

MY UNIQUE SKILL MAKES ME OP LEVEL 1

EVEN AT

2

Nazuna Miki

Art by Subachi



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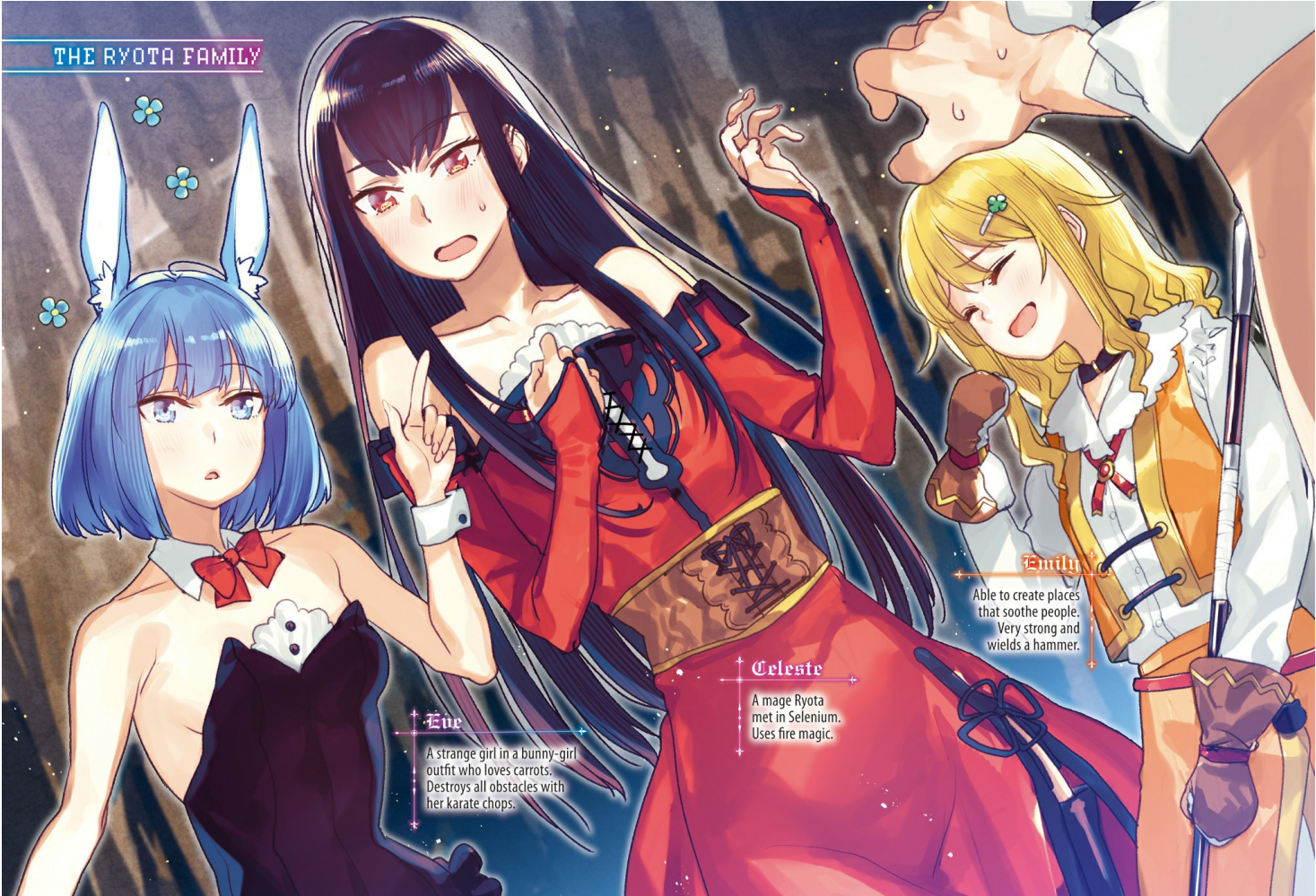
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CELESTE HELD OUT
HER HAND AND WHITE
FIRE ENVELOPED THE
MOUNTAIN OF TRASH,
BURNING IT TO ASH IN
AN INSTANT.



THE RYOTA FAMILY

Ene

A strange girl in a bunny-girl outfit who loves carrots. Destroys all obstacles with her karate chops.

Celeste

A mage Ryota met in Selenium. Uses fire magic.

Emily

Able to create places that soothe people. Very strong and wields a hammer.



"RAAAAH!"

I SEIZED ITS ARM
AND PULLED, THROWING
IT OFF BALANCE BEFORE
COUNTERING WITH A PUNCH
OF MY OWN THAT FLUNG IT
SIDWAYS. AFTER THAT,
I RAN AND CAUGHT UP WITH
THE AIRBORNE FRANKENSTEIN,
PUT MY HANDS TOGETHER,
AND UNLEASHED A DOUBLE
HAMMERFIST STRIKE.



MY UNIQUE SKILL MAKES ME OP EVEN AT LEVEL 1

2

By Nazuna Miki

Illustrations by Subachi

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KODANSHA

My Unique Skill Makes Me OP Even at Level 1, 2

A VERTICAL Book

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KODANSHA

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31. Rice Riot

In the afternoon, I brought my first load of the day—40,000 piro's worth of bean sprouts—to Swallow's Returned Favor. When I stepped inside, I noticed things were a little off. They were buying stuff at the counters as usual, but the employees were sullen, discussing something behind the counters. The adventurers were divided into groups and looked just as serious, too.

Wonder what's going on... I thought as I walked right up to a counter and greeted Erza.

"Hi there."

"Oh! Ryota!"

"Something wrong?"

"Well...a strike has begun."

"A strike?"

That was a word I hadn't heard in this world.

"Do you know anything about strikes?"

"Nope," I promptly answered, shaking my head.

I knew *of* strikes, of course, but I figured there had to be some minor difference in this world. Based on past experiences, I could assume that it had something to do with dungeons.

"You're aware of the dungeon Silicon, yes?" Erza asked me.

"Yeah."

“Well, B6 of that dungeon is the only place in Cyclo that drops rice.”

“‘The only place that drops rice’ is still such a weird thing to hear,” I mumbled.

“Excuse me?”

“Sorry, just talking to myself. Can you tell me more about it?”

“That floor is the Adalbard Gang’s territory. See, sometimes, people will band together and monopolize floors with their friends.”

“Think I’ve heard of that happening,” I mused.

“Now, as you know, the dungeon Nihonium appeared just recently,” Erza continued. “As Nihonium was confirmed to have no drops, the Adalbard Gang seized the opportunity. They put out a notice that if we want Cyclo rice, we’ll have to pay more.”

“I see...”

“Everyone gets excited when a new dungeon appears because monopolies collapse when drops overlap. What a shame...”

She looked dejected.

I glanced around; other employees and adventurers were discussing the Adalbard Gang, too. Nihonium had no drops for these people. I was lucky to have special drops all to myself, but the effects clearly extended beyond just me.

What an incredibly intricate world, I thought—but now wasn’t the time for that. If rice was monopolized to the point that it wouldn’t even come to market, that would cause problems for a lot of people.

Erza added, “Important people from the city are negotiating with them, but the Adalbard Gang has a lot of powerful friends, so I wonder if our only choice

will be to raise prices.”

I fell silent. That seemed like a terrible outcome.



Before long, I was at Silicon. Due to the commotion, the outside of the dungeon was teeming with people I'd usually never see around, like government workers or merchants. They had gathered together, faces even more severe than those of the people at Swallow's Returned Favor, and were discussing something.

For now, I planned to find the people responsible and talk to them.

“Oh? Is that you, Sato, my man?” someone asked, suddenly accosting me. It was the pretty boy I'd met at that restaurant, Neptune. He approached me, bearing the same smile as last time.

“Huh? Whoa, you're that gay dude!”

“I'm not gay. C'mon, you know I love girls.”

“Okay, but why are you here?” I rebutted coldly.

“I could ask you the same question. If you're here, I presume you've heard about the Adalbards?”

“...Yeah.”

“See, I got this request,” Neptune explained. “The Adalbards have done this same song and dance over and over. Every chance they get, they wanna raise the price of rice, so at this point, the people of our fine city are fed up with them.”

“Fed up enough to request that the Neptune family remove them, you mean?”

“Well, not quite.”

I cocked my head and asked, “Oh? Then what?”

From the way the conversation was going, I’d figured that was it.

“We’re not removing them. We’re *eliminating* them.”

“That’s a lot more drastic a decision than I expected.”

“It’s for the best, really,” he shrugged. “The problem is that they have a lot of people, so even me and my partners might end up getting hurt.”

“...I’ve got a suggestion,” I finally said.

“What is it?”

“Can you let me handle it?”

“Let you handle...eliminating them?” Neptune asked as he raised an eyebrow.

We locked eyes.

“Removing them.”

I had come for one reason...and I had a way to settle this peacefully.



Neptune and I traveled to B5 of Silicon, where we stood in front of the staircase to the next floor. Lil, Ran, and a few of Neptune’s other buddies waited at a distance. They were all pretty imposing, as skilled adventurers tended to be.

Neptune, clearly the leader of his group, said to me, “Just to make sure we’re on the same page, if you can’t handle it, we’re good to rush in and eliminate them, right?”

“Yeah.”

“All right. I wish you good luck.”

Neptune saw me off as I went down to B6. When I’d descended, I came upon people keeping watch. Two men stood guard, and they had built a path like those in construction zones.

“Stop,” one of them demanded. “Who the hell are you?”

“No one’s allowed on this floor,” the other added. “The staircase to the next one is right there.”

They had monopolized this floor, but it seemed they still let people go lower. I readied my guns—including the second one I’d recently obtained.

“They’re sending in attack dogs?!”

“Get over here, fellas! The city’s come to remove us by force!”

While the men prepared for battle, I silently fired my guns.

This time, I fused recovery rounds that I’d loaded in advance. The fused rounds emitted light that enveloped the two men. They collapsed on the spot like puppets with their strings cut and fell into a calm, blissful sleep.

Phew... I think I can do this.

“Wow, what do those things do?” Neptune asked, having sat his chin on my shoulder out of nowhere.

“Whoa! You followed me?!”

“Hahaha!”

“Don’t put your face on my shoulder!” I shouted, shaking him off. In order to distract myself from that assault, I explained, “They’re sleep rounds. When I shoot just one, they only heal the target, but if I fuse two, they put the target to sleep.”

“Wow. That’s like double the healing power, huh?”

“You could put it that way.”

Footsteps came from inside the dungeon. Adventurers appeared one after another. I aimed, fused more recovery rounds, and put all of them to sleep. The fusion rounds were super effective, knocking out everyone they hit. I even felled the gang’s leader, Adalbard himself.

Once everyone on B6 of Silicon was asleep, we were able to have them all hauled out.



When I left Silicon, a man with a shaved head and beard approached me and said, “Thanks, friend! You really helped us out.”

“Who are you?”

“Sorry for not introducing myself. I’m Clint Grey, Cyclo’s dungeon chief.”

Dungeon chief? I’d never heard of that job. However, I quickly realized the dungeon chief was probably a big deal in a world where everything came from dungeon monster drops.

“Thank you again for your efforts,” he said. “Because of you, we managed to

end this without casualties. Plus, now we won't have to see the price of rice go up, either. Seriously, thank you."

"It's okay. I just did what I could."

"Either way, you've helped out a whole lot of people. We'll have to think of a way to reward you."

"No, I really..."

"We'll look into it and contact you. Thank you! Thank you so much!" Clint ignored my protests and kept talking. After shaking my hand vigorously, he left.

Well, whatever. Fine by me.

Either way, the rice problem was solved, so I left to tell Erza. Even at Swallow's Returned Favor, people thanked me profusely.

32. The Dungeon Chief's Request

I killed mummies on B3 of Nihonium for speed seeds and checked my fusion rounds' capabilities, since when the bullets fired from my two guns collided before hitting a monster, they would fuse and create new effects.

Two normal rounds created piercing rounds. A flame round and a freeze round combined to make annihilation rounds. Two recovery rounds created sleep rounds. Flame rounds and recovery rounds fused into divine fire, causing undead monsters such as mummies to melt like butter. Given the phenomenon and the monsters they worked on, I decided to name them holy flame rounds.

Did the ability to make fusion rounds from two bullets come from the guns... or from me? I didn't know, but I knew that they would always fuse if they collided.

There was one huge problem, though. Not only did I need to use two guns, but I also needed to make the bullets collide mid-air. At this point in time, I had a ninety percent success rate. If I planned to use this technique, though, I'd *really* need it to work, so I wanted to pump that rate to a hundred percent. With that in mind, I mowed down mummies with piercing rounds.

Regular bullets didn't work on the mummies' tough skin, but piercing rounds could knock their heads clean off.

They still attempted ambushes, as all monsters in Nihonium did, but mummies were slower than zombies and skeletons, so I could get plenty of fusion round practice in. As a result, my success rate went up a little.

By the way, my speed rose from B to A in the process.



That afternoon, I went to a fancy building in the city instead of doing my daily Tellurium work. It was the Cyclo Dungeon Association's headquarters, where I met the man with the shaved head and the beard again—the dungeon chief.

I hadn't noticed it before, since I was riding the high from battle at the time, but now that we were calm and alone, this guy was a little scary. That was just how stern his face looked.

"Sorry for calling you here on such short notice," he said. "Have some tea and settle down, okay?"

The dungeon chief urged me to drink the tea his secretary had made. There were two teacups filled with aromatic black tea. He put sugar cubes into his own cup.

Plop. Plop. Plop. Plop, plop, plop, plop, plop, plop—

"You're using way too much of that!"

It was so insane to see that I had to not just comment, but scream.

After the dungeon chief had made a literal mountain of sugar cubes in his tea, the cubes looked like a glacier floating in the ocean. He drank his black (?) tea, putting a smile on his stern face.

"To be honest with you, I have a massive sweet tooth," he said.

"I can see that. Haven't you ever heard that too much of a good thing can be bad for you?!"

"Don't hesitate, friend. Drink up."

“Thanks for—wait, when did you put sugar cubes in my tea?!”

My teacup was full of sugar cubes. They dissolved strangely, turning it all into a syrupy amber mess. If I drank it, I’d die of diabetes. I couldn’t risk that, so I just left it and got down to business.

“Um, why did you have me come here today, exactly?”

“Right. You know the city of Hetero, don’t you?”

“Hetero?”

I cocked my head without thinking.

Wait, would it be bad if I don’t know about it?

Seeing my confusion, the dungeon chief began his explanation.

“It’s a city to the east of our Cyclo. It only has three dungeons, but it’s a livestock city with very high-quality meat.”

“I see.”

Hetero. A nearby city. Three dungeons that all drop meat. Ryota learns.

“What’s up with Hetero?” I asked him.

“A while back, a dungeon appeared between our two cities. It’s actually smack-dab in the middle of us.”

“Uh huh?”

“Now, because it’s *right* in the middle, there have been disputes over whether it belongs to Cyclo or Hetero. As you know, a tax is placed on all dungeon drop sales, so which city it belongs to will greatly influence that city’s funds.”

Wow. They were withholding taxes when I sold my stuff?

“Nihonium was a real thorn in our side in that regard,” he added.

Oh... They can't claim taxes, since its monsters don't drop anything.

“Recently, we came to an agreement. It'll be decided based on what the drops are. If there are a lot of vegetable-dropping floors, it'll be Cyclo's. If there are a lot of meat-dropping floors, it'll be Hetero's.”

“That makes sense.”

“That's where you come in. We want you to investigate, since you're strong and have high drop stats.”

“How do you know my drop stats?” I asked, feeling confused because I hadn't told anyone but Emily about that.

“I've heard about your bamboo shoots and watermelons. I don't know your exact drop stats, but they must be high if you can produce vegetables of that quality.”

“I see...”

Circumstantial evidence, huh? Nothing I can do about that.

“The thing is, we've already done some preliminary investigation.”

“Oh?”

“And much like how it's right between us, the numbers of floors dropping vegetables versus meat are equal.”

“Why ask me if you know that much?”

The dungeon chief looked at me head-on and answered, “The rare monster drops.”

His face was...terrifyingly serious.

“Rare monsters’ rare drops will decide it. Still, it’s not like just anybody can get drops from rare monsters, so we need to dispatch someone with high drop stats.”

“Got it.”

“Please. Of course, we’re not going to be slave drivers. If they win the dungeon, they’ll pay you a lump sum. If the dungeon falls under Cyclo’s jurisdiction, we’ll exempt you from all drop taxes.”

Tax exemption, huh? That sounds pretty good. Besides... Yeah, that’s a worthwhile reward.

If the dungeon became Cyclo’s, Cyclo would take taxes from drop sales. And in that case, being the only person exempt from taxes was a huge boon—as long as this wasn’t too Herculean a task.

“Understood,” I answered. “I’ll see what I can do.”

“Thank you! Thank you so very much!” the dungeon chief exclaimed as he stood up and shook my hand vigorously over the table. “It may not be much, but here’s an advance on your reward.”

Clunk!

The door opened, and the secretary from before brought in a mountain of sugar cubes.

“I don’t want that!”

“Now, now, now. Sugar is energy, friend!”

The dungeon chief tossed a cube into his mouth, which brought a smile to his face once more. Realizing it could give me diabetes, I politely declined the advance.

Thus, an unexpected request dropped onto my shoulders out of thin air.

33. Trash and Recycling

I counted on my fingers as I walked home from the Cyclo Dungeon Association. I was thinking of what I would need to pack for my trip.

Bullets were a given. I could restock normal rounds whenever I needed, but I would have to take lots of the special rounds that I could produce only in Nihonium. Apart from that, I considered whether I should bring my magic cart and how many changes of clothes I needed.

“Feels like I’m packing for a business trip.”

The thought of it put a smile on my face because it reminded me of the excitement of my first business trip at my last company, which had happened before they’d started putting me through the wringer.

Back then, it had been as exciting as a vacation or a field trip, so I was getting excited about this business trip to a new dungeon. But then, I remembered something. Leaving Cyclo to go to an unfamiliar place...

“It’s just like living away from my family for work...”



I got home—to our new two-bedroom home that cost 150,000 piro per month to rent—earlier than usual, and told Emily at length about the new dungeon that had formed and the request to investigate it.

“That’s incredible, Yoda! You’re just like the Neptune family.”

“Come to think of it, they did that for Nihonium too, didn’t they?”

I hadn’t met Neptune back then; I’d just heard rumors.

“Yes, and this is the same. It’s a big deal to be entrusted with dungeon investigations.”

“Makes sense, since dungeons drop everything in this world and all.”

“Understood. I’ll take good care of our home while you’re gone, Yoda.”

Emily smiled and put one of her cute hands against her small chest.

“No. I want you to come with me.”

“Huh? With you?” she replied, looking surprised.

“Yeah.”

“But I won’t be much help.”

I looked her dead in the eyes and said, “That’s not true. I want you to come with me, Emily.”

In my gaze was the hope that I wouldn’t have to leave her and go on my own.

Emily looked back at me. After a moment of surprise, she smiled softly and agreed. And so, we decided to go check out the new dungeon.



Emily and I left Cyclo early the next morning and used the map I’d received to find the new dungeon. I pushed the magic cart, while Emily hauled her hammer and giant rucksack. A typical sight, really.



She smiled the whole way there.

“You look happy. Any good news?”

“I’m on a trip with you, Yoda! It’s loads of fun.”

“That so?”

I’m glad I invited her.

Seeing her smile was more than enough to make it worth bringing her along.

That said...

I looked around. When we’d left Cyclo, the scenery had changed abruptly. The inside of the city was bustling with people, making it feel like a big place. But less than ten minutes out, it was a total wasteland. There weren’t even any dead trees around us.

“Nothing out here, huh?” I observed.

“It would be problematic if anything was.”

“Huh?”

“If anything was out here, it would turn into an outsider. The only things that don’t turn into outsiders are air, water, and the earth.”

“...Wow.”

What an incredible thing for her to say in a completely matter-of-fact tone. Right; everything in this world came from dungeon drops. When a drop was left in a place without any people nearby, it turned back into the monster that dropped it.

In other words, if anything was left in this empty wasteland, it would turn into a monster. As a result, people made sure it was empty.

“You can’t go building huts or something out here in a world like this,” I mumbled to myself.

Once again, I realized that I’d found my way into a crazy world.



After half a day’s walk, evening arrived. We were getting tired, so we decided to camp next to a river.

“I’ll get things ready,” Emily said as she put down her rucksack, took a tent out, and began putting it up like a master. She’d roughed it until she met me, so she was really used to doing this. “Yoda, could I get you to bring me some water, please?”

“Sure. Can I use the magic cart?”

“That should be fine.”

I nodded and pushed the cart to the river, where I scooped some water into the back of it.

I gazed at the river. It was really beautiful, but there were no fish, no plants, no nothing. Fish were probably dungeon drops, too; that was why there weren’t any in the river.

This...is one hell of a world. A fascinating one, at that, I thought.

When I came back with the water, Emily had finished setting up the tent.

“Emily?” I called out.

“I’m inside.”

I left the magic cart and entered the tent.

“Whoa, what’s this?!”

“A tent...?” Emily replied, looking confused.

“It’s as big as our living room!” I rebutted wildly.

The inside of the tent was very emblematic of her skill. Just like our home, I felt a sense of warmth and kindness wash over me the moment I entered. In other words, it wasn’t a tent at all. Instead, I seemed to have stepped into another different dimension, or a liminal space. The tent was just like a household. A table and a sofa were inside, and lamps hung on the walls. It really was just a perfect replica of our living room.

“How in the world...?” I murmured.

“I keep it all in my rucksack.”

“In that sack?!”

“It’s extremely heavy.”

“That doesn’t begin to explain it. The thing’s spotless and soft. Is this a carpet?!” The floor was so soft that it was hard to imagine that the world outside was a wasteland.

“I worked extra hard,” she said flatly.

“Just working hard doesn’t get you *this*.”

Emily was confused by my shock. Her face seemed to say, *What I’m doing is normal*.

As surprised as I was, I knew this was just like her. Maybe for someone like Emily, who could create warmth, softness, and even a holy aura in any home, making a tent like a household living room wasn’t a big deal.

“I’ll make dinner next,” she said.

“Sure.”

I decided to stop thinking about it and relax in the tent Emily had set up for us.



After eating Emily’s hot dinner, we drank tea and relaxed. We were camping, but even the meals were the same as ever. Not that it was much of a surprise, mind you. She had treated me to meals in dungeons before.

“Here’s some ice cream for dessert,” Emily offered.

“Okay, you have to have a limit!” I rebutted again when faced with the dessert. But yes, I did eat it all the same. “Oh, this is tasty. I like how it’s not too sweet.”

“It’s yuzu ice cream.”

“Yeah, I love it.”

“Relax here, Yoda. I’ll dispose of the trash.”

“Oh... Wait, dispose of...?” I asked as I raised an eyebrow.

“Yes? I’ll dispose of it.”

That wording got stuck in my mind. She wasn’t throwing it away; she was disposing of it.

“What do you do with the trash?” I asked.

“I do my best to burn it. When we’re in the city, we can have professionals

dispose of it, but out here, we need to burn it or else it'll turn into monsters."

"Wow. Even the trash, huh?"

Now that I thought about it, that made perfect sense. Life as a human meant that you seldom used things up entirely. There was almost always trash to deal with.

In this world where everything came from dungeons, abandoning things allowed them to turn back into monsters. And that was true of trash, too. If you didn't destroy it, it would become a monster.

I'd only just learned about this, but thinking about it, maybe it was obvious.

"I'll help. You've gotta burn it, right?"

I pulled out my gun. Emily knew about the flame rounds, so she smiled and said, "Thank you!"

We left the tent. Unlike its warm, bright interior, the outside was lonely and desolate, like we'd stepped into another world.

We put our trash down, backed off, and I aimed right at it. Then, I shot a flame round and the trash started to burn, but...

"It's not burning much, is it?" I notes.

"Disposing of trash is difficult."

"That's normal enough, I guess."

The sight before me was not normal, however. I took out my other gun. This time, I fired two flame rounds at once to burn it with a fusion round. The flame was so bright that it was hard to look at.

"That should do," Emily said.

“Yeah.”

“We don’t want trash turning into monsters. A trash spawn comes out different from its base monster, and it ends up really strong.”

“That does sound bad.”

Illegal dumping of trash would be a serious problem. Hell, maybe it already was a problem somewhere out there. If disposing of trash was so hard that I needed fusion rounds to burn it, then there were most likely people who cut corners and caused accidents.

Trash might just be a major issue in this world... Wait!

“Emily, what did you just say?”

“Huh?”

“Did you say trash turns into different monsters?”

“Yes. What about it?”

“What do they drop?”

“Nothing. Just like outsiders—Oh!” Emily gasped before she could finish her sentence. She’d figured it out, too.

Outsiders didn’t drop anything...unless I was the one who killed them. When I killed outsiders, they dropped things. So then, what about the monsters that came from trash?



I had Emily make more food, which created trash. We left said trash far away,

in the middle of the wasteland, and watched it from afar. After about ten minutes, it glowed and transformed into a monster. It was human-shaped. A man, to be specific. It had green, patchwork skin, and a giant bolt-like thing stuck out of its neck. In a word...it was like Frankenstein.

“I’ll hold it back,” Emily said, hoisted her hammer, and jumped forward. She leaped for the Frankenstein and swung her hammer down from above. It waved its arms and intercepted the attack, creating a dull, yet very loud, noise. It had stopped Emily’s hammer entirely—the very hammer that could smash rock monsters into bits had been held off like it was nothing.

“Emily, stay back.”

“Okay!”

Knowing that she was in danger, she jumped back as soon as she’d landed. The Frankenstein pursued her, so I fired my gun to stop it. Normal bullets didn’t work well on it, just like the mummies. Flame rounds burned it a little, but the fire quickly fizzled. Likewise, the freeze rounds only froze it for a moment before melting.

I fired bullet after bullet, but single bullets didn’t do much, so the Frankenstein continued its sluggish charge toward Emily.

“Emily, smack it one more time!”

“Okay!” she replied and swung her hammer again, putting every last ounce of her strength into the blow.

Once again, the Frankenstein canceled out her attack. It boasted power equal to a hammer backed by A-rank strength. Still, Emily had succeeded in stopping it, so I took that moment’s opportunity to load all of my flame rounds into my guns. Then, I fired them all at the Frankenstein...and every single pair turned

into fusion rounds.

The Frankenstein's patchwork skin burst into flames. This time, the fire from the fused rounds didn't go out...and the Frankenstein burned. Eventually, it fell to the ground and turned to ash.

"Thank you," Emily said.

"I didn't expect it to be such a pain."

I hadn't thought our dinner trash would turn into such a powerful monster. This world's trash problem might be a life-or-death issue. But hey, not a problem as long as it was disposed of properly.

More importantly, I wanted to see my drop. I waited with bated breath for the Frankenstein to disappear.

It dropped one bullet—a golden type that I had never seen before. Given its appearance and the fact that I'd only gotten one, it must be a good one. I was excited to find out what it could do.

34. Homing Rounds and the Overworked

I loaded the new golden bullet into my gun. Then, I brought a carrot—that had not been made into trash yet—to a faraway spot and placed it on the ground.

After backing away, I waited. Emily watched from next to me. She looked more nervous and excited than even I was. The carrot eventually turned into an outsider: a sleep slime.

I aimed carefully, predicted the sleep slime’s usual movement patterns, and fired. The bullet flew forth.

The slime was bouncing in parabolic arcs, so it was set to fall right into the bullet’s path. But then, the bullet changed its path mid-air! It curved upward with the slime’s arc. When the slime was dragged down by gravity, the bullet likewise curved down in its trajectory.

It was a direct hit. The bullet struck the sleep slime where I’d expected it to; it was just the path that had diverged from my calculations.

“Yoda, did that just...change directions?” Emily asked.

“Yeah, it did. Or more accurately, I guess the bullet chased it.”

“That must be it.”

“A homing round, huh?”

I recalled what I’d just seen. The arc of the bullet as it matched the slime’s bounces.

“I wanna experiment with this. Do you have more trash?”

“I’ll make more!” Emily exclaimed as she ran over to her luggage, boiled water with practiced motions, and brewed tea. She then put the tea leaves, now trash, to a distant place and served the tea alone to me.

“Thanks. You drink up too, Emily.”

“I’ll drink once everything’s ready,” Emily replied, already preparing the next part of this experiment. Heading in the opposite direction of the trash, she put a carrot on the ground and then returned to me. We drank tea together and waited.

Soon enough, the trash outsider, a Frankenstein, appeared. I made short work of it with fused flame rounds and picked up the golden bullet it dropped. The carrot that Emily had put down turned into a sleep slime just in time.

“Thanks, Emily.”

“Hehehe...”

I thanked the happy-looking Emily and fired the golden bullet in a random direction. It instantly curved away. After moving in a manner that no normal bullet ever would, it pierced the sleep slime.

“Wow... That’s incredible, Yoda!”

“Yeah, there’s no doubt about it. These must be homing rounds.”

The bullets that came from trash were convenient, indeed.



We stayed up all night and did a whole bunch of experiments. In the end, I got a good grasp of what the homing rounds could do.

First off, they always hit whatever enemy I wanted to kill. I tried it against even the most mobile slimes: bat slimes, cockro slimes, snake slimes. No matter how much they moved, the homing rounds always got them.

Hit rate: one hundred percent.

Incidentally, they were as strong as normal bullets, so they were just normal bullets that always hit. Always hitting was an extreme boon, though, so I wanted to collect more.



The next day, we were pretty short on sleep due to all the experimenting, but we still left early in the morning. When noon arrived, we saw it in the distance: a dungeon entrance with a mob of tents erected in front of it.

“Is that our destination?” Emily asked.

“Sure looks like it. By the way, this dungeon’s name is Selenium.”

“It sounds like a woman’s name, doesn’t it? What kind of monsters are inside?”

“According to what I’ve heard...”

As I recalled what the dungeon chief had told me, I found a large location away from the mob of tents. Even from afar, it was clearly a pile of trash—a literal pile of treasure, in my eyes.



When we approached the mountain of trash, we saw a tall, gorgeous lady with black hair. She was like a model, slim with long legs. The woman took a deep breath, created a magic circle at her feet, and cast a spell. A ball of fire flew from her outstretched hand and hit one part of the trash pile.

The trash burned, but for all the flame's vigor, it didn't work very fast. As I'd experienced yesterday, trash was hard to dispose of in this world.

"What's that lady doing?" I asked Emily.

"I'm not certain, but I think she's the one who disposes of trash here."

"Disposes of trash?"

"Like with cities, dungeons have lots of people around them. Living life means making trash, so they need someone to dispose of it."

"Oh, I understand."

Come to think of it, that makes sense.

I glanced over at the dungeon Selenium. There were tons of tents and adventurers there. According to the dungeon chief, it didn't belong to Cyclo or Hetero yet. As such, drops from within wouldn't be taxed, so some of those adventurers must have been there to make money.

With so many adventurers around, they needed people to dispose of all the trash they made.

Yep. That's a pretty simple cycle.

"Ah!" Emily gasped.

"What's wrong?"

“Someone’s brought trash from inside the dungeon.”

“Wow, you’re right. Wait, isn’t that more than what the girl there was just burning?”

“It is...”

Emily and I watched for a while. The only person disposing of the trash was that black-haired lady. She seemed like a mage, since she was burning the trash with flame magic, but she clearly had trouble keeping up. That was likely why this pile had formed.

“Ah! Look, she’s dizzy!”

“Yeah, you’re right.”

Emily ran to her and asked, “Are you okay?”

“Who are you...?” the woman mumbled, tired.

“Um, we’re here to investigate the dungeon.”

“Oh? Okay, well, if you’re staying here, bring all of your trash to me. You don’t have to divide it; I’m just gonna burn it all.”

“Thank you, but...I think you should take a break,” Emily advised her.

“I appreciate the sentiment, but now isn’t the time. If I don’t burn this trash, I’ll get in the way of everyone’s work.”

“But...”

“I’m fine!” the woman yelled as she tried to use her magic again. But the moment a magic circle appeared at her feet, it vanished, and she started stumbling about.

“Are you okay?!”

Emily held the woman in her arms.

“I-I’m fine.”

She put on a strong front, but I’d seen what had happened. There were dark bags under her pretty eyes. Her face had gone pale, too. On closer inspection, she looked gaunt. Unhealthy, even. That was the face of those who did over a hundred hours of overtime per month. I had seen people like her often in my company days.

She tried to stand back up and burn the trash again. Her strong sense of responsibility was clear on her face. Silently loading my ammunition, I fired. By combining two recovery rounds, I had put her to sleep.

“Emily, take care of her for me.”

“Understood. I’ll get her away from here.”

Working fast, Emily hauled the woman off. Meanwhile, I stepped away from the mountain of trash. It was clearly just a pile of trash, over which you might expect to see crows flying. But in my eyes, it was a mountain of treasure.

I stepped far away, loaded my ammo, and waited. Eventually, the trash pile turned into a mob of Frankensteins, one after another.

I mowed them down one by one...and in the process, I obtained plenty of homing rounds.



“Nnnh...?”

In our tent, the woman woke up. She’d been in a daze for a while, but then

her eyes abruptly focused...and she shot to her feet.

“Don’t push yourself,” I said. “You need more rest.”

But instead of listening to me, she rushed out of the tent without a word.

Emily and I followed her outside. There, we saw her standing stock-still from shock. The pile of trash was totally gone. Nothing was there anymore.

“What happened...?” she asked us.

“I took care of it for you.”

“Y-You?”

“Yeah,” I confirmed.

She gazed at me dumbly. And then...she sank to her knees.

“Thank goodness...”

“Huh?”

“More adventurers arrive by the day to make money. It was getting to be too much for me to handle, so I had no idea what to do...”

“Really?”

That sounded rough.

“Thank you. I mean it; thank you!”

On her knees, she looked up at me and thanked me over and over before collapsing again as if her battery had run out. I caught her. Despite her height, she was shockingly light. I could tell she’d given this her all.

“Emily.”

“Right! I’ll cook something energizing!”

Emily nodded with a smile and got right to work. For now, we knew that we needed to let this woman rest.

35. The Power of Homing Rounds

After leaving the exhausted woman with Emily, I headed toward the dungeon. I planned to report that I was here, and ask what to do next.

