?! But—”

“Attacking the rabbits with weapons is against guild regulations,” I pointed out.

“Then what are we supposed to do?” he asked, visibly anxious.

Stabbing, slashing, and hitting them with magic were illegal, so there wasn’t anything we could do. Though, they were tough enough to shrug off such attacks from low-level Divers anyway. Either way, anyone who attacked a rabbit would probably disappear at the hands of the secret lawless organization known as the Bunny Lovers Club if they ever found out.

While Dillon stood frozen in place, the rabbit approached him and began sniffing.

“Eek!” he shrieked as its nose grew closer.

Its size was rather intimidating, so I couldn’t blame him. He clenched his eyes shut, but he eventually realized that no harm was coming to him and slowly opened his eyes.

The rabbit rubbed up against him and squealed.

“Huh?” he said in disbelief.

*He finally gets it.*

“Um, is it...?”

“Why don’t you try giving it some attention?” I suggested.

“O-Okay...” he said.

The rabbit was big, but it only rubbed up against him, so the interaction wasn’t particularly taxing. Dillon gradually got used to it and began patting the creature’s head.

“It’s so soft,” he noted.

I mean, of course it was. Rabbits were soft and fluffy creatures. After rubbing up on Dillon for a while, the rabbit switched targets and approached me. As soon as it came within range, it started bopping me on my head.

“Hey!”

It bopped me again.

“Why are you like this with me?! Can’t you rub up on me like you did with Dillon?!” I complained.

The rabbit tilted its head adorably—then it tugged on my safari hat.

“Hey! Quit it! Stop that!” I shouted and desperately held on to my hat.

Dillon watched us with a dumbfounded expression. He seemed confused by how differently it was acting with me.



To tell the truth, this was why I didn't have a very good impression of the rabbits. For some reason, they always bopped me on my head, used me as a practice dummy for Rabbit Kenpo, or tried to steal my hat.

*They're toying with me? Quiet, you.*

They hardly ever just rubbed up on me like this one had done with Dillon.

*Sad.*

Anyway, the rabbit seemed satisfied after playing tug-of-war with my hat for a while, then it sat down on the spot and started grooming its head and face. That thing didn't have a care in the world.

"What's with this creature?" asked Dillon.

I didn't know either. These rabbits could probably qualify for one of the seven mysteries of the dungeon.

"Well, they're harmless, at least. Give them some attention every once in a while if you aren't in a rush," I said.

They could be a pain to deal with when you were on a tight schedule because you had to flee or repel them without hurting them somehow.

I looked over and noticed Dillon staring at the rabbit. I thought maybe he'd been smitten by its cuteness. They did look very cute, but I wished they wouldn't steal stuff from Divers and play tag with us. If it wasn't for this tendency of theirs, they would've been a comforting presence here. As it stood, the best source of comfort in the dungeon was the seals in the Submerged City. There were supervisors there to keep an eye out for trouble too.

Dillon gave me a reproachful look and said, "I wish you could've told me earlier they're harmless."

"You seemed to not have seen a rabbit before, so I wanted to see your reaction," I said.

"Ugh..." Dillon looked a bit bitter.

I was usually the scaredy-cat, so seeing someone else getting spooked was kind of refreshing. I couldn't help watching for a while.

“I’m only about eighty percent serious,” I said.

“So you *were* enjoying it!” said Dillon.

*Nice punch line. But now it’s time for some serious talk.*

“Dillon, we may be in the dungeon, but that doesn’t mean everything we encounter will be a monster, so you can’t go around attacking everything on sight. Also, make sure you study up on the Forest before our next dive together. You haven’t done much research, have you?” I asked.

“Huh? Oh, no, I haven’t...”

That was why he hadn’t known about Walker Rabbits. If he’d done any legwork, he would’ve known they were completely harmless.

“You thought you didn’t need to research because you can dive here without issues, right?” I asked.

“I-I’m sorry, I did not...”

“You have to research each floor properly,” I warned. “Getting complacent is how you end up in trouble like that one time.”

A look of realization appeared on his face. “You’re right...”

“Even if the monsters were weak and it seemed like an easy place, there’s a lot that can go wrong. There are poisonous plants and mushrooms, and some monsters have mysterious special powers. You really should know what you’re getting yourself into before setting foot in each floor. There’s a lot of info out there on areas that have been explored already. If you’re gonna dive solo, you have to be especially careful about these things.”

“I understand,” he said meekly.

I appreciated that he was listening to my advice seriously. I felt like we were having a productive conversation.

“You can write, right?” I asked.

“Huh? Oh, yes, I can,” he said.

“Then here, you can use this notebook and pen to take notes.”

I handed Dillon a set of Kokuyo-style notebook and pen, then he thanked me

and tested out the pen.

“Wow, this is amazing!” he said, shocked by how comfortable it was to write with.

There was no way Do-Meltan technology could compete with the almighty Kokuyo. He stared back and forth at the inked letters and the tip of the pen for a while.

“You should make a habit of taking notes. There are all sorts of monsters, plants, and items out there, so it’ll be helpful to write down anything that catches your interest,” I said.

“Got it,” he said and nodded.

I gestured ahead and said, “Okay then, let’s go. It’ll soon be time for you to get your revenge like we planned.”

And so, we were off to the Misty Hills, where Dillon had gotten stranded before.

## §

I was on an adventure with the newbie Diver, Dillon, to help him get revenge. We were now at the Misty Hills at depth level 7 on route one. It was the floor right after the Forest, and Dillon had been traumatized by his near-death experience here.

His movements had become noticeably sluggish since we entered this floor, and he’d become so stiff that he reminded me of the Golems in the Yellow Wall Vestiges. At this rate, an antique tin doll probably moved smoother. He seemed to be more nervous than I’d expected. He’d almost died here, so it was only natural that he’d be on guard. Fear was reflected in his every move, kind of like how I’d been when I’d first entered the City on route one.

He might have been overly nervous, but at least he was being cautious. The Misty Hills was an easy beginner floor like the Forest, but letting one’s guard down could easily lead to death. The monsters roaming in this area were far stronger than those in the Forest, and they ambushed unsuspecting victims from the fog. Getting attacked from behind was pretty much the default, and getting lost in the fog to find oneself surrounded by enemies wasn’t

uncommon.

One unique characteristic of this area was that it was cool year-round. It was too bad, because of the monsters here, we couldn't come here during the summer to cool off like how rich people went to their vacation homes. We wouldn't find a sign that read "Welcome to the Misty Hills" as if it was some sort of tourist attraction.

Anyway, Dillon was far too nervous. He looked stiff as a board, and I was afraid he wouldn't be able to move properly when needed.

"Hey, Dillon, could you stand up for a sec?" I asked.

"Huh? Oh, sure."

Dillon seemed confused that I'd stopped him out of nowhere but complied without question. Good on him.

"Okay, let's start by relaxing and giving your body a shake," I said.

"A shake?" asked Dillon.

"Yep. It's an important exercise to relieve unnecessary tension. You need it more than anything right now."

"How do I do that?"

"First, you relax your entire body. Imagine your arms dislocating from your shoulder blades as you let them hang. Then, imagine there's nothing but water inside you and shake your body by twisting it and letting your arms and legs wiggle around."

This was one of the exercises featured on a weekly TV health program. I'd always wondered how many types of those exercises there were. There were all sorts of people like kinesiologists, osteopathic doctors, yoga gurus, and some dude named Saraie introducing their health programs, so I hardly remembered what each of them was supposed to do. It all got jumbled up for me just like with those supplements and health appliances they sold on TV. This body-shaking exercise was no exception, and I didn't actually remember what it was supposed to accomplish.

I demonstrated the exercise anyway, and Dillon mimicked my movements.



“Like this?” he asked.

“Looks like it. Did it help loosen you up a bit?” I asked.

“I think so.”

He didn’t seem fully relaxed, but it’d have to do for now. He had trauma from last time, so he couldn’t help but feel anxious just being here. I couldn’t blame him. The whole point of coming here was to overcome that trauma. I figured we could gradually work on that by getting him used to this floor first.

“Let’s take out your weapon. That should help,” I suggested.

“Got it,” he said and drew his weapon.

“Now, you’ll be ready even if we get ambushed.”

We continued walking through the Misty Hills, then we noticed two humanoid silhouettes in the fog.

“Do you see that?” asked Dillon.

“Yeah, they look human. We shouldn’t need to worry,” I said.

There were obviously other Divers here in the dungeon, not just monsters, and human figures in the fog were usually just that. Especially when there were two or three of them walking together, you could pretty much guarantee they were Divers. If you assumed everything in the dungeon was a monster and attacked them on sight, it could land you in a heap of trouble and get you on the hook for medical expenses and compensations.

*Why not just kill them, Akira?*

A demon’s voice echoed in my mind. Sensei, the ruthless woman who could kill at the drop of a hat, would probably say something like that—in fact, she had. She’d even told me I could make it look like an accident. Her default solution was that of an assassin, and she terrified me, to say the least.

I stayed aware of my surroundings as I observed the approaching figure, then I recognized a familiar face.

“Oh? It’s Instructor Seeker,” I said.

Instructor Seeker, the dungeon guide, appeared from the fog. His face was

unshaven and unhealthy-looking as usual, and in his hand was his trusty umbrella sword. He reminded me of a lazy news reporter or low-ranking detective often found in manga and dramas—all he needed was a khaki coat to complete the look. He looked listless at first glance, but he was actually a capable guide who kept a sharp eye out in all directions at all times.

He wasn't alone today; a person stood next to him in full-bodied white armor. I thought Instructor Seeker was accompanying them as a guide, but the armored person looked as if they already knew their way around the dungeon.

*Who's that?*

"Oh, hey, Kudo," said Instructor Seeker.

"Hello, Instructor. Are you working today?" I asked.

"Oh, no," he said, "not today."

"I see you have company," I pointed out.

"Yeah, this is an old friend of mine."

I couldn't hide my surprise. "Huh? You have friends? Like, *real* ones?"

"Of course I do! What makes you think I don't?!"



“Well, my headcanon says you lost all of your friends after borrowing money from everyone you knew to pay off your gambling debt,” I said.

“You have quite the imagination, you know that?!” Instructor Seeker shot back.

The armored person turned to the instructor accusingly.

“No, that didn’t really happen!” said Instructor Seeker. “And I wouldn’t do that even if I did need the money! You believe me, right?!”

Judging by their reaction, whoever the armored person was must’ve been familiar with the instructor’s gambling tendencies. Addiction was getting more widely recognized as an illness lately, and I thought it was about time he got some professional help from a doctor.

Instructor Seeker eventually calmed down and said, “Gimme a break. Anyway, I’m surprised you’re not alone today, Kudo.”

“Right, I’m here with him today,” I said, and Dillon stepped forward.

Instructor Seeker recognized him and said, “Oh, I guided this kid in the dungeon recently. Dillon, isn’t it?”

“Yes, thank you for your help,” said Dillon with a polite bow.

*I’m impressed that the instructor remembers his name. I would’ve considered him a saint if only he wasn’t a gambling addict. Seriously.*

“Well, excuse me,” said Instructor Seeker.

“Huh? Don’t tell me you can read my mind,” I said.

“You just said that out loud!”

“Makes sense. You wouldn’t have lost so much money gambling if you could read minds,” I said.

“Stop bringing everything back to gambling, will you?!”

I decided I’d veered us off topic enough, so I kept quiet.

“Anyway, he’s the one you helped a while back, right?” he asked.

“Yes, things just happened to end up that way,” I said.

“And you couldn’t just ignore him, hmm?”

“Something like that.”

Instructor Seeker shrugged. “You’re just a big ol’ softy, aren’t you? I heard about that Long-Ears you saved a while back too—”

“Eek!”

The pathetic surprised shriek had come from none other than me, of course. I’d realized the armored person was inching toward me and staring directly at me. The bulky armor made their stare more intimidating than embarrassing, so my reaction had been a mix of fear and some surprise.

“Um...” I mumbled.

“Balrog, meet Kudo,” said Instructor Seeker.

“I’m Kudo Akira. Nice to meet you...” I said while leaning backward.

Balrog was a rather uncommon name. This person was completely covered in armor, so they weren’t a masked Spanish ninja or a Tolkienesque demon, but their name was Balrog nonetheless. And by the way, I surely wasn’t the only one who’d mistakenly called Izuna Drop “Inazuma Drop.”

Eventually, Balrog wordlessly reached out a hand to return my greeting. I shook it hesitantly, and they squeezed back.

“Do you usually dive solo?” I asked.

“No, Balrog is a member of Order of the Black Dawn,” answered Instructor Seeker.

“Oh, so a member of a major team, I take it?”

Order of the Black Dawn was one of the famous teams, and it was known to be a multispecies team due to its diverse roster. Crimson Lance, whom I’d met the other day, was also a member.

“How do you not know Balrog? Everyone should’ve at least heard the name,” said the instructor.

“I don’t really keep up with that sort of stuff,” I said haltingly.

If Balrog was so widely known, they must’ve been one of the higher-ranking

members, maybe even an officer. They didn't even talk, so maybe they were shy and preferred to stay out of the spotlight.

"So, what were you doing today?" asked Instructor Seeker.

"Dillon is level 12 now, so we came back here to get revenge on this floor," I said.

"'Revenge'?"

"Yes. He nearly died on this floor, so we're looking to get some payback on the monsters here," I explained.

"Ah, I get it."

"We have to nip trauma like this in the bud, or it'll come back to haunt him."

"What? Are you speaking from experience?" asked the instructor.

"No," I said, "I just figured that would be the case."

And it was true, I didn't have trauma—from the dungeon, at least.

Okay, I lied.

I had plenty of trauma from the Visceral Cave, the Ruined Undercity, and the City on route one. I never wanted to go to the Cave again.

"You're right that it's best to overcome trauma early," said Instructor Seeker. "You should handle that while you can because doing so could become more difficult the longer you put it off."

"Right, I want him to be able to laugh it off once we're done here," I said.

Instructor Seeker looked at me with a surprised expression. "Oh, you get it. Why don't you become a guide too, Kudo?"

"Eh...I think I'll pass."

"I thought you'd say that. Let me guess, you value your free time too much?" he asked.

"Of course," I said. "I'm here to have fun."

"You and Dracarion are pretty much the only ones who come to the dungeon for fun."

As I talked with Instructor Seeker, I sensed something else approaching us: a monster, at long last. I heard footsteps thudding in the distance.

“I-Is that...” stuttered Dillon.

“Yep, it’s the first opponent for you to exact revenge on,” I answered.

The footsteps reverberated all around us, making it hard to pinpoint where it was coming from. But the heavy sound and rumbling were a dead giveaway: it was definitely a Block Arm, a monster that appeared in the Misty Hills at depth level 7. It was like a relative of the Golems from the Yellow Wall Vestiges, and it was characterized by its massive rugged right arm. It was a pesky ambush specialist that disguised itself as rocks, much like Moss Faces, and it sneaked up on Divers from behind to crush them with its right arm. However, it had a massive flaw: it made a lot of noise when it moved, so it was easily detected whenever it tried to approach a target. Yet it was worth noting that someone at a similar level as a Block Arm would struggle to fight one even if they faced it head-on.

Also, unfortunately, the resources it dropped were pretty much worthless. It couldn’t even deliver material like minerals or anything, hence the poor thing was widely considered a big heap of trash.

Eventually, I sensed its presence right behind us. People with a high level could sense these things intuitively, so it couldn’t take me, Instructor Seeker, or Balrog by surprise. I gestured for Dillon, who was oblivious to the danger, to move away with us, then the Block Arm emerged from the fog.

“Can you give Dillon a word of advice on that thing, Instructor?” I asked.

“You brought him here, so you advise him,” said Instructor Seeker.

“Whaaat? Come on, you’re a guide,” I complained.

“Don’t slack off now,” he said. “You’re gonna teach him today, right?”

“Well, that’s true,” I admitted.

It seemed he wasn’t gonna let me take the lazy way out, so I decided to see how Dillon would handle himself.

“Let’s see you try taking it on solo for now,” I said.

