











## My Unique Skill Makes Me OP Even at Level 1, 7

#### A VERTICAL Book

Translation: Benjamin Daughety

Editor: Maneesh Maganti Production: Shirley Fang Proofreading: Kevin Luo

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#### 183. Failed Creation

Outside of Methylene, I looked around with more caution than usual. After confirming that nobody was nearby, I put down my drop and hatched an outsider.

The air shifted, and dungeon master Satanachia appeared.

"Repetition!" Without hesitation, I cast my ultimate farming spell to kill it instantly.

Dungeon masters were not beyond its power. The spell activated, and Satanachia was instantly killed.

"Phew..."

That was a bit of a relief. I'd looked around so carefully and used Repetition immediately for a very specific reason: Satanachia had the power to control women.

It wasn't just strong; nothing could be more troublesome than that thing manipulating some poor, innocent bystander, so I'd killed it before it could become a problem.

The outsider Satanachia dropped something. When I approached and checked, I found that it was an earring. As my fingers plucked it from the ground, the details of its effect flooded into my mind: Satanachia's earring could nullify the abilities of the woman who wore it.

I cocked my head and grumbled to myself, "Hmm."

That made sense, thematically. The woman-controlling demon had dropped

an item that suppressed a woman's powers. I could understand that. But compared to the other outsider drops I'd obtained so far, the effect was just too...lame. Sure, you could give it to a woman you think might become your enemy and hope she accepts the gift. Maybe.

"Well, it's not something I'll bother to use myself."

Not every drop can be a winner. Even dungeon master drops can't all be guaranteed to have enormous, life-changing effects.

Celeste's Bicorn horns, which also came from a dungeon master, weren't exactly stellar either. They just let her use elementary magic. A perfect fit for her, but not necessarily good.

Maybe it'll come in handy someday, I thought to myself as I shoved the earring into my pocket and began the trek back to Methylene.

Along the way, I ran into a woman. She was mysterious. Her lack of presence almost made me doubt she was actually right in front of me—as if she'd disappear the moment I blinked.

I'd been in this world for a long enough time now that I'd gradually acquired the skill to sense presences. But I could not sense hers.

Could she be a ghost? I shuddered.

The girl's casual walk stopped at a clearing. Then, she took something out of her pocket and placed it on the ground. A magic circle spread from where she'd put it down.

The toxic light of the purple magic circle shot all over like floodlights.

Suddenly, there was a presence. Not hers, though; the magic circle had one. I could go further and call it a *will*.

Slaughter. Destruction.

Those words appeared in my mind, prompting me to jump away.

Zap! I'd managed to jump, but purple lightning from the edge of the magic circle had struck me. My outstretched hand stung, and a chunk of flesh was burned away.

That was a dangerous magic circle. I didn't know anything about it, but I could tell that staying in there would destroy her.

"Hey! What are you doing? Get out of there!" I screamed at her.

She quietly turned around.

I was shocked, taken by utter surprise. Her eyes—no, all of her features—were those of an emotionless doll.

While I was stunned, the situation continued to progress. The magic circle ate away at her. Her long hair became short, and her clothes gradually disappeared.

I can't hesitate a single moment!

My brain worked at full speed.

What was happening, what she was doing. My possessions, my abilities.

All of them ran through my mind in an instant, combined, and arrived at one possibility.

There wasn't time to think anymore. I pulled out my two guns and loaded flame rounds in one and freeze rounds in the other.

Then, I fired repeatedly, combining them into annihilation rounds. They gouged out the ground, devouring pieces of the magic circle.

Now broken, the magic circle lost its effectiveness, and the lightning ceased.

Eventually, the natural clearing had returned to peace.

The woman...was safe.

"Phew!" I heaved a big sigh. My spur-of-the-moment decision—the only option I could come up with—had managed to succeed.

"What's wrong?" she asked me.

I couldn't help but shout, "Don't you 'what's wrong' me! The hell were you doing?!" I didn't know what her deal was, but to me, it looked like she'd attempted suicide.

"Carrying out Master's orders."

"Orders? Master?"

"Master says that I'm trash, and that I should dispose of myself."

"...What?" I felt my stomach roiling with rage.



I loaded more flame and freeze rounds in case she tried to commit suicide again. Then, I asked her, "What's this stuff about disposing of yourself anyway? You'd have to be insane to tell another human being to do that."

"You're not wrong."

"Uh?"

"I am an artificial life-form, a being created without a soul. Trash is the correct term in this case."

"Artificial...life-form?" I was at a loss for words. "Like... A robot, or an android,

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"Robot? Android?"

"Uhh... Golem, maybe? Or homunculus? Along those lines."
She nodded in response. "Very similar. Nearly equal."

"And why would someone..."

"You're asking for the objective behind my creation?"

"Y-Yeah?"

"For dungeons."
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"I was created to artificially produce A-rank drops. But I was a failure; all of my drops are F, and they do not grow. I'm a failed creation," she replied slowly, but without pause. Then, she closed her mouth, for she'd explained everything from start to finish.

I could see what was going on now.

"So because normal adventurer drop stats vary, they wanted to make an artificial life-form with maximum stats to get rid of randomness," I confirmed. She nodded. "And they failed... Damn it!"

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"Why are you angry?"

"Obviously—"

"What angers you about a faulty tool being disposed of?"
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"Ngh..." I gasped. When she put it that way, it started to sound like they were in the right. "E-Either way, it's not cool. I mean... I can't let you do this to yourself."

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"That is problematic."

"Why?"
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"I must obey Master's orders."

At first glance, that was a reasonable remark.

"Can you change masters?" I asked reflexively. At times like this, changing masters was the only way to solve the fundamental problem.

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"Yes."
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"How?"

"Put your hand on my chest, and infuse more magical power than my previous master did. That will overwrite it."

"And?"

"That's all."

"That's all?"

"I'm a prototype, so I was made for quick and easy changes," she explained.

Okay. Got it. In that case— "However."

"Huh?" I'd started reaching out my hand, but I stopped.

"My master's magic is my power source. Just by existing, I slowly consume magic—"

Then, I kept going and put my hand on her chest. And I infused her with magical power as she'd instructed.

I didn't know if the magical power she spoke of came from my MP or intelligence stat, but it didn't matter either way. Both were SS, leagues beyond anyone else in this world.

Her body glowed for a mere moment.

"Did it work?" I asked.

"Change of master complete."

"Great."

"...Are you okay with this?" For the first time, emotion appeared on her face. She was still mostly expressionless, but it was like...if you looked *really* closely, you'd see a hint of confusion.

Presumably, she was asking if I was okay with her taking up my MP.

"Yeah. I'll be fine." It was far better than seeing someone commit suicide.

More importantly, though, I was furious that someone would force that onto her because of their own selfish desires. I knew I wouldn't feel better until I intervened.

## 184. Renewed Allegiance

I took her to B1 of Cobalt with me.

"Now, uhh... Come to think of it, I don't think I got your name."

"Nayamileia."

"Nah-yuh...milluh?"

The name was so unfamiliar that I twisted my tongue while trying to repeat it.

"It means 'zero' in old language."

"Uh, let's change your name. How about Leia?"

"If it pleases you, Master," she assented apathetically.

The name Leia reminded me of a certain galaxy far, far away, but at least she was a girl too, and it was a lot better than naming a living, breathing person after a word for "zero."

I gathered myself and brought things back on track.

"So how does this work, exactly?" I asked Leia.

If she was made to support adventurers and add to their drops, then she must be strong enough to participate in battle. And so, as her Master, I decided to get a grasp of her capabilities—like I would with my bullets or magic.

"Please order me to 'attach.'"

"Um? Okay... Attach," I said cautiously, watching for what would happen.

Immediately after, Leia's body melted like some kind of liquid metal robot

from a movie. Then, the liquid crept onto me.

I was surprised for a moment, but I let her do her thing, because I knew she wasn't doing anything malicious.

Leia's liquid attached to me and turned into solid gear including protectors and gauntlets, things I already used often. A different being had turned into defensive gear.

I feel like I saw this in an old manga.

"I see. So this is what happens, huh?" I mused.

"This will raise your basic defenses."

It went around my arms and my ankles. They were the same as the pads I normally wore, so I felt no discomfort at all.

Just then, a zombie demon happened to appear. I clenched a fist tight and struck it with the Leia-formed protector.

One strike sent it flying, killing it instantly. I received no drop.

Another zombie demon came from the side, so this time, I fired normal bullets into its head. This one dropped a chunk of iron as usual.

"I get it... If I hit them with you, then it uses your drop rates."

"Yes, Master. If the experiment was a success, then the hope was that anyone could be given A-rank drops."

The concept made sense. If it had panned out, that would've been amazing. I could imagine the final stage of that plan. You wouldn't need a transforming artificial life-form. You'd be able to make...

"An A-rank drop weapon..." I muttered.

Only if it was a success, though.

I thought about that. Research in itself wasn't a bad thing. Their goal was to maximize production efficiency, which could lead to a sort of industrial revolution.

That wasn't evil. It was fine.



But creating artificial life just to dispose of it when they failed was a different story.

Should I do something about this?

While I thought about it, yet another zombie demon emerged.

Before I could reload and kill it, though, I noticed something: my gun had already been reloaded. I'd used all my bullets when rapid firing at the last one, and yet here they were.

"When did I..."

"I did it."

"Leia? You did this?"

"I took the liberty of doing so while you were deep in thought. Should I not have done so?"

"No, that's okay. Actually, that's...really helpful?"

"Is something wrong, Master?"

Inspiration flashed in my mind.

It was a method that had existed long before the advent of revolvers and rifling technology, but it might just be useful now.

☆

I left the dungeon and returned to the outskirts of Methylene. In an empty area, I put down tuna that I'd bought in the market and backed away.

Honestly, I'd have liked one more, but they only had one full tuna. I decided

to get another later.

After a short wait, when the tuna turned into a gorilla, I insta-killed it with Repetition.

It dropped a gun. After that, I fired a recovery round into myself. I did that because both using Repetition and becoming Leia's master had drained a lot of MP.

"A drop...? Master, what is this?" Leia asked me.

"Don't tell anyone else. My drops are S-rank, so I always get drops—even from outsiders."

"Understood. I will not tell a soul," she replied, though I wasn't quite sure she really understood. To me, it sounded more like she was just following orders rather than understanding.

Not that it mattered either way. Fine by me.

I picked up what would become my third gun.

"Hold this for me," I ordered her.

"Understood," Leia replied. A part of the protector reformed into an arm and held the gun.

Aha, so that's how she reloaded it.

"Let's do this. Just do it the way I taught you."

"Yes, Master."

I readied my gun and rapid-fired normal bullets into a place where they wouldn't hit anyone. After firing all the bullets I'd loaded into it, I dropped my gun and grabbed the next one I'd kept close by.

The new gun had been loaded with normal bullets. Likewise, I fired until it was empty, let go of it, and grabbed my next gun—the first one I'd dropped.

It had been reloaded. I rapid-fired again. While I fired, Leia would load it.

Once I was out, I'd use the reloaded gun the same way.

By subtracting the time I'd used to reload before, this had nearly doubled my firing rate!

Nobunaga had once used a three-line firing formation. Lately, there have been theories that they weren't actually people taking turns, but instead that they were handing loaded matchlocks to the ones who were better at shooting. This was basically the same thing.

After I'd finished firing, I lowered my gun.

"Great job, Leia!"

"Huh?"

"This is really helpful. Keep on helping me out like that, okay?"

"Understood... Thank you, Master."

She was sure to be able to help in other ways beyond reloading, too. I'd basically gotten a third arm. The potential was staggering.

What could I do? What could we accomplish? I racked my brain for more ways to make use of Leia. This moment of thought was the most enjoyable part of obtaining a new power.

"Whoops, I was lost in thought. Leia, you can go back to normal now."

"Yes, Master." As ordered, she returned to her normal humanoid form.

But she probably wasn't used to this since it was our first time doing it. While she returned, she got stuck on my clothes and the like, scattering bullets and

other items all over the place.