Tents were set up all around Selenium's entrance. It was reminiscent of a war camp. Adventurers walked about here and there, some pushing carts full of items. The cart-pushing ones were gathered around a certain few tents—presumably, those were where people bought drops.

Just from watching, I could tell that even if the buildings were just tents now, business here was almost exactly like it was in the city.

I stopped a few young adventurers who were walking by, and asked them where I could find the boss from Cyclo's Dungeon Association. After that, I went straight there.

Their tent was big. It looked like one that nomadic tribes would use. The inside was set up very much like an office space, with workers running about. In the very back of the tent sat a man in his thirties who looked like a manager.

"Excuse me," I called to him. "I'm Ryota Sato from Cyclo."

When I introduced myself, the man held his arms out, stood, and came to me.

"Oooh, we've been expecting you," he said, offering me a hand that I shook with the most polite smile I could muster. "I've heard all about you. Thanks so much for coming. My name's Duke; I'm the manager here."

"Ryota Sato," I said again, and moved to advance the conversation. "I've only heard the basics. Can you explain exactly what I need to do here?"

“Absolutely, my good friend,” Duke replied. Inside the office-like tent, he pointed me to a couch, which I sat atop to face him. “You’ve heard that we’re investigating rare monster drops, I presume?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, things have changed a little bit in that regard. As you might know, Selenium here has a total of ten underground floors. According to our current investigation, the normal monster drops alternate between vegetables and meat.”

“Right.”

“In these cases, as with other dungeons, rare monster drops typically go along those lines as well.”

“Then...there’s no point in investigating, is there?”

I was a little confused.

“But we still need to decide whether it will go to Cyclo or Hetero,” Duke continued rather than answering my question.

I nodded to urge him along. They did need to decide a victor in this dispute between Cyclo and Hetero; after all, it would determine which town got the tax revenue.

“So we’ve agreed on a compromise: it shall be decided based on the number of rare monster drops found in a limited time. Rare monsters don’t appear often, and it’s not as if we’re guaranteed drops from them. If they don’t drop anything in this period, then we’ll assume they drop nothing. Of course, it’s possible that they actually do drop nothing.”

Right, since there were monsters out there that didn’t drop anything.

“I get it,” I replied. “So all we have to do is concentrate on killing rare monsters on the five vegetable floors.”

Duke nodded firmly. Things were getting a lot simpler. My targets and objectives were clear, so the rest would be smooth sailing.

“All right, then. Starting tomorrow, I’ll camp—”

“Oh, that won’t be necessary. We’ve set bounties already that all the adventurers know about.”

“Bounties?”

“If a rare monster appears on a vegetable floor, they’ll send us a message. Then, we—you, that is—will go there and kill it.”

“Understood.”

It would be inefficient for me to run around searching for rare monsters all alone, so they were instead buying information from Cyclo’s adventurers and sending me in for the kill. This was getting easier by the minute.



A report ended up coming in before the end of the day. A rare monster had appeared on B1 of Selenium.

Duke and I went there together and found a crowd forming around a young adventurer who had caught a slime-like creature. The monster wriggled to try to escape, but he had a tight grip on it.

Meanwhile, an older, well-built man stood alongside a very masculine-looking adventurer at a distance from the monster. The older man was smirking at me. I

found it annoying, for some reason, as if he was looking down on me.

Curious, I asked Duke, “Who’s that guy?”

“That’s Harvard. He’s from the Hetero Dungeon Association, and he’s basically at my rank.”

“Is he their manager?”

He had the face of middle management in more ways than one.

“See the adventurer behind him?” Duke asked. “His name is Yujin. He’s strong, but the poor guy has the worst possible plant drop stat, F.”

A plant drop stat of F? Why is Duke telling me that?

There had to be a reason, so I thought for a moment. Then, something occurred to me.

“Are you saying they’re using an adventurer with the lowest plant drop stat to kill rare monsters they expect to drop plants?”

“In doing that, they make it so that the monster won’t drop anything. If they keep that up until the time limit...”

“It’s sabotage, then.”

I get it. That’s why their manager is smirking at me.

“It’s a dirty trick, but he is a skilled adventurer,” Duke said, resigned. “There’s nothing anybody can do once he’s defeated the rare monster. We can’t complain, either.”

“Figures.”

There was no rule against people with F-rank drops defeating monsters. If we complained about that, then that would mean Emily wouldn’t be allowed to

hunt, either. Even if someone had F-rank drops, it was still fine for them to try for that one-in-a-million chance. But by permitting this, they had allowed a means of sabotage. Duke was right; it was a dirty trick.

“Either way, this one’s ours. That young man there has a contract with our side. As long as he’s got it in his hands, Yujin can’t take it from him, since it’s against the rules to kill a monster someone else has secured without their permission.”

“I’ll go kill it now,” I replied.

“Good luck.”

I took out my gun and loaded a normal round. Since an adventurer on our side was holding it down, I figured a normal round was enough.

“Hold it still for me, okay?”

“I’ve got it,” the young man assured me.

Just in case, I used both guns to combine the normal rounds into a more powerful piercing round. There was a big hole in the monster now, making it look like a crescent moon.

All done—or so I thought. Harvard’s smirk grew even bigger as the monster regenerated. As it did so, it grew even bigger, allowing it to throw off the adventurer’s grip and fall to the ground.

“Here’s the thing about this monster,” the Hetero adventurer, Yujin, stated harshly. “Every time you attack without destroying its core, it regenerates and grows stronger.”

“Each of them has its core in different places, too. Only Yujin can figure out where they are,” Harvard added. “Attacking it recklessly just makes it stronger and puts everyone else in danger. Leave this to us, understand?”

Harvard made a declaration of victory, grinning even deeper now. Hearing him, Duke gritted his teeth angrily.

“Grrr... I thought you were a little too composed. So that’s it, eh?” he grumbled before turning to me apologetically. “I’m sorry. We didn’t do enough research. We’ll investigate its weakness right away, so for now—”

While Duke tried to declare our tactical withdrawal, I loaded different bullets in my guns and silently pulled the triggers as I aimed off in a different direction.

I was certain that this would work. The bullets traced boomerang-like arcs and pierced the bouncing monster. The monster turned into that crescent shape again...and then shattered without regenerating.

“Wha—?”

“He can see the core?”

The two people on Hetero’s side were aghast. Harvard stood with his mouth agape, while Yujin looked ticked off. I ignored them and watched the monster’s carcass. Eventually, it disappeared...and dropped bean sprouts. Big, golden bean sprouts. Kind of a shabby drop for a rare monster, but whatever.

Duke turned to them and said victoriously, “As you can see, it’s a vegetable.”

The pair from Hetero left in a huff. It seemed we’d won a small victory here.

After they left, Duke seized my hand with both of his and exclaimed, “Thank you! Thank you so much for coming here!”

He thanked me over and over. I was relieved and satisfied to be able to meet his expectations.

36. Delicious Earnings

Duke gave me an envelope filled with money. It was a reward for defeating the B1 rare monster, getting its drop, and winning a point for Cyclo. I had once received a bonus from my workplace. It had only been 5,000 yen, though, so it had really pissed me off. I remembered saying, “You can’t even spare ten thousand?!”

After parting with Duke, I opened the envelope and looked inside. Incredibly, it was 100,000 piro. In this world, piro were worth about as much as yen.

While I was mostly just surprised by the incredible amount of money in the envelope, I did feel a tinge of joy.



After settling things on B1 sooner than expected, I decided to spend some more time there. Walking around inside the dungeon, I saw many more adventurers in there than Cyclo’s Tellurium, and every single one had a glint in their eye.

Whenever monsters appeared nearby, they leaped for them and killed on sight. Not being taxed meant making more money, so everyone was rushing to get to them first. The monsters in question were slimes, but they weren’t quite like Tellurium’s. Their bodies had a splotchy, rainbow-colored pattern.

One happened to appear near me, so I whipped out my gun and hit it with a

regular bullet. The bullet pierced the rainbow slime...and it dropped something. It was a pile of soybeans—about enough for me to fit in one hand. It seemed the rare monsters dropped special bean sprouts, while the normal monsters dropped soybeans.

While I was there, I decided to walk around and make a bit of money. As I did, I kept track of the other adventurers' earnings. After ten minutes, I had a good grasp of the average.

There wasn't much difference between the drops I and other adventurers got. When any of us defeated slimes and got drops, we got a handful of soybeans. What differed was that I always got drops, while other adventurers sometimes received nothing from the slimes they killed. As such, it seemed the S-rank advantage on this floor was consistent drops.

As soon as I thought I'd understood everything, though, I saw something contradictory. A swordsman dressed like a vagabond sliced a slime in two. He was rewarded with double the usual amount of soybeans.

"Heh, lucky me," he said.

"Lucky? What do you mean?" I asked the man without thinking.

"First time here?"

"Yes, sir. I just arrived today."

"That so? Well, the monsters here have a special feature. Each of them has a different drop point somewhere in their body. If you attack that point and get a drop, you get double the normal amount."

"I had no idea."

"It only applies to Selenium, but that's why everyone's in a frenzy right now."

So that's part of why everyone's rushing around, huh?

This place wasn't being taxed, and you could receive double drops. I found myself getting excited, too.

"Good luck to you, kid."

"Yeah! You too."

The wanderer grinned and left in search of more monsters.

I reflected on what he'd said. It reminded me of the rare monster from before—a similar appearance, similar characteristics. You had to hit the rare monster's weak point to kill it, but the regular monsters could be killed normally; your drops just doubled if you hit the right spot. So that was this dungeon's gimmick, then.

Does that mean...?

I walked more until a rainbow slime appeared. Then, I loaded a homing round in my gun and shot poorly on purpose. The bullet curved and pierced the edge of the slime's body. Specifically, it hit a blue part. And as a result, I got double the normal drops!

I searched more and shot the next slime I found with another homing round. This time, it hit the red part in the center. Once again, I received double the usual soybeans.

Search, find, shoot with a homing round.

As it turned out, the drop points varied per monster. They were in different places and different colors each time.

Along the way, I tried normal rounds and flame rounds, but I only received the normal amount each time. You had to hit a very specific point to get those

double drops, and my newfound homing rounds could do that every single time with ease.

With the double drops I received from defeating monsters with my S-rank drop stats and homing rounds—and with a ten percent increase in revenue from my untaxed sales—my daily earnings surpassed 500,000 piros.

37. Thanks to Emily

With the day's earnings in my pocket, I went back to see Emily. Our tent wasn't in the place we'd left it before; it had been moved closer to the trash.

I approached it and stepped inside.

"I'm back... Whoa!"

The instant I entered, I was enveloped in warmth. Not to say it was cold outside or hot inside; the tent was just...warm. Or perhaps it was bliss that I felt—bliss in the form of gentle comfort enveloping me.

How can a tent feel like home?

"Welcome back," Emily replied.

All of this was thanks to her power, so a smile spilled onto my face.

"Hey. Sorry I got back so late."

"Don't worry about it. Good work today."

"Did I miss something? I noticed the tent's moved a bit."

"Yes. Someone came to throw away trash earlier. We were far enough from the dumpsite that it would've turned into outsiders, so I moved us closer."

"Makes sense," I agreed, and looked to the corner of our tent. The tall beauty from before was still sleeping there, but the pain was gone from her face and she was resting soundly, so I told Emily we should just leave her alone for now.

"I went down to B1 of Selenium," I said.

"How was it?"

“It’s a pretty interesting place.”

I described how you had to hit a particular spot on monsters to get double drops, and the fact that I’d used my homing rounds to get double drops every single time.

Emily listened intently, but she cocked her head at one point, curious about something.

“What’s up?” I asked.

“Yoda, did you use a lot of homing rounds?”

“Yeah. About half...no, more than two thirds of what we got today.”

“Isn’t that a waste? You spent two flame rounds to get each homing round, didn’t you?”

“Come to think of it, you’re right.”

That reminded me: the most efficient way to kill those trash-born Frankensteins was a fusion round made from flame rounds. I had gotten the flame rounds themselves using pickup boxes at a rate of one per two zombies, so the conversion rate was four zombies to one homing round.

Of course, all monsters could be defeated bare-handed, but it was easier to understand in terms of bullet exchange rate.

Given those calculations, perhaps Emily was right to call the process a waste.

“It’s fine,” I decided.

“Is it?”

“Yeah. I’m the kinda guy who doesn’t save up his elixirs. Homing rounds are the most efficient thing here, so I’m using them.”

“What’s an elixir...? Well, anyway, okay.”

Emily agreed with me.



When the woman sleeping in the tent woke up, she sat on her knees and introduced herself.

“My name is Celeste.”

She seemed restless. Glancing around the tent, she looked confused and bothered. I could tell what had her so frazzled.

“This is all thanks to Emily’s special abilities,” I explained.

“Bwuh?!” Emily made a dumbfounded noise.

“Crappy apartments, new buildings, even tents—she’s got a skill that can make them wonderful, warm, divine places.”

“Goodness! That is incredible!” Celeste piped up.

“D-D-Don’t listen to him! All I did was clean up!”

“I know, I know,” I said as I crossed my arms and nodded to her. “Prodigies always think their own abilities are normal.”

“Huuuh?!”

“I agree!” Celeste chimed in. “People with real talent never think of themselves as talented, do they?”

“Yep. They’re always like, ‘But this is normal.’”

“And then they turn it around on you by saying, ‘Why can’t you all do the

same thing?’’

“Right?!”

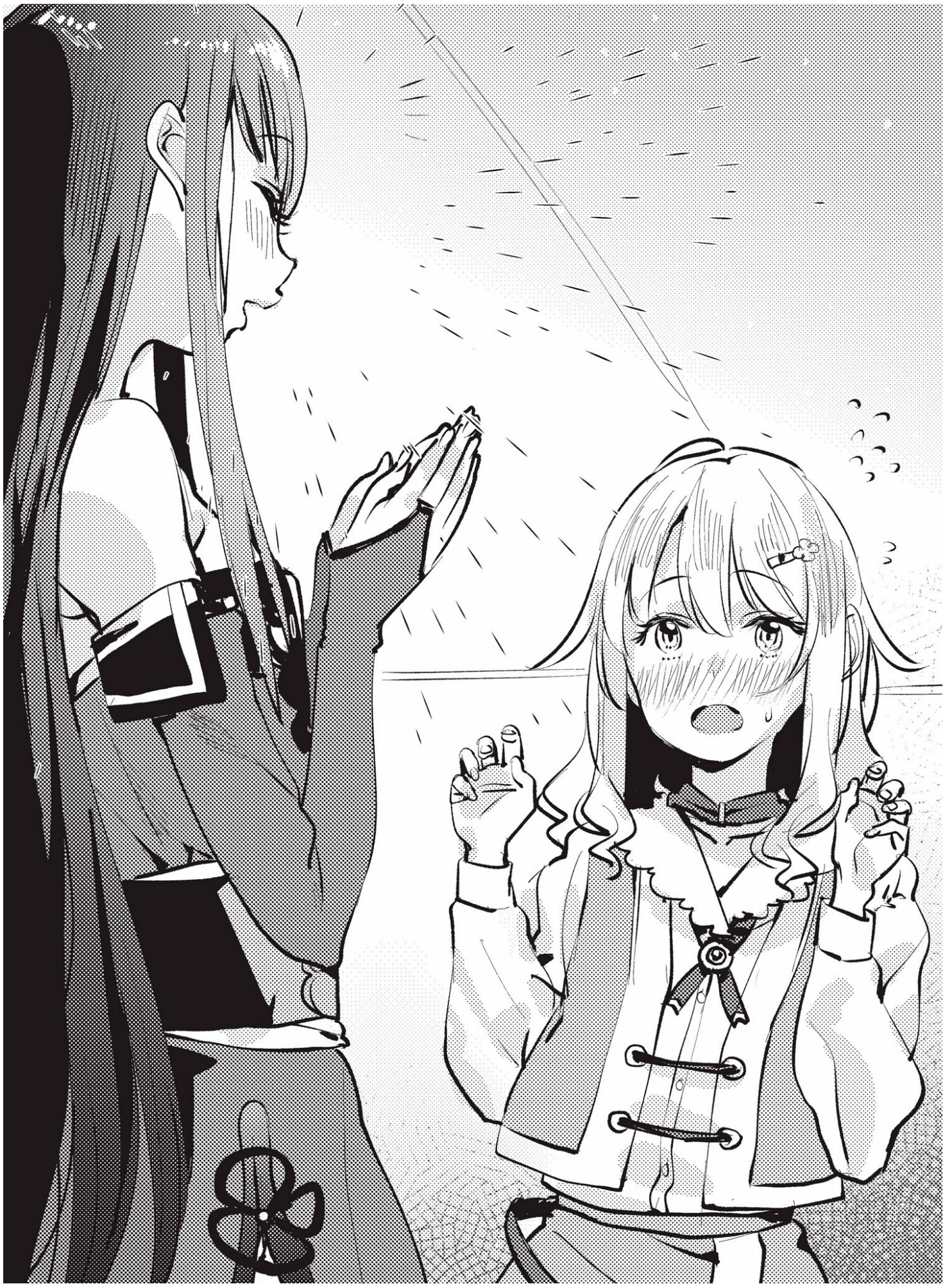
“Urk...” Emily groaned. She looked deeply perturbed...and was blushing, too.

“I-I’ll go make tea,” she said before running out of the tent.

Too cute.

Emily’s departure left me alone with Celeste. She looked at me and bowed again before saying, “Thank you so much for giving me the time to rest.”

“We did what anyone would’ve done. More importantly, why were you disposing of the trash all alone? If you can’t keep up with trash production, shouldn’t they be assigning more people to the job?”



“At first, I was keeping up just fine. But when word spread that the tax exemption would end soon, adventurers began flocking to the place.”

“I see.”

That was probably because of the negotiations between Cyclo’s and Hetero’s Dungeon Associations. Once it was clear which city the dungeon belonged to, that city would start taxing drops. People wanted to make money before then.

“By the way, how long did I sleep?” Celeste asked.

“Half a day, maybe? The sun’s already set.”

“Oh no!”

She ran from the tent. A pile of trash had already formed, just close enough to the tent that it wouldn’t turn into outsiders. It was easily a few truckloads’ worth. I was kind of grossed out by how much could accumulate in half a day, honestly.

“It’s grown even bigger...” she sighed.

“Yeah.”

“I’m sorry. Let me clean up a little.”

I nodded. It felt like a waste, considering the fact that my special rounds could handle it in seconds, but hey, I had to let her do her job.

Celeste stood in front of the trash and a magic circle spread at her feet.

“Whoa!”

I had to react. This magic circle was much bigger and brighter than the ones I’d seen when we first met. Celeste held out her hand and white fire enveloped the mountain of trash, burning it to ash in an instant.

“Phew...”

Incredible. I didn't think she had magic that strong. While I reeled in amazement, Celeste turned around, rushed over to where Emily was, and gave her a deep bow.

“Thank you,” she said. “This is all because of you.”

“Bwuh?!”

“Through resting inside your tent, I've recovered even more mana than usual. Thank you so much. You are an amazing person.”

“I-I didn't do much—”

For some reason, I felt a little happy seeing Emily get praised like that. Though it *was* amazing that she could swing that massive hammer around, I found the comfort of the homes she made and her ability to grant warmth and bliss to others even more amazing.

“Yep, agreed. It's all you, Emily.”

“Bwaaah!”

“Thanks to you, Celeste can take care of that trash just fine now, even when she couldn't come close to handling it alone before. You're improving all of our lives, Emily.”

“Y-Y-You're exaggerating.”

“Do I ever exaggerate?”

“I have to agree,” Celeste added. “Why, I want to go tell everyone in the camp about you.”

“Please don't. I think I'd die if you did that.”

Thanks to Celeste and I complimenting her together, Emily ended up red as a lobster. And yet, we kept on thanking her over and over until she was trembling.

38. One Million Piro of Gratitude

The next morning, I went down to B1 of Selenium again, where I used my homing rounds to farm double the drops. By leading the attacking slimes above my magic cart and hitting them with homing rounds, I could make the doubled drops fall right inside. It was kind of funny that I had to guide them to move a certain way despite having homing rounds, though.

Before I knew it, I had plenty of soybeans, so I left the dungeon and sold them. The weight of a full magic cart of soybeans was about 1,000 pon. I was 70 pon, so 1,000 pon was roughly a ton. For it, I received 80,000 piro. Not bad earnings.

With the help of my magic cart's weight calculation function, I made 200,000 piro before noon.



“Celeste.”

“Ryota.”

After my third round of selling, I happened to encounter Celeste hanging around the dungeon. Even in a crowd, she stood out. Her long black hair, model-like features, and tendency to stand up straight made her attract a lot of attention—in a good way.

“What are you up to?” I asked.

“I’m buying some necessities.”

“Gotcha,” I said, then nodded and looked around. “There sure are a lot of shops here. They’re selling daily needs, tasty foods, even jewelry. Wait, why jewelry?”

“They always sell jewelry at places like this,” she explained.

“But why?”

“Adventurers are flush with cash after a long day’s work.”

“Heh, you’re not wrong there.”

I was flush with cash myself. Between yesterday’s 500,000 and today’s 200,000, I had already earned 700,000 piro.

“When they are, they often buy souvenirs on the way home. The things that sell the most are typically accessories and jewelry for women.”

“The men are trying to show off their worth, huh?”

I hated myself for it, but I had to empathize. When you had a lot of money, you wanted to buy presents to show off a little. That was just how it worked.

I gazed at a shop that sold accessories. It felt like my beloved guns were telling me, *Let loose. You can always make more.*

Looking back, I’d promised to thank Emily after I’d obtained my second gun, but I hadn’t actually done that yet.

Hmm...



This wasn't me showing off; it was me showing my gratitude. It just so happened that my gratitude was equal to all of my current funds.

"Nah. This is a small price to pay," I said to myself, and I truly believed it.

Two days' earnings plus the money I'd brought from Cyclo added up to become the million-piro ring inside a box in my pocket. I could tell at a glance that it was perfect for Emily. It might've cost a million piro, but given how much I appreciated her, I didn't hesitate to buy it.

I was on my way to the tent where she waited. My legs began to run on their own. I was nervous and excited. Before I knew it, I'd stumbled and nearly dropped the boxed ring. After barely managing to catch it, I breathed a sigh of relief.

"...Hm?"

Nearly dropping the box called something to mind. A flash of inspiration struck me like white lightning.

What? What was I thinking just now?

I tried to remember, but I couldn't. I'd forgotten it as soon as it had come to me. That was just something that happened to me sometimes. However, I desperately wanted to know.

At times like this, repeating whatever I'd been doing when I had the idea usually jogged my memory, so I turned around, walked the same way, then tripped and almost dropped the box.

I caught it—and I remembered.

When I'd nearly dropped it the first time, it had left my hands for a moment. And this ring was another dungeon drop. In other words, following the logic of this world, losing it would let it turn into an outsider. And we were outdoors

now. Outsiders typically didn't drop things out here, but if I defeated them, they would.

"...One million piro," I mumbled.

What would an outsider that spawned from a million-piro ring drop? My curiosity and my gratitude for Emily tugged on either end of me.



I went to a less populated area away from Selenium. There, I left the ring in its box on the ground and stepped away.

In the end, curiosity had won the day, and I'd decided to turn the ring into an outsider.

"I'm sorry about this, Emily."

I'd convinced myself by the logic that I could spend the next day—no, two days—farming as hard as I could to buy the same thing again, so I waited with guns in hand. After what felt like forever, the box broke open from the inside and a monster came out.

It was a humanoid monster, but clearly not human. The thing was twice as big as a normal person, muscular, and its hair and skin alike burned bright red. The name "Ifrit" came to mind.

I loaded freeze rounds into my guns and fired. They hit the flames, sending frigid air flying—but that only lasted a moment. The fire spirit seemed to freeze for the shortest of instants, but the ice melted straight away. It then breathed fire, which I avoided before shooting at it again.

I tried to rapid-fire fusion rounds, but since I was evading as I went, I only hit the enemy without fusing the bullets. Freeze rounds hit it over and over, increasing the size of the frozen area.

The ice melted again, but it took longer than last time. Was it just my imagination, or were the places my bullets hit darker now?

“It’s working!”

Sensing that, I fired every last freeze round I could at the fire spirit.



When the spirit fell, it dropped an item. On the ground, I spotted the same ring I’d bought.

“The same exact ring...?”

Could this happen even outside of dungeons? Honestly, the ring was so expensive that I’d kind of expected a weapon even stronger than guns. Unfortunately, things didn’t work out that way.

Too bad. I’ll just head back with the ring, and we’ll call it even.

I picked it up, hoping to give it to Emily this time. But at that moment, I heard a voice.

Raises all drop stats by 1!

It was the same voice that I heard when my stats went up. Was this another

stat booster? If so, there was one thing that stood out. When I picked up seeds, they disappeared from my hand, but the ring was still there.

“...”

I put the ring down and picked it up again.

Raises all drop stats by 1!

I heard that voice once more. It was clear that the ring not disappearing meant it was not a stat-boosting consumable item, but equipment with effects that worked on the person who wore it.



I brought Emily to the status board near the dungeon.

“Do we need something here?” she asked me.

“Wear this for me.”

“What’s this—? Whaaa?!” Emily screamed, losing her mind when she saw the ring. “Wh-Wh-What is the meaning of this?!”

“It’s a show of appreciation for all you’ve done for me. Take it, please.”

“B-But...”

I gazed at the confused Emily. Under my watchful eye, her facial expression flipped from surprise to confusion to embarrassment. In the end, she timidly nodded and accepted the ring.

“Ah...”

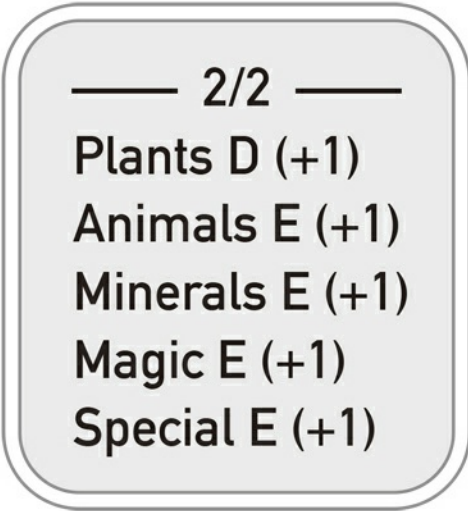
The moment she took it, she gasped and turned her eyes to the status board.

“Did you hear it?”

“Yes!”

“Let’s give it a try.”

Emily nodded again and operated the status board with a practiced hand. She skipped past the first page and brought up the second.



Before our eyes were stats we’d never seen before.

It looks like I was right about this ring being stat-boosting equipment.

“That’s great,” I said.

“Yeah! I’ve never seen something like this. Is it here thanks to your power, Yoda?”

She figured it out quickly, since she knew me well by now, but that wasn’t what mattered.

I looked at her again and said, “Thanks for everything. I hope you’ll accept it.”

“...Okay.”

After a rather long silence, she happily, yet bashfully, agreed.

“Thank you.”

She held that ring lovingly in both hands.

39. For You

I went to B2 of Selenium with Emily and searched for monsters.

After a short walk, something shot up from the ground like a plant. It was the standard B2 monster, a treant. Once it finished growing, it looked to be an elder tree standing at about ten feet tall. But when we approached, it reacted to our presence and attacked, using its branches like tentacles.

I promptly evaded and looked at Emily. She stared at the treant and tightened her grip on her enormous hammer.

“Ready to do this?” I asked.

“Yeah!” Emily replied. She then took a deep breath, hoisted her hammer, and sprinted forward with the ring I’d given her on her finger.

As she lunged forward, the treant swung its branches like whips. I provided supporting fire, deflecting them with regular bullets. Emily continued her charge and leaped forward before swinging her hammer down on the enemy!

Crack!

I heard the sound of wood snapping. Half of the treant’s branch tentacles were blown apart.

“Did you get it?”

When Emily landed and leaned back to stop her momentum, the treant counterattacked.

“Eek!”

After it pushed her back with its remaining branches, it began regenerating the shattered ones. It regenerated fast, returning to normal in only five seconds.

“It’s just like the rare slime from B1,” I mused. “Okay, so Selenium has a lot of regenerating monsters... Hey, Emily!”

“I’m okay!” Emily exclaimed as she jumped forward again, slamming the treant with her hammer over and over. She reminded me of someone pounding mochi as she continued the battle.

Emily’s full-power swings turned the treant into wood chips. Unable to regenerate as fast as she destroyed it, the monster disappeared with a poof.

“Looks like single-minded hammering does the trick, huh?”

“Yep!” Emily nodded. She was a reliable one. She’d defeated the treant, but it had dropped nothing, so we continued to look for the next one.

Another sprouted right away. Emily took the initiative and dashed in before it could finish growing. She didn’t need my supporting fire this time, and crushed it in one blow. When this elder tree disappeared, however, it dropped meat: a juicy-looking chicken breast.

Breast meat? This won’t sell for much, I thought to myself.

“It dropped an item...” Emily picked up the chicken and gazed at it, voice quivering.

“Is that a big deal?”

“I have F-rank drop stats. F is actually far worse than E, despite the letters being close together. People whose drop stats are all F are called Failures, and some dungeons forbid them from going beyond B1.”

“Wow. So that’s why they sent F-ranks, huh?” I said.

Emily cocked her head, so I told her about Yujin, the strong adventurer Hetero had hired. He was strong in battle, but had F-rank plant drops.

“That’s quite the strategy,” she replied, sounding oddly impressed.

After a while, she put her chicken breast drop in the magic cart and looked up at me.

“Thank you for this, Yoda.”

“I’m just happy that you’re happy.”

“I’ve never heard of an item like this. Are you the only one who has one?”

She whispered that last part. My S-rank drop stats were a secret between just the two of us, after all.

“Correct. I made it into an outsider and took it down again.”

“Wow... You’re incredible, Yoda.”

Now that we’ve checked the ring’s effects, it’s time to farm some easy money.

“This can work...for animals and minerals, too,” she murmured, gently touching the ring. “I can go anywhere with you, Yoda...”

I couldn’t make out what she said, but she sounded happy, so I was glad to have given it to her. But then, a monster ambushed her! A treant appeared, not from the ground, but from the wall directly next to her. Its sharp branches tore through the air.

“Emily!”

“Eep!”

Emily instantly reacted to my voice and leaped to the side. The monster’s

attack dug into the ground where she'd just been standing.

"You okay?" I asked.

"I'm fine."

"Good."

"More importantly, this tree...seems different from the others."

"Hm?"

Now that she'd mentioned it, I took a closer look at the thing that had attacked her. As usual, it resembled an old tree, but this one had a face with a very old-man-like goatee. It was bigger than the others, and more imposing, too. This one was clearly on a different level.

I looked around at the treants the other adventurers were fighting; yeah, this one was *definitely* different.

"So this is the rare monster on B2, huh?"

"It must be—Eek!"

The rare treant swung its branch tentacles faster than the normal treants. Emily blocked with her hammer, but she was launched back.

"Emily!"

"I'm all right!"

She landed on her feet and readied her hammer once more. She hadn't taken much damage.

"You little..."

I raised my guns—but I hesitated for a moment. The other monsters on B2 dropped meat, so this rare monster would surely drop meat as well. It hadn't

been confirmed yet, but that was the prominent theory. It was just awaiting proof now.

Before I knew it, adventurers had gathered around.

“Look! There’s a bearded treant!”

“Aw, dang it! I wanted that!”

“Don’t drop anything, don’t drop anything!”

If a drop was confirmed from this bearded treant, the Hetero Dungeon Association would pay out a handsome reward—just like I’d received from Cyclo’s after I confirmed the rare drop on B1.

That reward was first-come first-served, and it was forbidden for other adventurers to kill a monster someone else has secured. That’s why the other adventurers were praying that I wouldn’t get a drop.

If it didn’t drop anything, they’d have a chance when the next one came out. But I had S-rank drops, so if I killed this thing, it would drop something.

What should I do?

If I defeated it, I would bring the contest to a stalemate by my own hands, which seemed foolish.

Suddenly, I found a familiar face among the adventurers. It was Harvard, the man from the Hetero side. He looked at me with a smug grin on his face.

Could he see it? Could he see the cause of my uncertainty?

It was possible. Anybody could tell that strong adventurers might have high drop stats. Harvard knew how I felt, I was sure of it.

I looked closer; another man was standing next to him. He wasn’t Yujin, but there was something imposing about him. Like with Harvard, I could tell: this

guy had A-rank animal drops.

Hetero must have provided bounties for information on their side, too, so when they heard a rare monster was here, they'd come running.

Duke—the guy from Cyclo—was also here on the other side. He watched me with fear in his eyes. In fact, a whole mob of spectators had formed on both sides. It was becoming clear that we had to take this thing down.

Fine, then!

“Emily!”

“Okay!”

When I called her name, there was a gust of wind next to me. Emily, the 4'3" girl with the huge hammer, had run to my side. She glanced up at me and tossed something to me. I caught it; it was the ring I'd given her. It seemed she'd realized what I was thinking. Hell, maybe she was the one to think of it first, since she'd spent so many years with F-rank animal drops.

She was off to fight the bearded treant and make use of her unboosted drop stats—her F-rank ones.

“I'll cover you,” I called out. Loading up freeze rounds, I fired repeatedly at the wall. This froze the tree's roots and all of its branch tentacles alike.

Now that it couldn't move, Emily charged to attack.

“Haaah!”

She dashed and threw herself forward, swinging her hammer down at the monster's head.

One strike shook the dungeon. Emily had bashed the bearded treant to bits. The rare monster disappeared...and dropped nothing.

Surrounding adventurers rejoiced at the lack of drop, and dispersed. The smug Harvard realized the meaning of Emily defeating the monster and left with an irritated frown on his face. Once he was gone, I approached Emily to return the ring to her.

“Thanks, Emily.”

“It was my pleasure.”

“I’m amazed, though. You leaped into action before I could even ask.”

“I remembered what we’d discussed earlier,” she said, a hint of pride in her voice.

“That so?”

“I’m glad I could help you, Yoda. That made it worth all the time I spent thinking about what I could do for you,” Emily replied with a carefree smile.

I felt my heart heat up just a little.

“Thanks. You were a huge help.”

I smiled at Emily, took her hand, and returned the ring. She gleefully, yet gingerly, accepted it.