“Are you sure I can do this on my own?” asked Dillon nervously.

“You’ll be fine. Anyone over level 10 wouldn’t die so easily against one of those. It’s relatively slow for a monster in this region too. I’ll keep an eye out to make sure nothing else sneaks up on you, so focus on the Block Arm in front of you,” I said and gave him a nudge. “Go get it!”

Dillon approached the Block Arm, and the battle began. He looked for an opening and struck with his sword, but the blade obviously couldn’t penetrate the Block Arm’s hard surface. A high-level fighter could slice right through it as if they were demonstrating a knife on sale. I really wanted to know how that worked. How did increasing one’s level make their sword sharper? It didn’t make any sense.

“What do you think of Dillon, Instructor?” I asked.

“Hmm? I think he has talent. That isn’t the swing of someone who’s been farming until just recently.”

Balrog nodded as well, still silent as ever.

“Huh,” I said noncommittally.

“Can’t you tell?” asked Instructor Seeker.

“I mean, I’m just a student,” I said.

“You won’t—and can’t—be taking a walk through the dungeon if you were ‘just a student,’” he said.

“Then I guess my existence proves that isn’t true,” I retorted.

“You’re a special case. The general rule doesn’t apply.”

The instructor and I chatted for a while longer before Dillon returned to us. The Block Arm took this opportunity to disappear into the fog. It probably planned to lurk in the fog so it could get behind us and ambush us again. It was rather clever in contrast to its inorganic appearance. It was too bad its attempt would be completely pointless with Instructor Seeker, Balrog, and me here.

“This is hard,” said Dillon, his expression severe. He was clearly having trouble dealing with the Block Arm.



“Of course you can’t just fight it head-on and expect to take it down. You’d need a hammer or a mace if you wanna take that approach,” I said.

“Then maybe I can’t beat it with my current equipment,” he said.

“Not necessarily. You just have to find a better method,” I said, then went on to explain. “First of all, monsters with extreme anatomy like that tend to have very one-dimensional action patterns. My childhood friend used to tell me that those types look strong and can be intimidating, but they’re so specialized in one thing that their movement ends up being limited. They usually only make predictable moves, and you can bait them into doing exactly what you want. An asymmetric monster like that has a very hard time moving around.”

“So you’re saying...?”

“That monster tends to attack with its giant right arm, but its arm is heavy, so it doesn’t like turning to the left,” I explained.

If I recalled correctly, I’d heard something like this from Hiro after she’d defeated Coconut Crabbie Z, one of the Seafood Seven. It’d also had superlong nails on one side, but it’d gotten obliterated in one hit by Hiro’s Burning Smash. Hiro really had been too strong.

“Dillon, when you’re trying to defeat a monster, you can’t just fight without putting thought into it. You always have to use their characteristics against them. Observe their every feature and use your imagination. What features could you exploit to give yourself an upper hand?” I asked.

“An upper hand...”

“I’ll give you a hint. Let’s see...it’s similar to the Monoceros Deer.”

Monoceros Deer relied on their antlers and always charged at their opponents, leaving them wide open to counterattacks. All you had to do against one was evade its charge and watch out for its back kicks. So how could this apply to a Block Arm?

“Its right arm is heavy, so it’s slow to take left turns. It also attacks mainly with its right arm,” said Dillon. “Which means...I should circle around its left side as much as possible?”

“That’s right. Since it has trouble turning to the left, you can find openings circling around its left side. And when you attack, you should aim for the gaps in its joints, especially from the back,” I said.

“Got it!”

He now knew what to do, but I had one more piece of advice for him. “Also, you should try using that water gun I gave you. It’s surprisingly effective against Block Arms.”

“Do I aim for its eyes?”

“Yep.”

Despite looking like a giant hunk of minerals, it had eyelike organs vulnerable to irritants. This was called being strategic, not cheap. Monsters were responsible for protecting their own weak points.

The Block Arm eventually reappeared, and Dillon circled around its left side as we’d discussed. The monster turned sluggishly, but it was too slow to keep up. Dillon then found an opening and squirted the water gun at the creature’s eyes.

“Gaaaaaaaaaaaaah!!!” roared the Block Arm.

It reminded me of the time I rubbed my eyes after touching red peppers, so I felt a bit sorry for it; but it was a monster, so it had to die.

The Block Arm lost sight of Dillon and started thrashing about. This meant Dillon didn’t have a chance to follow up with an attack right away, but to his credit, he stayed calm and patiently kept his distance. Dillon stepped forward when the Block Arm finally buried its right arm into the ground, leaving itself immobilized.

“Ha ha! He won. Time to count my chickens!” I said.

“What chickens? What are you? A farmer?” asked the instructor.

“That was supposed to be a joke. Normally, I’d say ‘It’s time to take a bath’ as we say back home, but I figured I’d switch it up a bit.”

“Can you not make jokes that are so hard to understand? I don’t know how I’m supposed to respond.”

Jokes aside, I asked the instructor, “What did you think of my advice?”

“I think you did well,” he said. “You should always seek to strike an opponent where they’re most vulnerable. You even directed him to his own conclusion without giving away the answer; you handled it perfectly. You really should become a guide.”

“I don’t want to,” I said.

“Don’t be lazy,” said Instructor Seeker.

“Whaaat! I’m surprised to hear that from you, of all people!”

“Hey, I do my job as a guide just fine!” he shot back.

Anyway, back to Dillon. He slammed his sword deep into one of the Block Arm’s joints. Realizing his attack was effective, he followed up by sinking his weapon again all the way into the creature’s neck joint around where the medulla oblongata would be in a human. Then, the Block Arm suddenly crumpled like a puppet that had its strings cut.

“Whoa!” I yelled, impressed.

He’d taken the monster down with ease once he figured out what he was supposed to do. It was no wonder he had a protagonist type of name.

“Yes! I did it, Kudo!” he cheered.

“Congratulations, Dillon!” I said, and we rejoiced in celebration. He’d succeeded in getting a part of his revenge.

Suddenly, I sensed another monster as if it’d appeared to ruin the joyous moment. The newcomer was approaching with surprising speed, and I had a feeling it’d be a bit of a handful for Dillon to handle right now. And so, I decided to take this one on myself.

The silhouette that appeared from the fog was that of a Cyclops Head, a single-eyed blue-skinned humanoid monster without defining characteristics to speak of. Yeah, I confused myself too whenever I tried to explain this creature. Most monsters had some sort of special ability that defined them. This one had a single eye, so you’d think it’d shoot beams out of its eye or something, but it didn’t have any such powers at all. It was kind of sad, really. In other words, I

just had to fight it as if I were facing any humanoid opponent.

I'd decided to use the Efflux Wave technique Scrae had taught me. This time, I was gonna try a different approach than the original version I'd used last time. To be honest, techniques like the float step, which Scrae had used, were too advanced for me. Not to mention, I could easily picture Dillon losing faith in me if I used some half-assed move and failed terribly. He respected me now, so I obviously wanted to keep it that way. That was why I'd thought about what I was capable of and adjusted my movements accordingly.

My point of reference was Chinese martial arts. I'd studied books and videos over and over, and I'd practiced the movements in my yard at home every morning.

*Good job, me. You did great.*

First, I stepped forward with my right foot, turning it sideways to the left. Naturally my lower body rotated counterclockwise, then my upper half soon followed, opening up my stance to the side. With this motion, I concentrated momentum onto my extended right arm; I twisted, and I drove my palm up and forward with a thrust. Every part of this move, from the step forward to the arm extension, was all connected in a singular motion. Finally, I delivered a palm strike using the fundamentals of Efflux Wave, unleashing jinchi with the impact, and the rotation embedded in the strike I'd landed on the blue monster's abdomen left its skin twisted in a spiral. Instead of traveling through the monster and hitting its back, the impact spread all around it as if I were rocking a water bag. The step forward I'd performed near the potion exhibition venue had shaken the ground hard, but this time, it was more like the power of the stomp had been absorbed into the ground. I might have struggled if the monster and I were around the same level, but I was able to land my attack on the low-level enemy with ease. A single hit was all it took, and the Cyclops Head crumpled awkwardly and sprayed blood out of its eyes, ears, nose, and mouth before perishing.

"Whoa, it really sprayed out blood and died," I said, surprised.

I hadn't even hit it with a Mouko Kohazan from Chinese martial arts, but it'd spurted blood like a fountain. It only had one eye, so it only bled from six holes

instead of seven, like victims traditionally did.

“Wow,” breathed Dillon.

I looked over to find him staring at me with wonder. I knew how he felt. Growing up, I’d admired anime characters who could use mysterious martial arts moves, like Ryo-shihan. Scrae? She was supercool too. I hoped she’d eventually learn how to shoot energy waves named after a Hawaiian word that means “the lonely one,” then teach me how to do it too.

Instructor Seeker, who’d been watching the whole time, stared at me with wide eyes. “Hey, was that an Efflux Wave just now?”

“Yes, it was. You know it?” I asked.

“I have connections with Long-Ears too, so I know a thing or two about their martial arts,” he explained.

“I see.”

Maybe it was rude of me to think otherwise, but Instructor Seeker seemed to know quite a lot of people. Hearing that he knew Long-Ears was especially surprising considering that they were known for hating humans. But on second thought, he was a good person, so maybe it wasn’t all that shocking.

“That move of yours was very different from the original Efflux Wave though,” he pointed out.

“Can you tell? The last time I tried it, I got made fun of for my awful form, so I did a lot of research and practice,” I said proudly.

Instructor Seeker furrowed his brow in confusion. “Research? How? I don’t know of any written records of their martial arts...”

“I have my ways where I come from,” I said.

For some reason, that seemed to be enough of an explanation for him. I had a feeling that he, like Lion-Maru, had a hunch about where I’d come from.

“My efforts have paid off, right?” I asked.

“Yeah, I’d say so. A normal Efflux Wave drives its force through the target, but yours... It seems to have reverberated inside the opponent’s organs.”

“Heh heh. With mine, the impact sinks into the target,” I said.

“‘Sinks into the target,’ huh? I see,” nodded the instructor.

*I’m sorry. I was just being a know-it-all. Please don’t take it seriously. It’s embarrassing.*

“That was amazing. Dealing with the monsters on this floor must be a piece of cake for you,” said Dillon with admiration in his eyes.

“Yeah, pretty much,” I said.

“That reminds me, is that childhood friend you mentioned also a Diver?” said Dillon.

“Nope, Hiro is a hero,” I said.

“He-ro?” he repeated.

“Yep. It’s like the middle point between a rider and sentai member.”

“I’m not sure what those are, but she must be strong, right?”

“Sure is. Her Burning Smash, especially, is just ridiculous. It can blow up a kaijin with just one hit.”

“Um...huh?”

Understandably, this topic was too difficult for a Do-Meltan to grasp.

“Anyway, let’s get going,” I said. “It’s time for you to get more revenge! Yeah!”

“I don’t think that’s something you should say so cheerfully,” said Dillon hesitantly.

“Don’t sweat the small stuff!”

And so, we said our goodbyes to Instructor Seeker and Balrog, then I accompanied Dillon as he got payback against the monsters that had chased him around last time. Now, he’d surely overcome the trauma of his past (from about two weeks ago). Everything turned out just fine. Hooray!

## **Floor Thirty-Three: An Incident During Helping-People Week**

Linte Arty, the dungeon mercenary, was leaning on the wall at a safe point in a medium-depth-level floor while she stared at the ceiling.

“I’ve done it now...” she sighed.

Bright-red blood ran down her skin along with a streak of cold sweat. She’d encountered an unexpectedly strong monster and made one slipup while exploring a high-depth-level floor. That was all there was to it, a tale that was all too common in the dungeon.

She’d managed to flee from route four to route one using a hidden route and arrive at this safe point, but she wasn’t in the clear yet. While the crystal stakes made of monster cores kept monsters out of the safe point, in her weakened state, other Divers turned into potential threats.





There were those out there who had no qualms about hurting or even killing others for monetary gain, and the infamous criminal organization known as Sahasra Hands was a prime example. Whispers about its members had been circulating among the guild as they resided within the Gandakia Dungeon. Known for robbery and murder, they were said to be directly responsible for the disappearances of a tenth of the people who went missing in the dungeon. They were also known to be extremely cautious, which explained why no sightings of them had been reported to this day. An investigation could likely uncover their traces, but no one cared enough to track down the organization as long as it didn't affect them. Now, Linte was a potential victim herself.

"Birds of a feather, or something like that..." she muttered.

She remembered how she, too, had once been part of a similar organization. Killing was her specialty, and she'd personally disposed of those who'd stood in the way of her organization's founders.

She sensed someone entering the safe point. Nine times out of ten, it was going to be a Diver. She hoped it was a Diver with integrity, but as one went into the medium-depth-level floors and deeper, they were more likely to encounter ill-intentioned Divers.

Linte wore her monster-hide hood over her head to cover her face. She didn't want to ruin her favorite pelt with blood, but she had no choice. She curled up in her pelt and braced herself.

"Hup," said a brown-haired young boy with a large backpack like a porter's as he entered the safe point. He looked over at Linte and froze, his eyes round with surprise. After a brief pause, he gave her a little bow and said, "Oh, hello."

"Ah. Uh, hello," she replied almost involuntarily. He was so far off from what she'd been expecting that she couldn't help it.

"Excuse me," the boy said and made his way into a corner.

He was remarkably reserved and unassuming, in stark contrast to the ruffians who made up the majority of dungeon-goers; he was like a child who'd come to picnic.

Linte couldn't help but wonder how he was even able to get here. She

glanced at the entrance to see if the boy had come with someone taking care of him, but there was no other soul in sight. He was definitely working solo.

The boy took a cushion out of his bag and sat on it, then brought out a cup, some water, and food as if he didn't have a care in the world. Seeing his casual demeanor, she suddenly remembered the rumors about the Lone Porter she'd been hearing recently. Supposedly, the Lone Porter looked just like this boy. He was said to be innocent-looking, to wear unusual clothing, and to carry a big backpack. He was also said to dislike violence, to avoid dangerous places, and to often appear at safe points in low-and medium-depth-level floors. And when he encountered injured Divers—"Would you like me to cast healing magic on you?"—he was said to say such words in a strangely apologetic tone.

## §

Today, I was in a somewhat-difficult floor in the Gandakia Dungeon. I was on route one, somewhere between the Grotto and the City. I'd been debating if I should blast some Moss Faces with my trusty purple magic, take a picture of the giant statue there with my camera, and then edit the crap out of it to make some fantastic fake photos.

Route one was the beginner route everyone loved, but it suddenly spiked in difficulty after a certain point. The Smoky Verdigris City at depth level 22 was especially guilty of this. The wraiths and ghostly monsters there were really hard to deal with unless one had means of defeating incorporeal enemies. It looked like a ghost town full of abandoned buildings, and it was actually a ghost town full of ghosts. The City was teeming with Hunters, Slenders, and Shadow Stalkers that tried to stop me by threatening my mental peace and giving me a heart attack, which were very unmonsterlike attack methods. I could only pray I wouldn't die from shock.

I was currently heading beyond the City for the Machine Temple at depth level 38. The interior of the Machine Temple was very techy, and the floor looked like a futuristic mechanical labyrinth.

I'd been there just once before when Lion-Maru had taken me to the First Door right next to the entrance. I remembered that roaming around there had been a lot of mechy things, like those killer-automaton-looking machines you'd

find in science fiction movies and anime. They'd blared annoyingly loud sirens and fired off machine guns when they'd detected intruders, which had completely ruined my image of a fantasy world. Lion-Maru? He'd dodged the bullets by reaction alone as if they'd been nothing. He literally was a manga or anime character. I had no idea who'd made that place, but the technology there and what I'd seen on my adventure with Lion-Maru a while back made me think Do-Melta had had a very prosperous civilization in the distant past.

The Machine Temple was said to be so difficult that even major teams that specialized in diving gave up on exploring it. I'd heard that they couldn't even open the aforementioned First Door.