"My apologies, Master."

"Don't worry about it."

We picked them up together.

Regular bullets, flame bullets, and more. Paper bills and coins, which were drops just like everything else here. And my various other equipment, like the slime's tear.

"Oh?"

Suddenly, I noticed something amidst my items: Satanachia's earring. I'd obtained this just earlier today from that dungeon master. Its effect? Neutralizing women's abilities.

I fell deep into thought again.

"Master?"

"...Leia, try putting this on."

"I am an artificial life-form, so I do not require dolling up."

"It's not about accessorizing. I mean, it'd probably look good on you, but that's not why. Just wear it, okay?"

"Very well. If you wish, Master."

She finally put on the Satanachia earring as directed. And as soon as she did...

"I knew it!"

"Knew what, Master?"

"The MP consumption is gone."

"...Huh?"

Leia's expression showed surprise for once.

It was just what I'd expected. Satanachia's earring nullified women's abilities, whether they were good or bad. And it had suppressed her ability to gradually reduce her Master's MP—something I would hardly call an ability, myself.

Until just now, I could feel my MP draining away bit by bit like sand in an hourglass. But now, it wasn't draining at all.

"What about your other abilities? Try transforming, Leia."

"Yes, Master."

As ordered, she once again turned into gear.

I created an outsider from a coin and punched it with the protector gauntlet. When I did, a drop-boosting potion appeared.

The gauntlet had applied my own S-rank drops instead of Leia's F-rank drops. The earring was working!

"Can you reload?"

"Yes, Master."

"Figures. That's just an action rather than an ability. If you couldn't do that, then I imagine you'd be immobile the moment you put the earring on."

Leia's drawbacks—all the reasons she'd been called a failure—had been erased by the earring.

As far as I was concerned, Leia had given me a third arm with no drawbacks.

"That solves all our problems. Happy to work with you, Leia."

"...Yes, Master. I will follow you for the rest of my life," she said. It might've just been me, but she sounded a little excited.

I would not immediately understand the meaning of her words, though–for the earring had also neutralized the requirement that she obey me. She was following me of her own volition.

Unfortunately, I wouldn't realize that until it was pointed out to me much later.

#### 185. Wired All-Range Attack

We went into B1 of Cobalt to try out my new powers.

We'd given them a quick check outside the dungeon, but there are some things you won't know until you're in real combat, so we came in together.

First, I obtained one more gun. I paid an extra charge to have another tuna brought directly to me. Then, I turned it into an outsider and made it drop another gun. With this, I had four guns at my disposal.

A zombie demon appeared. I rapid-fired both of my fully loaded guns into it, filling its upper body with holes.

After I'd dropped those two guns, two more entered my field of view, so I accepted them and fired once more.

Rapid-firing into rapid gun exchanges.

A skilled shooter could fire a revolver faster than a machine gun, but reloading was an unavoidable and time-consuming task. But when I fired while Leia's arm reloaded, I could easily outpace a machine gun.

The zombie demon fell. Raw overkill.

"Good stuff, Leia."

"Thank you, Master." Leia's voice came from around my chest now that she was part of my gear.

At the same time, an arm extended and picked up the iron chunk dropped by the zombie demon. It then went into my pocket. The Grand Eater pocket swallowed the large, heavy iron ingot as if it were nothing.

I continued to swagger about the dungeon. It was just business as usual, finding enemies and immediately filling them with holes. When I ran out of bullets, Leia would reload the guns and hand them back to me. She picked up the drops, as well.

A significant boost to productivity.

Guns that didn't take time to reload approached the raw power of Repetition, and drop pickup was far faster than any method I'd tried so far.

I was at my most efficient yet. It felt like I'd reached a new dimension.

"Leia, there." I stopped and looked at a wall of the dungeon.

Leia's arm stretched forth and touched it gently. At a glance, it was an unremarkable spot. Her arm had moved according to my will without so much as me saying so.

"Incredible, Leia!"

"Thank you very much." Her voice was expressionless.

Something about it did sound lonely, but that was just how she was. Couldn't really help that.

I'd checked everything I'd imagined, and most things worked as expected or better.

Satisfied, I left the dungeon while chatting with Leia.

"When you're attached to me, does it consume or exhaust anything of yours?"

"No, Master."

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"Is there a time limit to it?"
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"Not at all. It will continue as long as I do not go dormant."

"Go dormant? Is that like human sleep?"

"Yes, Master."

I asked her about a few finer details I hadn't gotten around to yet. As her master, I wanted to know every little thing I could.

When we stepped outside the dungeon, I saw Nicholas. He leaned against a tree with his hands in his pockets. When he saw me, he gleefully ran over.

"Yo! I've been waiting for you, bro!"

"For me? Why, did something happen?"

"Nah. Let's rassle!" Nicholas smiled that usual crazy smile.

"Again...?"

"Of course! You're gonna go back to Cyclo soon, yeah? We gotta get our sparring in now! C'mon, I'm itching all over!" Nicholas scratched himself like a monkey and wriggled around.

This guy's such a handful... But it's fine, I guess. He doesn't mean anything bad.

"No normal person needs to 'get their sparring in.' And how many times have you lost by now? It's not gonna get any better."

"Tsk tsk! You just don't get it. There's an inherent meaning to sparring!"

"Okay, yeah, I get it. And by that, I mean I don't."

"Besides, you'll find I'm a little different today!"

"Huh?"

While I was confused by the meaning of his statement, Nicholas took a small glass bottle out of his pocket. There was an amber liquid inside... Knowing him, it was probably liquor.

He opened the lid and guzzled it down. I watched warily. Could it be some kind of potion?!

Instantly after, he slammed the bottle onto the ground, shattering it.

"Gaaah, tastes like shit!"

"...Huh?"

"I swear, man, these new liquors are all so damn bad!" He got mad in a... pretty incomprehensible way before rushing over to hit me.

"...!" Though surprised by his speed, I promptly evaded. He didn't hit me, but I almost fell on my backside from the sudden speed.

"Aw, damn! You really piss me off!"

He attacked yet again.

His strikes were a whole notch sharper than usual. Sharper and faster, to the point that I was being pushed back.

"Quit dodging! Let me hit you, damn it!" As his words became more abusive, his attacks only became sharper.

"Wait... You're not powering up from how much you hate that liquor, are you? Surely not."

"Enough talk, my man!"

I realized that my theory was probably correct. Nicholas loved old things, so maybe it was true after all.

I took a deep breath and met his fist head-on.

Bang! Our fists clashed, the explosion so great that it shook the hems of my pants.

I used the momentum to jump back, take a deep breath, and right myself again. Then, I lunged toward Nicholas.

"Yeeeah! Get over here!"

I challenged him to a close-ranged, hand-to-hand battle. I guarded his punches and kicked with my knee. Then, I swayed to evade his headbutt and somersault kicked his jaw.

We fought with such force that a whirlwind whipped up around us.

Instantly after, gunshots rang out one after another. Shots were fired at Nicholas from all directions around him.

"Ooow! The hell was that?"

Leia's arms had fired them.

Still attached to me, she had extended her arms and fired all four guns from a distance his fists couldn't reach. That was my intent—an attack based on my will, without me needing to even ask. She'd read my mind and created an all-range attack.

He was stunned when the bullets struck him, but he realized that they were shot from the arms sprouting from me.

Knowing this apparently put him into a good mood. "You've got some crazy stuff up your sleeve, my man!" Nicholas was plenty of trouble when he was in a good mood, so I attacked further with the extra arms and used the opening to slip closer.

Then, I struck him with a full-power punch.

He flipped three times in midair before finally falling head-first onto the ground—all with a gleeful smile on his face. Then, he stopped moving.

"Phew... Well, that's over."

"Is he okay, Master? He looks like he may be dead."

"I wouldn't have had such a hard time against someone who'd die that easily," I answered with a wry grin.

## 186. Empty Vessel

#### Bang!

I kicked open the metal door and charged inside.

They were right in the middle of doing something in there. Men in robes with hoods—dressed like some kind of mage—surrounded a single magic circle.

The magic circle flickered in long intervals, and a child—what looked to be a five or six-year-old boy—laid naked on top of it. I didn't know what they were doing, but it couldn't possibly be anything good.

"What are you do—" I silently stepped in and punched one man in the torso. "Gack!" He threw up gastric juices and collapsed on the spot.

The others held out their hands toward me, created magic circles, and began chanting.

But they'd reacted too slowly. One after another, I closed in on them and brought them down with a single blow.

After all the men were down, Cell came running in with his subordinates. "Apologies for making you wait, Sir Sato... What is this?!" He looked horrified when he saw the boy in the magic circle.

"Do you know what this is?" I demanded.

"It is a magic circle meant to sever soul from flesh."

"Soul from flesh?"

"Indeed," he nodded gravely.

Severing soul from flesh... This just keeps getting worse.

I'd told Cell about Leia and had him search for the people making artificial lifeforms like her. It took him no time at all to find them.

When I learned where their hideout was, I infiltrated it with his help.

What I saw was far beyond my expectations.

Cell squatted down next to the child and breathed a sigh of relief. "The boy still lives."

Just as I felt the same relief, a group charged in from deeper inside the hideout. Unlike the mage-like people I'd just taken down, they looked more used to violence. Some kind of bodyguards, no doubt.

"Sir Sato, leave this to me while you—" Cell said, prompting his subordinates behind him to step forth and prepare for battle.

But I immediately neutralized the bodyguards. I fired maximum-power limitless lightning rounds into all four of them, downing them instantly.

Sensing a connection between the boy and Leia, my rage billowed even more. Unable to let someone else do the job, I defeated them all myself.

"Let's go," I said coldly.

"...Right."

With Cell and his subordinates at my back, I proceeded deeper into the facility.

More bodyguards and mages appeared along the way, but I took them down with ease and continued.

There has to be someone above these goons. Someone who manages this operation, someone who knows everything about it.

Deeper inside, I arrived at the biggest room yet. In the center was one woman—an adult, but not a living human being. One glance told me that she was an artificial life-form. Moreover, she lacked a lower body.

She was attached to some kind of hanger, as well.

Behind her was a man who gasped, "Wh-Who the hell are you people?"

Unlike the other men before him, his robe had golden embroidery, proving that he was some kind of higher-up.

While he was confused, I instantly charged in, grabbed him by the throat, and pushed him against a wall.

"Are you in charge of this place?"

"You will get no-"

"Are you in charge? I'm not asking again." I put a little more force into it. He finally nodded painfully in response. "What was that magic circle outside?"

"W-We were healing the boy-Aghck!"

I tightened my grip even more and said threateningly, "Nayamileia."

Shock colored his face.

"Be honest. Or else..." I cracked my free hand's knuckles and squeezed his throat ever tighter.

"O-Okay, I-I'll...tell the truth..." he said, prompting me to let up a little. "W-We were extracting his soul."

"I know that. Why would you do such a thing?"

"We put the extracted soul in there... They're easier to control when you use calibrated human souls."

"How could you?"

"Did you say 'calibrated'?" Cell noted, causing me to gasp.

Calibrated human souls... Does that mean what I think it means?

"Explain!" I roared.

"Ghah! E-Emotions only spoil tools. We take them out of the soul before putting it in there."

"Emotions..."

"To make them tools... No wonder," Cell muttered.

I remembered how Leia acted. I'd thought that her lack of emotion was because she was artificial, but no; it was because they'd taken emotion out of her original soul entirely.

"What do you do with the emotions you extract?" I demanded.

"We don't need them, so we discard-Agh!"

I slammed the man into the wall. This dealt a powerful blow to his head, causing him to lose consciousness and collapse heavily onto the floor.

"Cell..."

"You don't need to say it. It's been a long time since I felt such rage. Some of them may still be lurking in the shadows, but I swear that they will all be brought to justice."

Cell looked calm as he turned to me, but his eyes were determined. I knew I could trust him to do this, but I still had to say it.