I was both happy and excited. If I kept defeating outsiders, we might get other equipment. Equipment could raise stats like seeds, but it could also be removed to cancel its effects, allowing us to customize our builds to suit our needs. That was what got me most hyped: the myriad possibilities that this ring created.

“Thank you! Thank you, Mr. Sato!”

“Whoa!”

“Thank you so much, sir! I see why you neglected to defeat it on your own. Truly, thank you.”

Intuiting Emily’s low drops from the situation, Duke thanked me over and over.

40. Equipment Just for Me

I spent the next day on B1 of Selenium, mowing down every slime I encountered with homing rounds. Using my strongest farming loadout yet—guaranteed drops with my S-rank and double drops from the homing rounds—I switched into full work mode and thought of nothing else.

Why B1, you ask? Well, because I could mindlessly kill monsters as soon as I saw them on B1. If I was on B2, that could've led to me killing a rare treant. I couldn't let any accidents happen now, so I chose B1 to help empty my mind of all thoughts.

Once my magic cart was full, I went back and sold the contents for about 80,000 piro. I then repeated that process two more times. The third time, I ran out of homing rounds, leading to me leaving early.

All in all, I made 200,000 piro. And with that money, I performed a certain test.



I made my way to a place far from the dungeon with no people around. Once I'd gone far enough that the dungeon, camp, and Celeste's burning pile of trash were dots in the distance, I took a bag out. It contained four bangles that I'd bought using all of the day's earnings. Each of them was set with a different stone: a pink sapphire, an orange sapphire, a white pearl, and a red ruby.

Altogether, they had cost 200,000 piro—an average of 50,000 each. One twentieth of the cost of the ring I'd bought Emily.

Surely the price has nothing to do with it, right? Surely.

I gathered my resolve, put the pink sapphire bangle on the ground, and stepped away. Then, I loaded freeze rounds and flame rounds into my guns and waited. This combination seemed the most adaptable to whatever monster might appear. Of course, I was also ready to load normal bullets and recovery rounds just in case.

After waiting for a while, an outsider was born from the bangle. It was a burning monster, like a will-o'-the-wisp. The words "lesser fire spirit" came to mind.

Perhaps because I was so far from it, it didn't try to attack me. Instead, it just sort of floated around.

I lifted my guns, aimed, and fired a freeze round. It struck, chilling the spirit.

The fire spirit noticed me and began floating my way, but it burned more weakly than before.

I fired more freeze rounds. Each one weakened the fire, shrinking the will-o'-the-wisp itself in the process.

After I'd shot five normal freezing rounds from afar, the spirit finally disappeared without a trace, dropping another of the same pink sapphire bangle.

I approached it and picked it up.

Raises mineral drop stat by 1!

I heard the usual voice in my head.

I see. So this just raises one stat, huh?

A million-piro ring had raised everything by 1, while this just raised a single stat. Perhaps that was appropriate, given the price difference.

Next, I tried leaving the orange sapphire bangle. It created a blue will-o'-the-wisp, which I finished off with flame rounds.

The same bangle I'd left dropped, so I picked it up.

Lowers mineral drop stat by 1!

It lowers your drops?! Well, I guess equips like that do exist. Having F-rank drops can be useful at times, so maybe there's a niche for it? Wait, could it be...?

Lowering an F-rank by 1 could reduce drop rates to zero. An F-rank could still get some drops, so it wasn't a perfect zero yet.

Probabilities could be divided into two distinct categories. One included one hundred percent and zero percent, while everything else fell into the other bucket. Though they were opposites, a hundred and zero were both absolutes.

Lowers by 1, huh? I'll have to get Emily's help again.

Next, the pearl bangle. This one created a medium-sized dog with a ferocious face. Its body was made of fire, so I fired freeze rounds at it. However, hitting it didn't weaken the fire much, so I used fused freeze rounds. They defeated the fiery dog, and it dropped a pearl bangle again.

**Raises all damage against monsters that
drop plants by 10%!**

Oh? Now there's an interesting one. Equipment that raises your damage against specific monsters, huh? I could use this.

I chuckled to myself. It was very like this world to divide things not into categories like "slimes" or "undead," but instead by drops. Either way, I wanted one or two more of these pearl bangles.

Before long, we would be going back to Cyclo, an agricultural city full of plant dungeons, so I could use more damage versus plant-dropping monsters.

Finally, I turned the ruby bangle into an outsider. This one was a floating black ball with electricity crackling around it. It felt like the eeriest of all four bangle-monsters. I did not want to go near that thing.

I took the safe route, focused my aim, and fired flame and freeze rounds. They fused in front of the monster, becoming an annihilation round. The blast enveloped the lightning spirit and defeated it in one shot.

The monster dropped a red ruby bangle, which I picked up.

**Occasionally raises the number of items
dropped by outsiders!**

"Huh?" I gasped.

That effect was similar to the one from the slime bros' drop, though not quite the same.

The slime bro monster on B1 of Tellurium had dropped a ring that doubled drops, but it only worked inside dungeons. As it couldn't affect outsiders, I'd given it to Emily.

However, this new bangle was different. Its effect was limited to outsiders. Just like the one that increased damage versus plant-dropping monsters, this one specified outsiders.

There was probably equipment that increased damage against outsiders somewhere, but that was a problem for another time. For now, I wanted to know more about this bangle.

I took out one of the pickup boxes that I'd brought from Nihonium to replenish my special bullets, then put it down, backed away, and created fifty skeletons.

"...Let's freeze these."

I could have defeated them with normal bullets, but I decided to use freeze rounds instead.

I loaded, fired, loaded, and fired again. Each one was a sure kill. Once the fifty skeletons were promptly massacred, I picked up and counted the freeze rounds I'd obtained.

Fifty-five in total. Defeat fifty, get fifty-five; I'd gotten ten percent more than I would have without the bangle. In a way, this bangle was made just for me. After all, nobody else could even get drops from outsiders.

41. Total Victory

As a dungeon teeming with adventurers from two cities, Selenium had free status boards set up here and there. Emily and I walked around until we arrived at the furthest one from the dungeon, which was rarely used.

I operated it to check my stats.



“You’ve grown really strong, Yoda. Your speed will be S soon!”

“Remember when we first met and I had an F in everything? Ah, the nostalgia.”

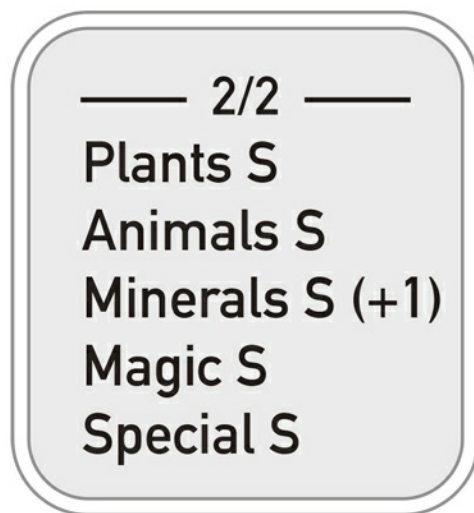
“Will you be turning them all into S-ranks?”

“That’s the plan,” I answered. I’d heard that Nihonium had nine floors in total, and there were nine stats on the first stat page. Those overlapping nines couldn’t have been a coincidence. I was certain of it. “Anyway, forget these. The

next page is what we want.”

“Okay.”

I changed the status board to the second page.



“Huh?” Emily mumbled, cocking her head. “They’re all still S.”

“I assumed they’d go up to SS or something.”

I gazed at the pink sapphire bangle on my arm, grabbed it, then spun it around my wrist. My mineral rank had risen by 1, and that was apparent on the status board—but my stat was still showing as S.

“Will it not go up because you’re at the absolute maximum?”

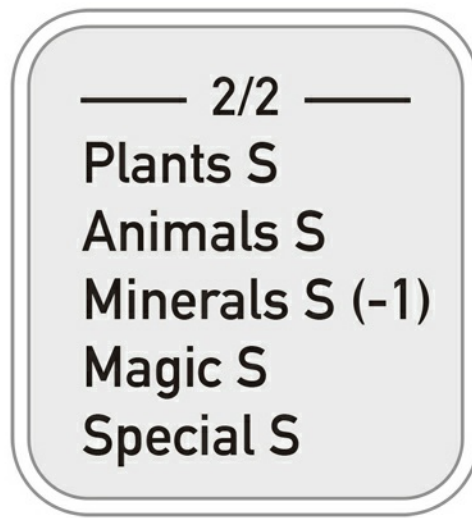
“Maybe. Just in case, you should try wearing it.”

“Okay.”

I took off the bangle, put it on Emily, and used the status board again.

Her mineral rank had gone from F to E.

This time, I tried putting on the -1 bangle.



“Huh? It’s not going down.”

“It isn’t...”

I was surprised. I’d expected it to bring my S drops down to A.

“Wonder why.”

“I’m sure...it’s just because you’re so special, Yoda,” Emily said with a big smile.

I had to agree with her. As I’d learned from asking some of the people of this world, S-rank drops were unheard of. They were a total mystery that belonged to me alone...and it seemed they were unaffected by equipment as well.



I split up with Emily, who had some shopping to do, and went back to our tent near the trash dump. When I got there, I found Celeste frowning.

“What’s the matter?”

“Ryota...”

“Looks like you’ve got something on your mind. What’s wrong?”

“Well, I’ve heard rumors that the number of adventurers here will almost double starting tomorrow.”

“You sure about that?”

“It is only a rumor, but if it’s true, then there’ll be more trash than ever. It’ll be too much for me to handle. I’ve continued sending requests for help, but...as it’s just a rumor, I’m unsure if anyone will come.”

Celeste was at the end of her rope. The amount of trash rose in proportion to the number of people present, so if this place doubled in population, she was doomed.

“I’ll help you,” I offered.

“Huh?”

“I’ll help dispose of the trash.”

“B-But... Ryota, you need to be in the dungeon.”

“I can’t leave you alone,” I said to the surprised Celeste.

She gasped.

Celeste had collapsed from overwork when we first met. Even when the amount of trash had overwhelmed her ability to dispose of it, she had kept working all alone. In a way, she reminded me too much of my old self, who had joined a corrupt company that pushed all the work on him instead of hiring more employees.

I knew that I had to help her, so I gazed at her with sincerity in my eyes.

“Thank you...so much,” Celeste said bashfully blushing.



“The rumors are true,” Duke, delegate of the Cyclo Dungeon Association, said in his tent. I had come to visit him to confirm what Celeste had told me.

“All because of last-minute demand?” I asked.

“Not quite. Hetero sent them here to do their bidding.”

“...So they’re planning to flood the even-numbered floors with human wave tactics, huh?”

“No, quite the opposite, in fact,” Duke replied, frowning bitterly.

“Oh?”

“They’re flooding the odd-numbered floors. The ones with plant drops.”

“Then they’re sending waves of people with F-rank drops?!”

Duke nodded.

“All signs indicate that they’ll try to sabotage us, regardless of the consequences. They’ll be here by tomorrow. As for their numbers... Well, I hear it’ll be enough to fill every floor with their people.”

“So they’re gonna monopolize those floors, huh?”

“Legally, of course. Their cover story is that ‘so many adventurers rushed in that there weren’t enough monsters to go around.’”

I could tell that even I looked disgusted. I’d dealt with people monopolizing B6 of Silicon, but that was different. There wasn’t anything objectionable about sending crowds of adventurers in to hunt all the monsters on a floor, so we were out of luck.

Suddenly, I had an idea.

“Then let’s settle this within the day. B3, B5, B7, B9; if all of them are confirmed to have rare drops, then the best they can do is force a tie, right?”

“If that were possible, it would effectively be our victory. However, rare drops aren’t that common. The chance of getting all rare drops within the time limit is below one percent.”

“A hundred percent for me.”

“That can’t be true!” Duke protested.

“Let’s double the rare monster information fee—no, raise it even further. First person to discover one gets ten million piro.”

“That’s far too much! If we pay all that—!”

“If I kill a monster and it doesn’t drop anything, I’ll shoulder the cost.”

Duke gasped, utterly astonished. I never once broke eye contact.

With my own S-rank drop stats, which were unaffected even by the bangles, I could make any rare monster drop the rarest of drops. I was certain of that.



On B9 of Selenium, Duke’s doubtful expression was starting to change. The rare monsters themselves had been appearing every day, but when word spread of the 10,000,000-piro information fee, reports began to flood in. Each time, I went into the dungeon with Duke and killed the captured monster.

We’d already done this on B3, B5, and B7. Every time I killed a rare monster,

Duke's face was filled with shock, followed by respect. And that brought us to B9.

The inflated information fee and the news of the previous floors' drops spread like wildfire, and now, people were rushing into the dungeon.

Under the watchful eyes of this sold-out audience, I confronted a giant snake with eight heads.

"It's just like Yamata-no-Orochi," I said.

"One of those heads is its weak point. When the monster regenerates, the weak point changes to a different head," Duke informed me. Since the rare monsters had appeared every single day, the method of beating them was common knowledge.

As a preliminary trial, I punched a head when it lunged at me. After repelling it, I fired a piercing round. The huge head flew off, but regenerated right away.

For its next attack, three heads lunged at once. I swiftly evaded. The ground where I'd been standing was gouged out deep enough to make space for a pitfall trap.

Amazed by its strength, I fired a freeze round and flame round together to make an annihilation round. When it struck, the three heads were swallowed up by the void. And yet, they, too, regenerated.

"This thing's a real pain," I commented.

"We've learned that if you get it to drink alcohol, only the head with the weakness will get drunk."

"So you've figured out all of its weaknesses?"

I had to laugh. This weakness really did remind me of Yamata-no-Orochi.

“Should we prepare some alcohol?” Duke offered.

“It’s fine. I’ll finish this soon.”

I hit the big snake so hard that it was knocked away from the crowd. As it reeled, I loaded my two handguns full of homing rounds and fired wildly.

The scattered rounds spread in all directions like homing missiles before closing in on a single one of the beast’s eight heads. The head of the Yamata-no-Orochi, itself bigger than the average human, was soon full of holes. Its giant body slammed into the ground and disappeared. The drop? Enoki mushrooms.

It seemed like the fun quirk of Selenium’s rare monsters was that, for all the annoyance they caused, their drops sucked. This dungeon was lame. I did *not* plan to farm here in the future.

“Thank you! Thank you so much for this!” Duke ran over and shook my hands up and down, repeating the same words over and over out of delight. “Now Cyclo can’t possibly lose! Thank you, sir! It’s all because of you.”

“Nah. I think you’re the reason for this victory, Duke.”

“Don’t be humble, now! Anyone can tell it’s thanks to you. Oh, I know! I should report this to headquarters!” Duke said, running off.

Watching him sprint out of the dungeon, I muttered to myself, “I’m not being humble.”

When I was at my old company, all of my suggestions were ignored, but Duke had accepted my request—that of a lone adventurer—and gambled 40 million piro on it. It was his decision-making skills that had brought us victory.

I was honestly grateful to him for trusting me and letting me do this.

42. Overpowering the Sneak Attack

In the tent, I found Duke still in high spirits.

“Thank you again, Mr. Sato. Because of you, Selenium pretty much belongs to Cyclo already.”

“I’m glad I could help.”

I was relieved to have wrapped up my work at Selenium.

“Headquarters is calculating your reward now. I expect you’ll be getting three separate ones.”

“Three?”

“First, you’ll be exempt from any taxes on goods from Selenium that you sell.”

“I’ve heard that one.”

It had been mentioned before I’d taken the job.

“Also, you’ll receive a cash reward, though it may not be much.”

“Oh yeah?”

That was fair.

“Lastly, I hear the dungeon chief is running around preparing a year’s worth of sugar for you.”

“I don’t need that much!”

Wait...a year’s worth of sugar?

“Uh...who defines what a year’s worth of sugar works out to?”

“...” Duke looked away, guilt in his eyes.

“It’s not a year by his standards, right? I’m not getting the amount of sugar *he* uses in a year, surely? Right? Tell me I’m right. Right?!” I repeated it three times because it was extremely important.

Unfortunately, Duke did not give the answer I wanted. Instead, he replied, “You’d best not hear it from my lips.”

So...I’m getting a year’s worth based on the dungeon chief’s standards?

I shuddered at the thought of the mountains of sugar that would be forced upon me.



When I left the tent, I planned to return to Emily. My job in Selenium was done. Would we stay here longer, or would we return to Cyclo? The plan was to discuss the matter with her.

The area around Selenium was still brimming with people. Really, now that the folks from Hetero couldn’t sabotage things anymore, it was even busier with people who were just farming for normal drops. Adventurers holing up in dungeons, others who supported them, and those who sold to the rest to make money... A rough count would put the lot of them in the thousands. The area might as well have been a small city by now.

I’ve got an idea. If we’re going home, I’d better buy some souvenirs for Erza and Ina as thanks for helping me so much.

There were plenty of traveling merchants here, so I was spoiled for choice.

And in that case, I figured I might as well stay a few days, make some money, and then head home.

I pondered the gift selection as I walked until, suddenly, I noticed something was off. Signs of people had disappeared from my once-bustling surroundings. But the people themselves hadn't vanished; only the feeling of liveliness had, because I was now surrounded by people with clear ill intent.

Men circled me from about sixteen feet away in every direction, glaring all the while.

Altogether...there were about twenty of them.

"What do you guys want?" I demanded.

The man in front of me, who was missing a front tooth, answered, "Don't blame us. We got a request to teach you a little lesson. Now, we're not gonna take your life, but we're gonna break your arms a little so you can't work for a while. That's your punishment for going too far."

"You're from Hetero, aren't you?"

"Taste the wrath of the people you put out of work!"

I get it. So that's your problem, eh?

They were probably the adventurers Hetero had sent. Because of me, they were out of work and wouldn't be paid, so they had come to vent their anger. Reluctant as I was, I was going to have to deal with this threat.

When I whipped out my guns, the man raised his hand. Right after he did so, a magic circle appeared at my feet.

"What's this?"

"We know how you fight," he answered coldly. "You use those to shoot

projectiles, right? This magic circle nullifies projectiles.”

“Nullifies them?”

“It’s like a magic storm, but man-made.”

Magic storms were weather events that prevented people from using magic, but this magic circle seemed to be something that prevented the use of projectiles.

“How thorough of you,” I replied, keeping my anger down.

“Heh! Get ’im, boys!” the man barked. At his word, all of the people surrounding me pounced.

I stowed my guns and clenched my fists. The leader tried to come at me. I dodged and punched him so hard that it sent him into a tailspin as he careened away.

“What?!” the man screamed, apparently surprised by my strength.

“Now that you mention it, I guess I only ever used my guns in Selenium.”

“Wh-What’s going on?”

“As long as I’m not trying to be efficient...”

Charging into striking range of the man, I stooped low. Then, being careful to hold back a little, I punched him in the torso. His body bent at the waist as he coughed up stomach juices.

“...I’m stronger without my guns.”

After all, I had S strength and A speed thanks to Nihonium’s seeds.

When they saw their leader fall, the other men went into a frenzy and attacked together. Relying on my power and speed, I took them down one after

another—never forgetting to hold back, of course.

Sure, I killed monsters for item drops, but there was no reason to do that to a fellow human; I just needed to deprive them of their ability to fight. I fought with that in mind, and in less than five minutes, the men all ended up flat on their backs atop the magic circle.

“No...way...” they groaned bitterly. Each of them was holding some part of their body and writhing in pain. They looked hurt. I didn’t have any bone to pick with them, so I took out my guns. The magic circle was still glowing, but I was sure that it wouldn’t cause problems.

I loaded a bullet and fired at the leader. It flew out and hit him because he was too hurt to do anything about it. White light formed around him—I had used a recovery round, after all.

In the projectile-nullifying magic circle, I shot recovery rounds into each of my fallen opponents. Like magic storms, these magic circles couldn’t nullify my bullets. White light glowed all around, healing everyone I’d fired at. They recovered instantaneously, but they were confused, unable to understand what had happened.

“You can use projectiles? What the hell are you...?” their leader asked, looking flabbergasted.

As a final threat, I fired an annihilation round at the ground. It landed right in the center of the projectile-nullifying magic circle. It seemed there was something there that kept the circle active, as it disappeared when the annihilation round gouged out the earth.

“This stuff doesn’t work on me. Also...” I trailed off, then held my guns out and shot a glare at each of them. “This won’t happen again.”

The men all shook their heads like broken puppets, agreeing to leave me alone.

43. Celeste's Magic, Emily's Magic

After beating back the ambush, I returned to the tent.

We'd left it near the trash dump even after taking care of Celeste. People would probably keep flooding in until the tax exemption ended, which meant even more trash for her to deal with.

Celeste stood at a safe distance, faced the trash heap before her, honed her magic, and summoned trash-burning flames. Fire seemed to leak out of nowhere, enveloping the heap and turning it into ash.

Beautiful. Cool, too.

Her awe-inspiring profile, lit by the magical flames, was exquisite. While I was taken by the sight, the majority of the trash burned, leaving just enough to fill a plastic bucket. She could deal with the rest with ease, so I decided that I would greet her after she'd done so. But then, Celeste cast another spell. It was the same one as before. After spreading out her magic circle, that big blaze appeared again, causing her hair to flutter.

She had used fire strong enough to burn a truck-sized pile of trash...on a pile the size of a bucket. It was overkill, like using your strongest attack on the weakest monster. Right as I started to wonder why, though, Celeste started tottering!

She fell to her knees, apparently about to collapse. I sprinted over and caught her.

"Ryota..." Celeste murmured deliriously in my arms. She was spent, exhausted

just like she'd been when we first met. Her eyes were unfocused, and I wasn't sure she was even conscious.

"Stay still."

I took out my gun, checked to make sure that it still had recovery rounds in it, held it against her arm, and pulled the trigger.

Like I was giving her an injection, I fired the recovery rounds into her skin. One wasn't enough, so I used two. It was then that the color returned to her face.

"Are you okay?"

"..."

"Celeste?"

Her eyes appeared more focused, but she didn't speak. Instead, she gazed at me for a while without a word.

"I-It's okay! I'm good now."

Celeste suddenly pushed me away and distanced herself from me. For some reason, she glanced at me over and over, blushing. She seemed bothered...but why?

"Geez, why am I so nervous? Besides..."

Celeste looked at me again and blushed even more. She was muttering something. What did it all mean? If something was worrying her, then I was glad to hear her out and help.

Smack!

Suddenly, Celeste smacked herself. She smacked with her right, then her left, then her right, then her left again—

“Okay, I think you’re being a little extreme now!” I exclaimed as I rushed over to her. I had no idea what was going on, but I successfully stopped her from slapping herself in the face over and over.

After that, she sucked in a deep breath and said, “Okay, I’m good now.”

She looked just as cool as she had before. That look suited a tall beauty like her, though I had to stare in a daze at her reddened cheeks.



Now that she had calmed down, Celeste explained her strange actions.

“Some weird thoughts were running through my head, so I had to shake them out.”

“O-Oh, I see...?”

That sort of added up. Sometimes, you had to slap some sense into yourself.

Yeah...sometimes. I’ll just hold off on commenting about how many times she did it.

To gather myself, and to change the subject a little, I asked her something that was on my mind.

“You were burning trash before, right? I saw you use a huge flame to burn just a tiny bit of trash at the end there. Why? Can’t you use a smaller one to save mana?”

“That’s the only one I can use.”

“Uh, what?”

“Inferno, level 3 fire magic. It’s the only magic I can use.”

“That’s...it?”

“That’s it.”

Celeste nodded firmly.

...Huh?

“You said level 3,” I pressed. “What about levels 1 and 2? You can’t use the weaker ones?”

“Nope. This is all I’ve got,” she confirmed again with not a hint of doubt.

Wind blew past us, her gorgeous hair fluttering in the breeze. In other words, she couldn’t use Frizz or Frizzle; she’d skipped straight to Kafrizz and learned nothing else. That explained why she’d overkilled that trash, at least.

“Does that happen a lot? Like, are there a lot of people who can use level 3 magic, but not level 1 or 2?”

I’d certainly never heard of it. From my gaming experience, I thought you learned magic from the bottom up.

“Nope. I’ve never known anyone like me, either.”

“Oh yeah? I wonder why?” I asked, but quickly regretted it because of the pained grin I saw on Celeste’s face. It was clear that she’s been hoping I wouldn’t ask.

I’ve gotta fix this. Need to change the subject...but how?

Just then, Emily appeared from inside the tent.

“Welcome back, Yoda,” she greeted me with the same warm smile as ever, replacing the awkward mood between us.

“Oooh! My goddess!” I screamed.

“Bwuh?”

“You saved me! I need a goddess like you with me all the time.”

“Whaaa?! Y-Yoda, what’s all this about?!”

I thanked Emily profusely, confusing her in the process. It made her blush, but I only communicated my gratitude more, which added to the blushing.



When she heard that my job was done, Emily said she’d cook a celebratory feast, then started a fire next to the tent and got right to cooking. Celeste and I watched and chatted.

“That is incredible. I heard that they’d finished, but the rare monsters’ drops weren’t confirmed yet. And you say you’ve taken care of all of them?”

“Well, I just did the odd-numbered floors.”

“The odd-numbered ones?”

I told Celeste about Cyclo and Hetero. She seemed confused at first, but then the realization dawned on her.

“That’s amazing,” she brooded.

“Think so?”

“I’ve never heard of someone doing that all alone.”

I felt a little embarrassed all of a sudden. How could I not be when a beauty like her complimented me? At the same time, though, I wanted her to keep

going. Just as I'd showered Emily with praise, I wanted to enjoy receiving praise as well.

"Celes—"

But just as I tried to muster my courage and ask, Emily returned.

"Thank you both for waiting. It just finished baking, so be careful. It's hot."

"Thanks."

"Thanks—Whoa, cake?!" Celeste was astounded as she took hers.

I stared at mine, also a little surprised. She had given us white plates, silver forks, and triangular-cut slices of cake.

"How did you make this cake?" Celeste asked.

"I baked it."

"You baked it...over that fire?"

"Yes."

"Baking a cake over a fire... Baking a cake...over a fire...?" Celeste muttered, looking between the fire and the cake.

I burst into laughter and said, "Celeste, don't think too much. Trust me."

"Huh?"

"Just like how fighters can't understand how magic works, we can't understand how Emily cooks or puts together a tent. Even if we spend all our lives trying to figure it out, the answers will elude us."

"Ah..."

Celeste looked convinced when she glanced at the tent. That explanation might not have convinced a stranger, but she had experienced that tent

firsthand, so she understood that Emily was a mystery.

“Yeah...”

“Baking a cake over a fire sounds like something Emily could do, right?”

“Yeah... It does.”

“There you have it. Thanks for the food, Emily. Let’s dig in.”

“Let’s.”

“Okay! Eat up. I’ll get back to cooking.”

With that, Emily ran off. Celeste and I grinned as we watched her.

“What do you think she’ll make next?” Celeste wondered aloud.

“I have no idea. But it’s Emily, so I won’t be surprised no matter what it is.”

“You’ve witnessed this a few times, then.”

“Emily’s incredible. That’s all there is to it,” I said, prompting agreement from Celeste.

We ate cake together. The cream was sweet, and also soft, yet firm. It was delicious. I’d had my doubts about fire-baked cake, but it was good, so I left it at that.

Right when we finished eating our cake, Emily returned and said, “Thank you for waiting.”

“Thank you. The cake was delectable,” Celeste replied.

“Good. Here’s the next item.”

Emily offered something, which Celeste accepted.

“Wait, ice cream?! Why ice cream?”

“Thanks. I’ll take some,” I said.

“Huuuh?! Ryota, you’re eating it? You can eat that ice cream without asking questions?!”

“Didn’t I just say not to be surprised no matter what she brings?”

“Uhhh...” Celeste was befuddled. Emily smiled warmly.

I stuffed my cheeks full of her ice cream. It was tasty, sweet, and cooled me down perfectly. This was what made it worth giving Selenium my all.

“Thanks, Emily.”

“You did a great job out there, Yoda.”

We smiled at each other in peace. The end of our short-term business trip was close at hand.

44. All-Rounder

I woke up the next morning and left our relaxing tent to stretch. The job I'd taken on was finished, so I slept in a little. Combined with the effects of Emily's tent, I wasn't tired at all.

"Hm?"

Suddenly, I noticed Celeste hard at work with her trash mountain. She'd cleared it out yesterday, but it was already a mountain again. As a matter of fact, it was even bigger than the last—maybe twice as big, even.

I approached and spoke to her from behind.

"Good morning."

"Morning. Finally awake, sleepyhead?"

"Emily's tent is just too comfortable."

"I get it. I had a hard time leaving the tent this morning, too. 'Just five more minutes,' 'Just one more minute,' 'Just thirty more seconds...'"

"Just so you know, our house is even better. If she can make even a tent so warm and welcoming, imagine her own home."

"It's even better than the tent...?" Celeste gulped, apparently imagining it.

I almost wanna invite her to visit...

Something made me want to show off Emily's work, to brag about her.

Shoot, might as well do just that when we get back to Cyclo.

I looked up at the mountain of trash again and asked, "By the way, what's the

deal with this? It's even bigger today, right?"

"It is. The dungeon master appeared, so adventurers aren't allowed in the dungeon right now. Almost everyone's eating and drinking like their lives depend on it."

"The dungeon master?" I asked, cocking my head. I'd never heard that term.

"As the name implies, it's the master of the dungeon," Celeste explained. "It only appears once every few months, so this is Selenium's first."

"Wow, so that's a thing, huh? Are they strong?"

"Yes, extremely strong. That's the whole problem. Almost all of the adventurers here are farmers. They specialize in killing the same monsters over and over again."

"So they can't handle the strongest monsters, right?" I surmised.

"Yeah. Adventurers who are trained to fight dungeon masters are set to come deal with it tomorrow."

Interesting. So there are all kinds of different adventurers out there. That makes sense, though. There are people who sell boxes of princess air, but also those like me whose abilities are useful for investigating new dungeons. There's nothing unusual about people specializing in fighting high-level monsters.

It seemed best to leave things to the professionals.

"Ah..." Celeste gasped.

"What's the matter?"

"That trash is turning into outsiders. I guess there's so much on the other side that it doesn't count as us being nearby."

"I'll go kill 'em."

“Huh? But...” she hesitated.

“I can’t go into the dungeon anyway, so just let me help you out.”

“...Thanks,” Celeste said, blushing for some reason.

I took my two guns and circled around to the other side of the trash heap. I had to jog pretty far; it took a whole minute. Once I got there, I found a crowd of Frankensteins milling about.

Yeah, figures.

They turned into outsiders when people weren’t around. And with this much stuff piled up, it wouldn’t just be one or two.

Celeste was concerned, but I smirked. To me, outsiders were treasure troves.

I put on my red ruby bangle, which boosted the number of outsider drops. I then loaded flame rounds in both guns and massacred the Frankensteins from a safe distance.

Standing still, I mowed them down with fused flame rounds. Each of the burning Frankensteins dropped golden homing rounds—usually one, but sometimes two, thanks to the bangle. They went down like they were on an assembly line of death.

Suddenly, I realized that my style would count as the farming style, too. I had a safe, efficient way of killing monsters down in my muscle memory. I did things to raise efficiency, like guiding slimes above my magic cart, as if it was second nature...and as nice as that was...

“It does make you wanna try something new every once in a while,” I muttered, a grin on my face.

Once I was down to the last Frankenstein, I put my guns away and clenched

my fists. The enemy's patchwork arm whistled through the air as it threw a punch. I blocked it with both hands and there was a snap as a shockwave disturbed our surroundings.

"Raaah!"

I seized its arm and pulled, throwing it off balance before countering with a punch of my own that flung it sideways. After that, I ran and caught up with the airborne Frankenstein, put my hands together, and unleashed a double hammerfist strike. The giant changed course immediately, crashing back to earth.

It broke the ground, creating a large crater. Still, it managed to get up despite struggling. These Frankensteins sure were sturdy.

I continued to attack, making use of my S-rank strength and A-rank speed to perform techniques straight out of anime. I even used some world-famous anti-air skills from a popular video game series. Back when I was a kid, I'd broken my wrist trying to do one on another kid who'd jumped off the jungle gym. But this time, it worked just fine, and I propelled the Frankenstein away with ease. It felt...pretty good.

I pulled off a lot of moves, which ended up taking a long while. It took more than twice the time I'd spent on the rest of the mob to defeat this one Frankenstein.

It dropped a single golden homing round, which meant that my bangle hadn't worked this time. Same result, but far less efficient. Still, I'd wanted to do it. It was satisfying. Sometimes, purely efficient play made you want to let loose. That was a bad habit of mine, at least, but I was satisfied now. At the same time, I was checking whether anything besides the most efficient method was viable.

I picked up the homing round and circled the trash mountain back to Celeste. There, the least efficient player had awaited me, casting Inferno on tiny piles of trash all the while. As she burned garbage, there was no avoiding leaving little piles of it here and there. Normally, you'd think she could just use weaker magic to finish those off, but as Celeste could only use one kind of magic, she had to take a less effective route.

She was wasting a lot of her mana and consuming her stamina. Even now, she looked dizzy.

"Emily, are you there?" I called out.

"Yep!" she responded and came out of the tent.

"Let's give Celeste a break. And by that, I mean we tie her up in the tent and make her rest. I'll take care of the trash."

"Got it," Emily replied, going to Celeste's side. She then took her hand and tried to drag her into the tent.

Emily had a huge smile on her face, whereas Celeste looked worried. The woman tried to shake the little girl off, but she couldn't. A 5'7" woman was losing a contest of strength to the 4'3" Emily; it was kind of funny.

Emily successfully dragged Celeste to the tent. Before going in, she moved the tent a bit further from the pile of trash.

That's Emily for you. She never forgets to help me make outsiders.

She was incredible. Even more incredible, however, were the divine waves of pure comfort emanating from the tent. Emily was a godsend.

"Let her heal you to satisfaction, okay?" I gave Celeste my blessing and backed away from the pile of trash. This time, I used fused flame rounds for efficiency.

“Mmm... That feels good...”

I occasionally heard Celeste’s relaxed voice from the tent as I cleaned up the trash and obtained plenty of homing rounds. I’d considered brawling with the last one again, but I managed to contain myself and killed it with my guns as per usual.