That place was practically begging me to conquer it. The thought of being the first one to do so was pretty appealing, and I wanted to try, though I wasn't too keen on the fame that would come with it. Anyway, the reason I hadn't challenged that place yet was obviously my level. Depth levels were a measure of the difficulty in clearing an area, and it wasn't necessarily tied directly to the levels of the monsters there. I wanted to make sure I was high-level enough to solo dive there safely.

Now, I'd entered a safe point just before the Smoky Verdigris City, I began to plan a path for me to get through the floor easily. On top of that, I decided to have some cup noodles and orange juice, then plaster myself with ofuda talismans I'd bought at a local shrine back home. This was when I noticed a mass of fur in the safe point that looked like a set of onesie pajamas.

"Hmm?" I said, second-guessing what I was seeing.

Curled up in front of me was something clad in what looked like the pelt of some sort of wolf-bear hybrid monster. A pair of ears and a nose were on the pelt with round holes punctured in where the eyeballs would've been. It was cutely stylized like a set of onesie pajamas, but it was definitely a bizarre outfit. I remember a hunter in a famous anime movie wearing something like this, so I felt a strange sense of familiarity.

But now that I thought about it, I realized I actually knew people who dressed like this: Adorners. Along with the Long-Ears, they were one of Do-Melta's ultimate races. They were blessed by the goddess Ruvi the Red, and I'd heard

they came from a region called Heznar. They were known for wearing the skins and bones of the monsters they'd defeated, usually in the form of waist wraps or outerwear. I assumed the person(?) in front of me was also an Adorner. There was a giant pair of scissors nearby, so I assumed they were a Ripper, one of this world's unusual combat classes. They seemed to be wary of me and were inconspicuously adjusting their position to keep me in sight.

I took out a cushion from my Dimension Bag and sat my butt down on it when I noticed something.

*Smells like blood.*

There was that unmistakable metallic smell in the air, and I noticed there were bloodstains all around the Adorner. They were apparently injured.

So, I asked if they wanted me to heal them.

"Healing magic? Are you a mage?" asked the Adorner.

"Yeah, I guess I am," I said.

"And you're offering to heal me."

"That's right. I still have plenty of mana, so I thought I'd ask in case you didn't have any honey potions."

I offered healing in the most cheerful tone I could muster, but I must've sounded shady, and now they sounded like they were on guard. Their muffled voice made it hard for me to tell their gender.

"So, what are you gonna ask for in return?" asked the Adorner.

"Nothing, really," I said.

They said nothing, clearly suspicious of me. It was only natural; some people randomly healed others, like in online games, but not all of them did so without ulterior motives. There were those who demanded money or loot in exchange, and unfortunately, there were scumbags out there who wanted something else when dealing with women all by themselves. Judging by this person's constant wariness and hint of hostility, they seemed to suspect I was one of those bad guys.

"Sounds fishy," they said nervously. "I don't trust people who go around

healing people for no reason.”

“Ah, right. Some people are like that,” I said.

“Why would you heal strangers?”

“I dunno, out of kindness?” I said. “There are people who can’t ignore those who are in need, right? They think, ‘I don’t want anything in return! I just want them to be happy!’”

“I can’t understand that at all. Why would they do something like that when it doesn’t benefit them? It’s insane.”

“You think so? People feel good when others show gratitude to or compliment them. I think it’s just an extension of that. If you heal others as a gesture of kindness, they tend to appreciate it. The feel-good chemicals that the brain releases from receiving the gratitude they get in return can be addicting. In the end, they’re really doing it for themselves; they just don’t know it or don’t wanna admit it.”

The Adorner made a thoughtful noise for a moment, then they nodded their hooded head. “When you put it that way, it kind of makes sense. I don’t know about that brain stuff though.”

“Right?”

“But in other words, that makes them hypocrites. It’s a really rotten way of thinking. Shitty, really. Makes me wanna puke.”

“You don’t pull any punches, do you?” I said.

This person had a remarkably sharp tongue. They were probably as toxic as the monsters in the Night Soil Swamps.

“So, are you one of those types who’ll make me wanna puke?” they asked.

“I’m just doing this because God asked me to. He said there have been a lot of Divers lately who die even after making it to safe points, so he wanted me to help if I could,” I explained.

“Ah.”

The Adorner seemed to understand. According to Ricky, the gods of this world

descended to the mortal realm every once in a while. They usually did things to help people, but occasionally, they asked others to act in their stead when they were too busy. The Adorner must be familiar with such rumors too, and they looked at me much more understandingly than before.

“So, what do you say?” I asked. “I think you should have your wounds healed, but I won’t push it if you don’t want me to.”

They went quiet, which I took to mean they were considering it. There was no doubt that getting healed would be the right move though. Their injury was pretty severe, judging by the amount of blood they’d lost. They seemed to have administered first aid on themselves, but the smell of blood had gotten stronger since I’d first arrived. I wouldn’t go as far as saying that trying to get home in this state would be suicide, but I couldn’t recommend it either. I mean, I was no doctor, but I could only imagine them falling over and dying midway. Thinking “I’m still fine” or “Just one more” in the dungeon as if they were *Shiren* or *Torneko* would be the wrong way to go. You had to use whatever was at your disposal, or you’d die without the chance to use it. There was no such thing as being too careful in the Gandakia Dungeon. Yet, the Adorner still hadn’t nodded their head. They were either super suspicious of others by nature, too prideful to accept help from others, or both.

“Just think of it like you’re using me. You’re having trouble trusting me because you feel like you aren’t the one in charge here. Instead of thinking of it like I’m the one healing you, just think you’re *letting* me heal you,” I suggested.

“You’re saying it’s just a matter of perspective?”

“Exactly. You’re making me heal you, then you’re gonna walk away without paying me a single coin. You’re taking advantage of my kindness. If you think of it that way, there’s no downside for you.”

“But that makes me sound awful,” complained the Adorner.

“Then you can casually give me something as thanks or something, and you’d be a good person again.”

“I don’t want to. Why should I give you something of mine?”

*Come on! What do you want from me?*

“I dunno... You’re being really unreasonable, you know that?” I said.

“No way. You won’t find many who are more reserved than I am,” said the Adorner, playing dumb. They seemed to be strangely particular about this.

I then realized they weren’t being facetious. It’d been a while since I’d met someone with a personality like this.

“Okay, then how about this?” I said. “Let’s just say I’m a weirdo who just can’t stand *not* healing people, and I’m going to heal you against your will.”

“That’s an odd thing to say about yourself.”

“I think having a good context is important. Anyway, here,” I said and cast the generic spell Binding Hold on the Adorner. Chains made of glowing purple mana immediately bound their hands together.

“Hey, what are you doing?!” they protested.

As they struggled, the monster-pelt hood came down, revealing a boyish girl with neck-length ultramarine hair.

“Now you can’t resist. Surrender to my healing! Ha ha ha ha!” I cackled in character according to my made-up scenario.

The Adorner gave me a dubious stare and said, “You seem like a pervert. You aren’t acting, are you?”

“I told you; I made this context up!” I said.

“But it suits you way too well.”

“Never mind that. I’m healing you now,” I said as I reached for her pelt cowl.

“Hey! What do you think you’re doing?!” she yelled.

“I mean, I can’t treat your wounds if I can’t see them,” I pointed out.

“That’s...true, but—”

“That’s what I thought. This is an emergency, so if you’ll excuse me,” I said as I removed her cowl.

Her outfit underneath was very casual. She wore no top or bottom under the cowl and just had bleached cotton wrapped around her body like bandages. I

was the one who'd undressed her, but I felt like I was doing something extremely obscene. I might have been breaking some laws here.

"Th-This is just medical treatment. Medical treatment..." I mumbled.

"What? You can't have your wits about you unless you say that out loud?" she asked.

"Can you blame me?! How was I supposed to know this is all you're wearing underneath?!"

*Okay, calm down,* I told myself.

I tried not to look at any of her sensitive parts as I first wiped away the blood with a wet towel.

"I'll be touching your body now," I said.

"You really *are* a pervert. The way you said that confirms it."

"I told you, I'm not—"

"Yeah, yeah. Sure you aren't one, pervert."

The Adorner wasn't listening to a word I said, but she didn't seem to care all too much. Maybe it was because she was from Do-Melta. I did notice that the people here had very different standards for shame from person to person—though, come to think of it, that was true for my world too.

As I examined her, I realized her side was stained red. The injury was far worse than I'd imagined.

"You've been holding in a lot of pain this whole time, haven't you?" I asked.

"I guess," she said.

"This is seriously bad."

Clearly, she was the type who couldn't stand showing weakness to others.

I continued, "Yeah, I'll need to heal you."

"You really are—"

"Whatever you say," I interrupted, "you aren't changing my mind. I can't leave you like this."



“Thanks,” she said after a brief pause as she averted my eyes.

I cast healing magic on her, and her wounds closed up without leaving a trace; her complexion improved too. Then, I dispelled my binding magic, and I knew she had some words to say.

“Anyway, you’re a strange one,” she said. “Don’t you get that a lot?”

I said nothing.

“Thought so,” she said.

It wasn’t true. Scrae and Ricky did call me weird sometimes, but I knew I wasn’t as weird as Sensei or Lion-Maru. Don’t tell me I shouldn’t be comparing myself to them.

“Why are you on guard like that?” asked the Adorner.

“Well, I thought you may attack me for healing you without permission,” I said.

“Why would I do that?” she asked.

“I guess you won’t, huh.”

“But I’ll be charging you a fee for letting you heal me.”

“Huh?! What do you mean?!”

“Come on; pay up. The context is important, right?”

“Actually, I’m starting to think that it doesn’t matter. Not one bit,” I said.

There was no way I was giving her money for healing her.

“Okay, that’s enough kidding around,” she said. “Thanks again.”

“Oh, don’t thank me. You can direct your thanks to God’s statue,” I said.

“Which god?”

“Mr. Ameithys.”

“Ah, the big boss,” she said.

“Hmm? I don’t think he’s the big boss,” I said.

“What do you mean? Lord Ameithys is the greatest god in this world.

Everyone knows that.”

“But when I last saw him, he said he can’t disobey his wife because she’s the greatest god in their family. I thought Ornyx the Black was the greatest of the gods.”

The Adorner paused, then said, “Come to think of it, you did mention earlier that God asked you to help.”

I seemed to have a different perception of the gods compared to the people of this world. Well, the wife being the strongest one in the household was a thing no matter what world you were from.

“My name is Linte Arty. I’m a dungeon mercenary,” said Linte.

“Oh, you’re a dungeon mercenary.”

Dungeon mercenaries were basically freelance Divers. That sounded rather odd, but these mercenaries earned daily wages working as bodyguards for teams and solo Divers. Folks who didn’t like interacting with others and dealing with the hassles of joining a team but were nervous about diving alone tended to become mercenaries who worked exclusively in the dungeon. That was pretty much what Ricky did too. Of course, the levels of these mercenaries ranged from really low to really high, and the weak ones were basically parasites while the strong ones were super stoic about their work. This person was probably the latter considering a parasite probably wouldn’t turn down an offer for free healing.

“I’m Kudo Akira,” I said. “Kudo is my family name, and Akira is my first name.”

“I’ll remember your name. You really helped me today,” said Linte.

“Glad to be of service,” I said.

I watched Linte leave the safe point, and I thought to myself that I’d been helping people a lot lately.

I’d thought this would be the end of our exchange, but soon, the Adorner peeked back inside and said, “Oh, do you have any food? I’m hungry.”

“I should’ve known...” I said to myself.

Never underestimate an Adorner’s appetite.

## Floor Thirty-Four: Emergency Directive? Overcome the Mystery Porridge!

It could've been another fun day of leveling by hunting bats in the dungeon—except it wasn't. My activities in Do-Melta were dependent on my mood. I grinded levels when I felt like it, and I did other stuff if the mood struck me. I'd taken care of my school stuff, so I thought I deserved that freedom. My basic activities here included eating stuff, drinking stuff, pseudocooking, and exploring Freida looking for bargains. But today, I was on an unprecedentedly difficult mission.

The stage today was set at the Divers Guild dining hall, where Divers gathered in search of food and respite. The food here provided Divers with the energy to get through the day with a side of hell and despair. Looking around, I saw all sorts of people: some were sipping on drinks and sitting idly like I usually did after school, a male Diver was hitting on a pretty Diver lady, a giddy Diver was sitting in front of the most expensive plate of food on the menu, which he'd ordered, someone was carefully grooming their tail and ears with a comb, and someone was sticking their finger in a pot of honey and licking it. With the wide range of people and situations here, this was the perfect place for people-watching.

This place was also open twenty-four seven for people who went on overnight dives, so it wasn't uncommon to see bodies slumped over chairs late at night or early in the morning as if this were an airport or ferry terminal. They weren't dead though, so you shouldn't mess with them.

On my table were various seasonings, my trusty cassette stove, and two cloches to cover my food. The cloches were silver dome things used to hide ingredients and dishes like the ones on Dotch Cooking Show or Iron Chef. They were originally meant to keep food warm and to increase customers' anticipation for the dishes being served, but I digress.

The reason I'd prepared these things was because I was about to take on a

virtually impossible mission of nightmarish difficulty.

“Kudo Akira’s Few Minutes Cooking!” I announced like I was in a certain daytime TV program.

“Oooh!” Scrae clapped, her silver ponytail bouncing around with the movement. She was as adorable as ever.

As usual, I was cooking in the corner of the dining hall using ingredients I’d gathered in the dungeon. I’d invited Scrae because I would’ve felt lonely doing it by myself.

“My assistant today will be Miss Scrael, representing the Long-Ears!” I said.

Though, Scrae didn’t introduce herself or say some assistantish line like “Happy to be here today!”

“Akira, Akira, how long are you gonna keep up this lame act?” she complained.

“It’s not lame,” I said. “Getting into the role for these things is important. It makes you feel like a real chef, and you want the food to be good, right?”

“Everything you bring is good. I can’t wait,” she said excitedly.

Unfortunately for her, I was about to betray her expectations and send her to rock bottom, like Avīci or Cocytus from the Divine Comedy. There was no flaming castle or frozen Satan, but I’d bet some Zimbabwean dollars that she was gonna be upset with me until the next time I brought her some *actual* good food.

“Okay, our main ingredient today will be one of the guild dining hall’s three disgusting dishes: the Mystery Porridge!” I announced as if I was on a cooking show, revealing the porridge under the cloche with a smile on my face.

Scrae made an unintelligible sound of shock and confusion as expected. This infamous dish was practically a weapon, and it was the very dish responsible for sending Scrae and her emissary friend into the pits of despair. See “Those Who Are Ruled by Soy Sauce” for more details.

As soon as I removed the cloche, Scrae’s face became completely devoid of emotion; even the highlights of her eyes disappeared. She must be getting

flashbacks.

After a pause, she turned away and said, “I just remembered I have something to do. Bye, Akira.”

“Wait, wait, wait! Don’t go!” I said, trying to stop her as she prepared to leave.

“No, no, no, no! I can’t drink that stuff!”

“Yes, you can! Probably, maybe, possibly!”

“Akira, that stuff isn’t food. It’s a monster in the form of porridge or maybe some sort of poison,” said Scrae.

“No, it isn’t. Sure, it might taste monstrously bad and has some poison-swamp-like qualities to it, but look, other people are drinking it too. See?”

I pointed at a group of Divers who were having an early dinner, and before them were bowls of the same Mystery Porridge. They scooped portions of it into their mouths as their eyes spun. As soon as their spoons went into their mouths, they coughed loudly, maybe because of an involuntary reaction to the sourness or bitterness, but they forced the porridge down their throats with sheer willpower. It nearly brought tears to my eyes—though I couldn’t help but wonder how no one had died from it yet.

What was up with it anyway? There was this strange phenomenon where people were compelled to drink the porridge even though they didn’t want to. Maybe it had some sort of illicit substance in it like those ramen from a case in a foreign country a while ago where someone laced them with powdered poppy plants. No one would be able to tell if they’d mixed sketchy stuff in the food, so there had to be something addictive in it we didn’t know about.

“I guess these Divers are inhuman if they’d drink that,” said Scrae.

“We’re Divers too, and we’re drinking this...” I pointed out.