"Make sure nobody can ever do something like this again."

We left the research facility and returned to Methylene. My rage had yet to subside.

At first, I'd only planned to stop what they were doing—to work with Cell and see that nobody would be made to be discarded like Leia. To keep such people from being forced to kill themselves if it did come to that.

That was why I'd joined the raid.

But I didn't think it would come to this. With all of that pent-up anger, I returned to the inn we'd been using as a base and met up with Leia, who'd been waiting for me.

"Welcome back, Master."

"...Thanks."

"Master. You seem angry...and sad?"

"Huh?"

"When you are angry, I am angry. When you are sad, I am sad."

"But..."

"Your emotions flow directly here," Leia said, putting her hand on her chest.

Because there's nothing else there, I thought to myself.

Her soul was lacking. It had no emotions, so my own filled the void where they should be. Empathy is great and all, but it had taken form in the worst possible way in her.

But if that was the case, and my emotions were going to fill that empty void,

then I didn't want to fill it with anger and sadness.

So I changed my mind on the spot.

"Ah... Master, your emotions!"

"Let's go into a dungeon. We'll make tons of money and eat good food tonight."

Seemingly infected by my sudden optimism, Leia lightened up a little. "Yes, Master. I will accompany you."

With her, I went into the dungeon as usual—all the while focusing on infecting her with joy and cheer.

☆

Ryota Sato is only human.

Thus, when he sees loss, he considers it irreversible. When you lose an arm or a leg, it doesn't grow back. Likewise with the soul.

He is a human with that way of thinking deeply ingrained in him.

But that is not always how the world works. If asked whether *everything* that had ever been damaged or destroyed was lost for eternity, one would say no.

There are some beings, such as earthworms and starfish, that can regenerate lost parts. This is true of the soul, as well.

Emotions are things that are born. That grow. Losing them once does not necessarily mean they will never return.

Master, thank you.

Nayamileia-now known as Leia.

In her heart, now filled with Ryota's strong emotion, a warm feeling had begun to grow. It was far too small, though, for Ryota or even Leia herself to realize. But it was there, and little by little, it was growing.

### 187. The Ten-Millionaire

B1 of Cobalt.

All the mess in Methylene had calmed down. On the surface, it was just a change in the Dungeon Association chief. But the next chief to take up the role would be someone under Cell's influence, so in effect, Cyclo had engulfed Methylene.

Cell was a busy man now, but he was happy about it.

At this point, my job was done. The problem was solved. I wanted to get back to raising my stats, so I planned to return to Cyclo tomorrow.

My plan for this last day in Methylene was to sell off all the iron I'd built up from B1 of Cobalt and have a nice dinner with Nicholas.

With Leia's support, my farming went smoothly. Her arms reloading my guns were a real help.

"Master, I sense three zombie demons ahead and to the left."

"Roger that!"

As someone made to support adventurers, she was equipped with a radar-like ability. It wasn't as strong as Alice's, of course. Alice could go as far as predicting monster spawn points, while Leia was *just* a radar. She could only search for things that currently existed in the dungeon.

Though that was plenty useful on its own.

Better yet, she picked up every single monster drop after I killed them and put

them into my pocket. All I had to do was get close enough for her to reach, and she'd pick them up on her own.

It was like in video games where just getting close to items would put them directly into your inventory.

Thanks to Leia, all I had to do was focus on efficiently farming monsters—so I did. My most efficient monster-killing method was, needless to say, Repetition. But how close could I come to such efficiency without using it?

I tested myself to see how fast I could kill them. Firing my guns, closing in for melee combat, even trying my other spells despite their lower grades... I wrung out all the efficiency I could.

Now, what came of holing up in Cobalt all day?

 $\Rightarrow$ 

We went to the drop-buying shop, Singing Birds.

While we waited for them to finish weighing the iron I'd brought, Leia and I researched how items worked with her. With her still attached to me, I had her hold a rock in her arm.

"That's an Absolute Rock pebble. When I use it, I change into invincibility mode. You try using it."

"Okay."

"When you use it, this happens." I punched the arm hard. Firing a gun would've been easier, but we were in a shop, so that would be a bit inappropriate. "No damage, right?"

"Yes, Master. None at all."

"Can you move like that? Does your radar work?" When I asked these questions, Leia tried a few things.

"Without issue, Master. I can use all of my abilities except for attacking."

"That so? Okay, the rock is yours. Make sure you always use it."

"...Okay." Leia turned into a gauntlet and protector and stretched out her arm.

To an observer, she might look like light armor. Said light armor now had the perfect defensive power of the Absolute Rock pebble. It didn't particularly benefit me, but it felt like an effective power-up.

While we continued, I wondered if there was anything else among my items that might suit Leia.

Meanwhile, they finished calculating, and the shop employee came back.

"Thank you for waiting, sir," he said. "Let's see... First, today's iron price is 18 piros per jin."

"Went down a little, huh?"

He nodded in response. Eh, it's fine. That's within the margin of error.

"Now, you've brought in 3,841 jin today, so your total—"

"Huh?" I gasped suddenly.

"Huh?" He made the same surprised sound. "I-Is something wrong?"

"Did you just say it was over 3,800?"

"Yes, sir. We weighed it multiple times, so our figure should be correct."

He looked at me with concern.

No, no, that's not what I mean. I didn't even bring a magic cart this time, so I couldn't have weighed it in advance. The significance is...that number was three times the last time I'd come. Three!

A few days ago, when I'd gone into the dungeon with Leia for the first time, we'd gotten about double the drops compared to the usual. And now that doubled figure had tripled!

I had spent all day focused on efficiency alone, yes, but this revelation was still jaw-dropping.

"Altogether, your total is 69,138 piros," he said.

About 70,000 piros. Not bad earnings.

But I didn't care about that number anymore; I'd tripled my greatest efficiency.

And my biggest daily earnings yet had been 3,000,000 piros in Tellurium. Of course, I had additional drops thanks to Aurum, but the 3,000,000-piro figure excluded that.

Over three times that would be...

Wait, does this mean what I think it means?

I stood up and fast-walked out of the shop. No, I was basically running at this point.

"Wait, sir! I haven't given you the money yet!" the employee called out from behind me, but I wouldn't hear it.

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"Master?"
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<sup>&</sup>quot;We're going back to Cyclo now."

<sup>&</sup>quot;Now?"

"Yeah. When we get there, we're going straight into a dungeon. Then, I'm going all-out. I'll need your help, Leia."

"Of course, Master." Leia seemed excited to be relied on.

But I was even more excited. More than triple three million—an elementary schooler could figure it out. This was the most excited I'd been in a long time.

Thus, I forced my way into Cyclo with Leia and stayed in the dungeons all day long. And for the first time, I achieved 10 million piros in one day.

## 188. Kindred Spirits

I returned from the drop-selling shop to my own home for the first time in a long time. At the mansion just after sunset, I found Emily wearing an apron and wielding a broom taller than herself.

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"Emily."
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"Yoda! Welcome home!" She tossed the broom aside and came running.

When there were only a few feet left between us, she leaped at me. I planted myself firmly to catch her embrace—but she didn't reach me.

Leia, who'd returned to human form, had stood between us and stopped her.

They both spoke up at the same time.

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"Yoda, who's your friend?"
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"Master, who is this?"

"This is a new friend, Emily," I explained. "Mind making her a room for me?"

"Okay!" Emily scampered off into the mansion.

"Master."

"Hm?"

"Am I your friend, Master?"

"Well, I think so... Is that bad?"

"No. I am a tool of yours."

"I don't like seeing you as a tool. Let's be friends instead."

Learning that her soul lacked emotions really made me want to deny the whole "tool" thing. So I emphasized her status as a friend and looked directly into her eyes.

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"Do friends..." she hesitated.
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"Hm?"

"Do friends...hug you, Master?"

Is she talking about Emily?

"I don't really mind—" Before I could say it, a hand slid over from the side and smacked me on the forehead.

When I turned, I saw Eve—the girl with the bunny suit and natural bunny ears—there. With a face just as expressionless as Leia's, she chopped me a second time.

"Ow, ow. What's the deal, Eve?"

"I hate low levels."

"Crazy how that feels nostalgic now." I laughed, took a carrot out of my pocket, and handed it to her. I'd left this one aside specifically for her from the 10-million-piro pile of loot I'd farmed. It was a fresh, S-rank carrot.

Eve looked just a little bit happy as she took the carrot.

"Finally, a carrot..."

"I'm happy for you."

"Don't make me wait so long." After very happily accepting the carrot, Eve made her final chop a weak one for me.

"And yet she chops me anyway," I sighed.

Then, she went back into the mansion, gnawing on the carrot all the while.

"Eve never changes... Hm? What's wrong, Leia? Got a problem with Eve?"

"Is she a friend of yours, too, Master?"

"Yeah?"

"Do friends...chop each other?"

"Huh? Oh, you mean that. It's fine; you're a friend, so just do whatever you want. It's cool."

Part of me wondered if I was too lenient, but I quickly realized that all of my friends were quirky. They all experienced emotions in their own special ways.

It seemed like Leia was trying to imitate them. If that helped her get her emotions back, then I was happy to help.

Someone like Alice was sure to be a good influence on her.

This time, Kerberos the giant guard dog came running from the courtyard.

"Master!" he screamed as he dashed wildly toward me, suddenly braked to a stop, and looked up at me with sparkling eyes. "Welcome back, Master!"

"Glad to be back."

"Hey, Master! I protected the mansion the whole time you were gone!"

"Aww, did you?"

Kerberos looked at me with puppy-dog eyes, practically begging for praise. When I petted him, his tail wagged like mad.

Despite his giant size, he really was just a little puppy.

"Hehehe..."

"Is this another friend, Master?" Leia asked me.

"Huh? Uh, yeah... I'd call him a friend."

"Friend..."

"In a way, he's the one most like you. He's our dog-slash-friend, and you're a tool-slash-friend," I said, trying to sort of...add to what I'd said earlier.

When I denied her status as a tool, that was my feelings talking. But it was possible that she considered that part of her identity. Refusing it outright was probably a bad idea.

Upon hearing that they were so alike, Leia gazed at Kerberos intently.



Eventually, she turned to me again. It seemed like she was exuding a desire for praise, as well.

But she wouldn't say it. When she didn't say it, it seemed like she was trying to suppress that urge.

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"Leia."

"Yes?"

"If you want me to do something, just say it. Don't hold back."

"...Master."

"Yeah?"

Is she gonna say it? I thought.
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"Master!" Just then, Kerberos—who I'd yet to stop petting—tackled me. Unable to withstand a dog twice the size of a St. Bernard, I fell over.

He then started licking me. A very canine expression of love. My face was sticky and covered in saliva, but I didn't mind.

I felt eyes on me-Leia's eyes, looking down on me from the side.

I shuddered.

"W-Wait, Leia! Don't be-"

By the time I'd realized it, it was too late.

After that, I was subjected to much licking from both Kerberos and Leia.

## 189. A New Village

When I woke up and left my room in the morning, Emily appeared before me.

"Morning, Emily."

"Good morning. A letter came for you, Yoda."

"A letter? That's rare. Wonder who it's from."

"It's from the chief of Indole."

"Indole?" I accepted the letter, opened the envelope, and looked inside.

When I read the contents, I found that it was a letter of gratitude. It seemed the residents of Indole were overjoyed that Linus, former Dungeon Association chief of Methylene, had been removed from his post.

Even after I'd helped Indole and brought them under Cyclo's umbrella, Methylene had continued to harass them in various ways.

After all, it was originally under their jurisdiction.

Cities with dungeons often developed villages in empty places in the hopes that dungeons would appear there. Indole was one such village founded and supported by Methylene. But over time, Methylene started treating them worse. Until I intervened, that is.

The people of Indole even called me their benefactor.

The letter repeated the words "thank you" over and over again, no doubt a sign of how much grief they'd gone through.

"They still had to go through all this since then?" I asked her.

"It mentions that it wasn't enough to bother reporting to you."