Suddenly, four of Cyclo’s adventurers came my way. They looked to be two fighters and two mages. All of them were imposing adventurers, and they had a well-balanced party composition to boot.

“Oh? Are those the guys?” I wondered aloud.

“They must be the adventurers who were sent to defeat the dungeon master,” Emily said from beside me.

“Thought as much.”

“Right. They look strong, but don’t have a magic cart,” she observed. “They’re equipped to hunt and then leave.”

“Yeah, for sure.”

The adventurers were all geared up for battle. If they were farming, they would have decent equipment, a magic cart, and the like, but they didn’t have that stuff at all. They were focused on the hunt.

“Selenium ought to be just fine from tomorrow on, then,” I reflected.

“Yep.”

“By the way, how’s Celeste?”

“She’s napping. When she wakes up, we’ll have a snack together.”

“Make some for me, too, please.”

“Okay!”

A wake-up snack made by Emily... I didn't know what she'd make, but just imagining it made me drool.

As expected, her snacks didn't just heal Celeste; they healed me, too. We spent the night being soothed by our own Emily. And in the meantime, the hunting party was annihilated by the dungeon master!

45. A Party Is Formed

In the Cyclo Dungeon Association tent, Duke was a total mess. He desperately ordered his employees around, trying to have control over *something*. I'd come to ask about the adventurers defeated by the dungeon master, but it seemed like now wasn't a good time.

No problem. I'll return later—

"Mr. Sato!"

When Duke and I happened to make eye contact, he jumped out of his chair and ran to me.

"Thank you so much for coming. I was just about to contact you."

"Looks like you guys have some trouble on your hands."

"We do! Nobody expected the Conrad family to lose, so all of our plans have been thrown into disarray."

"Conrad family? Would they be that four-person party?"

"Do you know them?"

"I caught a glimpse of them yesterday."

"Oh, of course."

Duke nodded and sat on the couch, gesturing for me to do the same. I sat across from him and got down to business.

"What's the situation right now?"

"We've contacted headquarters to have them send reinforcements, but

Hetero is blocking things.”

“Blocking things how?”

“They raise silly complaints along the lines of, ‘We need to be prudent. This is a new dungeon with a new dungeon master, so we need to be careful before any more lives are sacrificed.’”

“Since you call them silly, I assume that’s a bad idea?”

“Dungeon masters can change the dungeon’s ecosystem,” Duke replied bitterly. “They aren’t just strong. If they live for too long, they can alter the biology of the monsters in the dungeon, changing their species entirely. That is why they are given the title of master.”

“They can change...monsters’ species?”

“The monsters of each floor change into entirely different things. And of course, their drops change as well.”

Hearing that, I understood the game the people from Hetero were playing.

“The rare monsters, too?”

“Right. Them, too.”

“I get it. It’s more convenient for Hetero to let the dungeon master have its way. If they’re lucky, it could flip Selenium from Cyclo’s to Hetero’s dungeon. Or maintain the status quo, at worst.”

Duke nodded gravely.

“And what solution do they propose?” I urged.

“They want the next hunting party to be a joint party of Cyclo and Hetero adventurers.”

“They really want to get in the way, don’t they?”

“All they need to do is hold us back,” Duke added. “Worse, they can delay things as long as they need just by saying they haven’t chosen their people yet.”

This is awful.

“Can’t an adventurer just head inside instead of waiting for a hunting party?”

“They’ve made demands in that regard, too,” he sighed.

“What demands?”

“If adventurers want to go, there must be three, each with at least one stat at A-rank or higher, and they must all volunteer together. These requirements make sense, given the dungeon master’s victory in the last battle, but all of the adventurers here have planned for stability. They won’t volunteer to defeat a dungeon master.”

“I can see why more people would be better, but what’s the basis for picking a minimum of three?”

After a moment’s pause, Duke answered, “...It’s a measure designed to counter you.”

“Huh?”

“They expected you to take action. That’s why they set a personnel requirement.”

“A measure designed to counter me... And Emily...”

“Right. They know that you came in a pair, and they know that no adventurers near Selenium want to put themselves in real danger. The stronger farmer adventurers are, the more cautious they tend to be. They fight stronger monsters early on, but by the time they’ve become experienced, they only go

after monsters two ranks below them.”

I fell silent.

“I doubt we’ll be able to find any adventurers with A-rank stats who are willing to go...” Duke said, then heaved a deep sigh.



I left the tent and tried asking around for help. When you go to the same place every day, you end up making a few acquaintances—especially among the stronger adventurers, who I’d run into a lot while selling loot.

I began by approaching them and mentioning my plan to go and defeat the dungeon master, but every single one of them refused. Even their words seemed to drip with a love of stability. Many of them added that Cyclo or Hetero would handle it soon enough.

I felt Hetero’s malice at play. Three people could go in. I had Emily, so I just needed to find one more. Just one more and we could handle it. I tried running around to every place I could, but I couldn’t find that one person.

Adventurers were pretty stuck in their habits. In a world where everything dropped from dungeon monsters, adventurers who farmed were producers. Despite their title, they didn’t want to *venture* anywhere. They craved stability.

Hundreds of people here, yet none to help me. It almost felt more like a dig at me than an actual measure meant to stop me. I recalled the tension on Duke’s face. He knew this, too.

“Haaah...”

“Why the big sigh, friend?”

“Wargh!”

Feeling warm breath on my ear, I jumped in surprise. I made some distance between us before whipping around. And there, I saw an unexpected face. For some reason, the possibly-gay Neptune was standing before me.

“Neptune!”

“Hey, it’s been a while. You doing well?” he asked. Lil and Ran, the women I’d seen with him once, were behind him. “I’m glad we ran into each other here! Hey, you got some free time tonight?”

“I do not. And I’m never spending a night near you, anyway!”

“Hahaha! No need to be so cruel, now. That’s no way to treat a potential partner.”

“I’m not partnering with you—Wait...partner?”

Has my savior appeared?

“Hey, let’s form a party just for today, okay?” I nearly begged.

In terms of stats, he was plenty strong; he had A-rank strength, which could stand up well even against my S-rank. He had also done the preliminary investigation of Nihonium when it appeared, so he wasn’t the kind to use stability as an excuse, which meant he fit all of the conditions—

“Well, about that...” Neptune trailed off, looking mighty disappointed. “I’ve received a formal request from the Cyclo Dungeon Association, so I’m stuck waiting until Hetero picks the rest of the team.”

“What?!”

“I’m really sorry, friend. If only I’d came a little later and ran into you before I

reported my arrival.”

Neptune glanced at me, looking genuinely sad about it. It seemed like he liked me—not that I wanted that, mind you.

I understood that I couldn’t expect his help. My ray of hope had been extinguished.



When I returned to the tent, I could tell even from outside that things were a little hectic. As I wondered what was going on, Emily came out.

“Oh, welcome back, Yoda.”

“Hey. What are you doing?”

“I’m preparing to head into the dungeon,” she said as she wrung her fists. “I need to be ready to fight that dungeon master!”

“Wow, Emily. I didn’t even have to ask.”

That was so like her.

“But I’m sorry, that might’ve been a waste of time. We can’t go into the dungeon until we find a third person.”

“Yes, I’ve heard as much.”

“Huh? Then why—?”

I raised an eyebrow at her smile, and another person stepped out of the tent. It was that long-haired beauty, Celeste.

“I’m going with you,” she declared.

“Celeste? But what about the trash—?”

I turned around and saw multiple adventurers around the mountain of garbage. They were chatting pleasantly as they burned trash.

“When I said I’d give them my pay, they were more than happy to do it.”

“...They sure do love their stability,” I mumbled. For all the effort I’d put into finding someone, Celeste was an easy recruit.

Disposing of trash was about as stable as things got. I imagine it was easy to find replacements.

That aside, I looked to Celeste and asked, “Are you sure you’re ready to go into a dungeon?”

Celeste blushed for some reason and used one of the nearby status boards, which were everywhere in this bountiful time.

— 1/2 —

Level 21/54

HP D

MP C

Strength E

Vitality F

Intelligence A

Willpower A

Speed E

Dexterity F

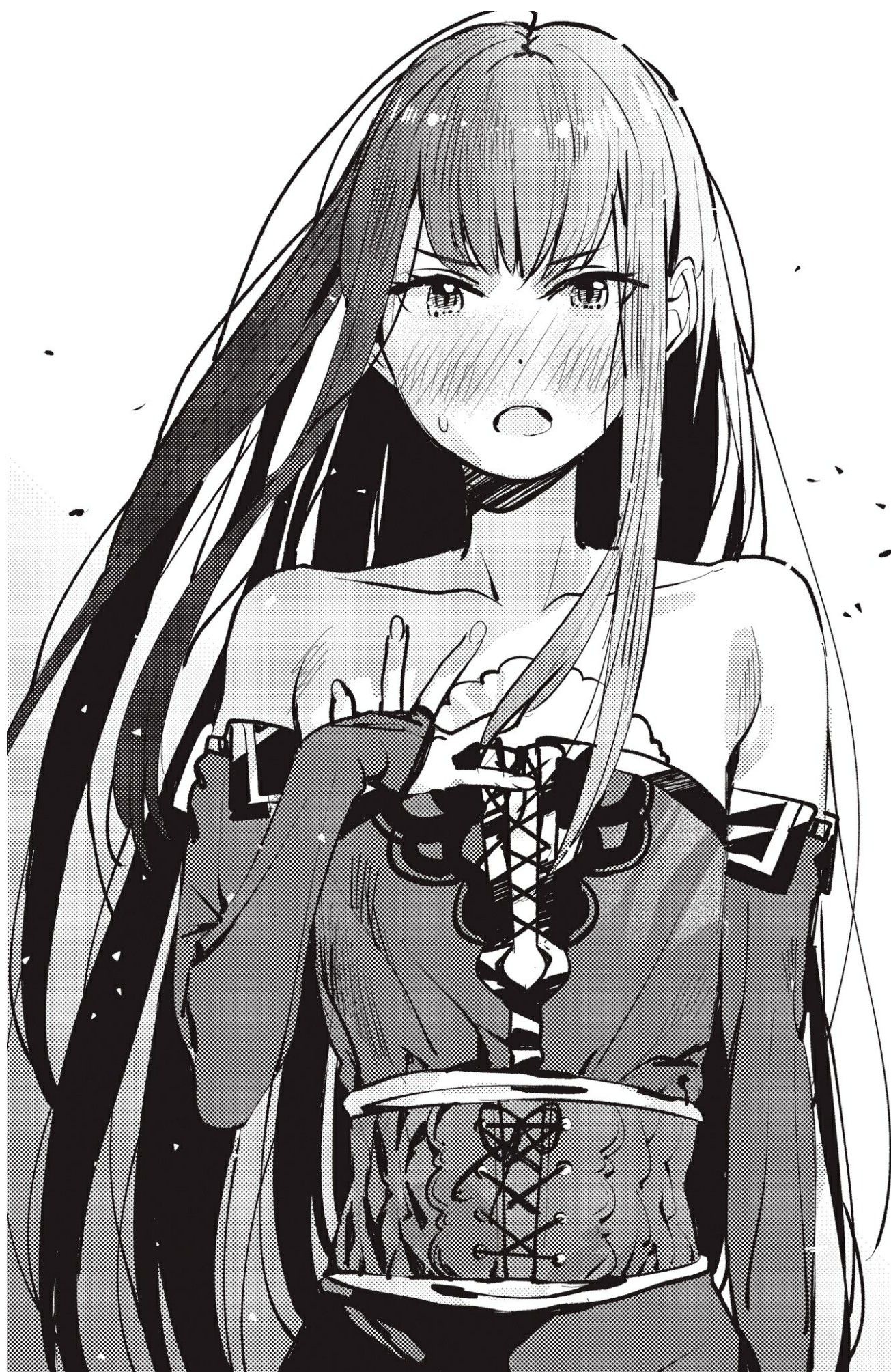
Luck C



This was my first time seeing Celeste’s stats. The first page was unsurprising, while the second page told the whole story of why she was more suited to trash disposal than dungeoneering.

“I want to go with you,” she said, flushing redder and gazing at me. “Ryota, I want to help you.”

My heart skipped a beat.



46. A Tearful Thank You

Emily, Celeste, and I entered Selenium together.

“Hmm,” I grumbled the moment I stepped inside.

The air felt stagnant. It stuck to the skin like humid air in the rainy season, but ten times—no, a hundred times worse. It was hard to breathe and troublesome to move. The air alone made me want to flee.

“Are dungeons always this...eerie?” Celeste asked.

“Not at all,” I replied. “Or at least, it wasn’t like this until a day ago.”

“This is the air of a dungeon with no monsters,” Emily answered, her face serious. “This is how the air gets when the dungeon master is present.”

“You’ve experienced this?”

“A few times in Tellurium, yes. At first, I had no idea what was going on. When the hunters told me, I ran as fast as I could.”

“I see. You did live in the dungeon back then, didn’t you?”

I realized what was happening and looked around.

“I can’t see monsters anywhere. Is that because of the dungeon master, too?”

“Yes. As long as it’s out, other monsters won’t appear.”

“We’d better kill it quick.”

Whether or not the dungeon master was here, a lack of monsters was fatal in this world. After all, they dropped all materials, and even water and air. If monsters weren’t appearing, then that meant a total work stoppage.

“So I hear the dungeon master can move to any floor freely. Is that true?” I asked.

“Correct. Like other monsters, it can’t leave the dungeon, but the dungeon master alone can travel to any floor it pleases.”

“Guess we’ll just have to search from top to bottom.”

We nodded to each other and proceeded into the dungeon, ready to battle at any given moment.

Nothing on B1.

Likewise, nothing on B2.

Then, we stepped foot on B3.

“It’s here.”

“Yes...”

“It’s hard to breathe...”

Emily and Celeste looked tense. That was no surprise. After all, pressure like never before weighed down on us. It was overwhelming and intense, as if to say that what had come before was only child’s play.

I tightened my grip on my revolvers, looked at the girls, and continued onward. It appeared up ahead: an enormous black horse with two horns atop its head, the incarnation of ill omens.

“So this is the dungeon master, huh?”

“The Bicorn...also known as He Who Defiles Purity.”

“Bicorn, huh? Well, let’s do this!”

“Right!”

“Okay!”

Emily was the first to charge in. She hoisted her huge hammer over her petite form, jumped, and spun it mid-air to bring it down on the enemy. Her hammer struck the Bicorn’s head—or so I’d thought, but it had stopped right above its horns.

Having deflected her hammer, the Bicorn tried to pierce her with its horns.

“Emily!”

I fired a few rounds into it to stop it. Emily used the recoil from her hammer swing to jump back. Dashing forth with practiced handiwork, I switched all of my ammunition to homing rounds, stuck out my hands, and fired in all directions.

The Bicorn wavered for a moment. More than ten bullets all turned in the air like homing missiles, drawing arcs as they flew toward the Bicorn. At the same time, I closed in and kicked it away from us.

When my homing rounds all struck one horn, I fired my newly-reloaded piercing rounds into that same spot. However, something felt off...

“It’s not working!” I yelled. “Is that a barrier or something?”

“I didn’t get a clean hit at all,” Emily agreed.

Our attacks on the Bicorn’s horns had been blocked by something invisible.

“Let’s keep attacking for now. Celeste, back us up.”

“Got it.”

Celeste nodded behind us and honed her mana. She created a magic circle and, after chanting, unleashed her magic. Level 3 magical fire swallowed the Bicorn, almost filling the whole cavern.

Doubting that this alone would kill it, Emily and I leaped into the swirling flames. The Bicorn was still alive, so we attacked with all our might. Emily smacked it with her hammer, and I fired my guns and occasionally fought bare-handed.

“Eep!”

“Emily!”

When she ate a counterattack, I promptly fired a recovery round her way. A horn had gouged out some of her side mid-air, but she was already healed by the time she landed.

“Thank you!”

“Don’t push yourself.”

“Okay!”

“Celeste, don’t worry about us!” I called out. “Just keep firing off your magic! Half-baked attacks won’t work on this thing!”

“Understood!” she exclaimed as she cast her third wide-area spell.

We fought with all of our strength. Slowly but surely, we were making progress. There seemed to be an invisible barrier around the Bicorn, but after it took a certain amount of damage, our hits began to strike true.

If we took a break before attacking again, the barrier would return to full power. In other words, this was a barrier that had to be broken through attrition. Still, so long as we kept it up—

“...Ah.”

I saw Celeste begin to collapse in my periphery. I ran over, caught her, and fired a recovery round into her arm.

One shot was enough for most injuries, but running out of mana required several to fix. I held her in my arms, pressed the barrel against her skin, and fired over and over.

“I’m sorry,” she said weakly. “I’m...just holding you back...”

“Don’t you worry. It’d be worse if you pushed yourself too hard and collapsed.”

“Huh?”

“You don’t have to keep on going until you keel over—Hm?”

Since I’d backed off to help Celeste, Emily was fighting all alone. I gripped my guns again, helped Celeste up, and returned to the front. Once there, I ran over to Emily, who had been flung into the wall.

“You okay, Emily?”

“Something’s wrong...”

“What do you mean?”

“Look here,” Emily said as she pointed at the Bicorn’s feet. A strange magic circle was spreading below the black horse. A second later, it had covered the entirety of the cave.

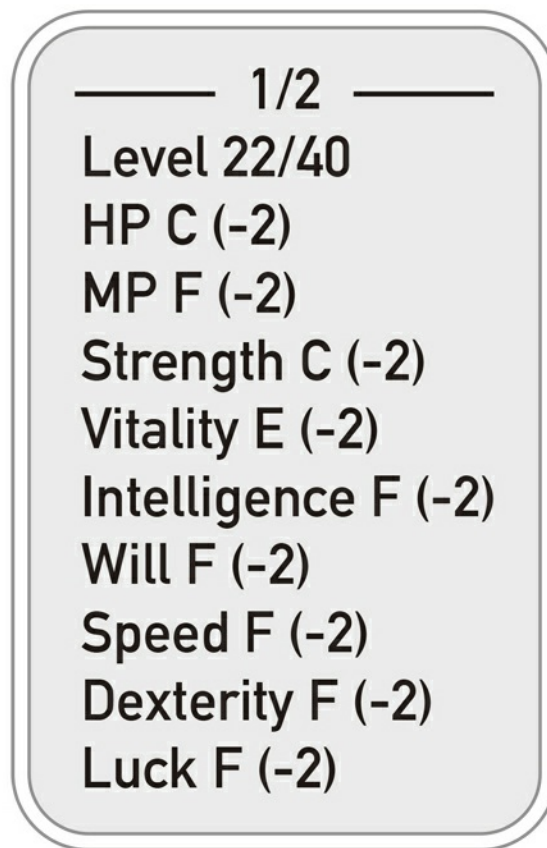
“When did that thing appear?” I asked.

“I don’t know... Ah!”

Emily put her hand on the wall to stand up.

“What’s wrong...? Whoa!”

On that wall, there happened to be a status board. She had activated the board when she’d placed her weight on it.



The stats displayed were lower across the board. Apart from her high HP and strength, her other stats were all near the minimum.

“He Who Defiles Purity...” she murmured.

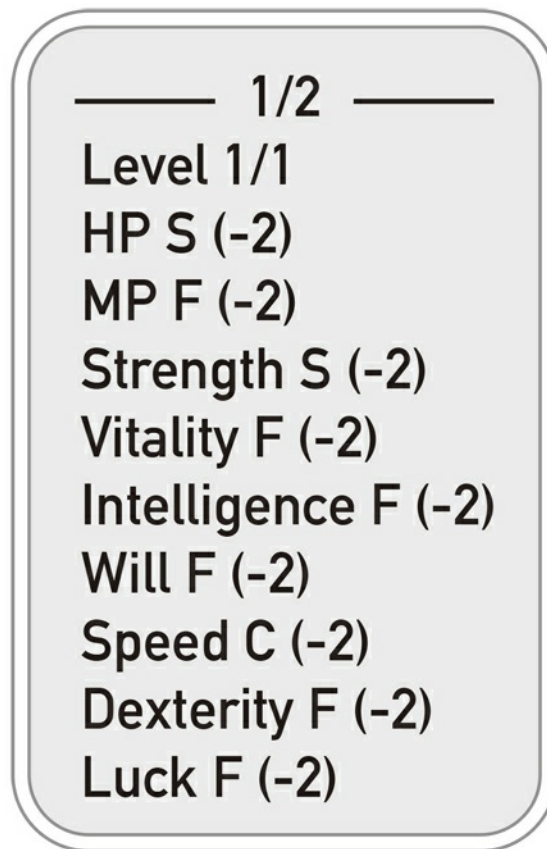
I gasped, finally realizing the power of the Bicorn’s magic. This dungeon master had a debuff that lowered the stats of people in its magic circle.

“Yoda, will your stats be okay?”

“Celeste!” I called out.

“Got it!”

While Celeste stopped the Bicorn with Inferno, I checked my own stats.



My stats that had gone up to S were unaffected, probably because S-rank stats were beyond the logic of this world, but at the same time, my speed—which I’d only raised to A-rank—had been lowered by the Bicorn.

Still, I could fight just fine.

“Emily, I’ll take the lead. You follow up.”

“Okay.”

“Celeste—” I yelled, firing a recovery round her way. “You support us, but don’t push yourself.”

“Right.”

I called out orders to them and charged toward the Bicorn, which had emerged from the flames. Now that I was aware of the magic circle, I could feel how it slowed me down.

My attacks were slower, and reloading started to take longer. The attacks themselves hit less often, making the battle difficult. Luckily, my strength hadn’t

gone down. It was still S-rank, so as long as I could hit the enemy, I could bring it down. But even knowing that, nothing progressed.

Both sides got stuck in a quagmire.



Celeste had never known someone like him before. Nobody said things like that to her. In fact, they often said the exact opposite.

“Stop falling over. Do your job right.”

In the worst cases, she’d even be told things like, “Tell us in advance if you’re going to be sick” or “Wait until we’re not busy before you collapse!”

Until now, she didn’t think they were wrong for doing that. Between her defective, unbalanced magic and her attempts at staying involved with people through trash disposal, she’d spent her whole life thinking that she couldn’t collapse—that she had to keep on trying. And yet, the man before her said the opposite. He’d claimed she didn’t have to push herself, and that things would be worse if she did collapse.

Ryota was the first person to ever say such a thing to her. It struck a chord deep in her heart, and drew her to him.

“I want to do my best...for him.”

It was perhaps contradictory, but those were her sincere feelings. She wanted to push herself beyond her limits for the man who said she *didn’t* have to push herself.

“I’ll use all of my strength...” Celeste proclaimed, mustering the limits of her

power. “All of my very being!”

A magic circle of light repelled the Bicorn.



As soon as I began to think things were taking a turn for the worse, Emily shouted “Yoda!” as loud as she could.

I whipped around and saw Celeste far behind us, casting her magic, but she didn’t look like she always did; her long, beautiful hair was aflame.

“Celeste?!”

“Here goes nothing!” Celeste yelled before her magic burst forth.

I got far away from the Bicorn before it was enveloped in a swirling fireball. The magic circle on the ground began to fade, and Celeste...began to sway.

“Celeste!”

“Yoda!” Emily screamed hoarsely at me.

I caught it—her hammer. She had thrown it to me before running off to catch Celeste herself.

“Ah...!” I gritted my teeth and sucked in a deep breath. Grasping the hammer, which was even more unwieldy than I’d expected, I charged at the still-burning Bicorn and swung it straight down. With my S-rank strength, I slammed Emily’s hammer into the dungeon master’s skull.

I felt the hammer tear through and shatter the now-flimsy barrier. The fire finally faded, and the black horse’s body fell to pieces, leaving only its two

horns.



I ran over to the fallen Celeste. She lay in Emily's arms, exhausted. It was just like when we'd first met, but she was far worse off now. I gleaned that she'd used way more magic than she could handle to create that fire.

Placing my gun against her shoulder, I fired recovery rounds like a syringe. One, two, three shots—I fired until the chamber was empty, but she still hadn't recovered, so I emptied another. That alone made it clear just how much she'd pushed herself.

I had some complaints, but I kept them to myself.

"Thank you, Celeste. It's because of you that we won."

"Did I...manage to help?" she asked weakly.

"Of course you did. I'm glad you came."

Celeste opened her eyes wide, tears flowing out of them.

"Wh-What's the matter?"

"Nobody's ever said that to me..."

"O-Oh, really?" I panicked a little; I hadn't expected her to cry. I had to do something to stop this.

After a moment of being flustered, I suddenly remembered the items I'd just found.

"I know. Take these," I offered.

“What are they?”

“These things the Bicorn left... They’re drops, right?”

I held out the two Bicorn Horns I’d picked up before. They were about as big as my fingers—much smaller than the originals.

“You’re giving these...to me?” she asked.

“Yeah.”

“Oh! There are two, so Emily should have one.”

“Nope. They come as a pair. Besides, I think it’d be better if you took them.”

“Me?”

“Take them, and I think you’ll understand.”

“Huh...?”

Though confused, she timidly accepted the Bicorn Horns. The moment she touched them, her eyes widened in surprise.

“Get it now?” I asked, grinning. “Wait, why are you crying again?!”

I was even more flustered when Celeste bawled with the Bicorn Horns in hand.

What did the Bicorn Horns do? Well, just having them allowed you to use level 1 magic an unlimited number of times. I’d given it to Celeste because I thought it was perfect for her daily needs, given she could only use level 3 magic. But for some reason, she was crying.

Emily hugged her. In turn, Celeste clung to her tight and cried her eyes out. They looked like a big child and a tiny mother.

Seriously, what’s wrong?

“Celeste. You’re confusing Yoda, so I think you should tell him how you feel.”

“Okay...”

Celeste looked up, wiped away her tears, and looked at me. Then, in a slow, quiet, yet clear voice, she said, “Thank you.”

I was surprised.

Thank you? Then that means...

“That’s right,” Emily said. “They’re tears of joy!”

“Ack! D-Don’t say that! You’re embarrassing me!”

Celeste frantically tried to cover Emily’s mouth, but the words were already out.

Huh? Well, okay. If that’s it...

I had to chuckle. Despite everything that had happened at the end there, I was glad. After all, I got to see another side of Celeste.

Thus, our dungeon master hunt ended in success.



47. Welcome to the Family

I went to the Cyclo Dungeon Association tent and reported that the Bicorn had been defeated. Duke didn't seem to believe it at first, but before he could even send people to check, adventurers were already rushing back inside due to the monsters reappearing. He was compelled to accept the truth.

"I'm amazed. You've defeated the dungeon master, of all things!"

"I decided to take action, since Hetero was going to drag their feet. Is that an issue?" I asked.

"Oh, never! As I'm sure you're aware, the Bicorn has some very annoying abilities. We were planning to send the Neptunes, as they had the power to deal with it, but Hetero kept prolonging things due to their incessant demands. We appreciate you forcing this to its conclusion."

"You say Neptune could have dealt with that? How?"

"I don't know the details; capable adventurers tend to hide their own abilities, after all," Duke explained. I could sympathize with that. After all, Emily was the only one I'd told about my S-rank drop stats. "All we can judge are achievements and self-assessments, and the Neptune family has quite the string of achievements."

"I see."

"Either way...thank you for taking care of all this. Since it's so sudden, we can't decide your reward here. It may not come to you until after you return to Cyclo, but rest assured, Mr. Sato, your efforts will be rewarded."

“Don’t worry about me. I just did it because I wanted to.”

“Then at least let me thank you. You have my utmost gratitude.”

Between Duke’s thanks and the cheers of adventurers outside, I was glad I’d meddled in this matter.



I left the Cyclo Dungeon Association tent and headed back to Emily’s.

Selenium was back to its usual state of affairs. Adventurers rushed into the dungeon, while others pushed full magic carts out to sell their loot.

Drops were sold in the city, while items and products flooded here *from* the city to be sold back to adventurers for the money they made.

It was funny to watch, like a microcosm of the world itself, in a way.

In this world, all human work was centered around dungeons—production, construction, services, and everything in between. In all activities, dungeons came first and foremost.

Did inflation and deflation exist in this world? What about bubbles and recessions? If so, how did they differ? How did they connect with dungeons? As I walked, my curiosity was piqued, so I decided to look into it once we got back to Cyclo.



When I got back to the tent, I found her and Celeste. Emily had started a fire in front of the tent. I waved, and she waved back with a smile.

Celeste was further away and had her back turned to me, but it looked like she was burning trash, as usual.

A magic circle appeared at her feet as she used her level 3 flame magic, Inferno, to burn it away. Using that wide-range magic to burn the whole pile left little bits of trash here and there.

This time, however, she held her hand out, raising two horns—the Bicorn Horns dropped by the dungeon master. When she brandished them, a much smaller fire burned the remaining trash. The flames were modest, but still strong enough to reduce it to ash.

For big piles of trash, she used strong magic. For the remainder, she used weaker magic made possible by the Bicorn Horns.

Once all of the trash there was dealt with, another small pile was brought over. She dealt with it right away using the Bicorn Horns' fire. After seeing that all the garbage was gone, I greeted her.

“Celeste.”

“Ryota!” she exclaimed, running over with a smile.

I fell silent. Was this the first time? The first time I'd ever seen her energetic after disposing of trash? I'd only seen her exhausted to the point of collapse, since most of the time, trash disposal left her fully spent.

“I see you've finished with your trash,” I said.

“It's all thanks to these Bicorn Horns you gave me.”

“I'm happy that I could help.”

“These Bicorn Horns are incredible. I’ve only heard of disposable items with limited uses—never something that lets you use magic infinitely, even if it’s just level 1 magic.”

“Disposable items?” I raised an eyebrow.

Celeste explained, “They come in only three dungeons with special drops. You haven’t heard of them?”

“Special... As in the stat, you mean?”

Celeste nodded. Indeed, among drop stats was one called “special.” Animals, plants, and minerals were easy to understand. I could guess what magic meant, too. Special was the one I hadn’t understood, but now it made sense.

If there were only three dungeons that had special drops, I *definitely* wanted to visit one someday.

I turned around and gazed at Selenium from the outside. It was bustling with adventurers and the people who helped them. The drop investigation was done, and the dungeon master had been dealt with.

My work here was done.

“It’s about time to say goodbye to Selenium,” I said.

“Are you...already leaving?”

“Yeah. The Cyclo Dungeon Association just sent me here on a short-term business trip, and I’m getting pretty homesick. Our tent has the warmth and comfort of home, but it’s nothing compared to the other place she painstakingly arranged for us.”

“Oh... When are you leaving?”

“Might as well rest for the night, so...tomorrow, I guess. There’s nothing left

for me to do here, and since it's full of adventurers, I can't make much money."

Celeste looked down and bit her lower lip. It seemed like she wanted to say something. She put her hands together in front of her chest, clenching the Bicorn Horns tight.

Seeing her, I finally asked, "How about you come with us?"

Right when I popped the question, she finished gathering her resolve and said, "Once this is over, I'm going to Cyclo."

The fact that we'd both suggested the same thing at the same time left us flabbergasted.

"Going to Cyclo? T-To do what?" I stammered.

"I'm sure Cyclo needs their trash burned, too. I was planning to quit my current job and find a new position there... What was that about coming with you, though?"

"We could form a party, or..." Neptune's infuriating face came to mind as I said what I was thinking. "We could be, like...the Ryota family, or something, maybe."

"Sure!" Celeste promptly answered, then approached me. She was champing at the bit, as if this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. "Let's do it! As long as it means getting to go into dungeons with you again, I'm game for anything!"

She stepped even closer to me, clutching her Bicorn Horns. Her sincerity...and her feelings...came through loud and clear.

"Okay, let's do it. Oh, but I'll have to ask Emily—"

"Let's celebrate!"

"Whoa!" I yelled, startled by the sudden voice behind me. When I turned to

face the source, I saw Emily there holding a perfect, photo-quality cake. “You made cake?”

“I just baked it.”

“...Over a fire, I assume.”

“Yep!” Emily replied, smiling with the cake in hand.

I looked at Celeste again. She gazed at me imploringly, as our conversation had been interrupted. Though she was a tall, model-like beauty, she resembled a puppy afraid of being abandoned.

“We’ll be counting on you from now on,” I said.

“We will!” Emily agreed.

“Okay!”

Celeste clutched her Bicorn Horns even tighter with a huge smile on her face.

48. The Family's First Campaign

When we returned to Cyclo, we hauled Celeste's things into our 150,000-piro, two-bedroom apartment. We'd decided to have her live with us until we found a better place in Cyclo.

Incidentally, she was rooming with Emily. Since it was a two-bedroom place, I'd offered to let the girls take both bedrooms, but Celeste had refused out of apparent guilt. After we discussed having her share a room with someone, we obviously came to the conclusion that the girls should sleep together.

Once things settled down, we'd find an even bigger place. I was the one who had invited Celeste to join the Ryota family, so I would, of course, shoulder the cost.

There were two potential plans. Either we would rent a three-bedroom and all move there, or I would find a one-bedroom nicer than this place and move alone.

Why nicer than this place, you ask? That was because they'd already denied my plan to have them use the two-bedroom while I moved back to the cheap, 20,000-piro apartment. In the case that I went alone, they would just feel bad if I didn't get an even nicer place.

I pondered the question as we moved Celeste's luggage. Since I was so deep in thought, I ran into her and dropped what I was holding.

"Eep!"

"Whoops! My bad."

The cardboard box fell and broke open, causing some of the contents to spill out.

“Sorry. Too focused on my thoughts.”

“No, it’s okay. I need to watch where I’m—Aaaaaah!” Celeste looked down at what had fallen out and screamed. Snatching it up, she hid it behind her back.

I’d already seen it, though. Hell, I could still see, both behind her back and in the broken box. They were fancy plushies that little girls liked. Wasn’t what you’d expect a tall, slender adult like her to be into, but who was I to judge?

“D-Did you see that?” she demanded.

“No,” I answered, but she already knew I was lying.

Celeste blushed bright red and pleaded, “F-Forget you saw anything, please!”

She spun around and ran into the apartment.

Whoops... I’d better make this up to her later.



Once we finished helping Celeste move in, I went out into the city with her and Emily. We had a lot of things to do, but the most important one was finding a job for Celeste. We started by looking for trash disposal businesses, since she was used to that line of work.

We hadn’t even been walking very long before we started to hear people whispering to each other.

“H-Hey, look at her!”