If Divers were inhuman, so were we. I mean, our physical capabilities made us kind of inhuman already, but still. The only ones who were truly inhuman in that sense were Sensei and Lion-Maru. We were completely normal compared to them.

The porridge in front of me bubbled like a poison swamp. It probably would look just like one if I dumped some purple food coloring in there.

Scrae shot a stern look at it and asked, "What are you gonna do with that?"

"I'm gonna season it so anyone can drink it," I said.

"Impossible! No way! You can't! It's bad even with shoy sauce. I've never tried, but I know," said Scrae.

I remembered how she'd refused to add soy sauce to it because she claimed it'd be a waste of soy sauce. She loved soy sauce, but even she didn't believe that dousing the porridge in the stuff would make it taste any better.

"You're right," I said. "Making this taste better won't be an easy task. That's why we're gonna season it properly. I brought everything we need to pull it off."

"What did you bring?"

"Behold this giant clam I found in the Submerged City!" I exclaimed and showed off tonight's key ingredient.

"A ghost clam!" said Scrae, her ears twitching.

Ghost clams were giant bivalves found in the Submerged City at depth level 18. They looked like big clams, and my godly translation powers translated them as "clams," so they were probably clams. The word "ghost" in its name made it sound like some sort of apparition that spit out mirages, but I was probably the only one who thought so.

The ghost clams were dangerously good. These were even bigger than the non-native quahogs, and they tasted like clams but with tenfold the umami. Ghost clams were known to be one of the tastiest ingredients found in the dungeon, and they were so good that even Chorus Seals often fought over them. Those seals usually spent all day relaxing in the sun, but the looks in their eyes changed whenever they spotted one of these tasty bivalves.

Scrae seemed to have deduced what was coming next. "Don't tell me you're gonna use this?"

"I am," I said.

“No. I can’t allow that. You’re desecrating food. That’s punishable by death,” she said.

“That’s a bit much, don’t you think?” I asked.

“You’d be guilty of contempt of food. Unforgivable,” she said, condemning me with her made-up criminal law.

“But I brought it just for this occasion,” I protested.

“I’ll take it from you even if I have to kill you.”

“Again, that’s a bit much!”

“That ghost clam will taste better if you just cook it normally,” said Scrae.

“That’s true, but— Wait, have you tried these with soy sauce?” I asked.

“Ah! I haven’t! Let’s try it! Right now! Gimme that!” said Scrae as she excitedly reached for the ghost clams.

“Wh-Whoa! Hold on!”

“I’ll take it from you even if—”

“Enough of that! And calm down! I have more.”

I took my spare ghost clam out of the cooler box in my Dimension Bag, then Scrae placed a few silver coins on the table.

“Pleasure doing business with you,” I said.

“To be honest, I want to buy your entire stock,” said Scrae.

“That would ruin today’s plans,” I said.

“You shouldn’t perform such a blasphemous ritual. Don’t do it.”

She went as far as to call my challenge “blasphemous.” Was it going to lower the sanity of whoever was going to witness it or something? Maybe with a critical failure on a 1d6? Would they go crazy when they discover the truth? The soup did seem like it could’ve been made by an elephant statue from the Call of Cthulhu game.

Scrae put a wire rack on the cassette stove and began grilling the ghost clam on it. She stared as it cooked slowly, drool running down the side of her mouth.

It was strange how this pretty girl became so dopey whenever food was involved.

“This will definitely taste delicious with shoy sauce,” she said.

She was right; shellfish always went well with soy sauce. This is the law of the universe.

After being heated for some time, the clam opened wide. Scrae immediately poured soy sauce on it, and the sauce bubbled on the piping hot shell and released a fragrant aroma into the air.

“Ahhh...” breathed Scrae in ecstasy.

She could eat three bowls of rice with the smell of cooked clam and soy sauce alone.

She picked up the hot ghost clam with gloved hands and placed it on a big plate. The juices from the clam, mixed with soy sauce, formed a sort of soup, and there was a ridiculous amount of that, maybe even too much. The soup alone could’ve been a dish in itself.

Scrae scooped some of it with a spoon and tasted it.

“Yum!” she exclaimed.

She then cut off a piece of clam meat and put it in her mouth, then—silence. She simply repeated the process, cutting off a piece of clam meat and eating it with intense, single-minded concentration. Anyone who interrupted her now would need to prepare to eat her entire arsenal of Jinshu techniques. Not a single speck would be left of any poor fool who dared get in her way. She’d probably incinerate them with Erupting God Finger or something.

Anyway, the clam looked delicious. The juices that seeped out as she cut it looked incredibly appetizing.

I knew Scrae wouldn’t be back for a while, so I plotted to desecrate the food while she was busy. I took the ghost clam, which I’d already rinsed and purged of sand, placed it in a pot, then filled the pot with water. I boiled the bivalve to make some stock, then I added the main ingredient: Mystery Porridge. Finally, I threw in some chopped green onions and announced, “I will now add miso, an



ingredient made from fermented soybeans!”

“That’s another new seasoning,” said Scrae.

“It’s something like the stuff that gets squeezed out when making soy sauce,” I explained.

“It’s related to shoy sauce?” she asked.

“Yeah, something like that.”

That was a pretty lazy explanation, but it seemed good enough for Scrae. She scooped some miso with her finger and licked it. Just like the time I’d first introduced soy sauce to her, her actions made me wonder if she was secretly Japanese. Her reaction was similar this time too, and she contentedly said, “I like this too.” If I’d brought some cucumbers here, they would’ve likely vanished in a matter of seconds.

“You’re gonna put this stuff in the pot?” she asked.

“Yep,” I said.

“That’s your second offense. You’re going to prison.”

“I’m already convicted?!”

As we went back and forth for a while, I added the miso to the porridge and mixed it around. My ghost clam Mystery Porridge miso congee was complete.

“It’s ready!” I said.

“It’s done... I’ve failed my people by allowing this sacrilege to happen,” lamented Scrae.

“Says the one who was too busy eating a clam. Anyway, let’s eat,” I said.

“I’ll bet on the million-in-one—no, billion-in-one chance that it turned out good.” Scrae put her hands together as if in prayer.

I wasn’t against making bets with bad odds, but as a plebeian who wasn’t big on taking risks, I preferred to avoid them.

We each scooped some porridge and ate it.

“It’s not good.” I heard her say, and I agreed.

“At least it’s edible now,” I said.

“It’s *just* edible,” she said. “You’ve killed the ingredients. You’ve murdered them. You’ve deliberately destroyed all their good qualities. You must have a grudge against them.”

“I can’t argue with that,” I said.

It was as if all that delicious soup from the clam had vanished like magic simply by adding it to the porridge. If I were to be put on trial for this, no lawyer would be able to get me out of this mess, and I’d have no choice but to jump into an instrument case. I could never increase my earnings by crashing into a dresser ever again. I hadn’t expected the taste to get completely killed simply by adding the Mystery Porridge. It was far more formidable than I’d expected.

“Are you gonna eat it?” asked Scrae.

“M-Maybe we’ll save it for later,” I said. It was pretty pathetic of me, I know.

I wanted to get the taste out of my mouth, so I threw my last ghost clam in a pot of water, then added miso to it as the water turned cloudy.

“You should’ve done this from the beginning,” pointed out Scrae.

“Well, you aren’t wrong, but that would’ve been so ordinary,” I said.

“If you seek stimulation in food, all you’ll get is regret.”

“Ugh, I don’t like spicy food so I can’t disagree,” I said.

I put the miso soup into two bowls, and we each had a taste.

“Mmm,” said Scrae.

“Ah, can’t go wrong with miso soup with clams,” I said.

It was a wonder how something this delicious could end up so much worse after adding porridge. Cooking was hard.

Scrae’s ears twitched happily. She seemed to be in a good mood as she sipped more miso soup. After we finished our soup, Scrae looked at the leftover porridge mix, and her expression fell visibly.

“What are we gonna do with this?” she asked.

“I’m not sure... Want some?” I asked.

“No, that would ruin my palate all over again.”

“Thought so. I’ll finish it,” I said.

I made it, so I had to take responsibility. But just as I was about to give up, a familiar face showed up at the perfect time.

“Oh, hey, Ricky. Nice timing!”

And so, we seemed to need much more time to make the Mystery Porridge more palatable.

What had happened to Ricky, you asked? I felt sorry for him, but I’d had him feel the same despair I had. I’d given him some of my leftover clam miso soup and a few bottles of cola as a token of apology, so he was probably fine. That wouldn’t be considered an act of terrorism...I think.

## Floor Thirty-Five: The Horror, the City of Verdigrisy Smoke!

I'll be honest: I was in a very gloomy mood, *super* gloomy. Even if I put it mildly, my mood was in the darkest pits of darkness. I felt like an exercise-hating kid on the morning of a school field day or a marathon; either that or I felt like someone who hated writing but was forced to write a book report. I felt worse than "having a dark cloud over my head" on the last day of summer break.

What could have me feeling so down in the dumps, you ask? The reason had to do with the dungeon, of course. Indeed, my melancholy was related to the floor known as the City, one of the three horror floors of the Gandakia Dungeon at the Free City of Freida—well, it wasn't just related, but that floor *was* the reason itself.

The official name of the floor was the Smoky Verdigris City, and it was found at depth level 22. At my level, I wouldn't exactly call it a walk in the park, but its depth level was low enough that I wouldn't be in serious danger unless I let my guard down completely. The issue with this place wasn't that the monsters roaming in it were really strong or anything like that. Its interior was similar to that of the Visceral Cave, which looked like the inside of some intestines; that should give you an idea of what type of place it was. Just being there depleted my sanity with a 1d6 or maybe a 2d10 roll. On top of that, the Smoky Verdigris City was known as one of the three horror floors for a reason: ghosts appeared here. Well, they were technically monsters like wraiths, but they were the same as ghosts to me. Djinnis, demons, phantoms; I didn't know the difference. I wanted to call on a hellish teacher to save me.

Anyway, it was my day off, so I'd been diving since the morning. But this place was always night like the Evernight Meadows. They said, "After every dark night comes a glorious morning of a new day," but that didn't apply here. Well, it wasn't as if tomorrow wouldn't come, but still. Furthermore, the ground was

completely black on this floor, and only the moon shone in the night sky.

Other than the darkness, the other defining characteristic of this place was the bunch of abandoned buildings. Unlike the ruined towns you'd see in Middle Eastern movies, they were more American. There were streets lined with a bunch of old houses with their windows and doors all boarded up. These ghost towns reminded me of the Undercity I'd visited with Lion-Mar, but that place wasn't quite the same. The Undercity was scary too, but this place was actually scarier because of the ghosts. That kind of thing was scarier than strong monsters for me, though I still didn't want to go back to the Undercity ever again. The Visceral Cave? That place was even worse than here, obviously.

At least there weren't any clowns here. If a clown monster had appeared, I'd never return here again. Such a place would be like a second Visceral Cave. I didn't have coulrophobia, but anyone would pee their pants and faint if someone dressed as a clown attacked them in the middle of the night. That actually happened in the States, making that place actually scarier than this floor. Those pranks really should die; anyone who did that sort of thing didn't deserve any mercy whatsoever.

Anyway, I wasn't diving solo today, and I felt like I haven't been doing so a lot lately. Today, I was here with Sensei. What was that? Sensei was pretty much like a ghost too? Don't worry, I'd already mentioned that out loud and gotten thoroughly punished for it. It would've been nice if Sensei were in her true form like that time we'd gone to the Paradise Hot Springs, but for that, I'd have to do something to remedy her situation first.

"Your legs have been trembling nonstop," pointed out Sensei.

"I can't help it! Real ghosts appear here, you know?! I'm not a commoner who accidentally wandered into the world of Fatal Frame or something!"

"A commoner, huh?" said Sensei. "Can a commoner use magic?"

"Well, maybe not a commoner, but I still consider myself a plebeian."

"Sure you are," she said in an unconvinced tone.

Those black band things coiled around Sensei as usual, and she was enshrouded in a misty black aura. She was acting like her usual enigmatic self,

but she never failed to punish me if I ever said anything out of line.

I, on the other hand, didn't feel like my usual self.

"Ugh, why did I come here..." I said.

"Look who's talking. You got all giddy and fired up to go just because I gave you a little physical contact," pointed out Sensei.

"Curse you, me from an hour ago," I lamented.

"You'd probably do the same thing even if you'd gone back to the past. You only care about living in the moment."

"That isn't true. You won't find many people as sagacious as I am," I said.

"You're careful, I'll give you that, but look how easily you succumbed to my coaxing and seduction. You're hopeless."

"Ugh, you cheated."

"You call that cheating? You're just too easy," said Sensei.

That wasn't true. Any man would feel giddy if a girl pressed her body against him. It was a completely natural and correct reaction.

Anyway, you might wonder why we were here. Well, if you got afflicted with a powerful curse, all other things didn't seem as scary. Also, when fighting terrifying things, you wanted to send other terrifying things against them in a "fight fire with fire" kind of way. I was sure the "curse" and "terrifying things" in this instance were obvious without explicitly pointing them out.

"You're thinking something you shouldn't be, aren't you?" said Sensei.

"N-N-N-No, of course not! What makes you think I'm having rude thoughts about you?!" I stuttered.

"You pretty much just admitted it. Want me to squeeze your balls?"

"Eek! Please don't! You'll turn me into a girl!"

One of her black bands transformed into a hand doing a squeezing gesture, striking fear into my heart. Some people probably enjoyed that sort of thing, but this was a matter of life or death for me. I squirmed around to escape the band, fearing for my very life. Then, I quickly prostrated myself, lowering my

head to the ground in a gesture of apology. This saved me because she couldn't reach the goods in this position. She eventually gave up and forgave me, though I thought I'd heard her clicking her tongue in disappointment. I had a feeling she'd punish me in some other way eventually, but I decided not to think about that. Sure, I was just trying to escape reality, but you had to pick your battles. I knew I didn't stand a chance against Sensei at my current level; my only option was to try and land little hits, then flee immediately.

"Anyway, you're more geared up than usual today," pointed out Sensei.

"You never know what will happen here," I said. "I brought all sorts of things so that I'll be prepared for anything."

As she'd pointed out, I looked a bit—well, a lot different than usual. I still had my usual safari top and bottoms, but I had a ring on my head with candles attached to it instead of my safari hat. It was adorned with colorful charms I'd gotten from a local shrine back home, and I'd also brought a gohei, which was a stick with paper streamers attached that priests carried around. I might have looked a bit funny, but I didn't let that bother me.





Sensei pointed at a piece of paper sticking out of my jacket pocket.

“What’s that paper with writing on it, Akira?” she asked.

“This? It’s a talisman called an ofuda. I got it from a local shrine back home,” I explained.

“A talisman?”

“Yes, it’s for exorcizing and warding off ghosts. It seems to be effective here too.”

Sacred talismans had been some of the items I’d always brought with me ever since diving here for the first time. While I carried them, wraiths stopped charging at me at full speed, and Haunters stopped trying to possess me. They actually had some effect.

“Hmm, I do sense some power from it,” noted Sensei.

“I guess my local shrine is the real deal.”

*Thank you, local shrine.*

I didn’t know what god was being worshiped there, but I was technically a believer in Ameithys, so all I could do was thank them. As I was thinking about donating a thousand yen or so the next time I walked by the shrine, Sensei spoke up.

“Hey, are you trying to move that thing close to me?”

“Huh? What do you mean of course I wouldn’t do that ha ha ha oh come on Sensei you always make me sound like a bad guy sheesh,” I blurted quickly.

“I’ve always told you: your flaw is that big mouth of yours.”

“B-Begone, evil spirit!” I shouted.

“Who are you calling an evil spirit? Anyway, I actually want to see what would happen if you stick one on me.”

“Do you think it’ll be effective against those things around you?” I asked.

“It isn’t powerful enough for that. The effect would be negligible if anything.”

“I see.”

I'd suspected Sensei was in this state because of some sort of curse, and that seemed to be the case. Thinking the talisman might be effective against it, I stuck one on a black band coiling around her.