"Just plain harassment, huh... How spiteful."

At least they didn't have to deal with that anymore. Methylene's new Dungeon Association chief was under Cell's influence, so that harassment would come to an end.

I'd be picking Aurum up this evening—after all, she'd been stuck in her dungeon while I was out—so I was excited to stop by Indole and give the villagers that good news.

☆

On B7 of Nihonium, I attached Leia and defeated a lightning-clad mummy using mainly flame rounds.

We tried to have her arm pick up the willpower seed it dropped, but unfortunately, it slipped through her hands just like anyone else's.

"I can't touch it. I'm sorry, Master."

"No worries. You can't help it; only I can touch them."

"Only you?"

"Yeah. I'm the only person in the world." I took the seed, and it disappeared in my hand, raising my stat by 1.

"The only person in all the world... You are incredible, Master."

"Don't let it get you down. Just help out in other ways, and that's more than enough."

"Understood. Then I will do this." Leia transformed one of her arms. The simple arm changed shape in complex ways until it became some kind of pattern.

"What is this?"

"A map of this floor. These are the locations where monsters are."

With my knowledge of the geography here, I realized that it was indeed a map of this floor.

Leia had lit up a few points on it, as well. I could tell that they marked monster locations.

"You can even do this?"

"I practiced it yesterday. This should be easier for you to understand."

"Yeah, it sure is. That helps a lot, Leia."

She didn't say a word, but I could tell she was happy.

While she couldn't pick up the seeds of Nihonium, she'd managed to devise a new technique to help instead.

A map I could always see was incredibly convenient. It was only a slight increase in efficiency, but it was basically twice as easy, because it only took up half of the usual mental space.

With the help of her extremely convenient abilities, I easily raised my willpower stat from B to A today.

☆

At midday, I went to Indole with Leia. There, I spoke with the village chief, who once again thanked me to no end.

He'd begged me to let him hold a big feast in my honor, but it was just too much, so I politely refused.

Now I strolled around the village with Leia.

Indole, village of gold. It was an impoverished village before, but thanks to the gold dust produced in Aurum, it was flourishing now.

Life had bloomed in it, and the construction boom continued even now. Before long, it would change from village to full-fledged city.

During just a quick stroll, I found bars, brothels, gambling halls, and other such places meant for people with fat wallets.

"This is the city Master made..."

"In name only. I haven't actually done any work as the Dungeon Association chief."

"But it is your city. How incredible it is that you own a city all to yourself, Master." Leia's words made me feel a little awkward.

We walked around a bit more until I found a beggar by the roadside. In a way, it suited a city.

As the village attracted people, trash began to pile up here and there. Their trash disposal wasn't keeping up with growth. The beggar looked awfully natural next to it.

One out of every few people walking by gave them some money—quite a bit more frequently than I was used to seeing. The gold rush really was filling everyone's pockets. They didn't hesitate at all to share.

Even beggars can make it in a place like this, I thought.

"Master."

"Yeah?"

"That is a monster."

"Huh?"

"An outsider," Leia said, just as emotionlessly as usual. Her eyes were fixed on the beggar.

"Really?"

She nodded firmly. "The same kind as your dog."

"As Kerberos... I see."

Leia could sense monsters. On top of that, she'd met our guard dog Kerberos

just yesterday, so she knew what he was like.

I looked at the beggar. They sure looked human to me, but if Leia said so, she must be right.

I approached the beggar. Nobody knew yet, but when they did, it could be disastrous.

This one had no collar like Kerberos's to prove they belonged to someone. If people learned they were an outsider, they'd likely be killed.

I had to protect them.

"Mind if we talk for a second?" I asked.

"Wh-What's going on?" The beggar looked up at me fearfully. He looked middle-aged, with tattered clothes and messy hair, like any other homeless beggar.

But I trusted Leia. I slowly pulled out two guns and fired two recovery rounds, fusing them into a sleep round.

The beggar fell asleep instantly. I put him in my magical pocket and left. It'd be bad if he struggled, so I took him to a place where we could talk comfortably.



We left Indole and went to an open clearing where nobody else was around. There, I took out the beggar and waited for him to awaken.

When he did, he looked around at his surroundings, terrified.

"Don't be scared. I'm on your side."

"Wh-What are you gonna do to me?!"

"I know you're an outsider."

He gasped and tried to run, but I seized his hand.

"L-Let me go!" he pleaded.

"Calm down. I said I'm on your side. If I wasn't, I would've just killed you there instead of putting you to sleep."

"Ah..." He stopped struggling, apparently convinced.

"Calm now? Can you tell me about yourself?"

Remembering Kerberos, I was ready to help if he needed it.

He thought for a moment before finally assenting. "Wh-Where do I begin...?"

"First, tell me what kind of monster you are. You just look human to me."

"I'm what's called a clayman." The moment he said that, the color drained from him, and he changed form. He'd turned into something like muddy clay.

"I see. You're the kind of monster that can shapeshift."

"Yes, sir."

"And you disguised yourself as a beggar to get gifts from the villagers."

"Yes... I'm the best at looking like normal humans. I can even adjust the figure I change into."

"I see." That made sense. Clayman—a man made out of mud. Of course. "The best? Do you mean there are others?"

"Yes... I have friends, but everyone else stands out like a sore thumb, so I do this for their sake."

That so?

"Everyone else? Are there many?" I pressed him.

"There are fifty-six of us in all."

"That's a lot! One beggar can't possibly feed that many mouths, right?"

"It's the only way. Any of the others would be killed on sight."

"Yeah..."

That was true of Kerberos, too. Using his canine features, he'd rummaged around in city trash and fled from people who approached.

Outsiders that gained near human self-awareness always ended up doing similar things.

I'd considered taking in this monster as well, but fifty-six extra mouths to feed were a fair few too many. They'd probably struggle to fit in the mansion. Hell, all three of my other homes wouldn't be able to house them.

If I wanted to do something, I'd have to rent a new home. Or build one, I guess.

I could build something like a dorm and have monsters like Kerberos and the clayman live there. Maybe making a dedicated home for them would be ideal.

"...Oh!"

Suddenly, I remembered something. The word "building" had reminded me of it.

The history of Indole, my position in it, everything led me to one solution.

I gazed at the clayman and said, "Let's build a village for outsiders."

"Huh? A-A village?"

"Yeah. I'm the Dungeon Association chief of this village, you know?"

"Whaaat?!"

"I can pay them money to have them build a village."

"R-Really?!"

"Yeah. It's a hassle if I use Dungeon Association money, though, so I'll use my own spare funds. I'm sure I can afford that much right now."

I told the dubious clayman many things. About the possibility that I could make it happen.

While I talked, I came up with a realistic plan. I could make ten million piros in a day if I tried, and I was the leader of the Dungeon Association. There are a lot of things I could do. Even if I was more cautious, there were still options left over.

After explaining that, I looked at him. "What do you say? You in?"

"Yes, sir!" The clayman returned to human form and held my hand tight and said, "Thank you!"

My hand hurt a little, as if hinting at all the pain and suffering he'd gone through to this point.

# 190. The Village Specialty

I went to Cell's office in the Cyclo Dungeon Association for a quick chat.

"Thanks to you, Sir Sato, Methylene is ours. I don't have the words to thank you."

"I'm amazed by how frankly you say that."

"I don't want to keep secrets from you, Sir Sato. Besides, I want to thank you properly."

"It's not like I did anything special... But if you say so, I do have a request."

"Go ahead. Ask me for anything."

"I want those collars that prove an outsider has an owner. Fifty-six of them."

"Understood," Cell promptly replied, rung the bell on his desk, and directed a subordinate to procure the collars. Said subordinate quickly left the room to see it done. They both moved fast.

"You're not gonna ask why?"

"I know you, Sir Sato. No doubt you're saving someone in trouble again."

"Someone in trouble, huh?"

"Indeed. Someone was in trouble, and someone with the power to help was there." Those were the words he had kept saying since we'd first met. To be fair, that described my usual deeds to a T. "I have no need to pry into the details."

"Guess not."

"But there is one thing I worry about."

"What is it?"

"I'm well aware that you have the power to help others, but I do wonder if that may lead to spoiling them in the process."

"...I'll keep that in mind."

☆

I left Cyclo and went back to the mansion, where I used the warp room to go to Indole via Aurum.

I walked through the village, flourishing with both people and goods, lively and chaotic, and thought to myself:

Spoiling them, huh? I do think I'm being careful enough to avoid letting that happen. But maybe this time it might end that way.

Like Kerberos, these monsters had learned how to exchange ideas with humans. They could interact normally with people, but there was one big problem: they couldn't enter dungeons.

No matter what, if a monster entered or exited a dungeon while in monster form, it would disappear. Even dungeon spirits like Aurum were no exception.

To take a monster out of a dungeon, you had to turn them into a drop and then respawn them as an outsider.

So they couldn't go into dungeons. In a world where everything dropped from dungeons, that was a fatal flaw. That was why my original plan was to essentially remake old Indole.

Using my authority as Dungeon Association chief, I'd use my own money to build a village and support them. I could do that, yes, but Cell was right; it might end up spoiling them.

Though in the case of the clayman and his friends, that might be inevitable.

"Can I just call it inevitable and leave it at that, though?"

Cell's words left me lost. Because of that, I didn't watch my step. I accidentally stepped on some of the extra trash and slipped. Fortunately, my honed abilities and high physical specs allowed me to quickly perform a backflip and land right on my feet.

"Oooh!" Passersby applauded my acrobatics.

I was a little embarrassed. I picked up the banana peel that had caused me to slip and threw it into the pile of trash nearby.

"...Oh!"

When I saw it, I remembered something.

☆

About a thirty-minute walk from Indole, I met fifty-six monsters led by the clayman. They were a diverse gathering of monsters, but none of them were hostile or malicious.

Like the clayman and Kerberos, they could communicate; they'd awakened to logic and intelligence.

There was a stir as they looked at me.

When I approached, the clayman stepped forth as their representative.

"M-Mr. Sato," he greeted me.

"Sorry for the wait."

"Umm... Who are the people behind you?"

I glanced back. There were three wagons operated by six people altogether. They were from Indole, but that could wait.

"First, take this." I took a collar out of the sack I was carrying and handed it to the clayman. "Put it somewhere on your body. As long as you don't attack anyone, they won't hurt you."

The clayman accepted the collar and looked confused. "W-Won't I be attacked by normal people?"

"Don't worry about that."

Like with Kerberos, it was proof that these monsters were my pets. Knowing my reputation, nobody would dare pick a fight with me.

I didn't say why, but I made my confidence clear. That seemed to convince the clayman.

He accepted the collars and began distributing them to other monsters.

The demi-human and animal-like monsters wore them like normal collars, but the insects and slimes struggled to find a place for them. As for the gaseous and ghost monsters, they incorporated the collars into themselves, making them kind of look like cores. Those were funny.

Once everyone had a collar, I spoke to the clayman again. "Now, we plan to make a village for you all here. But there's a job I need you to do."

"A job? I-Is there work that we can do?"

"Yeah," I replied confidently and gestured to the people in the carriages.

One carriage came forward and dropped its cargo heavily onto the ground.

It was trash—the trash that had been piling up all over Indole.

"Wh-What's this?"

"Destroy it for us. Doesn't matter how you do it."

"What is the meaning of this?"

"The human world has workers that dispose of trash to keep it from being left alone long enough to become outsiders. You probably know this, but Indole is starting to get covered in trash. People are coming in too fast for garbage disposal to keep up."

"Oh! I did notice..."

"You asked if there was work you could do. You can do this, right?"

"...Yes, sir!" the clayman confirmed. Some of the monsters listening stepped forth right away.

They attacked the garbage unloaded from the carriage. Those monsters were ones naturally skilled at attacking, so their all-out attack blew the pile of trash away in no time.

I handed the clayman an envelope I'd filled with cash ahead of time.

"This is market price payment for the trash you just disposed of."

Market price payment. Indeed, I'd chosen to give him market value for the work.