“She’s smoking hot! Why haven’t I seen her around?”

“Maybe she’s an adventurer from somewhere else?”

“Whoa...”

I understood how they felt; I felt the same way, after all. We hadn’t spent that much time around each other back near Selenium, but now that we were going around together, I totally got it.

Celeste was beautiful, and that was only accentuated by her height, posture, and fluttering hair.

She was so gorgeous, in fact, only that word properly described her. Walking with her, I started to feel a minor sense of superiority.

Suddenly, I wondered what she did with all of those fancy plushies. Did she sleep holding them? Did she talk to them?

“Pfft!”

The thought of it made me chortle.

“Huh? Ryota, is that you?” Erza, from Swallow’s Returned Favor, said that and ran over with a smile when she saw me.

“Hey, Erza.”

“It’s been so long. I’m glad to see you back.”

“Yeah. My work at Selenium is done now.”

“I’ve heard all about it. You accomplished big things in all aspects of dungeoneering, didn’t you? As a business partner, I’m rather proud of your fame myself.”

“That so?”

“Thanks to the rumors, more requests have come in for you. Come check them out when you have time, please.”

“Sure. I’ll do just that.”

Once the conversation settled, Erza looked behind me and asked, “Erm, who is that?”

Emily and Celeste stood behind me. She knew Emily, so she must have been curious about Celeste.

“Let me introduce you. This is Celeste.”

“Nice to meet you,” Celeste greeted her.

“My name’s Erza. It’s lovely to meet you, too.”

“Now that we’ve got more allies, we’re forming...a family, basically.”

“Is that so?”

Erza was surprised. She looked a little disappointed, but she replaced it with a smile right away.

What disappointed her about that?

“Then does that mean you’ll be going down to B6 for real this time?” she asked me.

“Hm? What do you mean?”

“Huh? Isn’t that why you formed a family?”

“Well, stuff happened... Is that normally why people form them?”

“Yes,” Erza confirmed, the bright smile she’d always shown in the shop gracing her lips as she explained. “Cyclo’s dungeons become much more complex from B6 onward in terms of monster traits, how to defeat them

efficiently, and the like.”

“I see. So that’s why you need a license, huh?”

“Right! Typically, people form parties and fight together.”

“Hmm...” I mumbled as I looked back to Celeste and Emily. They nodded to me.

Since we’ve made the party, how about we do it? I communicated through eye contact.

“Thanks, Erza. I’ll bring you some drops later.”

“Okay! I’ll be waiting.”

We left her with her customer-service smile, changed our plans, and headed to Tellurium.



When Erza saw Ryota off, she looked both lonely and envious as she gazed upon his new, tall friend, Celeste.

Her coworker, Ina, appeared out of nowhere and teased her by saying, “So a rival’s appeared, eh?”

It was a way of teasing common among close friends.

“I-Ina, don’t be weird. I don’t...”

“Oh? That look on your face tells me you wanna join his family.”

“That’s not what I want! I’d just be a burden in dungeons, anyway.”

“I’m glad you get it,” Ina said as she patted Erza’s back. This exchange, too,

was one only possible between unreserved close friends. “Well, all we can do is buy their stuff and tell them when there’s news in the dungeon.”

“Right. I just have to help him with information!” Erza said, rousing herself.

“That’s right.”

“Thanks, Ina.”

“It’s cool, it’s cool. We’re BFFs, right?”

Ina winked and shot her a thumbs-up. This alone brought Erza’s spirits up even more, so the two walked on to the shop.

“By the way, Ina, did you just say ‘we’ before?”

“Huh? Did I?”

“You totally did!”



We went down to B6 of Tellurium for the first time. The atmosphere there was clearly different. It was a dungeon, but it didn’t look like a dungeon. Trees grew here and there, and somehow, there seemed to be a darkened sky hanging overhead.

“Is this really a dungeon...?” I mumbled.

“It’s as if we’re outside,” Emily said.

“It’s kind of like the area around Selenium,” Celeste chimed in.

“Sure is.”

While we chatted, we wandered around, and soon encountered some

monsters. One enormous slime appeared, accompanied by dozens of smaller ones.

“Hm? There are two kinds of monsters? Does that happen often?” I asked.

“Nope. See, those are a single monster called a slime family. The big parent is the main body, while the little ones are like limbs.”

“You sure do know a lot, Celeste.”

“I asked around and got info on the way here.”

“Oooh!”

“It’s my specialty. You can leave all that to me,” she said proudly.

“Thanks.”

Truth be told, I didn’t have much of a knack for gathering information.

Focusing, I looked at the slime family. Now that I saw them through the lens of body and limbs, I could see the kids protecting the parent.

“Then let’s go straight for the body.”

I loaded homing rounds and fired in succession. The bullets took chaotic arcs, weaving between the child slimes and hitting the parent.

“Ah...” Celeste gasped.

“Huh?”

Her reaction confused me, but I quickly saw the answer. The homing rounds pierced through the parent slime, killing it. After it died, the children disappeared alongside it. Once they’d all disappeared...no item was left behind.

I knew from lived experience that me getting zero drops was unthinkable... and though I didn’t know the cause, it was clear that Celeste did.

“Sorry for getting ahead of myself there,” I apologized. “Guess you had more info for us?”

“Yep. Slime family drops are decided based on how many of the kids you’ve killed,” Celeste explained. “All of the drops come from the parent after you kill it.”

“Is that how it works?”

“So if you defeat lots of the little ones, you’ll get lots of drops?” Emily asked.

“That’s right, but the parent gets stronger with each defeated kid. So strong, I hear, that it’s almost impossible to kill all of them and still be able to beat the parent.”

“Then you have to find the right threshold for safety, I guess?”

The adventurers coming through this floor must have had a set number that they always defeated, based on their estimate of their own abilities. Of course, that wouldn’t mean they could always do it. The monsters wouldn’t just sit there, after all; they were constantly attacking.

I see. Yeah, that’s a good reason for limiting it to people with licenses.

I began to simulate a strategy in my mind.



We encountered a second slime family.

Emily, Celeste, and I looked one another in the eye. We all nodded at once, and then I fired freeze rounds. I aimed like a sharpshooter and hit the parent slime dead-center, freezing it in place.

“Inferno!”

Celeste, who had been casting in the meantime, enveloped the entire slime family in her wide-range spell. Her hair fluttered in the glow of her magic circle. All of the kids burned while their parent remained frozen.

Plink!

The ice cracked. The center of the parent slime’s translucent body began to flicker.

“Haaah!”

Emily leaped forward, spinning her hammer around overhead before smashing it into the parent slime.

Screeeeech!

There was a sound akin to metal scraping against metal. The parent slime seemed unwounded. Emily’s full-power blow had done nothing to it—but that was as expected. That was why we’d sent her in first, after all.

“Annihilation rounds! About four shots!”

After announcing her estimate, Emily jumped off of the parent slime.

“All riiight!”

I fired repeatedly with both of my guns. The left used freeze rounds, and the right flame. They fused into annihilation rounds before smacking into the parent slime.

The bullets hit the slime, gouging out pieces of the same body that had repelled Emily’s hammer. The slime writhed defiantly, but it collapsed shortly thereafter. Then, with a whole bunch of pops in a row, the area around us was filled with drops. Piles of potatoes appeared where each child slime had been

burned to death.

“Incredible!”

“We did it!”

Emily and Celeste cheered, and I pumped a fist in secret. The strategy had gone off without a hitch. This plan of attack, which used all three of us instead of just me, filled me with a deep sense of satisfaction.

The first campaign of the Ryota family was a rousing success, and I wanted to try so many more things with them.

49. Planning and Improvisation

The morning after our return to Cyclo, I revisited my old friend Nihonium. I was there to replenish flame rounds, the ones I'd used the most back at Selenium.

On B2, zombies greeted me. It had been so long that I froze up when I encountered the first, having forgotten my usual routine with them.

I readied a gun and fired off a headshot. The zombie collapsed, became a strength seed, and was sucked into a pickup box.

Right. I just have to shoot them in the head.

I calmed down and mowed down zombies with easy headshots.

After walking for a while, I suddenly started to remember something. My body moved before my mind could even finish remembering it.

"Haaah!"

A wall next to me had begun to crack. Before it could collapse, however, I'd punched it. The full-power punch, backed by S-rank strength, pierced through the wall and hit flesh behind the hard rock.

Nihonium really loved its undead ambushes. I'd been through here so many times by now that I could sense when I was about to be ambushed. As soon as I felt it coming, I would attack first, punching through the zombie's head before it could even come out of the wall.

Crap! That means the seed is still stuck in the wall.

When I touched seeds, they would disappear. My strength was already S-rank and I wanted to turn it into a bullet, so I couldn't touch it. But it turned out that was unnecessary. The pickup box worked fine, sucking the seed out of the wall and into its interior.

And so, I continued defeating zombies and obtained a total of two hundred flame rounds.



B3 of Nihonium housed the mummy, a very muscular undead monster with bandages wrapped all around it. As their appearance suggested, these guys were rather sturdy. A single bullet would often not be enough to kill them. Thus, they often took a long time to farm.

In the afternoon, I had plans to meet up with Emily and Celeste at Tellurium and head down to B6. I had less than an hour until then.

I wavered at the entrance to B3. There wasn't much time.

Should I keep going...or give up for the day?

"...Let's do it."

Remembering what happened in Selenium, I chose to continue.

First, I closed my eyes and recalled the structure of the floor, along with where mummies usually congregated, where they normally appeared, and where they tended to ambush me. Adding their respawn times, I constructed a route in my mind: the most efficient farming route possible.

"...Okay!"

Once that was decided, I began running. I immediately encountered a mummy, which I shot through the head with a fused piercing round. After catching it before it fell to the ground, I kept on running.

Along the way, the mummy disappeared and dropped a speed seed.

Ryota's speed went up by 1!

My still-A-rank speed had risen.

The fight against the Bicorn had put me in the mood to raise my speed to S. My special trait, S-rank stats, was exceptional in every single way, so I wanted to get my speed there ASAP.

I risked showing up a little late for the meeting, but I wanted this.

Another mummy appeared. This time, I grabbed it by the neck and carried it, shooting it through the head while I ran to the next spot. I then took the speed seed the mummy dropped and raised my stat once more.

I'd arrived at a chamber. There were two mummies inside, so I shot one with fused flame rounds and ran to the other.

This one I defeated in melee combat instead of using a gun. Mummies were as strong as they looked, but they couldn't hold a candle to my S-rank strength. I kicked the second mummy, then knocked it to the ground with a punch and stomped on its head to kill it.

After picking up the speed seed it dropped, I ran the other way. The mummy I'd burned had already dropped its speed seed. When I approached to pick it up, another mummy burst from the wall to ambush me.

“Got you!”

The ambushes and respawn times were exactly as I’d routed. I killed this new one with a piercing round and picked up the two seeds on the ground before heading to the next point.

And so, through various similar means, I raised my speed to S and made it to our family meeting just in the nick of time.



In the wilderness-like cavern that was B6 of Tellurium, we focused on searching for slimes. We happened to find one rather far away.

After passing through an area with trees and tall grass, we arrived at a sort of badlands, with just dirt and rocks. There was a hole in one spot on the ground where water had gathered and turned muddy. Child slimes played in the mud.

“It’s just the kids,” Emily noted. “They’re really cute when you get a good look at them!”

“They’re like piglets,” I guffawed. “Still, where’s the parent?”

Celeste answered, “Slime families are always a single monster. It must be around here somewhere.”

“Got it. I’ll take the front line, so—”

Before I could say it, the rock in front of me moved. But it wasn’t a rock. No, it was a parent slime covered in mud!

Camouflage! Since we’d approached the slime family in a carefree manner, we were ambushed.

The kids attacked at once. I crossed my arms to block their tackles, jumping back to evade damage. And while I backed off, Emily jumped in.

“Yaaah!”

“Emily?!”

She swung her hammer down with all her might, sending mud flying with a splash.

“Haaaaaah!”

Emily didn’t stop there, however. She swung her hammer horizontally this time and the air pressure from it blew the mud, rocks, and slime family away. Seeing my chance, I readied my guns while mid-air and fired a freeze round, turning the mud and rocks into a muddy wall of ice.

The wall pushed the slimes back as they tackled it. When I saw that it was beginning to crack, I fired another freeze round to reinforce it. And at the same time, I charged, pushing the wall forward.

I used the six-inch-thick ice wall like a bulldozer, shoving the slimes all the way to where we’d first seen them playing in the mud. Now they were all gathered—or so I’d thought. One child slime had gotten around the wall, and jumped to attack me.

I was pushing as hard as I could, so I couldn’t evade. Or...actually, I evaded the attack with ease. I leaned my upper body back, grabbed the slime, and pushed it against the ice wall.

After a moment’s confusion, it occurred to me: my speed was S now, but my muscle memory was still that of someone with A-rank speed. That was why I’d thought I couldn’t evade when I could.

“Yoda!”

“Yeah!”

I kicked off of the ice wall and jumped away.

“Inferno!”

When I escaped, fire enveloped the slime family. It melted the wall and burned the slime children. Inside the blaze, the adult slime rose and approached like a phoenix. I thought it looked pretty cool, but I had to raise my guns and fire four annihilation rounds at it. They gouged out the adult’s body, killing it.

Like yesterday, the slime family dropped tons of potatoes. Incidentally, whenever we defeated all of the children before dealing with the adult, the potatoes came out to a sum of 125,000 piro.

We made all that money by combining our power.

Emily and Celeste walked over, making eye contact with me.

This victory was the result of our efforts yesterday and everyone’s improvised tactics today. We smiled at each other and touched elbows triumphantly.

50. B4 of Nihonium

The next morning, I went down to B4 of Nihonium. When I checked the status board at the entrance, my stats were listed as such:



My speed had grown to S due to my efforts on B3 the prior day, so I had to start farming B4.

Nihonium resembled a limestone cavern, so it was a dungeon that could truly be described as a cave. This remained true for B4. Though, as I proceeded, I wondered if it would change on B6 like Tellurium had.

“Whoa, there’s the monster... Mummy again, huh?”

I was confused for a moment. The monster here was a muscular, humanoid being wrapped in bandages. It looked just like the mummies from B3, so I wondered for a second if I was on the wrong floor.

“I’ll know as soon as I take you down!”

In this world, dungeons and a monster’s drops are everything. That was common sense to me now, so my first reaction was to defeat the monster in front of me.

I first stepped forward for melee combat, using my speed to circle around and kick it in the side. The mummy’s body bent in half as it was blown away, so I aimed a piercing round right at its head.

The bullet tore through it like paper. After staggering for a moment, the mummy disappeared, leaving only its bandages as if the being inside had vanished.

...

...

...

I waited for quite some time, yet I received no drop. The monster was gone, but only bandages remained. It hadn’t dropped the usual seed.

“This isn’t like B3,” I muttered. Up there, mummies had never died and left just their bandages.

To test things out, I didn’t pick up the bandages there and looked for another mummy to kill. This time, I killed it quickly with its weakness, fused flame rounds. Once again, it only left its bandages.

“Hmm... What does this mean?”

I’d be really weirded out if it didn’t drop anything.

My drop stats were all S-rank, higher than the highest in the world. I’d even gotten drops from monsters that never dropped anything, producing items that

shouldn't exist in this world at all. I considered my S-rank drops to mean something would always drop if I killed an enemy, so I was befuddled by this situation.

"Are there exceptions to S-rank drops? Hmm..."

While I grumbled to myself, a change occurred. The bandages left behind by the monster slowly reformed into the shape of a mummy, like watching a videotape in reverse. Now reborn, the mummy attacked.

"Whoa! So that's it!"

I understood, and breathed a sigh of relief. It wasn't that it hadn't dropped anything; I just hadn't finished killing it. And so, I challenged the monster once more, ready to take it down for real this time!

Remembering Selenium, I loaded homing rounds and fired. Homing rounds would chase their target and had a one hundred percent hit rate. They would even hit enemy weak points every time.

I fired several. However, they did not change paths or search for a weak point. Instead, they simply fired straight into the mummy.

I stopped for a moment out of surprise, and the mummy approached and wrapped its arms around me, catching me in a sumo bear hug. It squeezed me tight as if to break my spine.

"You little...!"

I gritted my teeth and shook off the mummy. Then, I front-kicked it away, jumped back, and fired a fused flame round at it. It was burned by the blaze, once again leaving just the bandages.

We're just getting started.

It wasn't dead yet; it was going to revive. As proof, when I fired a homing round behind me, it did a 180 and flew right into the bandage pile.

That meant I'd have to keep on attacking. I stepped on the bandages and poked them. They weren't countering, so I picked them up and pulled them.

They looked like normal bandages, but they were extremely sturdy.

"Hrrrngh!"

I had S-rank strength, but I still couldn't tear them apart.

This must mean there's a special way to defeat these things. Why do I feel like I've seen something like this before?

I loaded the other special rounds, minus the homing rounds I'd tried already, and fired at the bandages on the ground. First, I tried a normal flame round, but they didn't burn. Next, a freeze round. It froze them, but that didn't actually do anything.

"Don't tell me..."

Last, I tried a recovery round. Healing light enveloped the bandages, and they gradually melted away. The very things my S-rank strength couldn't tear had now disappeared in less than five seconds under the effects of a recovery round. And then, the monster dropped a seed.

Ryota's vitality went up by 1!

"Aww, yeah!"

I pumped a fist into the air.

To further prove my theory, I searched for another mummy. More precisely, I turned back the way I came and found the revived one that I'd fought before.

I fired a recovery round; nothing happened. I then tried a sleep round, which also did nothing. Finally, I hit it with a barrage of punches, causing the insides to disappear and leave bandages behind. After that, I hit them with a recovery round and they disappeared, dropping another seed.

I had a good grasp of this now. After defeating the mummy once and turning it into bandages, you had to finish it off with healing. Now that I knew that, I would have to stock up on recovery rounds to get into the real meat of the mummy farm.

Once I knew how to beat them, they were at the same level of difficulty as the B3 mummies. In my search for an efficient way to kill them, I raised my vitality from F to E.



I returned to B1 of Nihonium. It was almost noon, so it was about time for me to meet up with the girls. But first, I wanted to check something.

Gripping my guns tight, I searched for a skeleton. Currently, my guns contained special bullets I'd obtained by turning the B4 mummies into outsiders.

Nihonium was essentially mine and mine alone. When defeated normally, enemies there dropped stat-boosting seeds that only I could use. If I took them out of the dungeon with pickup boxes and turned them into outsiders instead, I'd get special bullets from them.

I planned to meet up with Emily and Celeste after I checked the effect of this new bullet.

A skeleton appeared. This was well ingrained in my muscle memory by now. I jumped back, ready for anything that might happen, and fired.

The bullet that was fired from my gun glowed and burst in the air like a handheld sparkler. After that flash, the skeleton was unable to move...for it was bound by threads of light.

I see...

This seemed to be a restraining round, then. How could I best use it, though? First, I would have to confirm its effectiveness and range.

I started to get excited about the new tool—the new power—I had obtained.

51. King and Concubines Attack

At noon, I went to Swallow's Returned Favor. There, I met up with Emily, who had been farming dandelions in Arsenic all morning. While she was selling her items, I went to the store's waiting area.

I watched other adventurers who had come to sell their items. While I sat there idly, a teacup appeared in my line of sight and was placed on the table in front of me. I looked up and saw Erza. She put the teapot in front of me, then sat on the other side of the table.

"Have some while you wait," she offered.

"This place serves tea?"

"Heehee... You're a valuable client, so I'm sure this cup of tea will indirectly boost our sales."

"Then I'd better farm my butt off."

Erza and I laughed and drank tea together.

I was a little surprised. This wasn't the kind of tea that came from a tea bag or powder and tasted cheap; it tasted like tea that had been brewed using proper tea leaves. Honestly, it made me a little bit happier to be given such nice tea.

"You know, it's almost time for the Harvest Festival," Erza said.

"Harvest Festival?"

"Oh, you haven't heard of it? It's held in Cyclo once a year."

"Wow. Since the word 'harvest' is in there, I assume it's related to monster

drops.”

“Correct. The festival lasts three days,” she explained. “During that time, all of Cyclo’s dungeon products will be gathered and put on display.”

“Wait, really? All of them?”

“Yes, all of them.”

“What do they do with the products?”

I recalled La Tomatina. That was a festival in my home world where tons and tons of tomatoes covered a city. My knowledge of it was mostly centered around the big, projectile-based tomato wars, though.

Would we hit each other with plants...or just eat them?

“They defeat them,” Erza said.

“Oh?”

“Do you know about the arena to the south? Products are put on display there in order for them to return to being monsters. It’s a way of putting both the products and monsters on exhibit.”

“Wow, okay.”

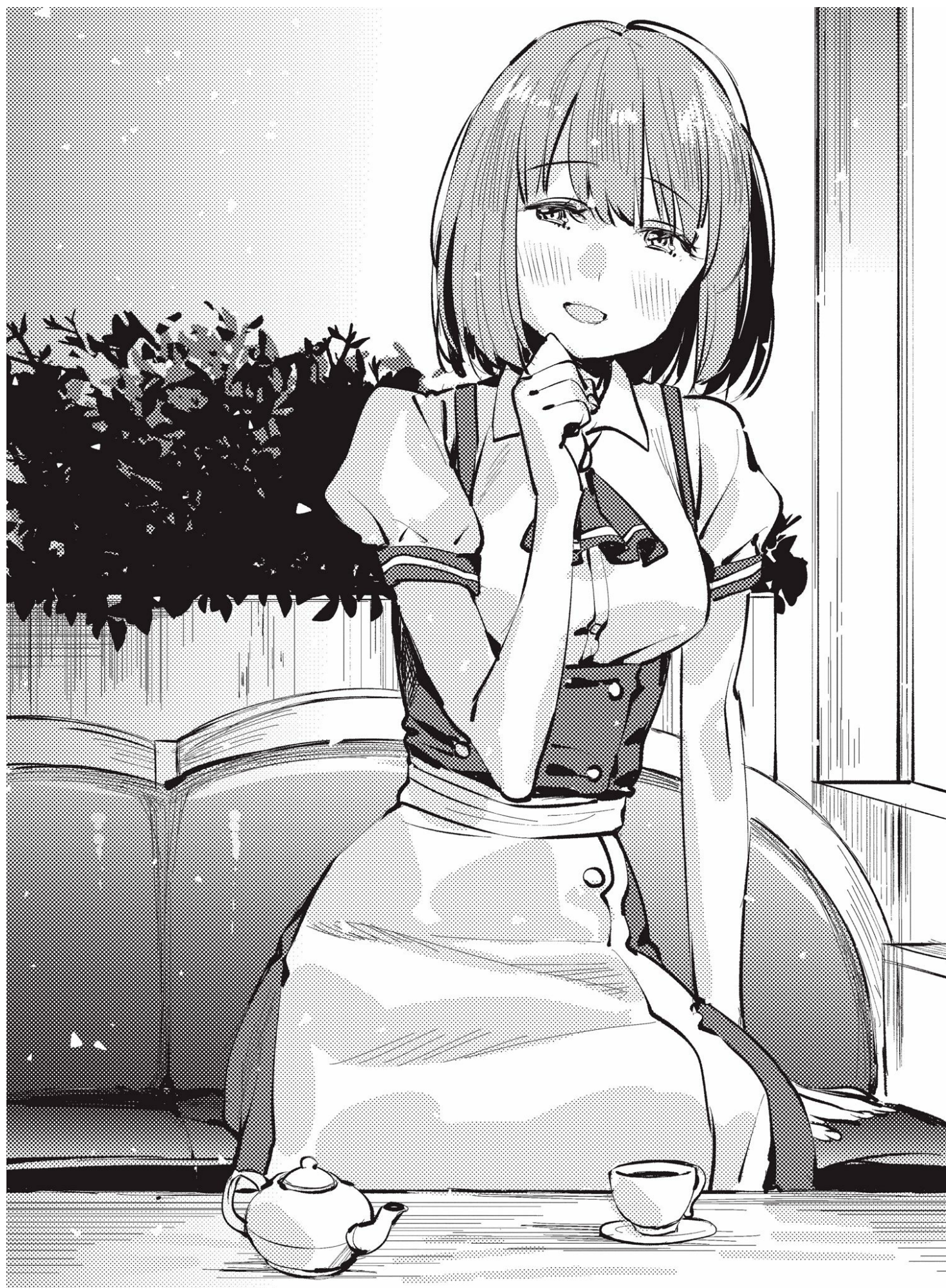
Oddly enough, I kind of understood. It sure sounded like something that would happen in this world. The thought of creating outsiders in the city gave me pause, but this was something they did inside an arena. Besides, they did it every year, so they must have a plan for if anything went wrong.

Erza added, “Normal products are one thing, but procuring rare monster drops is rather difficult, so they end up selling for a high price.”

“Makes sense.”

“Why don’t I give you a list of the rare drops that haven’t been procured yet?”

“Hahaha! I’ll work to pay off this tea, don’t worry.”



“Good!” Erza exclaimed as she flashed me a smile that was as warm as the beating sun.



We left Swallow’s Returned Favor along with Celeste, who had just arrived. The three-person Ryota family then headed to Tellurium.

“A Harvest Festival? I had no idea that was a thing here,” Celeste said.

“Did they not have something like that back where you lived, Celeste?” I asked.

“We didn’t have any sort of festivals at all, actually.”

“I see,” I said, nodding in understanding.

Fair. Some cities don’t “do” festivals.

But it wasn’t important to us, so the Harvest Festival discussion ended there. Instead, I brought up something I’d been wondering about.

“I think we should rent a new apartment. Our current one is a two-bedroom, but since you two are stuck in a room together, I say we should get a three-bedroom one.”

“But I’m not bothered by it,” Emily replied, cocking her head in confusion.

“Me neither,” Celeste agreed.

“Okay. But I still want to. We’re making tons farming potatoes, y’know? I want to use the money from that to rent, say...a Ryota family hideout.”

Celeste and Emily looked at each other.

“If that’s how it is, then sure. I don’t object.”

“I feel the same.”

“Okay. Then when we’re done for the day, let’s go see the real estate agent. What kind of apartment do we want, I wonder?”

“I say we pick a really awful one,” Celeste suggested. “I want to see the before-and-after of Emily turning it into a divine palace.”

“Same here! Still, I say we should get a good one if we’re going to do it.”

“That’s fine. Besides, a really awful room might have...*them*.”

“I’m scared of ghosts...”

Emily started quivering with her hammer in hand. Even if she could shatter boulders with that thing, spirits were another matter entirely.

“Nope. That’s not the ‘them’ I’m talking about,” Celeste said.

“Them...?”

“Yeah. Cockr—”

“Celeste, stop! Don’t say another word!”

I tried to silence her, but it was too late. The air almost audibly tensed. I looked at Emily fearfully. She had frozen on the spot and the light was gone from her eyes.

“Yoda,” she said.

“Y-Yeah?”

“I’m prepared to disembowel myself if I must.”

She clenched her favored hammer.

“Emily, wait! You can’t disembowel yourself with a hammer!”

“It’s okay. We humans are capable of anything we put our minds to. If I’m to be subjected to that horror, I would rather disembowel myself with a hammer. I know... Heeheehee, why don’t I practice now?”

“Aaaaaah! Wait, wait, Emily! Slow down—Why are you so strong?!”

As Celeste watched in utter confoundment, I desperately tried to console Emily, who was in the middle of trying to disembowel herself with a hammer.

After much trouble, I managed to stop her and return her to her right mind.

“Ryota... I shouldn’t talk about those things, should I?” Celeste said, understanding her mistake.

After bringing Emily back from the brink, we regathered our bearings and continued to Tellurium. However, we soon heard the screams of men and women alike. The city erupted into commotion.

“What’s going on?!” I shouted.

“I don’t know...”

“The screams are coming from over there!” Celeste exclaimed as she pointed at the city gate leading to the dungeon.

I quickly understood why. A civilian running our way screamed, “Monsters! Outsiders have appeared!”

The gorilla incident crossed my mind. Men and women dressed like adventurers ran past us, allowing us to hear their conversation.

“When are those dolts gonna learn?”

“Huh? What do you mean?”

“Get greedy and push yourself to take down rare monsters on the deepest floors if you want, but you’re only causing problems for people if you die on the

way back to the city!”

“Oh... So since they died, there was nobody around to watch the items?”

“Damn straight! We’ve gotta run! Those things are too much for us to handle!”

“Yeah!”

The pair of adventurers ran off as fast as they could.

“Eeeeeek!”

I heard another scream, which was much closer this time. When I looked toward the source, it turned out to be Erza. She had fallen on her rear end and was desperately backing away as a slime approached her.

The slime was pink, with double eyelids and long eyelashes. If you just looked at its face, it was kind of pretty.

“A slime jariya!” Celeste screamed. She hadn’t been in Cyclo for long at all, but it seemed she knew all about it by now.

Still, I didn’t have time for words. I took out my guns and fired, not even wasting the time to confirm they were loaded. A normal bullet came from the left side, while a restraining round came from the right.

The restraining round unleashed a flash of light, binding the slime jariya with threads of light. While it was restrained, I ran over to Erza and cradled her in my arms.

“Ryota!”

“Hold on tight!”

Holding her, I jumped back. Emily tagged in and leaped forward with her hammer spinning, while Celeste’s Bicorn Horn-sourced fireballs acted as

supporting fire.

The fireballs struck true, and Emily's hammer scored a direct hit on the slime jariya's head to boot. However, it still did not fall.

"Haaah!" Emily roared, smashing the restrained slime jariya with her enormous hammer over and over again.

The binding light had started to wear off, so I fired another restraining round as backup.

After ten seconds of single-mindedly, one-sidedly pounding away at the deathly-still slime jariya, Emily finally managed to defeat it.

"That thing's sturdy," I commented.

"Slime jariyas are from B26 of Tellurium," Celeste informed me.

"B26?! It's from that deep down? I can see why it's so tough..."

"U-Um, Ryota?" Erza said in my arms. Her voice was weak. I looked down and saw that she was pale, and her hands were trembling. "Thank...you..."

"Are you okay? Did it hurt you anywhere?"

"I'm not hurt."

"Thank goodness."

It seemed Erza was fine for now. When I let her go, she was doing well enough to stand on her own two feet.

"Still, things haven't calmed down. Why not?" I asked.

"I think it's because the slime jariya is just a regular monster from B26."

"Huh? This wasn't the rare one, then?"

Celeste nodded and said gravely, "The rare monster from B26 is the slime

sultan. It has a crown, so we should be able to recognize it at first sight.”

“A crown...? So it’s like a king, huh? That’s definitely not what we just fought. I guess that thing from before is like the king’s consort or something?”

High-level adventurers who had heard of the emergency appeared one after another, and battles broke out all over the city. I could feel, even from afar, a sensation that I’d felt often in dungeons: the monsters’ numbers were being culled by these adventurers.

“Eeeeeek!”

There was another scream. I locked eyes with Emily and Celeste, and we all started running at once. When we ran in the direction of the scream, we spotted a monster. It was a slime with a crown—the slime sultan. Several adventurers had fallen around it; it must’ve defeated them.

“Yoda, we have to save everyone!” Emily yelled as she ran in first. She jumped and spun her hammer in the air, but instead of swinging it straight down, she landed and swung it sideways.

The full-power swing of a hammer far bigger than Emily’s 4’3” frame batted the slime sultan away. Emily then chased after the monster, not just to defeat it, but to protect the fallen adventurers from it. Celeste ran after her as well to support her.

“Ah...!”

I gritted my teeth, loaded recovery rounds in both guns, and fired at all of the adventurers on the ground. The healing light glowed all around me. After ensuring that they were no longer in critical condition, I ran to catch up with Emily and Celeste.

Emily was in a bind. The slime sultan was attempting to crush her, and only

her hammer protected her from being flattened. Celeste shot fire with her Bicorn Horns, but level 1 magic had little to no effect on the slime sultan.

“Let...Emily...go-ooooo!”

I charged forward, seized the slime sultan, and pushed it away.

After getting it off Emily, I kept on pushing, digging a trench in the ground as we went. Once I’d pressed it against a building, the wall started to crumble. Debris fell around us.

The slime sultan changed shape and counterattacked. I guarded and jumped back, reloading and firing restraining rounds. After the flash of light, the slime sultan was bound.

However, it escaped the threads of light right away.

“Doesn’t even last two seconds...” I grumbled.

I looked back; Celeste was helping Emily to her feet. Emily didn’t look injured, but her hammer had bent due to the weight of the slime sultan. I couldn’t expect much firepower from her, so this fight was up to me.

Thus, I reloaded my guns and fired rapidly. One was filled with regular bullets, while the other had one restraining round and more regular bullets.

When the restraining round hit, the slime sultan was tied up for almost two seconds. In that short span, I fired piercing rounds at it from three feet away.

I fired until both chambers were empty, but it wasn’t dead yet, though my assault *did* seem to be working.

“In that case...!”

I reloaded and repeated the same thing once more.

“Graaaaaa!”

Fire rapidly from three feet away while it's restrained.

Continue firing before the restraint is released.

Right before it's released, fire another restraining round to keep up the piercing round barrage.

I repeated that process ten whole times. Once the slime sultan literally looked like Swiss cheese, it finally fell.

“Phew. There’s a point where you’re *too* tough. If I had to fight that thing fairly, I’d be in real trouble.”

I was glad I had these restraining rounds on hand. Though they cost me four flame rounds and two recovery rounds to obtain, they’d won the day for me.

While I enjoyed the feeling of relief, the outsider slime sultan dropped something resembling a pouch.

52. The Emily Hammer

I placed the pouch I'd picked up in my pocket for now. I knew from experience that it was probably a good item, but checking it would have to wait. For the moment, I returned to Emily and Celeste.

"Are you two okay?"

"I'm okay."

"I'm fine, too."

They'd replied. Indeed, they seemed uninjured.

"Your hammer's handle is bent, huh?" I asked Emily.

"Let's fix it—no, let's make it even stronger," Celeste suggested. "We'll make it so strong that it'll never bend again."

"Good idea, Celeste. What kind of hammer should we buy?"

"There was a nice one for five million piro at a weapon shop in the city," she answered, having become a veritable well of information. "The two surfaces of the hammer have different effects. One side deals damage twice per attack, while the other deals equal damage to monsters around the one you strike."