"Hmm, I feel like it got smaller, or thinner... Maybe a little bit," I said.

"Yeah, it really is just a little bit though," agreed Sensei.

"Maybe if I stuck a bunch of them on you, I could see through the bands."

"That sounds like a perverted comment."

"Well, actually, this is an important component in solving this mysterious mechanism. Since I'm assigned this issue, I'll need to investigate through trial and error using high-priority ideas. Though we'll, of course, need to reach consensus. I won't be able to achieve a resolution without acquiring evidence in that manner."

"Akira, using big words isn't gonna make you sound any smarter," said Sensei.

"Nothing gets past you, Sensei," I said.

She grabbed the talisman with a black band and tossed it aside, then she continued inspecting my belongings.

"What's in that bag?" she asked.

"Salt," I said. "Just some sodium chloride from the market."

"Salt? What? Are you gonna cook or something?"

"No, no, I'd throw it at wraith-type monsters," I said.

"Sounds like a waste."

"Actually, this is generally how salt is used for purification. And salt is cheap in my world."

"Salt is cheap, huh? Wars have been fought over this stuff," pointed out Sensei.

"That was true in my world a long time ago too. Nowadays, salt manufacturing technology is so advanced that we stopped fighting over it," I said, then reached into a bag with the name of an island from the Seto Inland Sea on it.

“Anyway, eat this purifying salt!” I shouted as I threw a fistful of salt at her, but she easily swatted it away.

“Hmm. Unfortunately, it seems ineffective against these things of mine,” said Sensei with disappointment.

“Seems so...”

The talisman had somewhat worked earlier, but the salt was a complete flop. The parts that had touched the salt were unaffected too. I wondered if smoke from burning sage wouldn’t have any purifying effects either. What exactly was this thing afflicting Sensei?

“Okay, it’s time to get going,” she said.

“Got it. But first...” I reached into my backpack and pulled out my main weapon for the day, then I called out with a hoarse voice like that from the original cat robot show, mimicking a familiar jingle, “Ta-da-ta-da-da-da! Instant camera!”

“What weird gizmo did you bring this time?” asked Sensei.

“It isn’t weird,” I said. “I got this from the antique shop my uncle runs.”

“Oh? And what exactly is it?”

“You just click this thing, and it does this.”

I pointed the camera in a random direction and pushed the button, setting off the flash, then a black film emerged from the camera after a pause. We waited for a bit, then the film gradually revealed the shot I’d taken moments before.

“Ah! Interesting. So it copies scenery onto paper,” observed Sensei.

It wasn’t actually paper, but I was impressed by how quickly she’d figured out the camera’s function, considering photographs weren’t even a thing in this world.

“But how is this gonna help us?” she asked.

“We’re gonna take pictures of wraiths with it!” I said. “Come on out, ghosts! Now’s your chance! I welcome you now and now only!”

“Easy to say when you’re hiding behind me. You really are a coward.”

I couldn't help being scared of scary things. The strong wouldn't be afraid to admit things like this—though I fell under the “weak” category.

I continued calling out to the monsters while staying behind Sensei. It didn't take long before a Slender—which I hated with every fiber of my being—responded.

“Aaaaaah!” I shouted. “Get your stupid face outta here! I wasn't calling for you!”

I felt like I was gonna faint.

I hated that thing. I mean, there wasn't a monster here I didn't hate, but still. It was a lanky humanoid monster with a completely black body, and to be honest, it was creepy as hell and super scary. Slenders acted and thought differently from other monsters: they froze where they stood once they were in someone's field of vision, but once the gazes turned away, they moved closer without making a sound. In other words, they basically forced you into a game of red light, green light. *What a nuisance.* You were supposed to play games like that with friends or your pet cat, not with monsters. I hated how they appeared in front of you out of nowhere, and I hated that dreadful feeling I got as soon as I turned away. Horror should only be experienced in video games, if you ask me. I had no idea why dungeon monsters loved playing red light, green light so much. Well, they chased humans around, so maybe it was more like a constant game of tag.

Anyway, I immediately gave that Slender a blast of my lightning magic. It died, of course. It probably would've been fine if it'd been made of rubber or something, but such characters only existed in manga. I was actually kind of glad I was only dealing with monsters here. Magic probably wouldn't work on a real ghost, so that was the only saving grace for me. It was the *one* part I was thankful for in all of this.

I hung around behind Sensei for a while, then the thing I'd been looking for finally arrived.

“Oh, a wraith! All right!”

I readied my Polaroid camera. At that moment, it felt like a firearm in my hand. I looked at the wraith through the viewfinder, adjusted the focus, then

snapped a picture. I moved the camera away from my face, and the wraith was gone.

“Woo-hooooooo! Yes! I did it! My ghost camera works!” I cheered.

The camera automatically developed the photo, and sure enough, the wraith was in the picture.

“So you converted the wraith into light, then sealed it by burning it onto that thing. Crafty usage of your mana,” said Sensei.

“I didn’t think it’d work so well,” I admitted.

As Sensei had pointed out, I’d obscured the wraith’s existence with the flash, then opened the shutter and burned the creature onto the film along with the rest of the image. I hadn’t been sure if it’d work, but the results were exactly what I’d expected.

“This,” I said and showed Sensei the photo as I pretended to be a TV narrator, “is a photograph taken at a certain ghost town overseas. There’s a sense of indescribable melancholy to the abandoned cluster of ruins there. Do you get the picture?”

Sensei said nothing.

“You can see a giant face at the top of the photo,” I went on. “Perhaps it could be a vengeful spirit wandering the ghost town?”

“Akira, save your messing around for when we get out of here,” said Sensei in an exasperated tone.

“Don’t say that! Some people do this for a living!” I said.

“Then they need to get a life,” said Sensei.

But I couldn’t help watching those paranormal programs on TV. I wished there were more of those programs, though you could find that type of content on YouTube year-round these days. There were some pretty scary non-Japanese videos out there too. I hoped these videos would scare the kids of the world so they couldn’t go to the bathroom at night, just like the good old days.

“This is crazy!” I said. “It probably only works on wraiths, but they don’t stand a chance as long as I have some film!”

“What do you plan to do with that ‘photograph’?” asked Sensei.

“Kill it with fire, of course! It’s too fake to post it online anyway.”

“You’re gonna incinerate it?”

“Yes! Death to everything that threatens to ruin my mental stability! Death! Death! Death!” I chanted.

“They bother you that much, huh? I almost feel sorry for you. You’re more frantic than a rabbit.”

“I’ll have you know, rabbits in my world are much more delicate,” I said. “Why are the ones here the way they are anyway?! These rabbits here are like sloths or capybaras wearing rabbit costumes!”

“Beats me. Oh, look, there’s another one.”

“I’ll lock you up in the fridge and freeze youuu!!!!” I screamed madly, snapping one picture after another.

Moments later, I stood there breathing heavily, victorious in my battle—if you could call it that.

“I’m surprised you’re so out of breath when you haven’t moved a step,” said Sensei.

“Sensei...can we go home now?” I asked.

“What? We just got here.”

“I know, but still...”

“Besides, they don’t stand a chance against you, right? So why go home? Get revenge on them to your heart’s content.”

“Well, the thing is that dark and creepy places like this wear on my psyche just by me being here,” I said.

“You only feel that way because of your mindset. Besides, there are some of those cute animals you like too. You know, like those Faceless Sheep. Wanna go visit them?”

“What? They aren’t cute! What the heck are those abominations, anyway?! They’re like a mix between a stuffed sheep doll and a Sarubobo from a souvenir

shop in Hida! They don't even have faces!"

When I'd first encountered one, I'd sought comfort from it, thinking it'd been an adorable animal. Yet, it'd turned out to have no face when it'd turned around. It went without saying that I'd screamed at the top of my lungs.

"How are those things alive, anyway?!" I asked.

"They have mouths, which should be enough," shrugged Sensei.

"They should have eyes and a nose too! Why would they lose those?!" I complained, then sighed. "Sensei, can you please come here by yourself from now on? I'm really on the edge of my mental limit here."

"I don't wanna," she said after a short pause.

"Why not?"

"Because...you don't wanna come here alone either, do you?"

I was surprised to see her depending on me. Putting it that way, I had to admit it didn't feel too bad.

"Heh heh, I guess you're really counting on me, huh?" I said.

"Yeah, you're right about that," she agreed.

"Th-Then maybe I'll keep trying for a little longer."

Yeah, I'd gotten carried away because I'd been so happy. She wasn't the type to rely on me like that, so I couldn't help it—though it didn't last, of course.

## Extra Floor: My Childhood Friend May Be a Glutton

Another day in the Free City of Freida in Do-Melta—actually, today I was in my hometown in Japan. It wasn't as if I was in the other world all the time, so I obviously had a life in this one too. I usually spent time with my family, went to school, hung out with friends, and studied—doing the typical student stuff. Though, I was able to use magic, and my abilities were boosted because of my increased level. In that sense, I was anything but a typical high schooler.

To be honest, not much had been happening in this world that was worth writing home about. I wasn't in any clubs, so I'd been going home after school. I'd hung out with friends here and there, bought some food at a place that had opened recently, and participated in school events. There were also some reports about terrorist incidents on the morning news, but that was about it. It was the same thing, day after day.

"I've been sensing faint evil energies from you lately, Aki."

The person who'd spoken that chuuni line on our way to school was my childhood friend, Masaki Hiro. We'd been calling each other Aki and Hiro respectively since we'd been kids, and we usually walked to school together unless there was some sort of incident in the morning. Growing up, we'd practiced our hero kicks together, and the Lightning Kick move I used with Ameithys Orbit was a fruit of our labor. It went without saying that Hiro's version of the kick was far more powerful than mine, though. What about my level, you ask? It didn't even matter. It made me consider how incredible humans could be. Hiro was an incarnation of potential.

"Evil energies? That sounds kind of dramatic, don't you think?" I asked.

"I'm not being dramatic. I'm just telling it how it is," said Hiro.

Hiro had a tendency to go on long speeches about justice or zip away to beat up a bad guy somewhere no matter what we were doing at the time; it was as if she couldn't help it—not that I wanted to discourage her from beating up bad guys though. Speaking of bad guys, I'd heard there'd been a lot of cases of



people stealing crystal stakes in the other world. But I digress.

Anyway, Hiro did a bunch of quick movements and struck a hero pose. She'd always done this since we were kids.



“Have you been in contact with a bad person lately, Aki? I sense evil pulses emanating from you,” she asked.

“You’ve always been sensitive to that kind of thing. Way more than I am,” I said.

“Of course. As a hero protecting Japan’s peace, I must be keenly aware of the presence of evil so I can protect the weak,” said Hiro, then she nodded deeply.

“*Evil*,” *huh...*? The most obvious answer would probably be...Sensei. She was the only one I knew who’d fall under that category. I didn’t really consider her “evil” though; she was more like a “devil.” I could easily picture her usual look where she wryly and unnervingly chuckled as a shadowy aura flared around her. I couldn’t quite think of anything else that could be considered “evil,” but I couldn’t deny the possibility that she was sensing “evil” because I’d been in contact with monsters.

“Anyway, I’ve been meaning to ask. Have you been busy lately?” I said. “You’re never free after school these days.”

“Yeah, kaijins have been more active lately,” said Hiro. “They’ve been up to no good. You saw the news this morning, didn’t you?”

“Oh, yeah.”

A new terrorist organization had blown up a monument in front of a station. It was a common story, really, though I wasn’t sure why they hated symbols of the city like that. This world was full of its own problems it had to deal with, though none of them had to do with a regular nobody like me.

Hiro went on, “Just the other day, the person inside the Meowdine costume was attacked by Snow Crabbigon and King Crabbilas of Seafood Seven. Meowdine will be out of commission for a while.”

“So that’s what happened,” I said ponderingly.

“Yeah.”

Hiro seemed to be dealing with a lot. If I remembered correctly, Meowdine was a cat-themed stuffed animal mascot for her team. They usually helped evacuate civilians to safety or used loudspeakers to cheer on the other

members. Wearing that stifling costume was tough in itself, but they also had to watch out for kaijin attacks. Their job must've been incredibly difficult. On TV, the subtitles often claimed they were working under the guidance of specialists and that they'd received advanced training, but I doubted that was true.

It was true that attacking the weakest link was a fundamental strategy in combat, but taking out someone who didn't really make a difference in battle probably wasn't going to cause any significant damage. What was up with that? I wondered if those kaijins really thought these things through before taking action. They probably didn't, and that was why they'd been losing time and time again.

*Also, there's no "person inside" Meowdine. Don't say things like that, Hiro.*

"So, is that person okay?" I asked.

"Yeah, just some severe injuries is all," said Hiro.

"I see. 'Severe injuries,' huh? I guess that's better than being in critical condition— Wait, that doesn't sound good at all! You make it sound like it's okay just because they didn't die."

I couldn't hide my resignation at Hiro's immoral comment. Those "Even if I die, someone else will take my place" types of comments were only fine if you were talking about yourself, and it sounded really bad when you were talking about someone else. In fact, it was probably something a villain would say.

"So, we're currently recruiting for someone to go in Meowdine. Why don't you give it a try, Aki? Think of it like a part-time job. You get a decent hourly wage for it too."

"I don't want to risk my life for a part-time job," I said. "Who would say yes after hearing what happened to the last person? It's way too dangerous. Even factory workers would go pale if they heard about the rate of accidents on the job. Not worth it."

"Don't worry, Snow Crabbigon and King Crabbilas have already been defeated," said Hiro.

"Oh, in that case—still no! That's only three including Coconut Crabbie Z. There are still four kaijins left in the group, aren't there?"

“Indeed. There are Don Tuna, Horsehair Crabbian Five, Crawfisher, and Death Lobster. They’re all formidable and surely itching to get revenge.”

“That’s even worse!” I pointed out, but Hiro just nodded to herself.

While the Seafood Seven was a strange group, there was the Meat Four before it, with members that had had incredibly similar and ridiculous names: Hamburg Sensei, Master Steak, Yakiniku Teacher, and Pork Cutlet Sifu. For some reason, this time we had Don Tuna, which was fish themed, with everyone else in the Seafood Seven having crustacean-themed names. And another thing, what was with Horsehair Crabbian Five? The “horse” part made it sound like it wasn’t even seafood related, and it was the only one with a number in its name.

“That reminds me, I heard Horsehair Crabbian Five was defeated,” said Hiro.

“You ‘heard’? Was it the work of some other hero?” I asked.

“Supposedly, some foreign girl with silver hair hit it with such a powerful palm strike that it went flying and exploded into several pieces.”

I fell silent. That sounded awfully familiar. I hadn’t watched it happen from start to finish, but when I’d brought Scrael to this world some time back, there’d been an incident where she’d hit a pervert with an Efflux Wave and blew them up. Maybe that was it.

“And just the other day, we were helped by some hero with dog ears and a tail. I’ve been meaning to thank them if we ever meet again,” Hiro went on.

I still said nothing. That was probably Eldrid, and I hadn’t realized the illusion magic had worn off at that point already. It would’ve been really bad if people hadn’t assumed she was a hero.

Suddenly, Hiro gave me an apologetic look and asked, “Anyway, there’s something I wanted to ask of you.”

“Yeah?” I asked.

“Well, I was hoping you’d...let me see your homework.”

“Whaaat? Again?”

“What am I supposed to do? I’ve been too busy doing hero work.”

“Are you sure it isn’t that you didn’t do it because you just didn’t understand the questions?” I asked.

“O-O-Of course not! Wh-What makes you think a hero protecting Japan would have trouble with mere homework?!” she said in a panic.

“I think you should calm down.”

Hiro was a terrible liar, and it took barely any prodding to get her to slip up. I wondered if she hadn’t expected me to call her out. She really should’ve thought about possible responses ahead of time because she was so bad at this.

“Come on, Aki,” pleaded Hiro. “A hero should always help a friend in need, don’t you think?”

“I don’t remember ever becoming a hero,” I said.

“Oh, but you are. You’ve saved me so many times by showing me your homework in the past. In a way, it’s thanks to you that Japan’s peace has been upheld. So, you can say you’re a hero too.”