Because of what Cell had told me, I stuck strictly to that.

The clayman accepted it. Other monsters approached and gasped as they

looked upon it. Almost all of them—save for the ones that didn't really have facial expressions—looked emotional.

Before long, the monsters all cheered and shouted, "Thank you!"

## 191. Village Produce

When I took Aurum out of her dungeon and back to the mansion, Kerberos came sprinting down the hallway at me. His tail was wagging, and he was clearly happy. I wondered if something good—

"Master!"

"Whoa!"

Before I could even finish that thought, he tackled me and knocked me on my butt. Then, he got on top of me and started licking my face all over.

Full-on, instinctual affection. Cute, especially coming from my own dog, but...

I sure wish he'd take it easy, given his massive size.

"Slow down, Kerberos. Calm down a little and move for a sec, okay?" I pushed his face back with my hands, pushed the giant dog off, and sat up. "What's gotten into you, big guy?"

"I heard you made a village for us, Master!"

"Us? Oh!"

Did he mean the clayman and the others? Maybe that did warrant an "us" from his perspective. Kerberos and the clayman had similar backgrounds, after all.

I'd taken Kerberos in since he was just one dog, but the others were a small army, so I'd made a village for them. That was the only difference.

"You already heard all that? From who?"

"The doll guy!"

"Doll guy...?" Who is that supposed to be?

"Isn't that the Cell guy?" Aurum said next to me.

Oh... Doll guy. My eyes glazed over slightly. I don't wanna be mean over people's hobbies, but can't he find a new one? Probably not.

"Thank you, Master!"

"C'mon, it's not worth your thanks."

"Say, Master, is it okay if I go play with them sometimes?"

"To that village? I don't mind, but it's far." I turned around and looked at the warp room.

I'd just come back from there by using the dungeon Aurum as a warp point to travel from Indole. It was pretty far from Cyclo.

"It's okay," Kerberos assured me. "I know where it is, so I can go there on my morning walk."

"He must have a lot of leg strength!" Aurum commented.

"Maybe you're right," I replied to Kerberos. "Okay. Just make sure you don't get in trouble with anyone, got it?" I figured nothing would happen since he had the collar, but it would be disastrous if something *did* happen, so I warned him just in case.

"Yeah! Thanks, Master!" Kerberos jumped on me again and resumed his licking.

The next day, after I'd taken Aurum back to her dungeon, I decided to stop by the clayman's village.

Loads of trash were gradually brought from Indole, and the monsters would destroy it through various means.

Though I called it a village, it was a monster village. There were basically no buildings; the whole area was surrounded by a fence, and they just made their own holes and igloo-like buildings and the like on their own.

In the midst of it, I found the clayman and approached. "Looks like things are going well."

"Mr. Sato!" The humanoid clayman ran over to me with a happy look on his face.

"How's it going?"

"Great! Everyone is so good at breaking things up...save for a few of us."

"A few?"

"Look there." With a wry grin, the clayman pointed at a place rather far from the disposal efforts. There were a few rocks there—monsters from Arsenic.

These rocks would never attack, even in Arsenic itself. Due to their traits, they were turned into outsiders for use in magic carts.

"Nothing you can do about that, I guess," I chuckled.

"Right. We're all friends, so we'll do just fine."

"I hope so."

"Kyu kyu!" something cried. I noticed there was something at my feet.

"Hm?"

When I looked down, I saw a slime pressing up against me. It was the same as B1 of Tellurium's slimes, an outsider spawned from bean sprouts. It made a cute face as it pushed against my leg.

I squatted down and petted it, prompting it to rub its body against me even more happily.

Well, it is a slime. Does that count as rubbing its cheek against me? I thought to myself with a gentle smile.



"Come to think of it, Master Sato, we found something strange."

"Something strange?"

"Yes. The earliest riser among us found it. Nobody can touch it, though, and we're unsure what to do about it."

"Hmm. Show me where it is."

"Okay!" the clayman assented and guided me through the village.

The slime stayed at my feet, so I picked it up to avoid stepping on it by accident.

Other monsters welcomed me with cheers and shouts when they saw me. Amidst their welcomes, the clayman took me to the center of the village.

"Here it is." He showed me a ball of light. That was really the only way to describe it. It floated in midair at about waist height. "Like I said, we can't touch it at all. It's fine for now, but it's a little eerie..."

"I see." I approached the orb of light and looked at it close-up from all angles. But it was just...an orb of light. No other thoughts came to mind.

For the sake of this village, I had to do something about it.

I took a deep breath, reached my hand out, and touched the orb of light.

Instantly after, the light dispersed. Engulfed in the dazzling light, I heard someone's voice in my mind.

Thank you. It wasn't just one voice; it was a whole group of them, like the whole class at a graduation ceremony.

Then, the light subsided, and the orb deflated. What was once basketball-sized had shrunk down to the size of a marble.

"Wh-What's happening?" the clayman worried.

"I think I know." I showed the clayman what I'd suddenly been holding—what had appeared in my hand when the orb of light shrunk.

A bullet. It was a bullet like I'd use in my guns, but it was unlike any of the ones I'd used so far.

My intuition told me it was some kind of special bullet. It also told me one more—no, two more things.

This was a product of the village. Not a drop, but something the outsider monsters had produced.

And on top of that, the ball of light was smaller, but it hadn't disappeared. With the passage of time, it would probably grow bigger. When I returned and touched it again, I'd get a new bullet.

Intuition told me it was probably like that.

#### 192. Acceleration Round

The next day, I received another of the same bullet in the outsider village.

The ball of light would shrink when I took a bullet from it, and it would return to its previous size after a day had passed, so I judged that it was probably a once per day sort of thing. That might be wrong, of course, but I'd just have to check as I went.

With two of these new bullets, I went to a deserted area on the outskirts of the village. When it came to testing bullets, it was best to do it in an empty place until I knew what they did.

Nihonium would be a perfectly fine candidate, but I had some important goals in mind there. I wanted to raise my remaining stats to SS, find the sword to match the mirror and magatama, and meet the dungeon spirit. I didn't want to do anything crazy there until I'd accomplished those things.

Incidentally, I'd left Leia behind for now. This might be dangerous, so I came alone.

I put a single bean sprout down and walked away. After a while, it created an outsider slime.

I loaded the new bullet, aimed carefully, and pulled the trigger.

I'd never miss a mere slime, but I made sure to aim carefully. The bullet pierced through the middle of the slime—and then just disappeared. The slime itself was unharmed.

"Is it like a recovery round, or-agh!" Suddenly, I felt a powerful impact in the

pit of my stomach. It felt like someone had just hit me as hard as they could.

I quickly realized why: instantly before the impact, the slime had disappeared as well.

Its tackle struck my torso perfectly. I jumped back to retreat—before promptly being struck in the back of the head.

My vision went white for a moment. My head pounded, and I saw stars.

I gritted my teeth and stood firm.

From the rapid succession of attacks and the meager signs I picked up through my eyes and ears, I understood that the slime was attacking at super speed–faster than even I could keep up with.

The cause was clearly that bullet.

An acceleration round, or something?

I had one more bullet. If it really was an acceleration round, then firing it into myself should help me fight off the slime. But I wanted to test it more. I wasn't certain it was an acceleration round, after all.

As such, I decided to fight the slime off as-is for now.

In the meantime, I felt an impact on the side of my face. It cut the inside of my mouth, filling it with the taste of metal.

I closed my eyes, took a deep breath, and calmed down. Honed my nerves.

Something touched my right flank. With a motion even faster than a spinal reflex, I dropped an elbow on it. This blow, the result of honing all of my nerves to the fullest, launched the slime and blew it to smithereens.

"Phew..."

That was probably the hardest I'd ever struggled against a slime. It was even harder than when I'd first come into this world with no skills to my name.

☆

Armed with some new information, I went to B1 of Nihonium.

I loaded the other acceleration round (tentative name) into a gun and fired it into myself as I would a recovery round.

The world changed. Everything turned quiet.

It's hard to give a comparison, but I'd consider "quiet" to be "the sound of silence." That was how I'd experienced it to this point.

But this quiet was different—not a sound at all. It was that soundless state where everything, even the air, had stopped.

If this was the first shot, I'd think it had stopped time. But because I'd used it on the slime first and saw how it rampaged, I considered it super-acceleration.

I readied a gun and fired the normal bullet inside. The bullet...flew out sluggishly. It looked like a trash round flying at normal speed, like a video playing frame by frame.

Time hadn't stopped; it had just slowed down a ton.

I fired all kinds of bullets rapidly, lining them up with the normal bullet.

It was then that I noticed something interesting. There was a difference in the distance each bullet progressed—in other words, they moved at different speeds.

The slowest was obviously the trash round. It was already slow, but while I was accelerated, it looked like it was just fixed in midair. The fastest was, surprisingly, the recovery round. From the same starting line, it had taken an early lead.

But that didn't last long.

The homing round, which had been slow until then, changed its trajectory and began flying toward a skeleton in the distance. It had become the fastest of all the bullets now that it had found a target.

The accelerated state continued.

I went over to the skeleton, which was nearly frozen like everything else.

In the time it took me to slowly walk seventy feet over, it could only move enough to open its closed mouth wide enough to fit a single finger in.

I punched the skeleton as hard as I could, blowing its skull to smithereens. Normally, it would die and drop something—but that didn't happen. Its head was blown off, but it did not die, and it did not drop anything.

"...Huh. I'm so fast that it takes time for the drop to come."

I punched the skeleton more. It wouldn't die or drop anything, so I punched it all over.

Arms, torso, legs—I crushed it from head to toe, but it just remained debris in midair as the bone fragments fell to the ground in slow motion.

Eventually, the bullet's effect ended, and my speed returned to normal. The skeleton bits flew all over, and it dropped—

"Whoa!" I dodged the bullets flying at me.

The bullets I'd fired earlier and forgotten about finally came. I smoothly

evaded them without incident.

I knew its general effect now. Indeed, the bullet was worth calling an acceleration round. I ruminated on its effects and the results of my testing and evaluated it.

"Basically the perfect weapon against strong enemies, but useless for farming."

Strong, but very specialized. It could be very fun if I used it well.

## 193. The Limits of Reflexes

The next day, I went to B7 of Nihonium.

I'd finished my rough acceleration round testing from yesterday. When I went to bed, I found myself unsatisfied by my conclusions and immediately sat right back up.

Strong against powerful foes, but not meant for farming—was that really true? In order to find out, I'd gone to the village first thing in the morning to pick up a new acceleration round and then come here.

I was currently in invincibility mode thanks to the Absolute Rock pebble.

Invincible, I walked around the floor and gathered monsters. There was an upper limit to how many monsters could exist on each floor. That was why Nihonium, a place with no other adventurers but me, wasn't constantly overflowing with them.

I walked around while they all attacked me, gathering them in one place before I began my testing.

I backed off from the lightning mummies, released my invincibility status, and took Leia out of my pocket. Then, I fired an acceleration round into her.

I knew from my first test on the slime that it worked on people other than me.

"Ngh..." I felt a slight impact—Leia attaching herself to me. She'd done it while in super-speed mode, so it was a lot more forceful than usual.

Speed is a component of force, after all, so more speed equals more force.

But she wasn't attacking me on purpose, so I patiently withstood it.

Instantly after, her four arms stretched forth and fired normal bullets.

She fired wildly, her arms moving so fast that they left afterimages—no, what looked like *clones*—and mowed down the mummies with a barrage of flame rounds. It was a super-speed all-range attack.

I thought to myself while I watched her massacre them with speed too fast to follow.

There were a few reasons I had her do it.

First was to get a grasp of how long it lasted. It was extremely hard to discern the duration when I was going at super speed. It accelerated one's perception of time, making it entirely different. And for things like these, effect duration was a vital part of the equation.

I watched the arm motions carefully and appraised their speed. To convert it to stats, it was like SSS... No, SSSS... Maybe even SSSSS speed. That was just how fast it was.