"So you can switch between double attacking and doing AOE damage? Nice! Okay, let's get that."

Celeste and I were in full agreement.

"N-N-No! Five million piro is way too much! I'll be haunted by the ghost of excess! I can just do this—" Emily desperately refused and tried to pull the

handle of her hammer back straight. “Hnnngh...”

She pulled so hard that her face turned red.

Screeeeech!

With a shrill noise, the handle broke.

“We understand how you feel, Emily,” I teased.

“You finished off your old one so you wouldn’t have any regrets, huh?”

“Hawha?! No, that’s not it!”

“So you’re bragging about your strength? Yeah, A-rank *is* pretty amazing.”

“You’d put gorillas to shame,” Celeste joked.

“Hawhawha?! This was an accident! In fact, if I just tape it back together, I could use it fine!”

“I’d like to see the tape that can fix that...” I said, rolling my eyes.

“Tape that could stand up to your strength would be more expensive than a new hammer!” Celeste laughed.

“Urgh... But the ghost of excess...” Emily, now with tears in her eyes, continued to refuse. Looking back, I realized she’d never spent money on herself since we started living together. I mean, I had rented out that room just for her, but before I knew it, she’d made me stay there, too.

Emily always prioritized me—us—over herself. Perhaps that was the source of her warmth, but for now, I wanted her to suppress those feelings.

“Emily,” I said, squatting down to her 4’3” level and looking her in the eye. “You’re always helping me out, so I want to pay you back.”

“Gulp...”

She leaned back just a bit. For some reason, she was blushing.

“Let me return the favor. Please.”

“...Okay,” she surrendered.

“Now that that’s decided, starting tomorrow, we’ve gotta work on getting rich quick. Our goal: five million piro. If we go hard, we can do that in under a week.”

“I can’t wait! We’ll get to dungeoneer with Emily’s new weapon. I bet we’ll be able to go even deeper!”

“Ah...”

“I meant to just return the favor to Emily, but it’s looking like we’ll benefit from it as well.”

I shrugged in a joking manner, and Celeste grinned sweetly.

Emily began to look less sorry and more appreciative. She then gazed at us with a blissful smile and said, “Yoda? Celeste? Thank you both.”

I should’ve been the one thanking her, but I decided not to say anything.



At night, once we’d returned home after a day of dungeoneering, we were visited by a well-dressed young man. We led him to the living room and sat facing each other across the table. He introduced himself in a rather polite manner.

“My name is Smith,” he said. “It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance.”

“Right. Good to meet you, too.”

“Please forgive my sudden intrusion. I saw you defeat the slime sultan earlier. Your individual skills and teamwork were a spectacular sight to behold. There aren’t many three-person parties out there who can defeat a rare monster from B26 so easily, you know?”

Smith kept on buttering us up.

“Okay...?”

I didn’t mind compliments, but I didn’t want some random person barging in and giving them. Emily and Celeste were likewise uncomfortable.

“Now, let’s get to the main topic. The young lady has broken her weapon, I understand?”

“Yeah. We’re planning to upgrade soon.”

“Please allow me to furnish the upgrade for you.”

“Furnish?”

“Ah...”

Emily and Celeste both made an odd noise. They seemed to understand what he meant, but I sure didn’t. What did this guy want?

“I am a weapons dealer. Mr. Sato, what sorts of weapons do you think sell the best?”

“What sorts? Uh, strong ones, right?”

“Yes, of course. But what if there were several weapons of equal strength?”

I shrugged and replied, “I dunno, you tell me.”

“Weapons that famous people use. Most adventurers seek stability, so they

shy away from buying new weapons.”

I’d heard that plenty of times. If dungeons dropped all products, then farming monsters was a means of production. As such, most adventurers craved stability.

“That’s why weapons used by famous people sell extremely well. After all, a weapon used by a well-known adventurer is proven to be effective. That is the unspoken seal of stability, as it were.”

“Makes sense.”

“Which is why I would like to furnish a new hammer for Miss Emily here. A hammer used by Emily, she who smashed a slime jariya into pulp, would surely fly off the shelves.”

So it’s like a company sponsoring an athlete, I guess?

Emily had lost her hammer in the fight against the slime jariya and slime sultan, but in exchange, we had gained the opportunity to obtain a new and improved hammer for free.

I looked at Celeste, who just nodded. We’d planned to buy one for Emily as a present, but it seemed smarter to go along with this plan.

“Okay, understood. Emily? How do you feel about that?”

“Umm...”

“Of course, since I’m asking you to use it, it will naturally be furnished for free—”

“Yes, please!”

Emily was as eager as could be. For someone as frugal as her, saving five million piro was a big deal.

“Thank you very much. Then I shall undertake the production of your own original hammer, the Emily Hammer. Please tell me the exact specifications that you would like it to have.”

“Okay!”

Emily and Smith began discussing the hammer. She told him what she wanted, though she kept her requests modest.

Celeste watched with a gleam in her eyes. I felt excited at the prospect of Emily’s new hammer, too.

53. Genius? God? Or...Prince?

The next morning, I went to Nihonium as per usual.

When I entered B1, I ran into Princess Margaret's operation. They were the ones who sold boxes full of air created by the adorable Princess Margaret herself. Their leader saw me and addressed me with a smile.

"Heya, Sato."

"Yo."

"I've been meaning to thank you. Because you used our Pandora's Boxes, brand recognition has shot through the roof."

"That so?"

"We can't thank you enough."

"You making more air today?" I asked, looking around the dungeon. In the distance, I spotted Princess Margaret and her four assistants. They were in the middle of battle as we spoke. The four men weakened the enemy as much as possible, and Princess Margaret dealt the final blow. I was used to the sight by now.

"Yeah. Sales have been up a little lately, but I've been racking my brain over what to do next."

"Well..." I trailed off as I thought about it. Presumably, he meant the boxes of air. I was amazed that they'd sold at all before, honestly.

"It's not like Princess Margaret's losing popularity, but..."

“Can’t you sell anything else?”

“Anything else?”

“Yeah. You use Pandora’s Boxes to show off that she’s the one who made them, right? Then there must be other things that you could sell. Like underwear, or...”

“Ah...!” the man gasped, his eyes widening in shock. “Are you a genius, son?!”

“That’s more of a perverted old man’s idea...”

I regretted it as soon as I’d said it. Buying used underwear? What era was this?

“That could sell! It would, but...Princess Margaret’s reputation...”

“You’d soil it. In a way, you’d be tearing open the chicken’s stomach to get the eggs out.”

The man cocked his head, confused.

Right. I guess that simile didn’t work in this world. It would have been annoying to explain, so I just changed the subject.

“What else would work? Hmm... That’s a tough question.”

Seeing the man mumbling to himself, I gave it some thought as well. What would sell with that so-called princess’s face on the box?

Suddenly, I remembered Smith’s visit and request to use Emily as a means of advertising. The word “brand” came to mind.

“How about rings?” I suggested.

“Rings?”

“Yeah. Sell rings made by Princess Margaret. It’s not gross, and you can sell

them the same way you would air or underwear. I know...you could even use a slogan like, 'Princess Margaret bought you a ring!'"

"Are you a god?!" the man extolled me yet more. "Yeah, rings are good! Really good, even! Macrolide would be better for rings than Cyclo, I'm sure. And we'll have to hire adventurers..."

The man put a hand to his chin and began muttering to himself. As soon as he found a business opportunity, he was already thinking about ways to make it a reality. That was a merchant for you. I didn't want to interrupt, so I—

"Eep!" someone screamed.

I looked toward the source curiously; it was Princess Margaret. Her four assistants were being trounced and tossed around by a multi-skeleton ambush from the wall.

After dealing with the men, one skeleton charged at Margaret. I whipped out my gun and fired a restraining round. Just as it lifted its bony arm to attack her, it was bound by light. I then stepped in, pulled Margaret off of her knees and into my arms, and jumped back. While still aloft, I swapped to normal bullets and fired rapidly at the skeleton. A few of the shots hit it and broke its bones.

By the time I'd landed, the skeleton had disappeared without a trace.

"You okay?"

"Ah..."

Princess Margaret put a small hand on my chest and pushed me away. She averted her eyes and looked down, her cheeks dyed pink.

"Are you okay, Princess?!" the man from before exclaimed as he ran over.

"Yeah, I'm okay..." she answered weakly.

Relieved to see her safe, he looked at me, bowed, and said, "Thank you! Thank you so much!"

"I'm just glad she's safe."

"Please let us thank you somehow!"

"You don't have to go that far. It's fine."

"Never! Say, those attacks you were using to kill the skeletons were consumables, weren't they? Akin to arrows, perhaps? We feel awful for forcing you to use those in a dropless dungeon, so... I know! Let us make it up to you with a ring."

"Huh?"

"I was thinking of printing serial numbers on the princess's rings and selling them. You must accept the first one!"

"I'd feel bad taking that."

"It's no exaggeration to say that you saved the poor princess's life. Please!"

The man bowed deeper.

I mean, I guess there's no harm in taking what I can get...



I left them and continued down to B4. There, I promptly ran into a mummy. Since it was a point-blank ambush, I took it down with martial arts moves and fired recovery rounds at the resulting pile of bandages. No drop appeared, however.

“Hmm...”

After confirming that fact, I proceeded deeper.

A pair of them attacked me next. Noticing a speed difference between the two as they approached, I turned around and ran. Once they’d formed a line of two in pursuit, I whipped around and fired a piercing round. It blew both mummies’ heads off, since they were lined up for it.

Their flesh disappeared, and the bandages covering them fell, so I destroyed the resulting pile with a recovery round.

No drop, as expected. After confirming the situation, I placed a hand in my hip pouch.

There were five grain-like items inside.

Ryota’s max HP went up by 0!

Ryota’s max HP went up by 0!

Ryota’s vitality went up by 1!

Ryota’s vitality went up by 1!

Ryota’s vitality went up by 1!

I heard the messages for all of the grains—that is, stat-boosting seeds. They matched up with the two I’d obtained from helping Princess Margaret and the three from defeating monsters on B4.

This pouch had been dropped by the outsider slime sultan. Its effect was that drops went directly into it—similar to Pandora’s Boxes and pickup boxes, but the

most important difference was that it entirely skipped the drop process and deposited them inside it.

To an onlooker, it would appear as though nothing had dropped.

I was a real fan of this piece of equipment. To this point, I'd been careful to avoid letting anyone witness me finishing off outsiders, but from now on, that was unnecessary.

While I thought about the matter, another mummy appeared. I killed it in a flash and destroyed its bandages. Then, I turned the pouch upside-down to avoid touching the contents.

The seed fell to the ground. I picked it up, raising my stat.

Ryota's vitality went up by 1!

When it was in the pouch, it wouldn't disappear, since I hadn't touched it. If I left it in the pouch, exited the dungeon, and turned it into an outsider, I could effortlessly save money on the pickup boxes I normally needed.

"Not many other uses for it, I guess."

I killed mummy after mummy like a machine, all the while wondering if the pouch had any other uses. In the process, I raised my vitality from E to D.

54. A Mage's Melancholy

I woke up in the morning, feeling refreshed. A good smell wafted in from outside my room. I went out into the living room to learn the source and found Emily in the middle of making breakfast.

“Good morning, Yoda.”

“Morning... Whoa! What's gotten into Celeste?”

At the table, Celeste looked like a wilted flower.

“Good morning...”

She was pretty pale. It seemed as though she could collapse at any given moment.

“Celeste has a headache,” Emily explained.

“A headache? Did you catch a cold or something?”

“Nuh-uh. It's a magic storm.”

“Magic storm? That's the natural disaster that stops mages from using magic, isn't it?”

Celeste nodded weakly and replied, “Yeah. When magic storms are brewing, my head gets heavy and aches.”

“Ah... I get huge headaches on days when the air pressure is low, so I understand. Should I go buy you some medicine?”

“It's okay... I'll feel just fine as soon as it passes,” Celeste said with an air of certainty.

“That so?”

If she said so, then she must be right. Magic storms didn’t just prevent Celeste from using magic; they messed with her physical health, too. That was an important factor to keep in mind.

“How about we take the day off from dungeoneering?” I suggested.

“No, it’s okay. You two should go like usual. I’ll be fine here.”

“Nah. We’re a team, so we’ve gotta stick together,” I said, grinning at Celeste.

“Let’s visit the realtor today.”

If today was a bad day for going to the dungeon, it was finally time to get to that new home search I’d been putting off.



In the morning, I raised my vitality from D to C in Nihonium. We could’ve gone to the realtor right after breakfast, but it would take time until Celeste had the energy to walk, so I grinded some stat-boosters to kill time.

I made good use of the pouch, too. Instead of taking foes down and picking up the seeds one by one, I could collect them as I went and use them all at the end.

The countless stat-boosting narrations in my mind were like seeing the multiple level-ups from killing a metal slime at level 1. The training had gotten my brain juices flowing—in a lot of ways.



Noon came and went, I met up with Emily and Celeste, and we walked through town together.

Due to the magic storm, we saw lots of mages around town. Restaurants and the like were using this opportunity to earn money, making claims such as, “Mage Day here!” “Mages get 10x points today!” “All mages in a group eat for free!” and the like.

One such mage, Celeste, still seemed to be in some pain.

“You okay?” I asked.

“I’m feeling a lot better now. Still can’t do much, but day-to-day stuff should be fine.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah. Besides, this is the kind of storm that still lets you use magic in town, so it’s not as bad as it could be.”

“You’re saying it gets worse than this?”

There were two kinds of magic storms. Depending on their scale, some only prevented use of magic in dungeons, while others kept you from using it in town as well. From what I’d ascertained and Celeste’s testimony, it seemed the ones that let you use it in town were smaller. And yet, they were still painful for her.

We chatted until we reached the realtor. Inside, I saw a familiar face. The young man with the soft demeanor, Antonio, stood up and greeted us.

“Hi there, Mr. Sato. It’s been a while. What brings you to my office today?”

“I want to rent a new apartment.”

“Is that so?”

Antonio smiled pleasantly and looked at Celeste.

“She’s a new friend,” I explained. “I want a place that all three of us can share.”

“But of course! Right this way, please.”

With his big customer-service smile, Antonio guided us to the couch for clients and had us sit. When I plopped down onto it, Antonio asked, “Now, what sort of place are you looking for?”

“Three rooms at minimum. Actually, I want three *bedrooms*.”

“Do you think we should have a guest room, too?” Celeste asked.

“A guest room?”

“Yeah,” she said, then nodded and glanced at Emily. However, the girl just cocked her head in confusion. “Living together has made me realize something. Sometimes, I might wanna bring a guest over and show off a bit.”

“Oh, same!” I totally agreed with her. “I know I’d love to show off the house Emily made once in a while. Hell, sometimes I wonder if it might be soothing enough to force a change of heart on bad guys.”

“What do you think would happen if we brought ghost-type monsters inside? Maybe it’d be holy enough to purify them!”

“I could see that happening.”

We nodded excitedly at each other.

“Of course not,” Emily cut in, annoyed. “Don’t be weird, please.”

“Hey, it’s not weird at all. Right, Celeste?”

“Right. Emily, nothing in the world is more calming than you.”

“Goodness! You two joke too much...” Emily pouted a little. We were just telling the truth, though.

“Incidentally, what’s your budget...?” Antonio asked us, bringing things back on topic.

“Three hundred thousand a month,” I answered. The last one was 150,000 piro a month, so I figured we might as well go for one that was double the price.

“Three hundred thousand!” Celeste gasped.

“Are you sure you want to pay that much, Yoda?”

“It’s not that much. If we go out as a group and farm slime families, that’s a hundred twenty thousand piro right there. We could get three hundred thousand in one day. Plus, most of all...I want to share a nice home with you two.”

Celeste and Emily gazed at me in surprise.

I was the one maintaining the Ryota family wallet. All proceeds from selling drops went to me, but my perspective was that we were all earning this money together. And in that case, how could I not pass on the benefits to my party? I mean, we’d earned it together to begin with. Money made together had to be spent on all of us. That was the simple truth of the matter.

“Thanks, Ryota.”

“Thank you!”

“Don’t thank me. We earned this as a team, after all.”

“Then how does this building look—?”

Just as Antonio was passing information on a building over to me, Celeste

suddenly held her head.

“Urgh!”

“Celeste, what’s wrong?”

“Sorry... My head...”

“Your head? Is it the magic storm?”

“I have heard that the storm is growing stronger,” Antonio said, brow furrowed. “Forecasts are saying that it will soon engulf the town, too. She is a mage, I presume?”

The natural disaster of magic storms, the “Mage Day” advertisements I’d seen in town...

“Yeah... Oh, I know. Are there any apartments that can protect a mage from getting sick during magic storms?” I asked expectantly.

“Only one, I’m afraid. And it exceeds your budget—”

“Show me.”



Antonio showed us to a three-story building on the western side of Cyclo. The first floor was essentially a garage where one could store several magic carts. The second was a shared space with a bath, kitchen, and living room. Finally, there were three bedrooms on the third floor.

The layout was perfect—without even mentioning the best part.

“Whoa. My headache is gone.”

“Really?!”

Celeste had recovered as soon as we’d stepped inside and closed the door.

“Yeah. I had no idea a house could have this effect.”

“Do you really feel okay now?”

“I feel great! It’s almost unbelievable.”

She was right; it was amazing how much more energetic she was now.

“How do you like it?” Antonio asked.

“It’s incredible,” I replied.

“How much is the monthly rent?” Emily asked.

“Four hundred thousand piro. It uses the latest magic storm insulation technology, so it’s thirty percent more than others of the same size.”

“Four hundred thousand...” Emily frowned.

“SSurely that’s too—”

Celeste tried to refuse out of guilt. However, I decided for them and said, “I choose this one. It’s a small price to pay for no headaches.”

They gazed at me in wide-eyed astonishment. Tears formed in Celeste’s eyes as she mumbled, “Ryota... Thank you...”

Thus, we decided to move. Our living situation had ranked up.

55. Special Dungeons

The next day, I woke up and entered our new living room. We'd just moved in, but the house was already filled with warmth. There weren't many things inside, so it wasn't very lived-in at all. And yet, it had the warmth and comfort of your grandmother's home.

"Emily, you are a fiend," I declared.

"For real. What did she even change?" Celeste asked.

"This is our fourth place if you include the tent, and I *still* don't know, so I give up on trying to figure that out."

"So it's incomprehensible no matter how much experience you have...?" Celeste let out a vexed sigh as she watched Emily make breakfast in the kitchen.

"I consider it a simple phenomenon by now: if Emily is present, a place becomes brighter and warmer. Without Emily, it's a normal house. That's how I see it."

"Hmm... I think I'll look at it that way, too."

"Speaking of phenomena, it seems like that magic storm is still raging."

"They say it's going to last through the day," Celeste explained, then heaved a different sigh this time. She slumped over, cursing her powerlessness. "I'm gonna be useless again today. My drops are all F-rank, and now I can't use magic. I'm just dead weight."

"It's cool. Take your time and rest up during these storms. You feel fine inside the house, right?"

“I’m still amazed by just how fine I feel. It’s crazy that there are buildings like this.”

“That’s good to hear. Makes me glad I chose this place.”

Celeste opened her eyes wide in apparent surprise. Shortly thereafter, for some reason, she blushed, looked down, and mumbled, “Hey, um...”

“Yeah?”

“Thank you...”

“Don’t mention it. You’re a member of the Ryota family, remember?”

Celeste smiled gently and agreed with a simple, “Yeah.”



Celeste was out sick due to the magic storm, so I went to work alone.

In the morning, I went to Nihonium and raised my vitality from D to C. I was used to double-tapping these mummies by now, so I could farm mindlessly.

After lunch, I went to B1 of Tellurium and farmed slimes for bean sprouts. This was even easier. So easy, in fact, that I started to get a little bored. As so, I decided to mix in some special rounds once in a while. For every twenty slimes I killed normally, I defeated one with a flashier technique.

Thus, I went on defeating slimes. Using the magic cart’s weight calculation function, I got exactly 40,000 piro before heading back to Cyclo to sell the bean sprouts at Swallow’s Returned Favor.



“Yes, that’s exactly forty thousand piro,” Erza said.

“Thanks... Oh, hey!”

“Did you notice?” she asked, grinning after handing me my money.

Of course I’d noticed. When she gave me 40,000 piro, she would always give me four bills worth 10,000 each. But this time, she gave me three 10,000-piro and ten 1,000-piro bills. It was still 40,000 altogether, but...

“Sorry for breaking the last ten,” she apologized. “Money isn’t circulating as much these days.”

“Oh? Why’s that?”

“A national administrator who was managing dungeons has been arrested for corruption, so production has temporarily slowed down. But they have a grasp of the crimes committed and just hired a replacement, so things should be back to normal soon.”

“I see... Wait, so does that mean that money is dropped from dungeons, too?”

“Yes...?” Erza cocked her head and asked back, as if manifesting a question mark over her head.

Why are you asking me such an obvious question? she seemed to be saying.

So that was it; even money came from dungeon drops. I took the money I’d just received, along with several coins, from my pocket. Even the money we used all the time was dropped in a dungeon.

Wait. Does that mean whichever country controls that dungeon can produce as much money as it wants? Actually, damn, that’s true of my old world, too. If a

country wanted, it could generate however much money it liked and control the supply. Things probably work the same way here. That's why there are administrators and such.

"Thanks," I said. "I'll be back."

"Okay. Please come again!" Erza exclaimed, seeing me off with a smile.

I tucked away the money, took out my biggest coin—which was worth 500 piro—and flicked it into the air and caught it a few times.

So even this is a dungeon drop, eh?

I'd never thought of it before, but knowing that made things interesting. Everything in this world came from dungeons. Interesting, indeed.

Bonk!

While I was thinking, I ran into another pedestrian.

"Whoops! My bad."

This made me fumble my 500-piro coin, which dropped to the ground and rolled away. I managed to catch up with it by stepping on it. Squatting down, I picked it up.

At that exact moment, I saw a gleam. A flash of light ran through my mind. I'd almost lost that coin. Losing it. Letting it go. Leaving it without an owner.

Outsiders.

Even I could tell that there was a sparkle in my eyes.



On the outskirts of Cyclo, I returned to a familiar, less-trafficked place. Once there, I placed a 10,000-piro note on the ground. After leaving it and waiting, the paper money turned into an outsider.

It was a bird. A big black bird that was about three times the size of a crow you might see in the city. The bird flapped its wings...and began flying away from me.

It was fleeing at an incredible speed!

“I’m not letting you get away!” I roared as I whipped out a gun and fired. The bullets chased after the escaping bird, which seemed to notice and took evasive maneuvers.

“You’re pretty mobile! Well, take this!”

This time, I loaded homing rounds and fired two. They traced opposing arcs to the left and right. The bird tried to evade, but the bullets homed in on it and struck true. It fell to the ground, and out popped a drop.

I went over to where it fell and searched carefully. Once I’d found what seemed to be the drop, I picked it up.

“Is this...a key?”

The bird, an outsider created from money, dropped a key with a jewel affixed to it.

“That’s cool and all, but how am I supposed to use this?”

I looked the key up and down, touched it, poked it, and even flicked it. At that point, I heard a voice in my head. It was the same voice that explained the effects of special items when they dropped.

“Like this...?”

I obeyed and turned the key mid-air. Right after I did that, I was whisked away to another place! Before, I'd been in the outskirts of Cyclo, but now I was in a dungeon. It was like a cross between a temple, ruins, and a big cavern.

Inside was a lone monster. At a glance, it was shaped like a woman, but it was clearly not human. Its body was pale and translucent, and it had no legs. Instead of walking, it floated in the air.

If Nihonium's monsters could be called corporeal undead, this would be more like a ghost-type wraith monster. It seemed the key was an item necessary to enter a special dungeon.

"Either way, if it's a monster, I'll just have to kill it."

I felt my lips curl into a smirk. In a world where even money dropped from dungeons, all monsters were akin to treasure chests. I'd be insane not to be excited over what this special dungeon monster might drop.

The wraith slowly approached, so I fired away at it.

Normal rounds...passed right through it.

Freeze rounds...passed right through it.

Flame rounds...passed right through it.

Recovery rounds...passed right through it.

Homing rounds...passed right through it.

I fired one after another, but all my bullets passed through it without dealing damage. Finally, I fired a restraining round—and it worked. The bullet glowed mid-air and wrapped the wraith in beams of light. The parts the light ropes covered began to look opaque.

I quickly loaded a homing round and fired. The homing round, which had

passed through the wraith before, now pierced it where it was vulnerable. It screamed in a way that no human could.

This is working!

Since it was restrained, I switched to regular bullets, closed in, and fired at its vulnerable points from point-blank range. The wraith screamed more until it dissolved into the air and disappeared.

It dropped a glass vial with red liquid inside. I picked it up, and in the blink of an eye, I had been whisked out of the dungeon and returned to where I was before.

I see. For one key, you can go to a special dungeon with one monster. So I earn money, turn that money into an outsider, then use the resulting key to enter the special dungeon and get the monster drop from inside? A bit of a long process, but what does it do?

I opened the vial and drank the red liquid. All at once, I felt it spread through me. It seemed to work immediately.

Just then...

Raises plant drop stat by 3 ranks for 10 minutes!

I learned that it was quite different from the things I'd found so far.

56. A New Stat Boost

I wanted to test this process more, so I put down another 10,000-piro note and started to walk away.

Come to think of it, these notes turned into birds. Those things were fast, so it would be a real pain and a waste of money if I let them get away. So then, the question was how I could defeat them without leaving any chance of escape.

After a moment of thought, I recalled something.

“Okay, let’s give that a try.”

I made my decision and resumed putting distance between me and the bill. When I got just barely outside of the range for it to turn into an outsider, I held my gun and waited.

“Five, four, three, two, one...” I counted down out loud.

The plan went off without a hitch, so I pumped a fist into the air. The period between putting something down and it becoming an outsider was consistent across all things, so I had the timing memorized.

I had fired as soon as the outsider appeared, shooting it before it could act. If you pursued efficiency to its peak, you learned to ready your attacks for the exact point when monsters spawned. This was the same principle.

The outsider dropped a key. I picked it up, stuck it into the air in front of me, and twisted. As a result, I was taken to another dungeon akin to ruins...where the same wraith appeared once more.

It floated my way, so I fired a restraining round and charged, tearing into its

now-corporeal body with my hand. I was safe because it was restrained, but I also wanted to know just how tough this thing was.

“Harder than a zombie, but not as tough as a mummy, huh?”

I was satisfied with that information, as I’d memorized the toughness of enemies by feel.

The wraith disappeared, dropping a vial of red liquid, and I was taken back outside. I promptly drank the contents of the vial.

Raises mineral drop stat by 3 ranks for 10 minutes!

This time, I heard that it raised mineral drops. The last was plants, while this was minerals. Now I wanted to test out even more of them...



After defeating another wraith, I was blessed with a vial of blue liquid. I downed it without hesitation.

Raises plant drop stat by 1 rank for 10 minutes!

After repeated testing, I had a good grasp of how this worked.

First off, there were two broad kinds of drops here. Keys obtained from paper money would give items that temporarily boosted a random drop stat by three

ranks. Ones obtained from coins, meanwhile, would do the same, but by just one rank.

The value was unimportant; all that mattered was the type of money. The vials were indistinguishable by color, so once I drank one and learned that it boosted plant drops, I could recognize other plant-drop-boosting potions.

I knew the drops, so all that was left was to properly investigate their effects. And for that, I needed some help.



The next morning, I went to the entrance of Tellurium with Emily and Celeste. Emily carried the new hammer that had been furnished for her, while Celeste was refreshed after the passing of the magic storm.

“What’s the plan?” Celeste asked.

“Emily, are you wearing that ring?”

“Yep.”

“Let’s see those stats,” I requested.

Emily trotted over to a nearby status board and brought up the second page of her stats.



“Your stats still reflect the boost.”

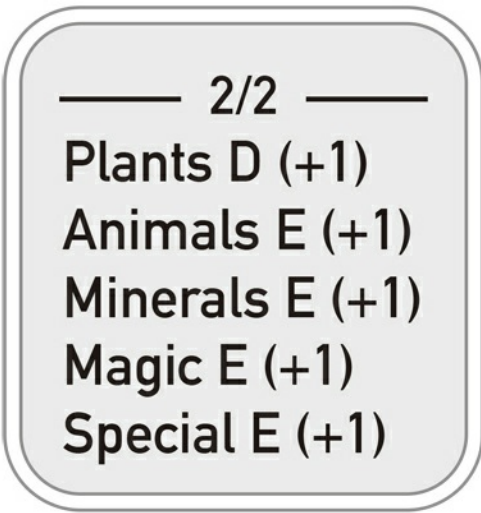
“Right.”

“I’ve heard of that. So those effects really do exist?” Celeste asked.

“Next, the pink sapphire bangle. Wear this along with it and see what happens.”

“Okay.

With both ring and bangle equipped, Emily restarted the status board.



“It’s the same...”

“So equipment effects can’t stack,” I noted.

“Which means you can’t wear a bunch of rings to get A-rank drops, huh?” Celeste added.

“I sure wish we could. Okay, next, try drinking this,” I said as I held out a red potion. I’d drunk this one before, so I knew what it would do.

“Do you want me to look at the same stats again?” Emily asked.

“Exactly.”

Emily downed the potion without hesitation. An instant later, she looked surprised.

“Did you hear it?”

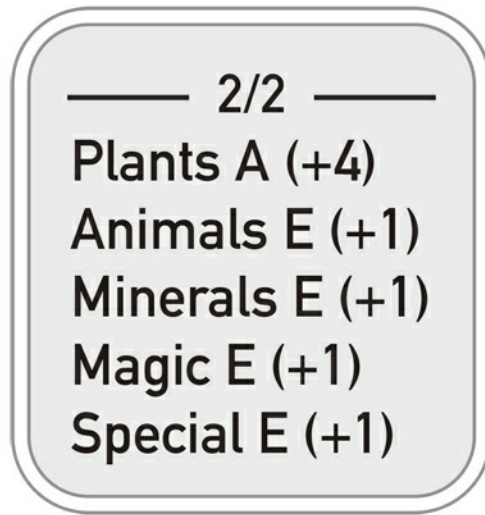
“Yes, I did. But does this really...?”

“That’s what we’re here to test.”

“I see!”

While Emily understood what we were here for, Celeste couldn’t digest the situation, since she hadn’t ingested one of the potions yet. Leaving her to her confusion, Emily operated the status board timidly, yet with clear excitement.





“Wh-Whoa...”

“I’ve got...an A-rank drop stat...”

Celeste and Emily were stupefied by the stacking of equipment and potion, but before long, they were gazing at me reverently.



On B1 of Tellurium, Emily leaped toward a slime and swung her hammer.

Back when we’d first met, her strategy was to take a hit and attack during an opening. But now that she had leveled up and was faster than the slimes, she could attack first.

She charged, dodged the slime’s attempted tackle, and swung her hammer around from the side. It struck dead center and took the slime down in one blow.

Pop!

Out came bean sprouts.

“Look, bean sprouts!” she called out to us.

“Let’s get to the next one.”

“Okay!”

Emily found, and mowed down, slime after slime. Celeste and I pushed the magic cart and picked up the bean sprouts as she went.

“Wow! She’s getting them nine times out of ten,” Celeste remarked.

“At this rate, she *definitely* has A-rank drop stats right now.”

“That potion was a consumable, right? How much did it cost?”

“Exactly ten thousand piro each. Oh, but I need to use bullets to take down the enemies that drop them, so a little more than that, actually. But still, ten thousand piro is the exact unit cost.”

“Really?!”

“Ten thousand piro for a ten-minute drop stat boost is a great trade-off, but it makes farming pretty hectic,” I mumbled to myself as I watched Emily kill slimes.

“More importantly...” Celeste gazed at Emily with a stern look in her eyes.

“Hm?”

“If those potions can give her A-rank drop stats, then they’d be especially effective when a rare monster appears.”

“Of course!” I agreed. “Everyone knows you have to raise your drop rates against rares and bosses.”

“If her drop stat is A and a rare monster appears...”

“Then ten thousand is a small price to pay.”

Celeste and I nodded in unison. She’d led me to the perfect use for these.

“You’re incredible, Ryota,” she said. “I’ve never heard of anyone who can do that.”

There were other adventurers around, so Celeste used vague language.

I’d told her about my S-rank drop stats when she first joined the Ryota family. She’d listened with a blank face at first, but then had freaked out and exclaimed, “Should you be telling me something this important?!”

I’d told her to keep it a secret, so I wasn’t worried; she wasn’t likely to let anything slip, after all.

“You’ve been full of surprises since we met, Ryota.”

“I surprise myself every single day.”

“It’s fun, though.”

“Heh. You can say that again... Wanna try it, Celeste?” I offered.

“Can I?”

I nodded and handed her a red potion, then pointed to a status board that was nearby. Celeste cocked her head and drank the potion before checking the status board.



“A-Are these mine...?”

She was shook. She'd mentioned her low drops once upon a time; with all F-rank drops, she was one of the so-called Failures. But now, one had risen all the way up to C. She was naturally left speechless. Even after seeing it happen to Emily and understanding it was real, she had to be surprised to see it work on herself.

"Go take down a slime," I urged. "I bet you'll be able to get a few drops."

"Drops...? I...can get monster drops?" Celeste replied, confused, as if she'd never even imagined it.

"Only one way to find out."

"Y-Yeah... I'll give it a try."

"Then you should wear this."

Emily, having returned out of nowhere, held her ring out to Celeste.

"Emily?!" Celeste yelped. "B-But...Ryota gave that to you, Emily."

"Whatever Yoda gives me is a shared asset of the family. Besides, it's really satisfying! You should try it, Celeste," Emily urged her on.

Celeste looked at me, concerned. Emily's offer made me waver for a moment, too, but...

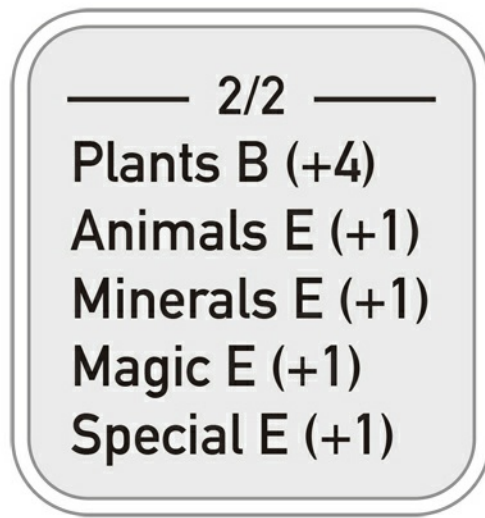
"That's Emily for you," I said.