“Get out of here with your silly syllogism,” I said. “You’re making words like ‘peace’ and ‘hero’ sound cheap.”

If the world could be saved by doing homework, there’d be peace all the time. After all, there were far more people who did homework than those who didn’t. Maybe that peace was offset by everyone’s sins of cramming all the homework into the last three days of summer break though.

“Well, I guess I don’t mind. Which part did you have trouble with?” I asked.

“Here. The part where you need to write out the kanji,” said Hiro.

“Couldn’t you...just do this yourself?”

“But I don’t know these kanji.”

“I mean, you can just look it up in a dictionary,” I pointed out.

“What are you saying? Looking it up in a dictionary would be dishonest. It’s cheating!” proclaimed Hiro, striking a heroic pose.

“What? You’re *supposed* to look it up in a dictionary! It’s writing practice to help you learn,” I explained.

“The teacher never said that.”

“That’s because it’s common sense.”

“Really? Ugh, I had no idea...”

“Come on, Hiro.”

Yes, my childhood friend Hiro had a strong sense of justice, but she was a huge numbskull. She hated dishonesty, unfairness, and cheating, so this type of thing happened often. She really should help herself before helping others, if you asked me.

“Here, I’ll lend you my kanji dictionary,” I offered.

“Gah, my head starts to hurt whenever I open it for some reason...”

“It’s just your imagination. You should start working on it when we get to school. I’ll give you emotional support,” I said.

“I want the answers, not emotional support...”

“Don’t give up before putting in any effort,” I said, resigned. Then I took the souvenir I’d brought from Do-Melta out of my bag. “Oh yeah, these are for you.”

“What are these?”

“They’re nuts. Try snacking on them sometime.”

I’d brought them from the Gandakia Dungeon, of course. They were grape nuts, one of the many strange dungeon foods. And as the name implied, they were nuts that looked just like grapes. I’d brought too many for my family this time, so I’d decided to share some with Hiro. They were delicious, and they fetched a high price in Freida. The demand for them was so high that Ashley had kept pestering me for the source of the nuts. My dad had been snacking on them while drinking, and they seemed to be very good for his health, especially his liver. When he’d asked me where they were from, I’d given him made-up names that sounded close to real places, like Nicronesia or Lithoania. I was pretty sure he wouldn’t figure it out, so it was fine.

Hiro chewed on the nuts, making satisfying crunching sounds with each bite.

“Om nom.”

“You’re eating them *now*?!” I said.

“Oh! Aki, these are delicious!” said Hiro, ignoring my comment and holding up the nuts with a gleeful look on her face.

“You know—”

“It’s your fault for giving them to me on the way to school. A crime so heinous you’d make kaijins go pale,” she said before eating some more.

“Are you comparing me sharing food to acts of terror?” I asked.

“Yes. Unforgivable. Om nom. Got any more of these?”

“Nope. I gave you the last of them.”

“This isn’t enough at all. They’ll all be gone before class even starts.”

“They weren’t meant to be breakfast, you know,” I pointed out.

“It’s fine, this is just a morning snack.”

Why did everyone around me have such a huge appetite?

“Don’t eat them during class, okay? Seriously,” I said.

“That’s too difficult of a request,” said Hiro.

“More difficult than beating kaijins?” I asked.

“Resisting the urge to eat is harder. No kaijin in this world is more powerful than hunger.”

“You shouldn’t say things like that. It cheapens the peace in our country.”

The kaijins were meat and seafood themed, so she should probably just eat them if she was so hungry.

*And stop doing those hand movements and striking your pose!*

Suddenly, Hiro looked down at herself with a quizzical expression.

“What is it?” I asked.

“Nothing, I just— My body is suddenly full of power.”

“Ah.”



Ingredients from the dungeon that were difficult to acquire tended to be extremely nutritious. They probably included nutrients that couldn't be found in our world too. Maybe they even had similar effects to Senzu Beans. Though, on second thought, potions were definitely the miracle healing items of Do-Melta.

"That melted away all my daily fatigue. I can keep fighting again," said Hiro, full of fighting spirit. Maybe my childhood friend was a battle maniac.

"Anyway, Aki, there's something I've been wondering about," said Hiro.

"Huh? What is it?" I asked.

"Well, behind us..." she said restlessly.

"Behind us? What?" I wondered if some suspicious person had been following us. They'd get clobbered by Hiro if that was the case.

We turned around, but there was no one there—or so I thought, then I caught a glimpse of a small creature with emerald-green fur in the corner of my vision. Carbuncle was walking leisurely on top of a wall, and it cocked its head at us when we noticed each other.

"Mew?" said Carbuncle.

"Waaaaaaaaait a minuuute!" I couldn't help screaming.

I remembered it'd followed me up to the front door of my house to see me off, but I'd thought it'd stayed there. When had it escaped?

Carbuncle jumped onto my head. *Oof*. It was having a hard time balancing there, so I picked it up in my arms.

"You followed me?!" I asked.

"Mew, mew!" it said energetically. It sounded kind of happy for some reason.

Anyway, Carbuncle was a strange creature that didn't exist in this world. It was kind of—no, *very* problematic for it to be walking around outside. I really didn't want it to be seen by others, particularly the person standing right next to me.

But Hiro's reaction was rather unexpected. "Aki, you know this cute little creature?!"

“Uh, well, it’s been visiting my home lately...”

“Really?!” asked Hiro, her eyes sparkling with excitement. “How did he get such an adorable creature to visit his house?” she wondered aloud.

She then reached her arms out toward me. She reminded me of a child asking for a stuffed doll, but I couldn’t tell her that, of course.

“Let me hold it!” she said.

“I thought you’d say that.”

I handed Carbuncle over, and she hugged it tight.

“So soft...” she whispered contentedly.

“Mew,” said Carbuncle.

Hiro giggled, her expression purely blissful. Carbuncle then gave her a nose kiss like a cat.

“Nngh!” she grunted, staggering from the cuteness overload.

“Hiro?!”

Luckily, she didn’t fall over, but her excitement was completely out of control now.

“Aki! Aki! Can I take care of this cutie at my place?!” she asked.

“No, I can’t let you do that,” I said.

“It isn’t fair! I want an adorable creature visiting my home too!”

“Well, Carbuncle has a right to choose.”

“I see. So you let it run free, huh...”

“Huh? Oh, well, I guess you could say that.”

In my mind, I didn’t really “own” Carbuncle. I let it choose whether to stay in Do-Melta or in Japan whenever it felt like it, so it might have been more accurate to say I just picked it up from time to time.

“This little guy’s name is Carbuncle?” asked Hiro.

“That’s what I call it, yeah.”

“Then I’ll call you Car!” she proclaimed.

Why did everyone call it different names?

Carbuncle jumped out of Hiro’s arms, went onto my school bag, then started fidgeting around. It opened my zipper with its paws, then went into the bag as flexible as an octopus settling into a pot. Was it planning on going to school with me?

“Now listen here,” I started.

“Mew!”

I looked at Carbuncle with a troubled expression, but it just averted my gaze. It seemed to have no intention to go back home. What was I supposed to do?

“Hiro, can you tell everyone that Carbuncle is your team’s new mascot? We’ll call things even for the last ten or so times I did you a favor by showing you my homework,” I said.

“That’s fine! But I want this to negate more of those favors! All of them, if possible!”

“No, that’d be too much.”

“Oh, come on! Don’t be so stingy!” complained Hiro.

“Who’re you calling stingy?! Do you know how many favors you owe me? You’re repaying me one way or another!” I shot back.

“Ugh...”

She’d brought this on herself. If she didn’t like it, she should make more of an effort to handle things herself.

Afterward, we did take Carbuncle to school, and everyone doted over it, but that was a story for another time.

Hiro looked at what I was carrying in my left hand and asked, “I forgot to ask, but what’s that thing you’re holding?”

“Oh, it’s a gift for my uncle,” I said. “I’m gonna visit him after school.”

I was talking about my uncle who owned an antique shop. As a student, my options for converting things into money were limited. I couldn’t sell gold coins

from Do-Melta at precious metal shops all the time, so I'd been slowly exchanging them for porcelain and other works of art and selling them to my uncle. I wished there was a way to easily exchange things for money in bulk, but it was a rather tricky issue to navigate. My uncle had mentioned he was afraid of dealing with tax officials, so I couldn't push the issue.

"Where do you find things like that?" asked Hiro.

"Oh, you know, places," I said vaguely.

"Humph. You won't tell me?" she pouted.

"Uh...maybe next time. I'll take you there when our schedules line up."

"Okay, I'm busy too. Promise me you'll tell me when the peace settles down here."

Taking Hiro to Do-Melta might be a good idea. God had said it was fine for me to bring friends over. Hiro was always putting out fires in our world, so adventuring in the dungeon could be a nice change of pace for her. Plus, she'd probably also take out the great evildoers of Do-Melta while she was there. Not that I even knew if such evils existed there. Lion-Maru had already defeated the Demon Lord, so maybe that wasn't a thing anymore.

*Wait a sec, what does "when the peace settles down here" even mean?*

"Oh!" I said.

I suddenly remembered that I'd encountered a terribly evil entity recently—other than Sensei, that was. It'd been a few days ago when a new product had arrived at the dining hall in the main hall...

## Extra Floor: The Evil Old Man at the Guild

It'd happened back when I'd first joined the guild. I'd been trying to not get in everyone else's way as I'd hung around the entrance, thinking about what to do for the day. I'd looked around for my drunkard friend number one or my food-loving friend number two so we could kill some time chatting or something.

Just then, I overheard the members of a Diver Team, who were standing around nearby, talking.

"I heard a new item was added to the dining hall menu."

"For real? It's been a while. What was the last one they added again?"

"Grapenut and Honey Pudding."

"That sounds pretty decent for an item on the dining hall menu. Adorners will be all over that."

"You're right, and it's sold out. I heard they're looking for a new supplier. Anyway, word on the street is that the new item is a dessert too. They're probably trying to ride the popularity of the pudding with this one."

"I hope it's good. Please let it be good."

The last comment almost sounded like a prayer, but I knew how they felt. I wished whoever made these menu items taste-tested them first. They really should have a trial run with a test kitchen or make their superiors try them. The bottom rung always got the short end of the stick, but I didn't want to see that being true in a fantasy world too. It was completely reckless of them to put their untested dishes out into the world and use Divers as guinea pigs. This was why the food in the dining hall was considered one of the first trials that new Divers must face when working in Freida. Supposedly, it was a way of filtering out the weak. That was one way to put it.

I had little hope for the new menu item, but I peeked into the guild dining hall anyway out of curiosity. There, I saw the name of the item that people had been buzzing about: Jelly-Flavored Slime.

I was at a loss for words. What was with that awful name? It had similar vibes as poop-flavored curry or curry-flavored poop. First of all, “jelly” didn’t have its own flavor. And were they literally trying to feed us slimes? I had so many questions. They should’ve gotten administrative guidance for not adhering to the Act against Unjustifiable Premiums and Misleading Representations and for trying to make the dish sound better by unnecessarily adding “Jelly-Flavored” to its name.

In this world, the word “slime” inevitably reminded me of Pop Slimes, which were giant amoebic creatures that immobilized Divers with poison, then melted and absorbed them, which sounded awfully scary. And no, it wouldn’t end up like a pervy manga scene if a girl got caught by one. I always wiped them out right away, but I’d heard anyone who got absorbed by a Pop Slime had their flesh dissolved until their bones became fully visible. It was pretty gruesome.

Were the folks at the dining hall trying to feed us such a monstrosity? Sure, they already served outrageous things like Nasty Soup and Mystery Steak, but this one really took the cake. I had a feeling that it’d melt me from the inside out if I’d eaten it. I truly hoped it wasn’t actually made of Pop Slimes...but I was gonna buy it anyway.

“Excuse me, I’d like to try the new item,” I said to the lady at the counter.

“You really aren’t afraid of trying out new things, are you, Akira?” she said.

“I’m a Diver after all. But wait, you probably shouldn’t be selling things that make even Divers tremble in fear,” I said, making her laugh out loud. “By the way, this stuff isn’t made of Pop Slimes, is it? This isn’t one of those cases like how people detox poisonous mushrooms with hot water or pickle blowfish ovaries to make them edible, right?”

The lady laughed again. This really wasn’t a laughing matter. It was fine, though. Life was all about taking on challenges—though I strongly recommended sticking to the non-life-threatening kind. Since this slime was being served as food, it had to be edible at the very least. I had to give it a try.

I had no idea what this Jelly-Flavored Slime would taste like. Driven by sheer curiosity, I opened Pandora’s box. At first glance, it just looked like colorless, clear jelly. The lack of color made me think it’d be flavorless too, but that

probably wasn't the case. Probably. I'd soon find out if this was as foolish as tickling a dragon's tail. I'd defeated giant zombie monsters that appeared on the same floor as Pop Slimes, but as I sat my butt down on the chair, I fearfully prayed my spoon wouldn't turn into a flathead screwdriver.

Then, out of nowhere, something incredibly disturbing appeared in the corner of my vision. There, casually sitting at a corner table with his cane, was a dreadfully evil being. He looked like an ordinary old man you'd find just about anywhere, except that a dense evil aura emanated from him, and the parts of his eyes where the whites were supposed to be were completely black. He looked absolutely terrifying; a nurarihyon from Japanese folklore looked cute in comparison, not that I'd ever seen one in real life. Not to mention, he seemed to be only visible to me for some reason. No one even noticed the entity, whose appearance was like a visual sledgehammer, but they all naturally avoided sitting in the seat he occupied. This was bad. Seriously. He seemed on par with Sensei on the scale of "beings I don't want to mess with."

"Can you see me, young one?" asked a voice.

The question was probably directed at me. We'd met eyes for a second, but I'd immediately looked away. My only option here was to act like I'd never noticed. This was one of those horrors where I couldn't let him find out that I could see him.

*I saw nothing. I saw nothing. I saw nothing.*

"You *can* see me, can't you?" asked the old man again.

"No, not at all," I said. "Not even a little bit. Come on, there's no way I can see a super-evil-looking old man."

"I don't see how you could've replied if you hadn't noticed me."

"Ahhh! Ahhh! I'm hearing things! I'm hearing things that aren't real!" I shouted as I repeatedly tapped my ears with the palms of my hands.

Maybe I was being too obvious, but the old man just stared at me the entire time. I didn't know what he found so interesting about me. I had a totally average face that wasn't particularly handsome or cute. Surely, I didn't look like I'd taste good.

I figured I'd be too distracted to eat my slime or jelly or whatever it was with him staring at me, so I moved a bit closer to him.

"You're quite brave to willingly try the new items here," said the old man.

"Well, I wouldn't call it bravery. It's more like a duty for someone who came here in search of good food," I replied.

"Such a pioneering spirit. I could learn a thing or two from you."

He seemed a bit old to be changing his ways now, but I didn't dare say the words out loud.

"Um...you wouldn't suddenly attack me or do anything like that, would you?" I asked.

"No need to worry about that. As you can see, I'm just here people-watching," he chuckled.

And boy, what an evil chuckle it was. It sounded like a chattering skull, and it scared the crap outta me. I felt like there were way too many horror elements in Freida lately. Well, part of that was because I'd walked toward them on my own, but still.

"Do you really expect me to not worry when you have that evil-looking aura coming out of you?" I asked.

"What am I to do? This is who I am. No one can choose what they are born to be."

"That's true, but still..."

"No need to sit so far, young man. Come closer," he said.

"Actually, I'm a bit timid, so I try not to go places that are too intense for me," I replied.

"You joke. If you'd been truly timid, you would've fainted before uttering a word to me."

"Oh, in that case, I'd rather go with that. Ahhh, I'm getting lightheaded..." I said, staggering around unsteadily.

"Why do you insist on categorizing yourself as a coward?" asked the old man,



baffled.

I didn't live for vanity like some other Divers, so I didn't care one bit about being called timid or a coward. Where there was life, there was hope. Staying alive was more important than anything else.