I'd experienced it myself, so I knew that being in the accelerated state was like a pseudo-time stop.

Anything made possible by stopping time was made possible by these acceleration rounds. That made the duration even more important.

While I thought about it, the mummies all died. Her arms were still moving, still at super speed.

There were no more monsters.

The speed she'd defeated that giant group was even faster than I could with Repetition.

Repetition was absolute, but it was still a single-target spell. Using it on such a large group would take longer since I'd have to cast it on one monster at a time.

Hmm. Looks like it's not so bad for farming after all.

The arms kept moving. I started to feel bad leaving Leia with nothing to do. Though, since she was going at super speed, I couldn't exactly offer her anything to do. She wouldn't be able to hear it.

Wait. I recalled the first time I'd tried using her arms—when I'd walked around the dungeon and let her handle everything. Leia's arms, or rather Leia herself, were connected directly to me. I could give her orders just by thinking.

No human, no matter how fast they talked or acted, could go faster than thought.

It's like how people's lives flash before their eyes before they die. Brain processing speed is overwhelmingly fast.

I thought, and Leia immediately acted. Her four arms fired normal rounds at the wall in rapid succession.

After gunfire faster than that of a machine gun, she'd drawn a hexagram in the wall with bullet holes. That was what I'd imagined—what I'd asked her to do.

This time, I had her draw a manga character at a child's drawing level. She ended up making a cute, one-stroke drawing on the wall.

This test made it clear: my thoughts moved as fast as super-speed Leia!

Maybe there were cases where it would be better to use the bullet on Leia instead of me. With that decided, I raised my mental utility rating of the acceleration rounds up a notch.

Incidentally, the duration was about a minute. Even more useful than I'd



## 194. Jumping to Conclusions, Accelerated

I farmed mummies on B7 of Nihonium with Leia's help.

She fused with me as protectors and extra arms. That was already very useful, but I continued searching for ways to use her even more. There were lots of things we could do. After all, I basically had six arms now thanks to her four.

However, it was Nihonium we were in, so I couldn't use four of those arms to finish off the enemies.

So I tried things out within that restriction. Along the way, we figured out a pattern and tried carrying it out to the fullest.

"Master, 75 degrees to the right."

"Got it!" I whipped around and finished off a mummy, which Leia had frozen the legs of, with a freeze round.

"180 degrees behind."

"Then I'll do this!" I turned just my upper body and finished off another frozen-legged mummy.

Leia froze them in place, and I finished them off.

It wasn't quite the same as simply weakening them; we focused on making her *stop* them. I occasionally finished them with flame rounds, and if they were far enough for me to fuse bullets, then I'd sometimes use annihilation rounds instead.

We started with freezing the legs and tried out various strategies after that

point. After all, freezing the legs was something we could do in any situation. It wouldn't be a waste at all to optimize what came next.

"Master."

"Yeah?"

"Is this necessary? You can defeat them in one blow on your own, can't you?"

"It's a bad habit of mine. I like to take skills that aren't stat-related—in games, you call those personal skills—and master them. Sorry, but I gotta drag you along."

"Understood. I am willing to obey any order of yours. You don't need to apologize."

"Thanks."

Leia and I went around the dungeon together. We created various patterns beginning with shooting them in the legs. Along the way, we repeated and practiced a few of those patterns.

I could feel myself gaining muscle memory as we repeated them.

"Okay, that'll do," I decided.

"That was enough, Master?"

"Yeah," I confirmed and picked up a willpower seed that had just dropped.

Sensing that I'd probably reached the next rank, I checked a portable status board.



Indeed, my willpower stat had gone up to S. Today's quota was complete.

There wasn't any special meaning behind it, but I generally liked to raise stats by one rank each time I came in here. Personally, I think that sort of satisfaction is necessary for repetitive farming.

Since I'd accomplished that for today, it was about time to leave.

"Normally, this would be the max," I muttered casually to myself. Suddenly, I became emotional.

The feeling that I'd come so far welled up from the depths of my heart.

My willpower stat would max out at SS before long, but not right now. So I'd leave it at S for now and focus my efforts on B8. Was the next one dexterity or luck? The question excited me.

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"Master."
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<sup>&</sup>quot;Yeah?"

<sup>&</sup>quot;I've observed an unidentifiable phenomenon."

"A what now?"

"The number of monsters is increasing and decreasing."

"Don't they always do that?"

"...Allow me to rephrase that." Leia's tone turned serious. "They're increasing for a mere instant before decreasing again."

"Hmm?" That did sound strange. What could cause that to happen? "Is someone killing them? No... Margaret's gang are the only others who come here. I've never seen anyone else in Nihonium. Even Margaret never goes past B1."

I'd been in this world for a while now, and I'd been in Nihonium for almost as long. I had no recollection of any adventurers from B2 onward.

A dropless dungeon in a world where everything dropped in dungeons—the result of that combination was, naturally, that nobody came here at all.

"Just to be sure, you don't sense anyone else here?" I asked.

"No, Master," Leia said confidently. She could sense adventurers to an extent, just like monsters.

"Do you know where they're appearing? Heck, is it just one place?"

"This way." Her arm stretched forth to point in a direction. I followed. "Here."

"It just looks like a dead end to me."

"They've reduced."

"Hm? You mean it just went up and back down again?"

"Yes."

"I didn't see anything. Could it be that you're mistaken... Nah, doubt it."

Looking back, I doubted that would happen to Leia. She had a robotic side—not just in terms of attitude, but in terms of performance. When I ordered her to freeze the mummies' legs, she'd dutifully shoot them all in the ankle with freeze rounds.

She simply did not make mistakes.

It'd be best to assume that something was happening, and she was sensing whatever it was.

"...You say they only increase for an instant?"

"Yes."

"Does that happen with regularity?"

"Yes," she responded immediately. Quite robotic as well.

"Okay. Tell me five seconds before it's about to happen next."

"Understood." I waited there for a while for Leia to give the signal.

Eventually...

"Five seconds."

"Got it."

I slowly pulled out a gun and fired a bullet into myself. It was a fresh acceleration round I'd just harvested this morning.

The instant I fired it into myself, the world almost stopped.

In the accelerated world, I waited for five real-time seconds to pass. A naked zombie appeared in front of me.

A zombie with no skin, muscles out on display. It was a few dozen times grosser than your average hospital anatomical model.

I didn't waste any time thinking; I moved reflexively.

Even in this pseudo-time stop, the zombie had already begun to disappear rapidly after its appearance.

I punched as hard as I could. Why not use a gun? Because the mummy would disappear before the bullet could land. I could only use my hyper-accelerated body, so I punched as hard as possible.

The zombie faded even more. *Come on, make it in time!* I prayed as I swung my fist, but I felt nothing.

I looked at where the zombie had been. Nothing was there.

"Too slow, huh? Shame. I'll just have to try again tomorrow." I got one acceleration round every day, so I'd just have to try again the next day.

With that decided, I waited sixty real-time seconds for the acceleration effect to end.

Just then, the air in front of me glowed a little. Even the glow was slow. Gradually, something began to float amidst the light.

Oh... Right.

I'd defeated the zombie, but during the accelerated effect, it just felt like a long time before the drop came out.

With a wry grin, I waited for it to finish dropping.

## 195. Two Million and Twenty Thousand

What had dropped in the accelerated world was a sword—one rusty sword.

Unlike longswords, daggers, and the like—which used different materials for handle and blade—this one used the same material for both.

It looked as if it had been carved from a single hunk of metal. Next to it was a woman, figure-sized and wearing a ceremonial kimono. She stared fixedly at me in slowed time.

"Aha... You mean that's the one?" I asked. She nodded quietly in response to my murmuring.

The mirror, the magatama, and now this sword... They were clearly the Three Sacred Treasures. And here, on the seventh of nine floors, I had obtained a rusty sword.

"Are you telling me to clear the next two floors?"

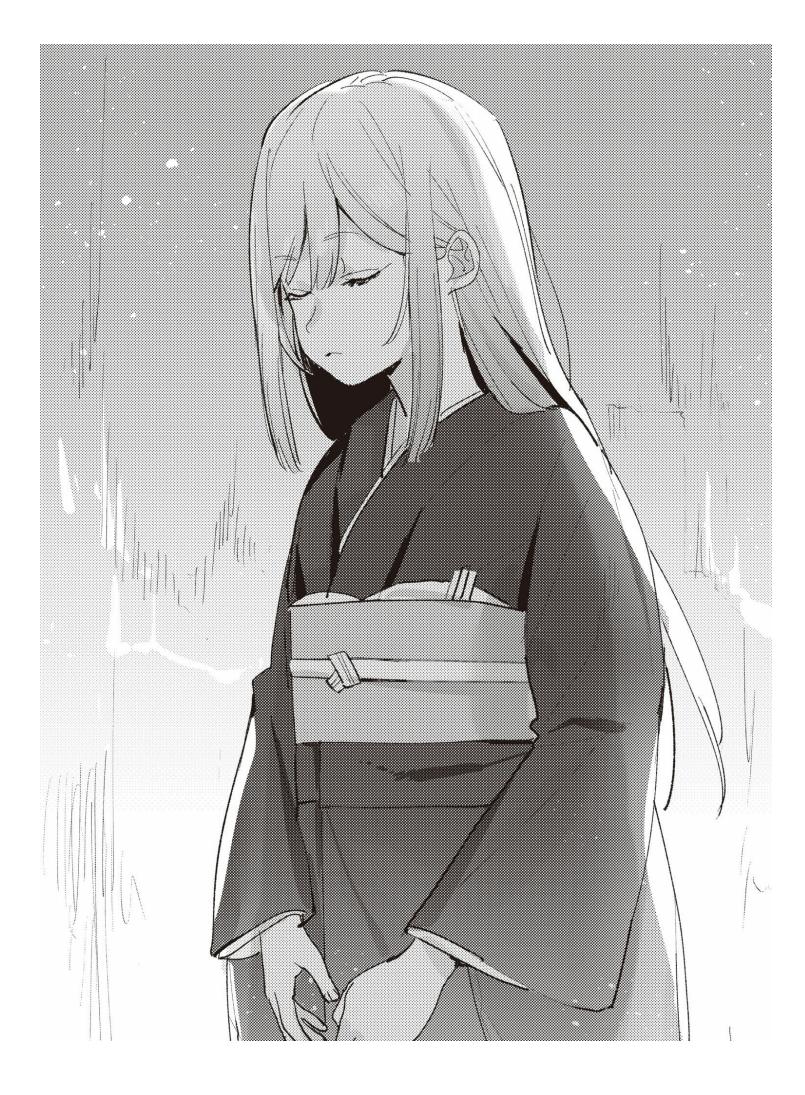
She quietly nodded again and smiled.

That was it, then. I didn't know what the exact process was, but if I cleared the remaining two floors, then this sword would regain its original luster.

I predicted that, and the woman—Nihonium—had confirmed it.

"Got it. Wait just a little longer for me."

She disappeared with a sweet smile on her face.



I took the sword and decided to deposit it in my pocket until the time came.

Come to think of it, I wonder...

Through obtaining the mirror, I had raised the limits of my HP, strength, and vitality from S to SS. MP, speed, and intelligence had likewise had their limits increased by the magatama.

Surely the sword raised the remaining three.

Back when I'd tried to leave the dungeon earlier, I'd assumed I couldn't go to SS because I didn't have this sword. Obtaining it in its original state would surely raise my remaining caps to SS, but what about this rusty one?

Curious, I found a mummy in the accelerated world and insta-killed it.

The seed...did not drop immediately, of course, leaving me impatient.

Hurry... Hurry!

After a while, the acceleration effect cut off, and the seed dropped.

"Master?" Leia asked dubiously, but I ignored her for the moment and picked up the seed.

#### Ryota's willpower went up by 0!

My caps hadn't gone up yet.

It seemed I really did need the sword's unblemished form to unlock the final three SS caps.

In the afternoon, I farmed in Tellurium as usual, but this farming was a little different from my morning Nihonium farm.