"Huh? What do you mean?" Emily replied, cocking her head.

"Everything you're doing right now. Celeste, you heard her; give it a try."

"O-Okay..."

Celeste put on the ring and checked her drops on the status board.



After a moment's hesitation upon seeing her B-rank drop stat, she gulped and gathered her resolve.

Slimes appeared. They came from the floor, the walls, even the ceiling. Five slimes in total had appeared as if birthed by the dungeon itself.

"Huff... Inferno!"

In a grandiose display, Celeste used her level 3 fire magic to burn all of the slimes at once. The wide-area flames engulfed them and burned them away. Then...

Pop, pop, pop, pop, pop!

In a rather lucky streak for someone with B-rank drop stats, she got bean sprouts from all five slimes.

Celeste fell silent.

"They dropped!" Emily cried.

"Not as many as your A-rank got you, though, Emily."

"Yeah. Still, I'm glad it worked out."

"Yeah. Good for you, Celeste... Celeste?"

"..." Celeste was dumbfounded. She stared off into the distance with the most

vacant look on her face. But gradually, she regained her senses. Then, with awkward, stiff motions, she turned to us.

“Ryota! Emily!” she exclaimed, jumping at us. “Thank you, Ryota! Thank you, Emily!”

“Congratulations, Celeste,” Emily smiled.

“Thank you... Hic! Thank you so muuuch...” Celeste clung to us and bawled, thanking us over and over again.

57. The Self-Pleasuring Cycle

The next morning, as usual, I continued farming mummies on B4 of Nihonium. I took them down one after another with perfect efficiency, purifying their bandages with recovery rounds as I went.

With the seeds they dropped, I boosted my vitality. I was plenty experienced with this dungeon by now, so as a result of my efficient farming, my vitality had already gone from C to B before noon.

Guess I'll use this time to make special rounds with pickup boxes... I thought to myself.

But just then, an awful chill ran down my spine, making me feel as though my back had frozen.

"This malice... The dungeon master?!" I pulled my guns back out and turned toward the source of the foul energy I sensed. There, I saw a ferocious beast: a small one, in a bunny suit and with natural bunny ears. She had somehow snuck up next to me, and began gnawing on my arm.

"Um...Eve, what are you doing?"

"Dead or carrot."

"You still say the weirdest things."

"Dead or carrot!"

"Urk!"

She unleashed her malice again, still gnawing away at me. It was my policy

not to cause grudges over food, so I obeyed.



On B2 of Tellurium, I defeated sleep slimes and obtained plenty of carrots, which I gave to Eve. I could only estimate by looks, since I didn't have the magic cart, but it appeared to be about 100,000 piro's worth.

Eve gnawed away at the small mountain of carrots like a rodent. The malice from before was all gone, replaced by a blissful smile.

"Sorry. I've been away from Cyclo for a while."

"I heard from Clint," she answered before going back to eating.

"Clint... Oh, is that the dungeon chief's name? Yeah, I was off on his request. Sorry for not being here to get you carrots."

"Not a problem, as long as I have carrots."

Eve continued chewing on her carrots. It was oddly adorable, and I was taken aback by the sight. Noticing that I was staring, she stood in front of the pile to hide the carrots...not that she was successful, given there were so many.

"You can't have my carrots."

"I'm not going to take any... Eat up," I said, finding that my emotions and tone of voice were growing softer. After seeing that Eve had resumed eating, I suddenly remembered something. "By the way, Eve. You're in a party, right? I made my own party, which we've called the Ryota family."

"We split up."

“You did?! Why?”

“Fundamental differences in dungeon priorities.”

“What are you, a band?!” I joked. However, Eve looked pretty serious.

“It’s common. There are people who want adventure, people who want stability, people who want to stay on one floor forever, people who want variety, people who want to stay in the same city, people who want to travel...”

“Oh... I see. Guess those differences in priorities are a common thing, then, huh?”

“They are.”

“What differences did you and your party have?”

“A new girl joined and the men all went with her.”

“Forget differences; it sounds more like she’s a homewrecker!”

I had to retort even harder this time. I didn’t ask for details, though. She might have told me way more than I wanted to know, so I didn’t want to press it.

Eventually, Eve flattened the mountain of carrots. She had devoured a pile bigger than her own body.

“You ate all of it...?”

I was aghast.

“You think I would waste any of this?” Eve chomped down on, and swallowed, the slightly green part of her final carrot. “Carrots must be eaten in full.”

“No, that’s not what I meant. It’s the sheer amount that confuses me.”

“Thanks for the meal.”

“No problem.”

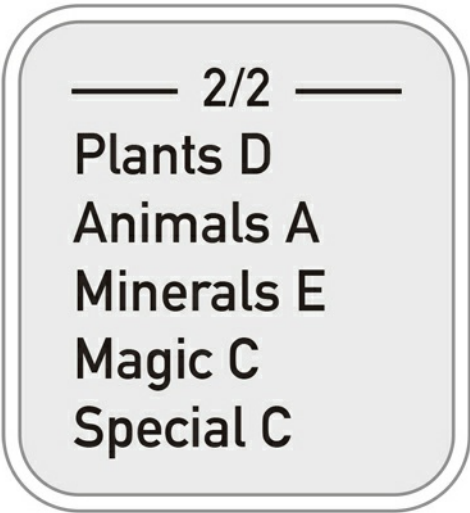
“...I hate low levels,” she stated as she hit me with a trademark chop.

“You don’t always have to do that, you know...? Also, why was that chop more gentle than normal?”

“My carrot-and-peace ideology doesn’t allow for overt violence.”

“You’re really mangling these sayings... Anyway, why do you keep squeezing me for carrots? Can’t you farm them yourself?”

Eve tapped the status board next to us.



“I have a D in plant drops, so they taste bad if I farm them.”

“Why are you even in Cyclo with stats like that?!”

“Where carrots go, I follow.”

“Don’t try to sound deep!”

“Because of these stats, people call me the ‘Carnivorous Bunny.’”

“That’s probably because of that A-rank animal drop stat!”

Seriously, why was she in Cyclo? Did she just love carrots that much? I gazed at the status board and realized something.

“Eve, try drinking this,” I said as I took out a red potion and handed it to her.

“Carrot juice?” she asked.

“Forget carrots! I mean, don’t actually forget them, but...”

“What do you want from me?”

“Just drink it...and you’ll understand.”

Eve glared at me for a moment before finally gulping it down.

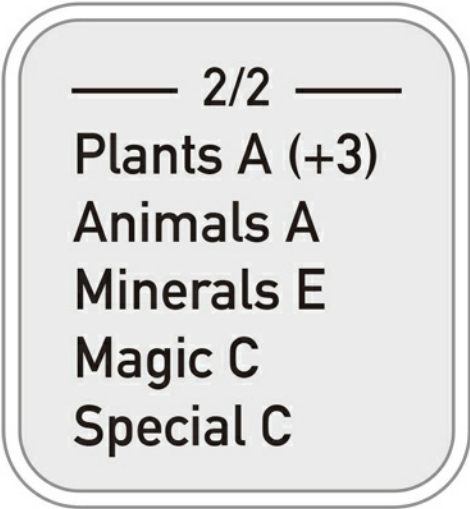
“Wha—?” she gasped.

“Did you hear it?”

“What does it mean?”

“Check that status board again.”

Eve nodded, evidently surprised, and operated the status board.



“A... My plant drop stat is A now...”

“Now—”

“I can be the ‘Herbivorous Bunny’!” she exclaimed triumphantly.

“They’re already herbivores! Now go take down a slime.”

“Okay,” Eve assented and walked off in search of a slime. She soon encountered a carrot-dropping sleep slime and pounced. “Hah!”

“I can’t stand how you obliterate monsters with a single karate chop,” I chuckled. Her karate chops really were a terror to behold.

The obliterated sleep slime dropped a carrot. Eve picked it up, chewed, and said, “It’s delicious... Rich, but not too rich, with a sweet and refreshing aftertaste...”

“Are you a gourmand now?!”

“This...is a carrot!”

“Well, yeah. It’s a carrot.”

“D-rank carrots are no carrots,” Eve declared.

She wasn’t wrong; drop stats influenced not just the quantity of drops, but the quality as well.

She splattered another sleep slime with her karate chop. It turned into a carrot, which she ate with a blissful smile.

“Delicious...”

“I’m glad you like it.”

“Hunting my own carrots to eat... A self-pleasuring cycle.”

“It’s self-perpetuating!”

After downing the carrot, Eve used the status board to display her drop stats. For some reason, she looked back and forth between her temporarily-A-rank plant drops and me. Finally, she dove and prostrated herself before me, begging, “Let me join you.”

“Geez, is it worth all this?”

“If begging isn’t enough, I can pay with my body.”

“You don’t need to strip! Even rolling down the top of your bunny suit is already way too indecent!”

“I-If that isn’t enough, then I...can pay with my ears.”

“Why is that what makes you blush?! Is that more embarrassing than stripping?!”

“Please let me into your party. Please let me in. I’ll do anything, and I mean anything, for you,” Eve pleaded, rattling out words like a machine gun.

It was clear that she was after those red potions—or more precisely, the carrots—but I liked this a lot more than her usual hostility.

“Sure. You can join—”

“I love you, low level!” Eve jumped up and hugged me, yelling over and over that she “loved, loved, loved” me. It felt less like I’d gained a party member and more that I’d gotten an actual rabbit to like me, which prompted a slightly troubled grin to appear on my face.



58. Frolicking with Monsters

“What was that potion?” Eve asked.

“Oh, yeah. Since you’re one of us now, I guess I should tell you.”

To answer her question, I used the nearby status board to bring up my stats. She looked at them from next to me and cocked her head, causing her bunny ears to bounce, before gazing up at me.



“...S?” she read.

“As you can see, all my drop stats are S, which is higher than A. Because of that, I can get drops that normally shouldn’t exist.”

“I see.”

“You...understood pretty easily, huh?”

“They were tastier than my carrots, so, duh!”

“Carrots sure are your standard for everything,” I said as I rolled my eyes. But hey, that was very like her, so I continued explaining everything. “I’ve got other items like that potion that you’ll be seeing from now on. All of them are things

I've gotten from defeating monsters with my S-rank drop stats."

"Uh huh."

"I only tell my inner circle about these things, so keep them a secret, okay?"

"Got it," Eve agreed with unusual sincerity.

Her eyes seemed to be saying, *I won't tell a soul*. I was the one asking for secrecy, so why was she so serious?

Well, it didn't take long for me to find out why.

"I will never tell anyone so long as I live, even if I am torn to shreds and thrown all over the dungeons of the world."

"That's some vow! You don't have to go *that* far to keep a secret!"

"For the carrots!"

That almost sounded like a motto. I could once again see how seriously Eve took her carrots. She was one-of-a-kind; that much was clear.

After Eve expressed her loyalty, she gazed at the status board again.

"Something wrong?" I asked.

"These stats here. S-rank HP, B-rank vitality... Is S better than A?"

"I said that before, didn't I?"

"..."

Eve stared at it for a while longer and slowly moved her hand in my direction. Then, she karate-chopped my head.

Smack!

"What's gotten into you? More low level hate?"

“ ...”

Without answering, she chopped the dungeon wall next to her. Part of the wall crumbled in response. It didn't just break, and she hadn't just cut through it, it had crumbled into nothingness.

She looked up at me again and said, “You're tough.”

“Is that the same chop you used on me?”

“I did one hundred fine chops in a single second.”

“What are you, an ultrasonic cutter?! Also, don't do that to people.”

“But you're tough.”

“Well, yeah... It didn't hurt much.”

“If you had S-rank vitality, it might not hurt at all.”

I gasped. Eve's casual remark had come as a real shock.



That afternoon, I went into Cyclo to meet Emily and Celeste at the usual place.

“Let's have another productive day at work, Yoda.”

“What are we doing today? Heading back to B6 of Tellurium?”

“Sorry! Can we act separately today?” I put my hands together, bowed, and begged them.

“Huh? But why...?” Celeste asked, confused.

“Something came up.”

“Is it urgent...? We could do it together after the dungeon—”

“I understand,” Emily replied, accepting my decision with ease. “Leave today’s work to us.”

“Thanks, Emily! And sorry, Celeste! I know; here are some plant-drop-boosting potions. Feel free to use them however you want.”

I gave them all the red potions I had, turned around, and ran off. Sprinting through the crowded city, I imagined what I had to do and how it would look when I’d succeeded.



Emily and Celeste were left alone after Ryota’s departure.

Celeste looked half-confused and half-disappointed, but Emily maintained her gentle smile as she watched him disappear into the crowd.

“There he goes... Are you sure we should’ve let him go without any questions, Emily?”

“That’s how Yoda always is.”

“Huh?”

“He always makes that face whenever he’s come up with a new idea. It makes me want to support him.”

“Well...he *did* look like the coolest guy in the world, but...”

Celeste flushed a little and looked in the direction Ryota had gone, a hint of

bashfulness evident on her face.

“The look on Ryota’s face... What do I want to do...? I know!”

Celeste began to run after him, but Emily grabbed her arm to stop her.

“We can’t get in Yoda’s way.”

“But he might need help!”

“If he needs it, he’ll tell us. He didn’t say anything, so we should head to the dungeon on our own.”

“Let me go, Emily! Please, let me go to him!”

“You can’t!”

“Let meee go-ooo!”

Celeste so desperately wanted to go that she looked like a little girl complaining to a parent. And yet, Emily dragged her off to the dungeon.



B4 of Nihonium was as empty as ever. When I got down there, I immediately encountered a mummy. I grabbed it by the throat, slammed it into a wall, and crushed its neck. Its head fell off, and then it died.

When its flesh disappeared and left bandages, I fired the usual recovery round. The bandages were destroyed before they could even lose the mummy’s shape.

It dropped a seed, raising my vitality by 1.

I searched for my next enemy. When I saw a mummy in the distance, I fired a

piercing round, waited a beat, and followed up with a recovery round. Even throughout that, I sprinted forth to get closer.

With a bullet shot right through its head, the mummy died. After its bandages were purified, it dropped a seed just in time for me to catch it.

I gave Nihonium my all because I wanted to raise my vitality as quickly as possible. In my excitement, I judged the fastest way to kill each mummy as soon as I saw it, and successfully executed my plans.

After spending the afternoon rampaging through B4 of Nihonium, I had successfully raised my vitality from B, not to A, but to S.



I went outside for a break and confirmed my stats on Nihonium’s sole status board.

— 1/2 —

Level 1/1

HP S

MP F

Strength S

Vitality S

Intelligence F

Will F

Speed S

Dexterity F

Luck F

My level remained 1 as always, but my vitality was a perfect S.

After checking that, I went back inside. On B1, skeletons ran rampant, so it didn't take long for me to find one.

I would normally have killed them in an instant, but this time, I did nothing; I simply stood there with my hands in my pockets.

The skeleton's bones rattled as it ran at me and attacked. It felt like a light slap. Sure, it hurt, but it was only about as painful as a kindergartner hitting me.

I started walking. The skeleton followed, attacking as we went. There weren't any other adventurers in this dropless dungeon, so I found another skeleton with ease. That skeleton and the other one attacked from both sides.

Slap, slap! Slap, slap!

I was just fine. As confirmation, I dodged. One skeleton's swing slammed into the ground, gouging out some of it. They were pretty strong attacks, but to me, they were mere slaps. They essentially did nothing.

That was all thanks to my S-rank HP and vitality. In video game terms, I was probably taking 1 point of damage over and over.

The skeletons continued alongside me. Two became three, three became four, and four—

They kept piling on. In the end, all of them crowded around me and were attacking me over and over. By the time there were twenty, the crowd was so dense that I couldn't walk forward anymore. And yet, they still didn't hurt. I was continuously taking their flimsy, 1-HP hits.

I spent the whole skeleton-tickling session thinking of how I might be able to make use of this new power of mine.

59. The Man Who Cornered Sisters

“Inferno!”

On B6 of Tellurium, Celeste’s magical fire burned two slimes.

They were twin pink slimes, balance ball-sized. One of them escaped the range of the fire, while the other was incinerated without a trace.

“Nkh!” Celeste groaned. The escaped slime had split into two slimes again in the distance. They were once again twin slimes, both the same size and color—just like before. Worse, though, the surviving slime had sustained damage from Celeste’s magic, but healed itself fully somehow once its division was complete.

These were the rare monster on B6 of Tellurium, the sister slimes.

“Aha! So this is how they work,” I mused.

Celeste had failed to defeat them, but she explained what she knew from her research.

“You can’t beat them unless you kill both at once! As long as one is alive, they’ll come right back and reset any damage you’ve done to them.”

Emily and I listened well, along with our new comrade, Eve.

“No matter how many times you do it?” I asked.

“The record for how long one has survived is six hundred and sixty-six deaths. That was when the people fighting them gave up.”

“I’m amazed that they went on for so long when drops are everything.”

Honestly, I was impressed by their tenacity.

“So then, we just have to kill both at once?”

“Yeah, but they have different HP values.”

“Wait here a second.”

I fired at both slimes, one per gun. Both regular bullets struck at about the same time. One shot right through and blew the slime to pieces, while the other merely gouged a bit of its body out. As a result, the living one split into two and healed itself again.

“That’s annoying,” I muttered.

“What’s the plan, Ryota?”

“Hm...”

Upon taking the individual strengths of Emily, Celeste, and Eve into consideration, I came up with our strategy.



I walked toward the pink sister slimes. They both started attacking at the same time. When they hit me, they bounced in the direction they’d come from.

This dungeon had the appearance of a jungle, so one slime mowed down trees when it bounced, while the other hit rocks and made them crumble to pieces. As for me, their blows hurt about as much as someone hitting me with a plastic bat as hard as they could.

The slimes bounced and tackled me again. I pressed on, tensing up my abs

and walking straight forward. My S-rank HP and vitality let me advance like an armored tank, ignoring the minimal damage.

The slimes continuously attacked and caromed off me. Eventually, I had them cornered.

“Celeste and Emily, you take the left! Eve, the right’s all yours!” I called out.

Celeste started by attacking with one of her Bicorn Horn fireballs. Right after that, Emily and Eve charged in from behind me.

Emily spun her hammer overhead and swung it down, while Eve’s bunny ears and tail bobbed as she chopped the slime. I had estimated the slimes’ strength through how their attacks had felt, and allotted my allies’ firepower to suit them.

The pink sister slimes died in a spray of pink at the same time. We had successfully defeated this annoying rare monster despite its division and damage resets.

“We did it, Yoda!”

“All done. Shame it didn’t drop any carrots,” Eve complained.

“Sister slimes don’t drop carrots, anyway,” Celeste laughed.

We’d defeated the rare monster and obtained no drops. I didn’t know if it counted as Emily or Eve defeating it, but either way, we were left with nothing.

“But that was cool, Yoda! It was awesome to watch you corner them like an unstoppable wall!”

“I-I thought so, too. I-It was cool how you were all undaunted—” Celeste started, but she was interrupted by Eve.

“It looked like sexual assault.”

“Huwha?!” she shrieked. “S-Sexual assault? How?”

“He cornered the sisters against a wall and kept them from moving.”

“You know, it does kind of sound like that...” Emily chimed in.

“It does not! It wasn’t sexual assault!” I screamed, unable to take much more. Eve’s comparison was way too uncharitable, so I had to change the subject. “By the way. Eve, your chop from before seemed a little slow.”

“She chopped slowly,” Emily agreed.

“I didn’t.”

“Huh?”

“When I’m not attacking, I do this,” Eve explained, chopping her right hand up and down with her fingers together. She looked like someone robotically directing traffic at a construction site. “When I’m attacking, I do this.”

“It’s a little slow,” I replied. “Oh, that’s the one you used on me, huh?”

“When I’m giving a hundred percent of a hundred percent, I do this.”

“Now it looks REALLY slow.”

“I did it two hundred times in one second,” Eve said matter-of-factly.

“Wait, does that mean it’s just so fast that it looks slow?!”

“Don’t worry. I wouldn’t do this to you, low level.”

“I really wish you’d stop calling me that, but...thanks?”

Though I was a little interested in what her high-frequency chopping would do to me now, honestly.

Suddenly, I noticed Celeste staring at Eve. She seemed...nervous? It was as if she had something to say.

“Come to think of it, I haven’t formally introduced you. This is Eve. She’ll be fighting alongside us from now on.”

“I knew that from before we entered the dungeon, but the thing is...”

But what? What has Celeste so worried?

“Sorry. Did I make you uncomfortable by deciding without consulting you?” I asked.

“Not at all! You get to decide who’s in the family. But, see...” Celeste started mumbling. What had gotten into her? Eventually, she mustered her courage and asked, “U-Umm...what do you...think of Ryota, Eve?”

“I love the low level.”

“L-Love—”

Celeste was bizarrely shocked. She was so astonished that I imagined lightning striking behind her, like in an anime.

“He’s the god of carrots,” Eve declared.

“...Huh?”

“You can’t have the low level’s carrots. Show me all the money in the world, and I won’t give you so much as a single frond.”

“Again, you don’t need to go that far...” I sighed.

That’s Eve for you.

Amused, I turned to Celeste and explained, “Well, as you can see, she loves carrots—”

“I lost...”

“At what?!”

My voice turned shrill. I didn't know what she was losing at, but Celeste fell onto her hands and knees, making the "orz" pose.

Eve huffed with pride, while Celeste was stricken with grief for some reason.

Meanwhile, Emily cut in, saying, "It does feel like a waste, doesn't it? If Yoda had defeated it, we could've gotten a rare monster drop."

"Nah. We don't need a B6 drop."

"Why's that?"

I took a note out of my pocket and showed it to the confused Emily. It had cute writing on it and smelled faintly of flowers.

This was the list of rare monster drops that Erza said were still needed for the Harvest Festival.

"The B7 one is where the real big bucks are," I declared.

"I see... Should we go there?" Emily asked me.

I looked at my party. That had been our first fight with the four of us. It seemed the addition of Eve and my increased stats had greatly bolstered our available strategies. We'd grown stronger as a party, so...

I looked at everyone. They all looked back at me, including Celeste, who was on her feet again.

"Let's head down to B7," I announced.

All three of them agreed with my decision.

60. Onions and Tears

B7 of Tellurium was a lot like B6. There were trees here and there, with shepherd's purse growing all over. And yet, snow somehow fell in this tropical dungeon.

"Snow? In the middle of a dungeon?" I asked, incredulous.

"It's called dungeon snow," Celeste explained. "You know how air and water come out when you don't get drops? Well, depending on the structure of a dungeon, some floors have snow instead."

"Oh, that makes sense. Water gets sucked into the ground, right?"

That was kind of interesting. I put my hand up and caught some snow in my palm. The moment it touched me, however, it melted.

"It's not cold."

"That's because it's made from the nutrients and mana of monsters that were defeated in the dungeon."

"Not from temperature and precipitation, then?"

"Adventurers and monsters on dungeon snow floors get stronger as a result of absorbing it."

"Wow. You sure know a lot, Celeste."

"Huh? N-Not really... Yay, he complimented me!" Her voice trailed off and she blushed.

Together, the four of us proceeded through the dungeon and ran into familiar

faces. Three familiar faces, in fact: one older man and a younger man and woman. It seemed they'd just defeated a monster, as the older man was picking up an onion and putting it in their magic cart.

"Well done! I am truly moved by your performance," he said, tears streaming from his eyes.

"Captain..." the younger pair replied emotionally. They were even more haggard than the last time I'd seen them. Their clothes were tattered, and they were wounded all over. They'd clearly been overworked.

"It was difficult. It was arduous, wasn't it? There were times when we couldn't get them to drop anything, as well as times when we missed the kill and let them get away. Every time, you suffered and agonized over the mistake... I know exactly how you feel."

"Captain..."

"I feel the same way. Whenever you're hurt, I find myself hurt just as much. But I couldn't say that because I knew that if I did not hold strong, you would lose your will once and for all."

The man cried yet more, putting his crocodile tears on full display.

"You've been through so much, Captain..."

"Forget me! This is all because of you two. You powered through the pain and succeeded, so I could not be more proud of you! I'm so happy to have met you, friends!"

"Captain... No, we should say the same," the young man replied.

"We're glad we chose to follow you," the woman added.

Impressed by his fake tears, they both hugged him.

I left, unable to take much more of this eyesore. The word “brainwashing” came to mind. It reminded me of my past.

“How about we just do whatever today and head home if we can’t find any rare monsters?” I asked the party, feeling sullen.

“Okay,” Emily replied.

“H-How about we have dinner together?” Celeste piped up. “I found a tavern where you can see the dungeon lights, so I wanted to go with you, Ryota...”

“I’ll go back to B2. I like to sleep surrounded by carrots.”

Emily, Celeste, and Eve responded in their own ways. I felt the darkness that squeezed my neck beginning to fade.

“Yoda! A monster has appeared!” Emily exclaimed, her voice causing all of us to tense up.

On the dungeon snow-covered floor, we encountered a slime that was...big, but otherwise pretty normal. I decided to stand out front, since I had the highest defense among us.

I ran forward and closed the gap, firing a piercing round. The bullet went clean through the slime, but it didn’t die, so I followed up by jumping at it and punching it with a full-power right straight.

“Huh?” I gasped. My punch seemed to have no effect.

Holding fast to the slime, I fired my guns repeatedly, emptying both chambers. And yet, they did nothing. Why, they seemed even less effective than the piercing round from before, so I fired more piercing rounds, but this time, they didn’t penetrate at all.

“What the...? Nkh!”

While I stood there, confused, the slime counterattacked. I guarded the point-blank blow with my arm, but the force of it slung me away.

My arm stung. That hurt more than the slime family from B6. Maybe that was thanks to the dungeon snow?

“Ryota, don’t! You can’t defeat a guts slime alone!” Celeste yelled out to me.

“Why not?”

“Guts slimes become invincible when they’re in peril. And at that point, whoever last attacked them can’t hurt them anymore.”

“Which means you need one person to reduce its HP and a second to finish it off, huh?”

“Yeah,” Celeste confirmed, letting loose a small fireball with her Bicorn Horn. The guts slime that had withstood my gunfire died on the spot.

“Wow. You got it!” Emily cheered.

“This floor doesn’t allow soloing. That happens a lot sometimes,” Eve explained nonchalantly.

“You should leave the fighting on this floor to us, since you’re the ideal one to finish monsters off, Ryota.”

“If that’s how it works here, I have to agree.”

The four of us walked through the snow. I looked around and noticed that there were two kinds of adventurers here.

One kind was the sort who favored stability. They defeated monsters and put their drops in their magic cart as usual. The other kind ran around in search of something, ignoring the guts slimes who crossed their paths. They must have been one-and-done gangs who were after the rare drop for the Harvest

Festival.

We faced a guts slime that one such group had ignored. Emily charged, spun her hammer around, and slammed it down, using her momentum to power the strike. It blew half of the slime away. Though unfortunately, at the same time, she ate a counterattack.

“Emily!”

“F-Finish it off!” she cried out as she hurried away from it.

I held my guns with both hands. After firing a recovery round at Emily, I hit the slime with a normal bullet. Emily was healed...and the slime dropped lots of onions.

“You okay, Emily?” I asked.

“I’m fine. It looks like it worked!”

“It sure did. Once you know how to do it, it’s not that hard to kill.”

“Yeah. The floor is only impossible for a single person,” Celeste giggled.

“Onions...” Eve mumbled.

“Eve, do you like onions?” Emily inquired.

“Carrots are all I need.”

I shook my head and replied, “Don’t talk about them like they’re human.”

“Lovers...”

“Don’t say that and blush!”

“Then how about I make us curry tonight?” Emily suggested. “It’ll have potatoes, onions, and lots of carrots.”

“Lots of carrots...” Eve murmured, then started to drool. However, Emily

quickly cleaned her up. Natural bunny ears, a bunny suit, and drool... What a strange sight.

“Let’s make it together.”

“Leave it to me. I’m good at cutting,” Eve declared as she began chopping onions with her bare hands.

“Eek... Y-You’re making me cry!” Emily squealed.

“Sorry.”

Eve’s onion-cutting had caused Emily, and the bunny-girl herself, to start crying.

What the hell are they doing?

I laughed internally at the sight.

“Celeste, do you like curry—?” I began.

“Watch out!”

Just as she warned me, something slammed into my side. I crashed into the ground, kicking up a cloud of dungeon snow.

“Yoda!”

“Carrotman!”

“I’m fine! Also, I don’t like that nickname!”

I stood back up and noticed that the sudden ambush had hurt my side.

“Tch!”

I heard an annoyed tongue-click come from right next to me. When I turned, I saw one of those one-and-done adventurers frowning.

I looked back and saw a different slime where I’d been standing. Was that the

rare monster of B7?!

“Lucky son of a gun,” the adventurer muttered and left, clearly mad about it.

Aha! We got the right to fight it because I got ambushed. That’s why he’s mad. Well, that’s luck for you.

Feeling a little bad for the guy, I returned to the group. Before attacking, I asked Celeste, “How do we take this one down?”

“It’s a high-guts slime. It still needs someone else to finish it off, but we have to be careful; when an attack brings its HP below a certain threshold or it becomes invincible, it’ll reflect the full damage of that attack.”

“That means we have to grind it down over time,” Emily noted.

“Leave it to me. I know its HP,” Eve said, charging right in.

“You do?”

“I’ve done this before. Let’s make short work of this thing.”

She unleashed her chops. They were about medium speed, looking slower than the type she used on me, yet faster than her full-power ones; they cut the slime all the same.

Split like a pomegranate, the slime tried to counter, but Eve evaded its attacks with ease.

“All good!” she called out to us.

“Got it!” I responded as I pulled the trigger.

A normal bullet shot forth, tearing through the rare monster. In response, a tear flowed from the slime’s eye. When the slime disappeared, the large tear fell to the ground and hardened.

“That jewel is its drop,” Celeste explained. “Equip it, and it’ll reflect some attacks.”

“Wow...”

The drop from B7’s rare monster had a wondrous effect, indeed. I absolutely wanted to try pairing it with my S-rank HP and vitality.

61. Auto-Leveling

On B7 of Tellurium, a guts slime emerged from the snow. The monster created a picturesque contrast with the environment, but I shot right through it with a piercing round.

One shot gouged out enough to make it a crescent moon shape. Now, my attacks would no longer work on it.

“Here you go,” Emily said as she handed me the rare item we’d obtained, the slime’s tear.

“Thanks.”

I accepted it and casually approached the enemy. The hollowed-out slime bounced and tackled me. As soon as it made contact, it was blown to pieces.

The slime dropped onions, confirming that my experiment was a success. Emily, Celeste, and Eve, who had stood at a distance to watch over the test, approached.

“Wow! So if you use this, you can farm B7 alone,” Celeste said.

“Yeah. You attack the slime until it uses its ability, then just tank the attack and reflect the damage right back at it. I had a feeling it was becoming invincible when near death.”

“But that’s something only you can do,” Eve pointed out.

“Meh, I guess. Taking a blow every time you need to kill one isn’t very good for farming. You can’t even try it unless you have both high HP and high vitality.”

“You felt okay after taking that attack, Ryota?” Emily asked me.

“Yeah, I’m just fine.”

“How badly did it hurt?” asked Celeste.

I thought about Celeste’s question for a moment, turned to Eve, and put a finger on my forehead. She nodded and chopped me.

“That’s a little much,” I said. “Go slower.” Eve soon chopped again. “It felt about like that, I’d say.”

“Wait there,” Eve said. She then fast-walked over to a tree, stood in front of it, and unleashed a chop at the same speed. The big tree, which was as thick as a human torso, was cut right in half and nearly fell.

“Th-That’s really strong.”

Celeste was shocked.

“That’s our Yoda for you. Even that couldn’t make him budge.”

Emily smiled as innocently as a child.

“Yeah, good job!”

“Barely-useful trash,” Eve declared of the item.

“Don’t be like that, Eve. The damage reflection is still—” I interrupted myself with a gasp.

“Yoda? Is something wrong?”

The three of them looked at me dubiously as I hit upon an intriguing idea.



I went to B2 of Nihonium because that was the best place for avoiding prying eyes. Normal dungeons were full of adventurers, and even Princess Margaret's group made air on B1 sometimes, but from B2 onward, it was rare for me to run into anyone in an entire week.

I strutted about in this cavern-like dungeon, walking on and on. Like last time, during my S-rank vitality test, I didn't attack monsters when I found them; I just slowly persevered, letting them attack me all they pleased.

I encountered zombies here and there. Sometimes, they ambushed me, but I just kept walking with them in tow.

By the time I had more than fifteen followers, *Pop!* One of the zombies attacking me burst apart. As soon as it had hit me, it blew up and died, leaving a seed behind.

"Wow, Yoda! You defeated a monster just by walking around!"

"It sure is useful."

Emily and the others watched from a distance to keep out of my way. Their eyes went wide and they exclaimed in admiration.

Indeed, it was the very experiment I'd tried before, where I dragged a train of monsters behind me. But by using the slime's tear, I could sit back and relax as monsters killed themselves by attacking me.

"That's cool and all, but this is really inefficient."

I took out my guns and fired madly, mopping up the zombies in a flash. With no more monsters around, the girls came closer.

"You only have your own power to blame for that, Yoda."

"Fair. Anyway, that's another one for the bag of tricks."

“What should we do with the slime’s tear?” Celeste asked. “I think it’s a versatile item, but they need it for the Harvest Festival, don’t they?”

“It would sell for a pretty high price,” I replied.

“How many carrots’ worth?”

I laughed off Eve’s instinctive question and replied, “Let’s just head home for the day. We can decide tomorrow.”

“Okay,” Emily agreed.

“Then let’s get going.”

“I’m going to Tellurium. I want to sleep on a mountain of carrots.”

They spoke one after another and departed. Meanwhile, I stood frozen in place—a flash of inspiration had struck me. The three of them stopped and turned back.

“...”

“Yoda?”

“Something wrong?”

“Sorry, everyone. Head home before me today.”

They all looked surprised for a moment, but quickly gave in.