Anyway, I didn't sense any ill will from this old man, so I figured he was safe. I could feel his evil energy radiating like crazy, but he wasn't setting off my bad-guy sensor, which was why I'd decided to interact with him in the first place. There was one thing that I had to ask, though.

"Um, by the way, I won't be cursed or anything by talking to you, will I?"

"Unfortunately, you already are," he said. "Once you talk to me, you must find three others who can see me and have them talk to me as well. Otherwise, misfortune will follow you."

"Now hold on just a minute," I said. "Haven't your teachers at school told you not to write chain letters?"

"Hmm? So something similar already exists, huh. Then let's make it ten instead of three—"

"That's even worse! How badly do you wanna curse me, huh?!"

The old man laughed. "Jokes aside, let us talk for a while. It's been quite some time since I've had someone to talk to since no one can even see me."

"Wait, does that mean I look like a weirdo talking to myself right now?" I asked.

"Indeed, you poor, pathetic young man. I shed tears of pity for you."

"This is *your* fault!" I pointed out, and the old man chuckled creepily again.

I looked around and noticed no one was looking at either me or the old man, nor did they seem to realize we were chatting. It was as if we'd been pulled into a strange dimension created by the old man.

"Why can't anyone see us, anyway?" I asked.

"Because I made it so," he explained. "Though, you seem to be able to see me, for some reason."

For a moment, I thought he should just undo whatever spell was making him invisible to others, but then I realized the entire guild would be sent into a panic if he did. It would've been total chaos if an old man emitting such a dreadfully evil aura suddenly appeared out of nowhere.

"What are you doing here, anyway? Are you watching for an opportunity to take down the Divers Guild or something?" I asked.

"Yes, that's exactly it. I lurk here day and night, observing the guild's movements so I can show them a nightmare like they've never seen," he said with an evil laugh.

"You know, mister, you pass the vibe check," I said.

"Don't you think so? I was once serious to a fault, but a subordinate once told me, 'You can be quite the buzzkill, Your Highness.' That stung me. So ever since then, I've made it a point to go along whenever others joke around. After all, it's all over if your subordinates give up on you. A one-man show will eventually lead to ruins."

"Being a leader sounds like hard work," I said.

"It truly is. Now, I get to enjoy a comfortable retirement life," said the old man.

His story sounded like one of hardship you'd find anywhere. In fact, I was sure these struggles existed in every world. Working at the bottom was tough, but being at the top had its own problems too.

"So you really aren't up to no good?" I asked.

"That's right. I may not look it, but I'm a pacifist. I'm not a fan of violence, to tell you the truth."

"Yeah, that isn't very convincing at all," I said. "You either sit in some luxurious chair in a giant castle at the end of the world with a horde of monsters under your command, or you're a super evil madman who conducts secret experiments in an underground lair at the corner of some major city, or you're a supernatural being who lived a thousand years. Something like that, right? You've probably offered half the world in a deal with someone before."

He chuckled.

“Hey, don’t just laugh! You were supposed to deny that. Which one was right? Come on, seriously,” I said.

“All of that aside, I truly am telling the truth when I say I mean no harm. I simply enjoy being here,” he said.

“What? Just sitting here and watching Divers?” I asked.

“Exactly. Watching the relationships between humans is quite entertaining, and I simply can’t get enough of absorbing the envy and resentment that seep out from time to time.”

“I was kind of on board with you in the first half, but the second half was kind of crazy.”

He really was evil. Absorbing such negative energies sounded really out-there. Though, that reminded me of a time when Hiro had beaten up someone like him before.

So anyway, that was how I’d gotten to know an evil yet silly old man. But then there was still the most important issue of all: the Slime-Favored Jelly or Jelly-Flavored Slime or whatever it was. Not to worry, this wouldn’t conclude with a tragic ending where my body was dissolved from the inside out.

“Thanks for the meal,” I said to the lady serving the food. “To be honest, it didn’t taste very good. Actually, it didn’t taste like anything at all, which I think is an even greater crime.”

“Oh, I’m sure,” the lady laughed.

I felt like I’d eaten unflavored konjac or tokoroten. And why did she laugh when I told her the food wasn’t good? I wished the people working there put effort into cooking. Seriously. It was their fault there were always people on the brink of death even though they hadn’t even dived into the dungeon. They really needed to consider their roles in these things.

## Floor Thirty-Six: Where the Rabbits Hang Out

Today, I was at the Forest, which was featured very often in the story. Everyone loved the Great Forest Ruins at depth level 5. Well, people always came here because you had to go through it to get to the other floors, but still. There were people heading to deeper floors ahead, people coming back from those floors, people here for weeding, and so on. One could always find other Divers when walking through this place.

This floor was incredibly vast, but most Divers just passed through and didn't bother exploring it once they were good enough to advance to other floors, unless there was something specific they wanted. Once one could make a steady living by farming on other floors, picking thea wasn't an attractive option anymore.

The safe points here were well maintained since it'd be dangerous for Divers to wander into dilapidated areas. They also served as shelters for those who needed to flee from other floors. It would've been pretty jarring if this sunny, pleasant walking route I was on turned into a place like the summit of Mount Everest. Sure, the surroundings here would be lovely, but monsters appeared here too, so the positives and negatives canceled each other out.

Anyway, I was on the way home from a high-depth-level floor. I'd been exploring hidden pathways and secret routes on a floor that I'd personally found to be safe yet relatively deep, so I'd ended up diving into this place on a whim. If I had to guess, that floor was located in the corner of the deep end of the Forest somewhere. My path did end up being a shortcut compared to the standard route, so I found it pretty easy to get there.

Today's spoils was a giant carrot that I'd acquired in the Evernight Meadows. It didn't fit all the way in my bag, so the leaves and part of the stem were sticking out, making me look like I was carrying giant leaves on my back. It was like a makeshift ghillie suit, and I probably resembled a soldier decked out in field camouflage. All I needed was some military-looking gear, and I'd fit right

into one of those survival games. Though, the leaves were so voluminous that maybe my head looked more like a broccoli. They were actually limiting my visibility, to be honest. This was probably a total nightmare for a certain Oldtype pilot who hated carrots because of a character from a series with draconic balls whose name was based on carrots. It may have been the embodiment of benevolence or something, nutritionally speaking. Who knows.

Anyway, the carrot had a nice bright orange color to it, so it was probably fine, and I imagined it'd be rich in beta-carotene. The lady serving food at the dining hall would probably be willing to buy it from me. Otherwise, I'd just take it home, chop it up, and dump the pieces into the vegetable drawer in my fridge.

I couldn't help but think about how a lot of the food in this world was so big. I could probably contribute to solving the food scarcity problem on Earth if I could mass-produce these things, but I wasn't a farmer. A skinny kid like me wasn't built for the farming life.

I arrived at the safe point, and there were crystal stakes haphazardly strewn around a cottage. The place was pretty run-down and looked like it'd been abandoned for a long time. Most safe points in the Forest were kind of like small campsites. The default layout consisted of a triangular bungalow with a simple brick stove, and surrounding the building was a minimal wooden fence.

The Evernight Meadows, where I'd acquired the giant carrots, had safe points similar to this place. Well, there was a major base there called the Nightless Fortress, so everyone just went there unless there was some sort of emergency. I would recommend the Mushroom Sauté at the Sleepless Fairy Pavilion there. Calling it "cooking" was kind of deceptive when all they did was heat some mushrooms as is, but the mushrooms themselves tasted so good they could get away with it. Pro tip though: you had to bring your own soy sauce and butter to take the mushrooms to the next level. That was seriously delicious.

In the Infinite Gray Castle, where I'd met up with Miguel and his team, entire rooms had been used as safe points. As for the big halls, the crystal stakes were installed all around the room. Similarly, in the Yellow Wall Vestiges, they also used rooms as safe points.

On the other hand, building safe points in the Night Soil Swamps was much more complicated. Since that place mostly consisted of poisonous and bottomless bogs, they'd needed to build a large-scale camp instead of just throwing some stakes down without putting much thought into it. Not to mention, the camp needed constant repairs because of all the toxicity and acid, so its maintenance must've been a huge pain. These repairs were huge ordeals that happened a few times a year. Each time, they had to hire a group of professionals to install the crystal stakes and a few high-ranking Diver teams to help, and all of them had to be fully geared up in preparation. These groups had been making multiple trips to the campsites and back completely uninjured, wiping out the giant zombie monsters there and retrieving their core stones. According to Ashley, I was also on the list of people to request help from, but I wished I wasn't. The only time I ever went there was when I really needed something from there. That place made me feel queasy as if I were getting carsick, and no one liked that feeling. *Yuck*. Sure, I hadn't been physically injured, but the mental distress was real.

Anyway, back to the safe point. This place was...well, fluffy.

"What's going on here?" I wondered out loud.

The safe point was absolutely packed with Walker Rabbits. They were all over the place lying on the ground, sitting cross-legged, sprawling themselves out, and doing whatever they felt like; some of them were even sliding around on their round bellies like bulldozers. There were some nasty herbs, which were as invasive as mint or shiso, all over the place, and the rabbits were munching on them as if this was a grazing ground. They had a habit of digging like European rabbits, so there were huge unsightly holes everywhere too. They could surely be patched up, but it was like having trap holes all over the place. I wished they could only use a maximum of three pitfall traps, including the ones made from their crafting ingredients. There seemed to be a limit on the items you could bring in the recent titles though, but the new system allowed you to restock at the camp. Things were so much more convenient these days, though I still thought it was unforgivable that they never fixed that charm bug.

This safe point belonged to the rabbits now. They probably found monsters annoying too, so they were chilling here, where they wouldn't be bothered. Not

a lot of humans came by here either since this place was so far from the entrance. Rabbits in our world were very territorial, but the ones here cooperated with each other and never seemed to fight among themselves. That made it easier to keep more than one of them as pets, but it was clear that keeping even one of them fed would be financially unsustainable. It wasn't hard to imagine how much they could eat, judging by their massive size.

This rabbit paradise was a dream come true for rabbit fans. If the Bunny Lovers Club somehow found out about this place, I could easily imagine them claiming it as a protected area and mobilizing to occupy it by force. I had no doubt all ethics would go out the window if it meant they could take control here, even though there wasn't a yen to be gained from colonizing this place. Maybe the comfort they'd get from the rabbits was considered priceless.

These rabbits must've been in relaxation mode, and they didn't even seem to care that I'd shown up. Some of them glanced my way sometimes, but I was keeping my distance and trying not to bother them, so they hardly reacted at all. Weren't they supposed to be wild animals? They were totally like house pets.

Something was off about this place though. Sure, the location was remote, but it should've been maintained so that Divers could use it anytime. Judging by its condition, no one had been here to do any repairs for a long time.

"The bungalow is pretty. Maybe this place has been abandoned already," I said. Possibly, it'd been forgotten for a while now. "Come to think of it, the stakes aren't even installed properly."

The monster-warding stakes were normally driven into the ground; they were usually placed at intervals ranging from regular to pretty random, but they were typically placed pretty neatly. Here, there was no sense of planning or regularity, and to be honest, these stakes were just a random, jumbled mess as if someone had tossed them around. I wondered if these rabbits had pulled out the stakes from other safe points and brought them here. I'd heard that stakes were being stolen for a little while now, so it made sense. These rascals were worse than carrot thieves; Mr. McGregor would've been shocked to hear about this.

I picked a spot to sit down and rest, and after a while, baby rabbits started gathering around me. They *were* Netherland dwarf rabbits, their fur ranging from orange to chinchilla color. Even the babies were over a meter tall and almost my size, so they were pretty intimidating.

“Whoa!” I shouted in surprise when one of them put its face in front of mine.

It seemed to be far more curious than an adult rabbit. It kept sniffing at me, and I wondered what kind of info it was trying to extract. Maybe my criminal record or something? Petting dogs would probably be a crime in the rabbits’ book considering how wary they were of dogs—other than Eldrid, that was. It finished its investigation after sniffing for some time longer.

Then I noticed that the baby rabbit was staring at something behind me, and it didn’t take long for me to realize it was looking at the giant carrot’s leaves. It then extended its front paw as if asking for the carrot.

“Sorry, this is mine. I can’t,” I said.

The rabbit shook its head, then pointed its little paw at the leaves instead of the orange part of the carrot.

“Huh? Oh, wait a minute...”

The idea that rabbits like carrots had been imprinted in our minds since we were young because of a certain *Peter* and *Rabbit* picture book, but they actually liked to eat leafy greens. The rabbit I had at home mainly ate pellets or greens such as pasture grass and the occasional fruit. I’d heard some rabbits only ate the orange part of carrots if the carrots were dried and cut into thin slices. Most of them just rubbed their faces on it, and that was it.

“You want this part?” I asked and pointed at the orange part, but the baby rabbit shook its head. It only wanted the greens after all.

The guild would buy it off me as long as I had the orange part, and there were no dumb rules like those in my world that prevented stores from selling vegetables with minor cosmetic defects. Giving away just the leafy part should be fine.

“Okay, you can have the leaves,” I said.



I ripped them off from the rest of the giant carrot and started handing off pieces of the leaves to the baby rabbits. They each patiently waited their turns, showing that they were actually very intelligent. Once they got their greens, they began munching away with fervor.

“They’re adorable,” I said to myself.

These rabbits didn’t mess with people by stealing things or pulling some annoying pranks. The rabbits that wanted to play had gone out to find something to do, so the ones in here just wanted to take it easy and rest.

It was comforting just watching them. My brain was releasing stuff like serotonin, and I felt myself relaxing. I decided that next time when I go to a high-stress floor, I could come back here for some peace and happiness.

## Epilogue: Natural Honey vs. Commercial Chocolate

My usual weekday afternoon routine after school was to visit the other world and go on adventures. I'd go see beautiful sights, eat good food, and delve into the dungeon to grind some levels. My leveling had plateaued lately, so I needed to figure out some way to make more progress; though, I hadn't put anything into action yet. Thinking I could figure it out some other time, I decided to relax and hang out in the main hall. Carbuncle hopped onto my backpack as I walked by the reception area, then I headed toward the back of the Divers Guild.

There was already a pretty sizable gathering at the guild dining hall. I noticed people suffering in agony as they tried the new menu item, wallowing in regret for ordering one of the three disgusting dishes. Others were being treated as traitors for bringing in food they'd bought from the food stalls outside.

"It's chaos as usual in here," I said.

"Mew."

Carbuncle must've been used to these sights by now too. It usually roamed around the reception area when it wasn't at my place, so it could see the happenings of the entire main hall from a distance. Together, we stared in resignation at the struggles between the Divers' palates and the dining hall food, which happened pretty much every day.

"Oh, it's Kudo," said a voice out of nowhere.

"Huh? I recognize that voice."

I turned toward the familiar husky voice, and there stood a monster—yes, a monster. It was a few centimeters taller than I was, and its entire body was covered in fluffy, soft white fur with black spotted patterns on it like a snow leopard.

"Hmm?" I said, squinting my eyes.

This monster definitely didn't look like it'd be bipedal, yet here it was standing on two feet. This world was full of things that made me wonder if something

was wrong with my eyes.

“Wait a sec,” I said, realizing it was just someone wearing a pelt.

They were visible from the nose down, and they were clearly human, not a monster. They were carrying a giant pair of scissors on their back that was clearly meant to be a weapon, so they were definitely a Diver. Besides, I’d turned around because I’d heard a familiar voice, so I should’ve worked backward from there to figure out what was going on.

“Is that you, Linte?” I asked.

“Who else would I be?” asked Linte. “I didn’t expect you to look at me like *that*. Most people would’ve been insulted, you know?”

“I mean, but look at what you’re wearing,” I said.

How was I supposed to know? She was basically wearing a set of onesie-like fur pajamas. I could only see her from the nose down, making it nearly impossible for me to figure out who it’d been. It was as ruthlessly difficult as the mosaic guessing game in *Super Wagyan Land* on kamisama mode. I still had terrible memories of mosaic images of the lion with a blue mane, the green bear, the scorpion with player-two colors, and the mysterious empty can.

“We only met a few days ago and you already forgot me? That’s pretty mean. Are you devoting any of your brain capacity to interpersonal relationships?” she asked.