Leia could pick up Tellurium drops. In fact, it was more efficient to have her do it.

I went back to the mansion and asked Erza for my total.

"Today's total is 2,140,000 piros," she confirmed.

I was unsurprised. That was fine; not every day could be perfect. Trying new things comes with failure, and more importantly, that had taught me that today's method wasn't the most efficient.

But I wasn't quite over it. It was bad enough that Erza saw it on my face and worried, "You look sullen. Is something wrong?"

"Yeah, I was just trying some new things out today, and it looks like they didn't work out."

"It's still incredible to make over two million piros in a day."

"You're right, but I have Leia now. I want to keep aiming higher."

"Ryota... You are amazing." Erza looked at me with respect and emotion.

I didn't think it was that big a deal. If anything, it was just me being overly competitive with myself.

Her looking at me like that made me feel a little guilty. I tried to find the words to brush her off, but help came unexpectedly.

"Master!" It was Kerberos.

"Looks like I'm needed. Be right back."

"Okay!"

I escaped Erza's little office and went to the courtyard. When I got there, I found not just Kerberos, but the clayman as well.

"What's up?" I asked them.

"A report for you, Master!"

"A report?" I cocked my head and looked back and forth between them.

The clayman stepped forth, gazed at me, and said, "We finished our work today without issue and received our reward."

"Yeah? That's great."

"I talked with the others, and we decided to bring you this." He held out an envelope.

When I looked inside, there were two 10,000-piro notes.

"What's this?" I asked.

"The remainder after we took everyone's cut out of the reward."

"It's for you, Master!" Kerberos chimed in.

"Hey, you don't have to do-"

With a sincere look, the clayman cut me off, "We can live our lives quietly there now. All of it is thanks to you, Mr. Sato, and we want to show our gratitude."

"He says he wants to do what Indole does!" Kerberos added.

"What Indole does... You mean the taxes?"

Indole did regularly send transfers to my bank account to this day. They donated a portion of their tax revenue as the village of gold, and it seemed the

clayman's village wanted to do the same.

"Really?" I appreciated the thought, and refusing felt bad, so I accepted the 20,000 piros. "Sure. I accept."

"I'll come by to deliver more every day," the clayman said.

"Isn't that kind of a pain?"

"Not for our legs."

"I see. You are monsters; I guess your stamina is greater than the average human's." I thought for a moment and asked the two of them to wait. Then, I went into the mansion to see Erza. "Sorry, Erza. Mind canceling a portion of the sale for me?"

"Sure, that's fine. What would you like to cancel?"

"A little of everything... About 200,000 piros worth."

"Understood."

After that, I put the 200,000 piros worth of veggies in my pocket and went back to the courtyard.

There, I took the veggies out of my pocket and put them in front of the clayman.

"Here. Take it."

"Huh? Are you okay with that?"

"Doesn't matter what I think, does it? You earned it." I smiled.

The clayman was a little hesitant, but he smiled back and answered, "Thank you. Everyone's going to be overjoyed."

He picked up the 200,000 piros worth of veggies on his own and left the

mansion.

That's a monster outsider for you.

After we saw him off, Kerberos said, "Master, you're too kind!"

"You think?"

"And generous!"

"They have almost no money, after all."

"It's still incredible!" Kerberos said and wagged his tail as he pounced on me.

"Maybe."

The Cerberus monster's giant form was a little heavy, but I didn't mind.

And so, along with Indole, I began to receive tax revenue from the village of monsters as well.

# 196. One Man's Junk Magic...

In the afternoon, I passed on dungeoneering for the day and relaxed in the mansion living room. Celeste and Leia relaxed alongside me.

Celeste had taken today off due to a magic storm, and Leia naturally didn't have any work to do since I wasn't working.

"Are you sure you don't want to go to the dungeons today?" Celeste asked between bites of Emily's homemade sweets.

"It's fine," I replied. "Today's my day off. I decided to make another rule for myself."

"What is it?"

"You know how I only work until 5:00 PM most days?"

"Most days, yes," Celeste agreed.

We'd casually added the phrase "most days" to that rule. She knew well that I would break said rule if I had a good reason.

"Well, I've decided to give myself two days off each week as well."

"Two days off?"

"I've always dreamed of a two-day weekend, taking days off according to the calendar. Before, I might as well have thought Saturday and Sunday were no different from the rest of the week."

"I don't really understand, but resting is a good thing. That means I get to spend time with you..."

"Hm? Did you say something, Celeste?"

"No. Nothing." Celeste smiled sweetly.

She seemed to get prettier by the day lately. Not cute, or anything—but pretty. It was like she'd put all of her stats into beauty. And when you put her in a beautiful, palace-like home maintained by Emily herself, that was overkill, like killing a fly with a shotgun.

Hmm. That's not a very pretty simile, is it? Maybe giving a tiger wings? Giving Benkei a naginata? Putting the Mona Lisa as your default Windows background?

None of them really worked, and the last one really made me doubt my sanity, but she was amazing either way. I was all but entranced by her.

"Perhaps 'giving Master a gun' would suffice?"

"Huh?" I made a dumb sound at Leia's sudden suggestion. "What are you talking about?"

"The answer to your question, Master. I consider it an apt metaphor for a situation where someone powerful has happened upon a strong weapon and becomes uncontrollable."

"Giving Ryota a gun... I like that saying!"

"No, no, no, stop. I get what you're saying, but be careful where you say that. If a certain nobleman hears that saying, I'm done for."

"Cell would probably spread it all around the world in a day, huh?"

"Yes. So please stop."

He'd probably do that, too. He would make that stupid saying an actual trend in no time.

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He's not listening in right now, is he? I looked all around. I glanced out the windows. Fortunately, Cell was not in sight.

Suddenly, my rest day had become anything but restful.

"By the way... What are Leia's stats like?" Celeste asked.

"Huh?"

"You don't know?"

"Now that you mention it..." I looked at Leia. This late in the game, I realized that I'd never checked. "I do know that she's what they'd call a Failure. What about your combat stats, Leia?"

"I'm afraid I don't know."

"Okay, use this." Celeste handed over a portable status board.

I played along and directed Leia to use it.

Level 1/1
HP F
MP F
Strength F
Vitality F
Intelligence F
Willpower F
Speed F
Dexterity F
Luck F

Plants F
Animals F
Minerals F
Magic F
Special F

"Oof," I winced.

Leia's stats were all Fs from start to finish. Combat, drops, F across the board. And her level was stuck at a max of 1, so there was nothing that we could do about it. "I'm sorry I made you do this, Leia."

"Hm? Why are you apologizing, Master?"

"Umm, well... Forget it."

Leia didn't seem bothered by it. Far from it, she didn't even understand why I'd apologized.

Her reaction was sad in its own right. It broke my heart as someone who knew how artificial life-forms were created from souls with the emotions extracted.

But I did my best to not worry about it. Going any further would just imprint my emotions onto her.

"It's nothing," I brushed it off. "More importantly, with these stats, I think it's best you keep focusing on supporting me."

"Yes, Master."

"I'm counting on you, Leia."

"Anything for your sake."

"More importantly, Ryota?" Celeste spoke up.

"Hm? What's up, Celeste?"

"If her maximum level is 1, wouldn't that mean she's free to eat magic fruit like you?"

"...Oh?" I put my hands together in realization. I hadn't realized it before, but the natural-born mage Celeste had figured it out immediately.

Despite its harsh drawbacks, magic fruit allowed you to learn a spell at random. And for some, those drawbacks were nonexistent.

☆

In the mansion basement, I left the magic fruit I'd just bought on the floor.

I backed away with Celeste. Leia was attached to me.

After a while, the magic fruit spawned an outsider. The liquid metal monster quickly morphed to resemble me.

"Here we go, Leia."

"Yes, Master," Leia replied, her voice emotionless. We then fought Metal Ryota.

Just as I had Leia attached, he also extended a protector-clad arm.

Against this monster, which copied 80% of my strength, I fired off a Repetition. I'd just wanted to see if he would copy Leia's arms. I never actually intended to fight him alongside her. Now that I had my answer, I insta-killed him with Repetition.

Metal Ryota dropped a magic fruit. Before I'd made it an outsider, the fruit had one hexagram. But the one dropped by the outsider had two.

"Back to normal, Leia." I picked up the fruit and had her detach. Then, I put the magic fruit in her hand. "Eat it."

"Yes, Master." She obediently ate the magic fruit. Seeing her eat expressionlessly was surreal.

After a while, she finished it.

"I've learned two magic spells," she declared.

"Ooh!"

"So she can learn them."

Celeste and I nodded at each other. It seemed even Leia could learn magic by eating magic fruit.

"What spells are they? Try using them," I urged her.

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"I cannot."
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"Huh?"

"The spells I learned were Inferno and Raging Mist. Neither can be used with F-rank MP."

"Ah..."

"Right... There are almost no spells usable at F-rank MP."

Celeste and I gazed at each other again. Disappointment was clear in our eyes.

Eating a magic fruit reduced your level and made it so you could never level up again. For people like me and Leia, with maximum levels of 1, it was impossible for that drawback to activate. That was why I'd had her eat it.

But it required MP to use magic. At the lowest rank of F, most spells were useless.

"Here I thought this might work..." Celeste sighed.

"No... I think it just might," I replied.

"Hm?"

"It just means she has to eat magic fruit until she learns elementary magic."

"Wait, Ryota. Magic fruit costs two million piros a pop! And the spells you learn are random. That's a really expensive lottery!"

"Let me share some wisdom a colleague of mine imparted to me."

"Wh-What is it?" Celeste was overwhelmed.

I said to her, "If you keep pulling until you win, your success rate is 100%."

"That sounds like a gambling addict's words!" she cried.

I ignored her screams, went back into the city, and bought more magic fruit.

We spawned an outsider with the second one and once again killed it with Repetition. Then, I had Leia eat the resulting magic fruit.

```
"I've learned two magic spells."
  "What are they?"
  "Calamity's End."
  "That sounds insane! You can't use that one, can you?"
  "I cannot."
  "And the other?"
  "Revive."
  "Revive... Magic that saves people from death? That sounds incredible too, so
I doubt you can actually use it."
  "Ryota..." Celeste watched with a painful look. That was the pain of someone
watching a 2,000,000-piro gacha roll instantly fail and waste the money put into
it.
  Too bad. I'm gonna keep rolling. Now for the next magic fruit...
  But just then, Leia spoke up.
  "I can."
  "Huh?"
  "I can use Revive," Leia said. Celeste and I were both surprised.
  "You can? Isn't it like an amazing spell?" I asked.
```

"Ah..." Celeste gasped.

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"Celeste?"
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"I just remembered how Revive works! Maybe she can use that after all..."

"Really?"

"Yes. People call it 'junk magic.' Normally, it's the worst of the worst."

"Normally?"

Celeste nodded. After telling us to wait a moment, she left the basement before coming right back.

For some reason, she had a carrot.

She handed it over to Leia. "Try using it on this."

"Okay." Leia accepted the carrot and used the spell as directed—the junk spell Revive.

It was instant. The carrot had turned back into a sleep slime, far faster than I'd ever seen an outsider spawn.

"What the?!"

"Revive brings monsters back to life, turning their drops into outsiders."

"...And that's why it's junk magic."

Celeste nodded.

Such magic had almost no use in this world. As far as I knew, it could only ever be useful for harvest festival displays. It made sense why they called it junk.

However...

"It's useful for you, Ryota," Celeste mused.

"Yeah... Great job, Leia!"

"All I did was eat the magic fruit and win the lottery."

"Either way, that's awesome."

"...I suppose," she finally assented with a confused look on her face. I could tell that some part of her enjoyed the praise, though.

Revive—magic that instantly created outsiders. Indeed, that would be extremely useful for me.

## 197. Revive and Repetition

In the mansion basement, we had created a mountain of bean sprouts. Today, we were going to experiment with them.

At first, we waited for the usual length of time for them to turn into outsider slimes. I shot them with normal bullets, causing them to drop normal bullets.