“Okay!”

“Had another idea, huh? Tell us about it later!”

“Be careful, low level.”

They turned around without even questioning me and left. I waved and saw them off.



The next morning, my joints ached pretty badly. Curious, I yawned and stretched—and felt a slap.

“Wh-What the—?! Oh, yeah. I slept in the dungeon, huh?”

I immediately remembered because five zombies were surrounding me and attacking nonstop. One of them died from the counterattack and dropped a seed, which was then sucked into the pickup box next to me.

After seeing the girls off last night, I’d spent the night on B2 of Nihonium. This was the very place they’d left me. I hadn’t moved much at all; I’d just set up the pickup box and slept while holding the slime’s tear.

In effect, I’d done nothing. I looked inside the pickup box for the fruits of my nonexistent labor.

“One, two, three... Thirty-seven in total, huh?”

Just by sleeping here, I’d defeated thirty-seven zombies. It was inefficient, though. I could hardly say it was useful at all. Still, farming in my sleep was a unique experience, to say the least.

62. Twofold Rewards

I returned to our new, three-story home that we'd rented to get through the magic storm. In the second-floor living room, I found Emily and Celeste about to eat breakfast.

"I'm home," I announced. "Just you two today?"

"Eve really went to Tellurium," Celeste laughed. "She left us a message for you, though."

"Right. She assumed you'd ask for her opinion about what to do with the slime's tear, but she said that she doesn't care, since it has nothing to do with carrots," Emily explained.

"She never changes."

I was impressed, in a way.

"Looks like you came back with results, Ryota."

"Maybe I have."

I explained what had happened to the perceptive Celeste and now-excited Emily. I told them I'd spent the night in Nihonium holding the slime's tear...and that just by sleeping, I'd defeated thirty-seven zombies with counterattacks, and obtained their drops.

"That's awesome...but it's not a lot, huh?" Celeste said, sounding disappointed.

"Yeah, it's pretty bad. Awesome as it is to get drops without doing anything,

it's as slow as farming gets."

"And you're the only person who could ever manage it, Yoda."

"Yeah. Sleeping the night away in a horde of monsters and waking up just fine... Nobody else could pull that off," Celeste agreed.

"If it's not useful enough for you, maybe we should just sell it after all?" Emily suggested.

"I thought so, too. Neat as it is, it's not essential. I'm thinking we may as well sell it and keep the next one if we ever get another drop."

I then asked for their opinions. Emily and Celeste assented without objection. And since Eve didn't care about anything but carrots, I knew she wouldn't mind.

"Then let's go to Erza after breakfast," I decided.

Apparently, the employees of Swallow's Returned Favor had some incentive to buy rare items, so I figured I might as well take the slime's tear to someone I knew and liked.

I happened to notice Celeste was deep in thought.

"Something on your mind, Celeste?"

"No, I was just thinking..."

"Yeah?"

"What would a rare monster's outsider drop?"

"That does make me wonder. Hmm... Now I'm not sure. No matter what it drops, it'll be different from the original item, but we can't afford to check with this slime's tear."

"Don't worry about that," Emily said as she smiled and produced a ring.

“That’s...from the slime bro!”

“Yep! It’s from the slime bro on B1 of Tellurium!”



After breakfast, we went to the outskirts of Cyclo. We found an empty spot, as usual, and confirmed there was nobody nearby. I then put the slime bro’s ring on the ground and stepped away with Emily and Celeste.

“How exciting!” Emily exclaimed.

“Yeah. I wonder what we’ll get?” Celeste added.

“I’m sure it’ll be something incredible! Yoda’s S-rank drops are the best in the world.”

I grinned, a little embarrassed by her praise. To hide it, I loaded my guns and prepared for battle.

I’d be fighting an outsider slime bro. I recalled the last time I’d fought one. Even back then, it was weak; I’d defeated the monster with a single normal bullet. I could probably defeat it with ease again this time, but just in case, I loaded one revolver with restraining and homing rounds.

After a while, the ring turned into an outsider slime bro. A second later, my normal bullet penetrated the monster. I’d pulled the trigger right as it revived, shooting it dead immediately.

It disappeared...and out popped an item, which I approached and picked up.

In my mind, I heard a voice.

“Double drops...and sometimes, you recover HP and MP when you attack?” I mumbled.

“That’s great!”

“So it adds another effect on top of the existing one?”

“Are these on-attack recovery effects common?” I asked them.

Emily and Celeste thought for a moment before answering.

“I’ve never heard of them.”

“Drop-doubling effects exist, but I’ve never seen it in person, either.”

“You don’t say...”

“That’s awesome, Ryota! Now I wonder what the slime’s tear might make.”

“Same, but we can’t check,” I answered with a chuckle.

One big reason: the ring we’d gotten now had a completely different design than the original. Its shape and the stone inset differed, so even an amateur could tell at a glance that it was a different item.

“If we do it with the slime’s tear, we won’t be able to turn it in for use in the festival.”

“Right.”

Celeste sounded disappointed.

“It’s all right,” Emily said.

“Oh?”

“We can’t check it now, but we can always get another one.”

“How?”

With a big smile, Emily took out a pouch—the very one dropped by the slime sultan—and showed it to us.



“This is the rare drop from B7 of Tellurium!”

Swallow’s Returned Favor was as busy as ever, full of adventurers bringing in their drops, but when Erza yelled that, it fell silent and attention gathered on me.

Emily, Celeste, and I all grinned nervously as adventurers around us started chatting amongst themselves.

“B7?”

“You mean from that guts monster?!”

“Whoa... Isn’t that one so rare that it always takes until the last minute to get it?”

“Tch! Lucky guy.”

“Those things drop plenty, but lots of adventurers get too bold and end up dying while trying to use them. Since they get lost all the time, they’re harder to acquire than other rare items.”

I could see why it was so hard to find on the market despite being a B7 drop.

Upon realizing that she’d drawn so much attention, Erza blushed and apologized hurriedly, “Oh, I’m so sorry!”

“Don’t worry about it,” I reassured her. “More importantly, you buy these for

a high price, right?”

“Yes! Thank you very much! Thanks to you, our shop’s rank will go up again.”

“Does that happen when you get items for the Harvest Festival?”

“Correct! Especially rarer ones like this. We really appreciate you, Ryota!”

“I’m just glad I could help.”

“By the way, will you be coming to the Harvest Festival?”

“Yeah, I think I’ll be there,” I answered, my mind wandering to the pouch in my pocket.

During the Harvest Festival, they would turn all of the items on display in the middle of the arena into outsiders because it was an exhibit of both crops and monsters. Adventurers would then defeat the outsiders. And during the latter part, it was tradition for the adventurers who had helped with acquiring the rare monster drops to do the bulk of the work.

The festival tradition had started as a way of both displaying monsters and their drops, *and* for adventurers to share methods of defeating them.

As Cyclo grew, so too did attendance. The monster-killing demonstration of the Harvest Festival was especially famous among adventurers; after all, it was proof that you could defeat such monsters. A way of showing off your strength, essentially. And yet another bonus was that whoever defeated the rare monsters would often get commissions to obtain their rare materials.

Thus, my answer that I would be there. I’d avoided defeating outsiders in front of others before, but thanks to my pouch—which directly absorbed drops without making it look as though anything had dropped—that worry was gone.

“Then I look forward to your performance,” Erza smiled.

“Leave it to me.”

“Now, here’s your reward.”

Erza held out a bundle of bills over the counter—a bundle that added up to a rather significant amount. There were three of them in total. It was probably already an expensive drop, made even more expensive for the festival. Not only was I sure to get a slime’s tear’s outsider drop; I had also obtained a 3,000,000-piro reward.

Excited, I turned around and high-fived Emily and Celeste.



63. Ryota vs. Metal Ryota

The next day, I went to B5 of Nihonium. I'd already raised my vitality to S on B4, so I was done with it, which meant I had to advance downward.

When I descended the stairs, I found another cavern-like floor. It was a real difference from the lower floors of Tellurium, which resembled the wilderness. However, one thing was the same here.

"Dungeon snow... So this place has a snowy floor too, huh?"

Like on B7 of Tellurium, magic snow fell here. But unlike Tellurium, it was kind of funny to see snow falling inside what was essentially a cave.

A monster appeared: a skeleton that had crawled up out of the ground. It looked the same as skeletons from earlier floors, and it moved the same after emerging as well.

Can different floors have the same monster?

Confused, I readied my guns—but then the skeleton changed. Snow fell upon it, dyeing its bones. Taking in the magical snow caused its white bones to turn blood-red.

"Oh, nice. It's a different mon—"

My relief didn't last long, though, as the skeleton closed in on me in the blink of an eye. I crossed my arms to block its attack, then kicked at it in order to make some distance between us—but my kick hit only the air.

It had evaded with incredible agility, slipped around to my side, and attacked again.

Too fast! This red skeleton's three times as fast as normal ones!

"Still...!"

It was fast, but I was faster. The skeleton had taken me by surprise before, but now that I knew it was fast, I was fine.

I blocked its attacks, prompting it to jump away. But its hit-and-run tactics failed, as I'd already overtaken it. My S-rank speed allowed me to circle it and counter with a glorious side kick.

My counter, backed by S-rank speed and strength alike, broke the skeleton's hip bone in half. The fallen bones twitched on the ground, but they quickly stopped moving and turned into a seed. When I picked it up, I heard the usual voice.

Ryota's max MP went up by 1!

So the monsters on B5 drop MP seeds, huh? Okay, I'll raise this bit by bit.

"...Huh?" I remembered something. MP was like energy used to cast magic. "How do you learn magic, anyway?"



After raising my MP from F to E, I met up with Celeste in the city and asked her the burning question on my mind.

She explained, "Normally, you learn spells as you level up. Levels and stats are

inherent to the individual, so what sort of magic you'll learn is all but decided at birth."

"Uh, but I'm stuck at level 1. Are there...any other methods?"

"You can also learn magic by eating these things called magic fruits."

"That's a thing?"

"Yeah! But they come with a lot of drawbacks, so most people don't bother."

"What kinds of drawbacks?" I asked.

"Eating magic fruit means defying your natural growth, so when you eat one, it curses you by fixing your level in place to keep you from leveling up. Also, there's only one kind of magic fruit, and what you learn when you eat it is random... Sometimes, people end up learning things they already know."

"That's rough. But it doesn't matter as long as you raise your level to the maximum beforehand, right?"

"Right. As long as you eat just one, anyway."

"...Does the second pose more problems?" I asked as I raised an eyebrow.

"The second onward lowers your level by one each time you eat one. Of course, they lower your stats as well."

"That's *too* rough."

Simply eating one made it so you couldn't level anymore, while the second onward would lower your level. Sometimes, curses could be a little too cursed. However, I had to ask, "There are no other drawbacks?"

"Nope. In fact, they're pretty expensive, since a lot of people eat just one after they've maxed out their level."

“Then I guess I’m set.”

“Oh, right! Your max level is just 1, so that means you don’t suffer any drawbacks.”

“Exactly.”



“I bought it...”

Outside Cyclo’s biggest magical item shop, I held a fancy wooden box.

Celeste, who had joined me, opened the lid. Inside was a melon-sized fruit with a hexagram on it.

So this is the magic fruit, eh? If I eat it, I’ll learn some magic.

“Should we have done that, though?” I asked. “That cost the whole three million piro we earned. Maybe we should’ve used it on something for everyone?”

“I want you to eat it, Ryota. I’m sure Emily would feel the same way. And Eve...”

“She wouldn’t care because it’s not a carrot,” I cackled. It seemed none of my friends minded.

“Now, let’s get that in your belly.”

“Actually, hold on a second.”

“Why?”

“I’ve learned by now that we can’t *just* eat something like this.”

“Huh...? Do you want to have Emily cook it?” Celeste asked as she raised an eyebrow.

I smiled back at her, closed the lid, and walked ahead.



We arrived at the usual spot in the outskirts of Cyclo, at which point Celeste finally understood my plan.

“Oh! You’re going to make it an outsider and have it drop something, right?”

“Yep. I’m thinking it’ll turn into an even better item,” I declared, though I was only half-sure.

It would probably become something better, but who knew what *better* would entail? Rare monster drops tended to turn into better versions of the same item, but sometimes—like with the tuna-gorillas becoming revolvers—they turned into different things entirely.

I didn’t doubt that it would be better, but I wasn’t sure it would keep the magic fruit’s effect. I still wanted to try it, though. Back at my old company, I’d always have my new and exciting ideas rejected because they were “unprecedented.” But when someone else came up with those same ideas later, the very manager who’d turned me down would get mad and scream, “Why didn’t you think of that?!”

That didn’t matter anymore, though; I was ready for new and exciting things. And so, I put down the magic fruit and stepped away with Celeste. We waited a while...and a monster emerged from the magic fruit. I leaped forward, ready for battle.

The monster was a metallic-looking ball—or so I'd thought, but it suddenly melted and changed shape.

The molten metal reformed itself into a human figure.

"Ryota?!" Celeste shouted.

Indeed, it was the spitting image of me now. It replicated my features and clothes perfectly, though it lacked color; its whole body was that metallic silver.

It was a liquid metal android. I felt like I'd seen this in a movie before.

It lunged at me, and boy, was it fast!

I protected myself from its right hook, kicked it away, and put some space between us. After that, I fired a round of regular bullets. They hit, but didn't seem to have any effect. The thing lunged again, closing in at incredible speed. Its punches and kicks whistled through the wind.

I blocked and counterattacked. This time, I fired a piercing round. The bullet... stopped before it could strike the android's chest. It had guarded by crossing its arms, which was something I did often.

"Tough, fast, and strong," I noted.

Metal Ryota (or so I decided to call it for now) had pretty high stats, but they weren't as high as mine.

It seemed bullets wouldn't work, so I stowed my guns and fought mano-a-mano.

Evade attacks, counterattack, kick away, catch up and kick at a 90-degree angle.

After enough fighting, I had a good feel for it. This thing's power and speed were about eighty percent of mine. Thus, I concluded that the monster copied

about eighty percent of its enemy's stats.

"Definitely not a good enemy for farming—Hup!"

As it tried to counterattack, I grabbed its wrist and threw it up into the air. Then, I fired a restraining round at it. Metal Ryota was bound by rays of light, and unable to move.

Now that I knew almost everything about my foe, it was time to end this. I loaded flame and freeze rounds into my twin revolvers, then fired them over and over, using my most powerful fused bullets: the annihilation rounds.

As Metal Ryota couldn't evade mid-air, they all struck and gouged out parts of its body. Even full of holes, it continued to struggle—but as the holes grew in number, it finally succumbed and burst like a water balloon. In the end, it turned into liquid metal again and dripped to the ground.

I held my guns at the ready, but it was over. The liquid metal disappeared... and out popped a drop.

I slowly approached. Celeste, who had watched from afar, ran over to meet up with me. She frowned in confusion when she spotted the item I'd picked up.

"It's just a magic fruit? Maybe some stuff doesn't change."

"Nah, that's not true," I replied. Curling my lips into a smirk, I rolled the magic fruit around in my hand and showed it to her.

There were now two hexagrams on it.

"Could it be...?" she gasped.

"I'd say there's no doubt about it."

It was probably the same deal as the slime bro—a better version of the same item.

I took a bite of the magic fruit, and an announcement-like voice echoed in my mind.

You've learned two spells!

64. Two Spells

“Wind Cutter!” I roared as I imitated the casting method that had flashed through my mind. Green wind whipped up, and blades of air cut through the space before me.

“That’s the first spell, huh?” Celeste said.

“Seems like it. It’s called Wind Cutter.”

“That’s level one wind magic.”

“Level one, huh? Well, that’s about as strong as it looks... I can see why it’s considered a waste of time. You level all the way to max, spend millions of piro to buy it, and get this?”

“There are cases where people like Emily end up learning healing magic. For the first one, it’s really just down to luck.”

I nodded and agreed, “Guess so.”

If pure fighters like Emily were lucky enough to learn healing magic, that would greatly expand their abilities in dungeons. I’d just gotten an unlucky draw in this case.

“What’s the other one like?” Celeste asked me.

“That one’s pretty iffy, too.”



We met up with Emily and went down to B6 of Tellurium. There, we ran into this floor's monster, the slime family. As usual, it contained one large slime and several smaller ones. They looked like a mob of slimes at a glance, but they were only counted as one monster.

"All right. Let's go with the plan," I called out.

"Okay!"

"Leave it to me. Inferno!"

Celeste cast her magic. Her level 3 wide-area fire magic, Inferno, expanded and burned all of the slimes. The child slimes were incinerated one after another, disappearing without leaving behind any drops.

Once the kids were gone and the parent was all alone, I cast my own magic.

"Reservation!"

Magical light enveloped the powered-up parent slime. The light was then absorbed into the slime, which disappeared.

Emily leaped forward, spinning her hammer. With speed and weight bolstering her hammer's power, she struck a direct blow to the slime. Its body was crushed, and part of it splashed away.

After being powered up to its maximum from losing all of its kids, the parent slime did not go down in one blow. It regained its shape like clay and counterattacked.

"Not happening!" I exclaimed as I fired a restraining round, stopping the slime in place.

Left with no need to worry about a counterattack, Emily advanced once more. She pounded the slime repeatedly.

Firing restraining rounds when necessary, I stayed far enough away to give Emily room while supporting her with my guns. After Emily's mad hammering and two restraining rounds, the parent slime died.

Right after that happened, a mountain's worth of potatoes dropped from it. Big piles formed where each of the child slimes had died. Those drops weren't from Emily's E-rank. No, they were clearly from my S-rank drop stats.

"Wow. It's like I'm you, Yoda!"

"Does that mean the spell..." Celeste gasped.

"Yeah. When I cast it on a monster before it dies, it drops stuff like it would for me no matter who kills it."

"So it gives us S-rank drop stats?"

"Yeah. It's not very good, though. Giving other people S-rank drop stats is great and all, but since I have to cast it on monsters rather than people, it won't work unless I'm with you."

"If you could cast it on a person, we'd be able to have you use it on us and split up..."

"It takes a lot of time to cast it on a monster, so I might as well just kill it myself."

Celeste and I nodded in unison and sighed. It wasn't useless, but it was oddly...not useful.

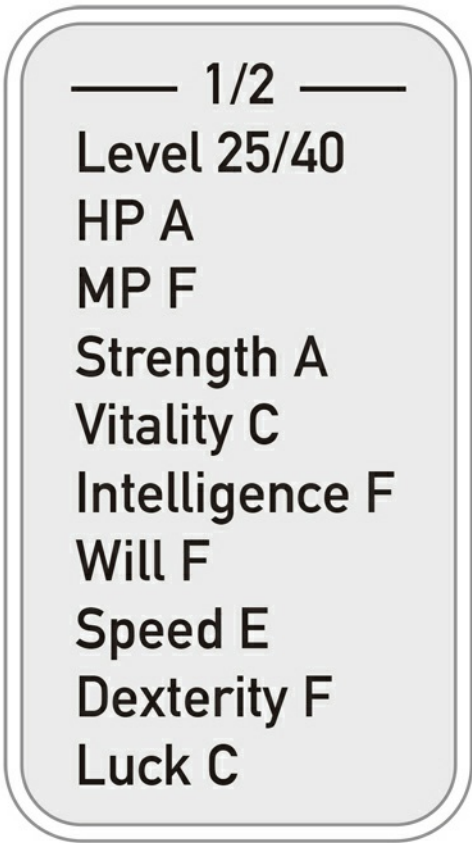
"I disagree! Thank you!" Emily said out of nowhere.

"For what?"

"Come here."

She took my hand and began walking. After a short trek through the

outdoorsy dungeon, we arrived at a status board for adventurers, which Emily used to bring up her stats.



“Level 25... Did that just level you up?”

“It sure did! I leveled up to twenty-two when we fought the Bicorn, but I haven’t gotten stronger since. Now I’m up to twenty-five in one bound!” Emily said with a full smile. Her level hadn’t just gone up, either; her HP was up to A now.

“Wow! So if Ryota uses that magic, other people can get the finisher, which means...”

“We can level up!”

“Oh...”

I snapped my fingers. The whole reason I’d eaten the fruit was because my maximum level was fixed at 1 regardless. And since I had S-rank drop stats, I’d always get in the finishing blow when I went dungeoneering with the girls,

which meant all of the experience was being put to waste.

However, this magic was the perfect solution.

“But that’s too much to ask of Ryota, isn’t it?”

“Not at all!”

“Eek!”

I protested loudly, causing Celeste to yelp.

Looks like I went a little overboard.

I hadn’t even realized that I’d been stealing experience from them. Knowing that, I wanted to give them back every last bit of what I’d taken.

“From now on, we share the kills,” I declared. “We’ll share the experience. Then, once your levels are maxed, we can all eat magic fruit.”

“...Okay.”

“Thank you!”

Extra Side-Story: The True Dungeon Master

On B6 of Tellurium, Emily remained still as Ryota and Celeste left.

It looked the same as ever, with adventurers and slime families duking it out. There wasn't much out of the ordinary. However, one thing did stick out to Emily: potatoes were here and there all about the dungeon. They were all small. The smallest of them was as small as her pinky finger, while even the largest was only a little bigger than her thumb.

Potatoes, though extremely small compared to normal ones, littered the dungeon floor.

Is something wrong? Why are there so many abandoned potatoes here? Emily couldn't help but wonder.

Too curious to help herself, she asked an adventurer who had defeated a slime family nearby.

"Excuse me? Can I ask you something?"

The adventurer was a woman who looked to be in her forties. She was well-built and had a kind face, like one of those strong, independent mothers on TV shows.

Emily had addressed her because, though she picked up the potatoes she'd just had drop for her and put them in her magic cart, she ignored the other ones on the ground of the same size.

"Hm? Sure, what's up?"

"Why isn't anyone taking these potatoes?"

The woman picked up a fallen potato and asked, “You mean these?”

Emily nodded and gazed at her, waiting for an answer.

“‘Cause they’re junktatoes, of course.”

“Junktatoes...?”

“Yeah. Nobody’s gonna pay money for these junktatoes. Do you cook? Potatoes have to be a certain size and the right shape, or else people won’t pay for ‘em. Peel these, and you won’t have much left, so there’s no point in even taking ‘em home.”

“I see...”

“Throwing away trash in the city is against the law, but on the same floor of the dungeon it came from? Nobody cares.”

Those words stung somewhat as Emily recalled what had happened to her as a child, but the woman was right. B6 of Tellurium dropped potatoes, so leaving them on the ground here wouldn’t do anything worse than make more slime families. In fact, since it created more opportunities to get monster drops, it was encouraged to discard things on the floor they were found if one were to discard them at all.

“But hey, take all you want,” she offered. “Don’t expect to make any money, though.”

Having said that, the woman left in search of her next kill. Understanding the situation now, Emily surveyed the dungeon once more. Because the discarded junktatoes had no earning potential, the majority had been crushed by adventurers. Here and there, hunks of potato mush could be found.

Emily was annoyed. Even knowing that they would turn back into slime families and clean themselves up, it didn’t feel good to see a place so dirty.

“...Okay. I’ll do it,” Emily declared. She then pumped her fists slightly, steeled her resolve, and got to work. She used her hammer to begin cleaning the floor. Despite it being taller than her, she used it like a broom to sweep up the junktatoes and gather them all in one spot. Even as other people watched her curiously, she ignored them and cleaned.

Over time, she managed to gather them into a large pile. However, Emily’s cleaning spree did not end there. This time, she used her hammer again to sweep up the squashed and pulpy bits of potato. In the blink of an eye, she’d gathered all of the hard-to-clean crushed potatoes in one spot.

While other adventurers kept on farming monsters, Emily continued sweeping the dungeon! She didn’t think much of it; she simply gathered the potatoes and cleaned. But due to her efforts, B6 of Tellurium hadn’t just been cleaned; it had been granted the warmth and brightness of a living space.

That was a good thing in itself—if it was done in buildings such as the apartment where she, Ryota, and Celeste lived, anyway. However, though this dungeon was nothing like a building, the brightness and warmth of it sapped the adventurers of their will to fight.

“Argh... I don’t think I’ve got any more motivation in me for today.”

“Wanna call it quits for now?”

“Zzz...”

Their farming efficiency decreased to about half of what it had been before Emily had begun cleaning. But of course, she didn’t even notice that. How could she have noticed something she’d done without thinking?

She gazed upon the mountain of potatoes that had yet to be crushed. Maybe the middle-aged woman she’d spoken to was right; this junk wouldn’t earn her

any money.

House chores were Emily's specialty. She had the eye of a housewife, too, so she knew that the common housewife wouldn't spend anything on potatoes like these.

"But...it's such a waste," Emily complained.

Unlike the other pile of dirty, crushed potatoes, these could still be used. It felt like too much of a waste to discard them. She racked her brain, trying to cook up some solution.

"...I'll have to give it a try."

After making a rough plan in her mind, she pulled out some cooking utensils from her enormous dungeoneering rucksack, which was full of the tools she'd once used when she lived in the dungeon. Even now that she lived with Ryota, she always hauled this over her shoulder when she entered dungeons.

From it, she retrieved a cooking knife. She then used her favorite knife to peel away the junktatoes' skin. They were small, so someone less skilled might have ended up peeling away more than the skin of the potato, but Emily didn't fall prey to that mistake.

After that, she sliced them. In the meantime, she put a pot over a flame and heated some oil. Then, she tossed the sliced potatoes into it, deciding that they would become homemade potato chips. The delicious scent of potatoes cooked in oil began to spread throughout the dungeon.

A nearby adventurer walked over with sparkles in his eyes and asked, "Whoa, what're you up to?"

"I'm making potato chips."

"Potato chips?! In the middle of a dungeon?"

“My mother loved having big feasts in dungeons, so she trained me and taught me how to cook inside them.”

“Wow...I’ve heard of people eating in dungeons, but it’s rare to cook the food here, too.”

“Would you like one?” Emily asked as she placed potato chips on a plate and offered it to the man.

“Can I really eat this?”

“Of course. Please, go ahead.”

“Well, don’t mind if I do... Wow, that’s tasty!”

“I’m glad.”

Emily smiled as the man stuffed his mouth full of the delicious-looking chips. Enticed by the smell and crunching sound, more adventurers walked over to them.

“What’s going on here? Got some tasty food?”

“Potato chips, huh? Wow... You made these with this junk?”

“Not bad! Cooking with these must suck.”

“You all can have some, if you’d like,” Emily announced.

The already-low motivation of the adventurers was reduced to nothing by the smell of potato chips. One after another, they gathered around Emily and enjoyed the snacks she prepared for them.

Before long, there were more adventurers eating potato chips than hunting monsters.

Emily quickly made more potato chips. Somehow, she had created a big

adventurer feast like the ones she'd seen daily when her mother was still alive. She enjoyed cooking with those memories in mind...but a certain group watched greedily from the shadows with their eyes on her...



“Okay, B6—Whoa!”

Ryota, who had come back to B6 in search of Emily after she hadn't returned, was shocked the moment he entered the place. He knew how dungeons were supposed to feel, and this was *wrong*. This floor was as calming as home. It felt like a home maintained by none other than Emily herself.

It was bright and warm, and it soothed him just by being inside it.

“It wasn't like this before. What did Emily do?” Ryota chuckled to himself. There was no doubt in his mind that she was behind this, so she had to be around here somewhere.

Ryota circled the dungeon floor in search of her.

“Huh? Uh...there aren't many adventurers here. And...there are a ton of monsters?”

After walking for a while, he noticed that something was off. The sun was still high, so the workday was not over. And yet, there weren't many adventurers around.

“It's like how Silicon was during the magic storm,” he muttered to himself as he continued his search.

After a while longer...he found it. A place even warmer and more relaxing

than the rest of the dungeon floor was before him.

In the center of the sacred ground, Emily sat and napped with her back against the wall. That alone was normal. That alone would have brought a grin to his face. However, there were slimes next to the napping Emily—one giant slime, surrounded by many small ones. It was the slime family, the resident monster of B6 of Tellurium.

The slime family had gathered around Emily and snuggled against her as they slept.

Ryota noticed something and sniffed, smelling a familiar odor wafting about. It was the scent of delicious junk food—potato chips, which seemed incongruous in a place as holy and clean as a temple.

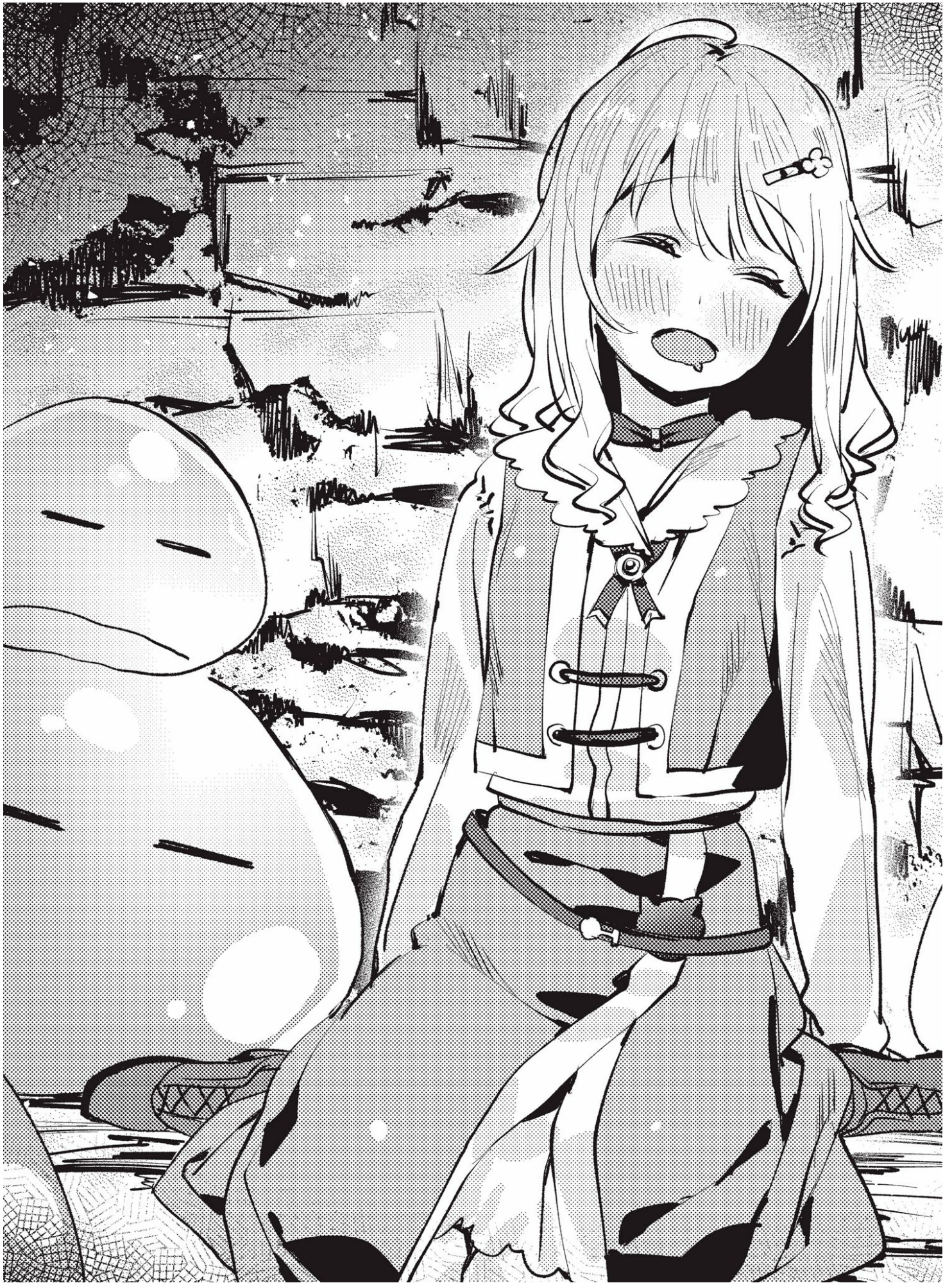
He followed the smell and eventually found a plate piled with potato chips further away. Another slime family had surrounded that plate, and were stuffing their tiny faces with potato chips like a family of ducks.

Ryota chuckled again and said, “Wonder how all this happened.”

He didn’t know, nor could he imagine, the events that had led up to this. Still, one thing was certain.

“Mmmnnnhhh...”

Emily, who snored with the most carefree look on her face, had seized control of this floor with her unique skill.



Afterword

People write novels. Novels are written by people.

Nice to meet you all. Or wait, perhaps it's better to say that it's good to see you again? Either way, I'm Nazuna Miki, a Taiwanese light novelist.

Thank you so much for picking up volume 2 of *My Unique Skill Makes Me OP Even at Level 1*.

Due to your support, we've made it to the release of the second volume.

Volume 2 is fundamentally similar to volume 1. In short, it's akin to *Minecraft* or the "Straw Millionaire." It's a novel where our protagonist starts life in a new world and gradually works his way to becoming the strongest.

Though our heroes had to live in a shoddy, 20,000-yen-per-month apartment before, they now have the power to move to fresh new buildings with their new allies.

Of course, Ryota will continue to power up his abilities, gain more skills and items, and procure greater assets and allies alike. Just you wait and see how far he goes and how strong he becomes!

This work continues to be published on *Shousetsuka ni Narou* as well. The web novel doesn't come with illustrations, but it *does* contain chapters 65 onward, so you can read ahead all you like there! It's being updated at a rate of one chapter every two days.

If you've read this book and you want more of it right away, try visiting the web novel's page.

Finally, I have many thanks to give.

To Subachi-sama, who continues to create the most wonderful illustrations.

To K-sama, who continues to edit my awkward writing.

To the K Light Novel Books' editorial department, who made this publication a reality.

To the bookstores who stocked this book, as well as those of you who bought it.

I offer my deepest thanks to each and every person involved in this work.

Now, I'll put down my pen, praying that the next volume will someday reach your eagerly waiting hands.

Respectfully yours,

Nazuna Miki

December 2017

Author: Nazuna Miki

Formerly a wannabe voice actor, now a light novelist.

This is my first work that's received a manga adaptation.

It's all so exciting that I can hardly sleep!

Illustrator: Subachi

I upload my illustrations early on Twitter, so please give me a follow!

My Unique Skill Makes Me OP Even at Level 1 vol 2

KODANSHA COMICS Digital Edition

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