“If I’d forgotten you, I wouldn’t have known your name,” I said. “I’m actually pretty good at remembering people, you know.”

A certain Ricky might have something to say about that, but I usually remembered everyone I met. Linte was one of the more eccentric ones, so forgetting her would be hard even if I tried.

“Well, I guess it’s hard to tell with what I’m wearing,” she admitted.

“This one’s different from what you were wearing before,” I said.

“Yeah, because the one I was wearing when you forcefully undressed me got dirty.”

“Bwah?! Don’t say it like that! We’re in the dining hall! What if someone

hears you?!” I said in a panic.

“What? I’m just saying what happened. I tried to resist, but you bound me by force with magic and touched my body,” she said and acted like she was breaking down in tears even though she’d been completely fine a second ago.

“Ah! Ahhh! Linte?!”

She continued pretending to cry, glancing at me occasionally to see my reaction. To an onlooker, she must’ve looked like a girl whose chastity had been violated by force—not that I’d seen one myself. The Divers around us seemed to have overheard our conversation, and I started to hear grumblings all around us.

“I-It isn’t true! She’s framing me! I’m innocent! I had to do it so I could use healing magic on her!” I said in full-blown panic mode, going around and explaining to the surrounding people.

The worst part about it was that Linte hadn’t lied, but she’d deliberately used misleading phrasing. I was this close to being socially murdered. I wished she wouldn’t try to take me out like an assassin out of nowhere because people die very easily.

Everyone ended up accepting my explanation surprisingly easily, so I was able to go back to my seat without further issues.

Linte, however, wanted to keep that topic going. “You know, you could’ve offered to heal me just so you could undress and touch me.”

“Can we *please* just talk about something else?” I asked.

“You’re right, that’s enough joking around for now.”

I gave her a resentful glare, but she just stuck her tongue out and made a silly face, completely unfazed. I clearly didn’t have what it took to penetrate her defenses. She was hard to deal with in a different way than Sensei.

Linte took a seat next to me and brought out a small pot, the kind that Adorners often carried around with them.

“Oh, right, we were talking about my pelt. This one’s one of my favorites,” she said. “I’m wearing this one because I got blood on the black one I was wearing

before.”

“You must have a lot of pelts,” I said.

“Yeah, I like to collect high-quality monster pelts.”

“As a hobby?” I asked.

“Yeah, pretty much everyone belonging to my race does. We all keep hides that we like and process them to suit our own styles.”

The distinctive pelts Adorners wore were apparently handmade. Though, they must’ve all been handmade if you consider the level of sewing technology in this world, so that shouldn’t have come as a surprise.

“I noticed other Adorners I see at the guild wear waist wraps and scarves,” I said.

“The culture is probably different depending on the clan. Mine traditionally wears a lot of headwear. You’ve seen people wearing processed head pelts, right?” said Linte.

“I have,” I replied. “What other kinds of pelts do you own, by the way?”

“Well, I have a Sky Shark one, which I worked on, and one from a Saurusman, which you don’t really see around here.”

“A shark and a dinosaur?”

I’d assumed she’d have more cute ones, but she seemed to be a fan of more grotesque creatures. I was a bit more familiar with Sky Sharks, but what in the world was a Saurusman? Was it literally a dinosaur? There were way too many different types of monsters in this world.

Carbuncle suddenly showed interest in the pot that Linte had brought out. It brought its nose up to the pot and began sniffing, clearly curious.

“This is the one that’s been hanging out at the reception area, isn’t it? I haven’t really seen any other animal like it.”

“Yeah, I hear they aren’t easy to find,” I said.

“Hmm. So it’s rare, huh?” she said, her eyes narrowing as soon as the word “rare” left her lips.

“Mew mew mew?!” squealed Carbuncle.

Quickly looking at and away from her, it must’ve sensed something unusual about Linte. Thinking its pelt could be in danger, it zipped to the opposite side of me and hid away from her sight.

“Aha ha, I wouldn’t do that. You’d need to be bigger if I were to wear you,” she laughed.

“Mew...”

Carbuncle gave her a wary look, then it started shadowboxing as if challenging her to a fight, all while still hiding behind me. Maybe it’d been affected by the TV show I’d been watching in my living room the other day. It put on a brave front, but it was obviously scared judging by the way it gradually backed away further from her.

I didn’t want her to be the second coming of the Facepeeler kaijin either. Our peaceful and heartwarming story was about to turn into a psycho horror story real quick. Japan had been a pretty scary place until that menace had been defeated.

I picked up Carbuncle and placed it on my lap. It was scared stiff as I brought it very close to Linte without warning, but it relaxed into a liquid, like cats and rabbits did, when she began patting its head.

“Mew...” it said contentedly. This animal sure loved head pats.

“What’s in the pot, by the way?” I asked.

“Oh, this? It’s honey. Why?” said Linte.

“Thought so...”

I knew it. Of course it was honey. She was an Adorner, after all. But I just wanted to make sure, you know? I mean, there was a small chance it could’ve been something else, but Adorners still loved honey as much as ever.

“Do you scoop it with your finger and lick it too?” I asked.

“No, not me. I put it on this.” She stopped patting Carbuncle and took out what looked like a small stick of bread. Surely that was what she used to dip honey and eat for a snack.

“So that’s how you eat it,” I said.

“Of course. If I’d used my finger, I’d have to wipe it down every time. It’d be a waste.”

“I’ve seen people lick it off of their fingers.”

“I don’t like doing that. It looks so gluttonous,” she said.

I felt like that was a silly thing to worry about considering Adorners became immobilized from hunger by default. It was as if they had a hunger gauge that depleted like in *Shiren* or *Torneko*. If there were a hunger spell, it’d probably kill them in one hit.

We continued talking for a while longer, and Linte took out her breadstick and dipped it into her honey for snack time. She had a wide smile on her face as she began stuffing her face.

As she bit into her fourth stick, she looked toward me and asked, “Hey, aren’t you gonna eat something? You must’ve come to the dining hall because you’re hungry, right?”

“No, I just decided to stop by on a whim,” I said.

“Did you bring anything? Like jam, maybe?”

“You want something of mine? Are you trying to mooch off me?”

“Yep.”

She really was straightforward when it came to these things, and she didn’t intend to hide her gluttony. What was that about not wanting to look gluttonous earlier?

Well, it was about time for me to have a snack too, so I didn’t mind. What did I have on hand, anyway? She’d probably want something sweet, but I didn’t have the honey sugar bread that Reverie had liked last time. I started digging into my Dimension Bag like a cat-type robot who was visiting from the future.

“Oh yeah, I forgot about this,” I said as I pulled out a pack of chocolate and some fresh cream.

I didn’t remember why I’d even put it in there, but it was probably so that I

could bring it here and share it with someone. Maybe I'd been forgetting things more lately because I'd been through a lot of traumatic things.

"That smells sweet," said Linte.

She moved her face closer to the packaged chocolate bar and sniffed like Carbuncle had done earlier. From a certain angle, she actually looked like a monster because of the pelt she was wearing.

"I haven't even opened the package yet," I pointed out.

I took out my cassette stove and a small pot, then I heated up the fresh cream and threw in the chocolate that I'd broken into pieces. I then stirred the concoction, and the easy chocolate fondue was ready to eat.

Linte looked restless as she gave me a sidelong glance. "Hmm...that smells and looks good."

"Sure does," I said.

"It smells and looks good," she repeated.

"You just said that."

"You know, that smells and—"

"If you want some, you could just say so," I said.

What was she? An NPC who could only say a predetermined line?

"Shouldn't you be moving the pot closer to me so it's easier for me to eat?" she said, undeterred.

"I don't even know what to say..."

Why was she like this? I mean, I was sure this was her way of joking around, but still. Some people didn't know how to simply ask for things.

Linte dipped about half of her small breadstick into the sea of fondue, then she put it in her mouth.

"Ooooooooooh?!" she yelled, and I turned to her in surprise.

Linte was frozen in place with the piece of bread still in her hand. Her face was stuck in an astonished expression, and her voice was a bit muffled with the



bread still in her mouth. She was surprisingly loud for how calm she usually was. The taste of chocolate must've been just that shocking to her.

She eventually recovered from her awe and put more chocolate on the rest of her breadstick, then she chewed some more. She then turned to me abruptly, grabbed me by the shoulders, and shook me with the force of a magnitude-six earthquake.



“K-Kudo! Kudo! This! This! This thing!” she yelled.

“L-L-Linte?! Wh-What are you shaking me for?!” I said as she shook me back and forth.

“This is so good! Why? What is this?!”

“Let’s calm down first! You’re way too excited about this!”

“How can I be calm?! I just found out that something so sweet and delicious exists in this world! This is a very serious matter!”

“Okay! I’ll explain. Just let me go!” I said, and Linte finally released me from her relentless shaking.

She wasn’t done grilling me for answers though. She raised both hands into the air like a monster threatening its prey.

“So?! What is this? Tell me!” she said.

“It’s chocolate,” I explained, “a kind of treat from where I live.”

“I never knew such a delicious treat existed,” she said with wonder.

“W-Well, there’s still more, so help yourself,” I said, offering the chocolate in an effort to calm her down.

Linte repeatedly dipped some bread into the chocolate fondue and brought it to her mouth while a look of ecstasy spread on her face the entire time.

I was glad she enjoyed it so much, but I was starting to wonder if I’d fed her something I shouldn’t have. Something about giving so much sugar to an Adorner didn’t seem like a good idea.

While I was regretting my actions, Linte repeated the singular action of dipping bread in the fondue and stuffing it into her mouth, all while mumbling “Yum...yum...” like a zombie with chocolate all around her mouth. The calm, collected image I’d had of her had vanished into the horizon.

I was ready to eat too, so I opened my Dimension Bag to look for a banana or waffle I’d bought at a store.

“Mew, mew,” Carbuncle said as it hopped onto the table, showing interest in the fondue pot.

“Oh, you can’t eat this one,” I said.

“Mew— Mew, mew?!” said Carbuncle, doing a double take.

It clearly hadn’t expected me to say that it couldn’t have any. But chocolate was poisonous to cats, and it couldn’t be good for a small animal like Carbuncle.

“Mew, mew!” it protested, angry that I wasn’t sharing.

It stood on its hind legs and raised its paws as if trying to intimidate me. It was probably imitating what Linte had done earlier, but it looked more like a red panda than a scary monster. It continued raising its voice at me as if demanding that I share, but it only looked all the cuter.

“You can’t eat it; you’re gonna suffer if you do. You don’t want that, do you?” I said gently as I patted Carbuncle.

“Mew...” it said, looking upset.

It then put its mouth on my finger as if to drain my mana out of spite—not that I minded.

“Come on, don’t be upset. You can have this instead,” I said and offered a Churu cat treat.

Carbuncle snorted in dissatisfaction as if it were doing me a favor by letting me off the hook, but it looked pretty happy while licking the cat treat. Everyone around me was like this for some reason.

“Hey, Kudo,” said Linte as I resolved the Carbuncle situation. “That was ‘chocolate,’ right? It was delicious.”

“Oh, glad you— Wait, what do you mean it *was* delicious?” I asked and looked at the pot.

It was empty. There was no fondue left in the pot. She must’ve scooped every last bit of it, and the pot had been wiped clean without a trace of chocolate left. She hadn’t even left any streaks or anything. It’d all disappeared at the speed of light.

“Linte?!” I said, “Where’s my share?!”

“Well...in my stomach,” she said.

“Why didn’t you leave me any?! That was chocolate and fresh cream! The chocolate is one thing, but fresh cream isn’t cheap, you know?!”

“My bad. It was all gone before I knew it.”

“Can you please *not* let food control you?!” I said.

“That’s impossible. I’m an Adorner, you know?”

“That’s true, but it doesn’t excuse your actions!”

“This is your fault for bringing out chocolate in the first place. You should’ve known what would happen,” she said.

“I mean, you aren’t wrong, but I feel like that’s letting you talk your way out of this!”

I had to admit, I really did feel like I should’ve expected this would happen.

“I do feel like I went a bit too far though,” said Linte.

“Well, yeah, you did,” I agreed.

“You aren’t gonna say ‘No, it’s okay’?”

“No, of course not. Don’t try to take advantage of my kindness. If I said that, you’d just say ‘Then I guess it was fine,’ and act like nothing happened,” I said.

“You’re pretty distrustful, aren’t you?”

I definitely didn’t agree with the way Japanese people say “It’s okay, I don’t mind at all.” with a forced smile when they didn’t even mean it. I had to know how to say no, or I’d never survive this harsh world.

Linte looked deep in thought for a moment, then seemed to decide on something. “Okay, then I’ll let you hire me for free. How about we call it even then?”

“Hire you? Oh, that’s right, you’re a dungeon mercenary,” I said.

“That’s right. I can go anywhere up to around depth level 40 or so. Not a lot of Divers can go that far.”

“I didn’t know your level was so high,” I said.

“Yep,” she said as she rose from her seat. She was probably on the way to the

dungeon now. “Thanks for the chocolate. Make sure you have some more the next time we meet.”

“You’re gonna mooch off me again, huh?”

“I resent that. I’ll pay you properly next time,” she said. She could be strangely conscientious at times.

“Okay then, until next time,” I said as I rose with Carbuncle.

Linte then tapped me on the shoulder and said, “Okay, let’s go.”

“Huh? What do you mean?” I asked.

“I said I’d let you hire me, didn’t I? Come on, let’s go to the dungeon.”

“You meant today?!”

“What? Aren’t you about to go for a dive?”

“Well, yes, but—”

“Then we might as well go now. Don’t worry. I’ll be useful.”

And so, I was off to the dungeon with Linte today.

## Afterword

It's been a while, everyone. I'm Hitsuji Gamei, the author.

*After-School Dungeon Diver* volume 4 is finally out! Congratulations! And thank you! I never knew whether I should say "congratulations" or "thank you" whenever I write an afterword, so I decided to go with both this time! It makes it sound like I'm acting some sort of monodrama, but anyway. Thank you very much for reading my work.

This time, the story starts with Akira taking Eldrid on a trip to the modern world, and a new heroine (?) appears for the first time. Some of you may be thinking "There were actually about two of those!" which would be an inconvenient truth for me as an author, so please allow me some time to recover my sanity points. She'll make a proper appearance soon...

Included in this volume are some stories not featured in the online version. There are some fun times with Eldrid, along with a small peek into her past. On top of that, we have more Linte, including some lewd parts.

Of course, it also features the episode with butter soy sauce and clam cooking in soy sauce. Reading about corn with steak at night is sure to give you cravings, but grilled shellfish is just as delicious too! I haven't personally eaten a lot of hard clams before, though, nor have I eaten many horned turbans! Unfortunately, there are only so many places that produce them in Hokkaido. I hope I've added enough food episodes this time...

I digress, but in the published version, I'd like to add some more episodes about the characters' pasts—just enough so it doesn't affect the overall vibe of the story. And of course, I'd like to keep adding more food episodes.

Lastly, I would like to sincerely thank GCN Bunko, my editor K, illustrator Karei, Ouraidou K. K., and all the readers who have been supporting me.















Sign up for our mailing list at J-Novel Club to hear about new releases!

[Newsletter](#)

And you can read the latest chapters of series like this by becoming a J-Novel Club Member:

[J-Novel Club Membership](#)

# Copyright

After-School Dungeon Diver: Level Grinding in Another World Volume 4

by Hitsuji Gamei

Translated by Shoji Izumiya Edited by N@TSUKI

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

Copyright © 2024 Hitsuji Gamei Illustrations © 2024 Karei

Cover illustration by Karei

All rights reserved.

Original Japanese edition published in 2024 by MICRO MAGAZINE, INC.

This English edition is published by arrangement with MICRO MAGAZINE, INC.

English translation © 2025 J-Novel Club LLC

All rights reserved. In accordance with the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, the scanning, uploading, and electronic sharing of any part of this book without the permission of the publisher is unlawful piracy and theft of the author's intellectual property.

J-Novel Club LLC

[j-novel.club](http://j-novel.club)

The publisher is not responsible for websites (or their content) that are not owned by the publisher.