That was my usual way of doing things. It was easy to get a single bullet at a time this way, but waiting took forever. Waiting a few minutes, killing them in a second—that's awful efficiency.

I'd done that to this point, though, because there was no other way.

"All yours, Leia."

I heard the attached Leia's voice directly in my mind. "Understood."

I readied my gun and approached the mountain of bean sprouts.

Outsiders spawned in places where there were no people. Conversely, they wouldn't spawn when people were near. I defied that rule and approached, despite having this basement specifically for outsider generation.

I stood in front of the pile and picked up a bean sprout.

"Revive," Leia cast.

The elementary junk magic, Revive. The instant she cast it, the bean sprout became a slime.

It spawned in the palm of my hand. The sensation of a drop becoming a monster in my hand was one I'd never felt before.

Then, I crushed the slime. It dropped a bullet. "Very nice. Let's keep going." "Yes, Master." I took a bean sprout, Leia cast Revive, and I insta-killed the generated slime. This had changed my world. Until now, I'd wait a few minutes to spend one second killing. Now, I could wait one second and then spend the following second killing. It was a whole different world. A new dimension of efficiency. "Master." "Yeah?" "I'm out of MP." "Yeah, you had F-rank MP, right? Try firing a limitless recovery round into yourself." "Understood." As directed, Leia fired a limitless recovery round into the

protector that she'd morphed into. "Revive."

Another bean sprout became a slime. The combo was working!

Recovery rounds healed both HP and MP, and they worked on Leia as well.

I had her keep using Revive. When she ran out of MP, she'd recover it with the limitless recovery rounds before resuming her Revive spam.

With this method, I'd cleared the giant pile of bean sprouts in under twenty minutes.

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"Master."
```

"Yeah?"

"I've been wondering. What was that thing you received alongside the bullets?"

"Hm? Oh, you mean the experience points?"

Come to think of it, this was the first time Leia had seen it. It's been a while I'd bothered making EXP, since I normally didn't kill as many monsters as I did today.

I showed her the big ring on my thumb.

"This ring dropped from the dungeon master of Nihonium. When you wear it, the EXP you earn after the cap comes out as crystals. Give the crystals to people who aren't capped, and they can level up."

The ring had helped a lot with Margaret, but it hadn't seen the light of day since then. After all, most every adventurer in the world had reached their level cap through everyday farming.

It was almost never needed.

I'd put it on today, partially because I planned to go all out, and partially because I had an idea in mind.

"Thank you for waiting, Yoda." Emily appeared at the basement entrance.

Behind her, workers—people from the Swallow's Returned Favor—brought in bean sprouts one after another.

"You got it?"

"Yes. Like last time, we bought almost all of Cyclo's stock," Emily replied as bean sprouts were hauled in next to her.

Before long, a veritable mountain range of bean sprouts had filled the basement.

After the people from Swallow's Returned Favor had left, Emily declared, "Here's the one million piros of bean sprouts you ordered."

It was the same amount I'd ordered back when I'd helped Margaret.

It had taken almost an entire day to turn that many bean sprouts into the EXP needed to raise Margaret's level.

How long would it take this time?

I rolled up my sleeves.

"All right, you ready?"

"Fight, Yoda!"

"Sure will. Leia, we're speedrunning this with the max-efficiency strategy we discussed."

"Understood."

We approached the bean sprouts. Leia cast Revive, and I cast Repetition on the revived slime.

Revive, Repetition. Revive, Repetition. Weaving recovery rounds in between, another Revive and Repetition.

With the fastest combo I could think of, we defeated slime after slime without even moving much.

I caught glimpses of Emily supporting us, hauling the dropped regular bullets and refined EXP out of the basement.

I focused, mindlessly farming slimes. The mountains of bean sprouts were visibly getting smaller.

It had taken me all day to chew through one million piros worth of bean

sprouts last time-but this time, it didn't even take two hours.

Thanks to Leia's revives, my outsider-related production had undergone a revolutionary change—no, a revolutionary evolution.

## 198. The World's Greatest

In the morning, I took Aurum back to her dungeon through the warp room and came back to the mansion. Upon my return, Emily spotted me and ran over, her slippers smacking against the floor.

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"Ah! Welcome back, Yoda!"
```

"What's up, Emily? Need me for something?"

"Yes. A visitor was here for you."

"A visitor?"

"Someone from the Carbon Dungeon Association."

"Carbon... Never heard of it, but if they're from the association, it must be some city?"

"That's right."

"Do you know what they want?"

"They said they'd come back. They really want to speak to you in person. They gave us a sweets assortment, too."

"Oh? Wonder if something came up."

"Maybe!" Emily smiled.

She'd known me the longest out of my friends—heck, out of everyone in this world—so she knew what I was thinking.

This happened often lately. Rumors about me had spread all over, and more people had started coming to me when problems arose.

"Amazing as ever, Yoda."

"I think you're the one who's amazing, Emily."

"Please. Nowhere near as much as you."

That's not true, I thought to myself. But I didn't say it. Emily would just act all humble again, even though she didn't know she was.

This space was warm, bright, and soothing, somewhere between a home and a temple.

Every home she maintained ended up this way.

From what I've heard, that didn't even stop at houses. Sometimes, she did the same thing with *dungeons*. Apparently, slimes would even be entranced by the power of an Emily home and nap with people...?

Compared to me, a guy who had raw strength and nothing else, I thought Emily was the more impressive one. But again, I wouldn't say that; she was just too humble.

"Oh!" I gasped.

"What's wrong?"

"I forgot to pick up my daily acceleration round. Be right back."

"Okay. See you soon!"

☆

After I returned from picking up my daily acceleration round from the clayman's village, Emily once again ran over.

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"Yoda, Yoda!"
```

"What's up, Emily?"

"A visitor was here for you."

"You mean the person from Carbon?"

"No, this one was from a place called Aldehyde. This time, the Dungeon Association chief came directly."

"What?" I was a little surprised. First a different city's Dungeon Association, and now the chief of another one? "Are they still here?"

"No, they said they'd come back. But Yoda... This is a problem. They gave us sweets."

"Sweets? Didn't the one from Carbon give you those?"

"Yes, but not *those* sweets..." Emily furrowed her brow with a concerned look. Then, she took out a box of sweets. "It's this."

"Looks like normal sweets to—whoa, that's heavy!" As soon as I took it from her, I was surprised by the weight of the box.

There definitely weren't just sweets in here. Based on the weight, there must have been rocks or something in it. I looked carefully into the box and saw that it had a false bottom. When I opened it...

"A bribe of golden sweets! They really did it!" I shouted.

Gold was spread out beneath the false bottom of the two-tiered box.

Is this a souvenir, or is it a bribe?

"I...don't think they're in trouble, at least."

"It does seem different..."

Emily and I were thinking the same thing.

When I'd heard someone from Carbon had come, I thought they were asking for help like people often did. But this gift from Aldehyde made it clear that they weren't in dire need. Of course, they still wanted something from me, but that was different from being in trouble.

"Wonder what it is."

"I wonder..."

Emily and I cocked our heads.

Erza came from the other end of the hallway. "Oh, Ryota!"

Since she was an employee of Swallow's Returned Favor, even though she was on indefinite duty in my mansion, she still wore her uniform during work hours.

"What's going on, Erza?"

"Umm... I have a request. It's from our main office."

"A request?"

"Someone from the Arene Dungeon Association wants to meet you."

Emily and I looked at each other.

Carbon, Aldehyde, Arene–this was the third one now.

"That look on your face tells me...you've gotten requests from other places, too?" Erza guessed.

"It sounds like you know why, Erza."

"Yes..." There was a complex look on her face. Happy, or maybe proud, but also troubled. "I think everyone is coming to recruit you. They want to see if

you'd be willing to move to their cities, even if it's next year or the year after."

"Move? Why?"

"Yesterday, the yearly total purchase ranking was posted."

"Yearly total purchase... You mean the total worth of goods taken to dropbuying shops?" I asked, prompting a nod from Erza. "I had no idea that was a thing... It basically just ranks people by wealth, then?"

"On said ranking, you're third place worldwide."

"Really?"

"Wow! That's incredible! You're really something, Yoda!" Emily complimented me.

"And that's why they came to win me over? Oh, of course. Because drop purchases generate tax revenue, right?"

"That's part of it, but that isn't all. Adventurers from agricultural cities like Cyclo typically don't even make the ranking since an individual drop unit has lower value."

"I see."

"You're the only person from an agricultural town to make it into the Top 10 ranking in the past ten years. That's why everyone's interested in you. You have experience in a mineral town, and with animal drops as well, as I recall. Everyone wants to convince you that you'll make more money in their towns. We happen to have a shop in Arene, too, which explains that one."

I see. That explains things.

"Also..." Erza started to speak again.

"There's more?"

"You haven't even worked the entirety of this past year, have you?"

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

It had been less than a year since I'd ended up in this world, so indeed, I had not worked a full year yet.

"Everyone is quite aware of that, so we're all wondering what would happen if you worked all year. Everyone thinks you're a shoo-in for first place next year. Some even say that you're effectively in first place already."

"That's great! Yoda, you're a really incredible person!" Emily was beyond excited. While Erza was calmer, her eyes sparkled.

Things have gotten a lot crazier than I expected. Here I thought I was just doing my job like normal...

## 199. B8 of Nihonium

For the first time in a long time, I came to Nihonium alone. I'd bring Leia when it was time to farm, but for now, I came by myself because I wanted to be absolutely ready for the worst-case scenario.

When I got to B8, I immediately encountered a monster.

It was a zombie, but it wasn't *just* a zombie. Its body was humanoid, but it crawled on all fours. With neither clothes nor skin, its pink muscles were totally exposed.

More eerie than that, though, were its three heads.

It was a hydra-zombie with a human body. Those words naturally came to me.

"First things first, let's do some testing."

The three heads were exactly the same, like triplets.

I fired a normal bullet into one head. It struck right between the eyes, a perfect headshot.

But it didn't work.

The bullet lost all momentum when it struck. Then, it fell straight to the ground. But that didn't mean nothing had happened.

With the zombie still on all fours, the shot head disappeared like mist. Instantly after, it had three heads again.

"There's something to this..." I muttered to myself before firing another—urgh!

The instant this headshot struck, a powerful impact rocked my brain. My vision went white. I felt like I was about to lose consciousness.

My upper body reeled back, and I lost my balance. Meanwhile, the zombie seized this opportunity to jump at me.

I quickly leaped to the side and rolled along the ground. Not a graceful dodge, but a dodge nonetheless. When I got onto my hands and knees to stand again, I saw the zombie's shot head flicker again before it once again had three heads.

With my instant judgment and past combat experience, I hypothesized on the truth of its three heads.

To confirm one more thing, I shot one of the zombie's legs with a normal bullet.

The bullet instantly blew off its leg, but it immediately regenerated—so fast that the zombie didn't even lose balance. I shot its other leg, but it promptly regenerated as well.

The zombie continued to lunge at me, seemingly not losing any vigor at all. Its momentum and focus remained the same.

I'd probably never kill it by hitting anything but its legs.

Its weak point was one of its three heads. I had a feeling I knew how its three heads worked, too.

As a test, I fired off another headshot.

Right between the eyes. The head disappeared and regenerated as if nothing had happened.

My fourth headshot finally pierced all the way through a head, causing the zombie to collapse in tatters—just as expected.

Of the three heads, one was invincible, one reflected damage, and the last was its weak point.

The invincible one was, literally, invincible. Attacks on it would be nullified.

The reflection head probably reflected double or triple the damage you dealt to it. That was how it had felt when it hit my head; if I didn't have SS-rank HP and vitality, I'd have been in danger.

Shooting the last head would kill the zombie.

The problem was that if you attacked one—rather, either of the two non-weak-point heads—the heads would all disappear and shuffle their positions. The zombie always forced you to choose one of three heads, and it was a dangerous decision.

I picked up the seed it had dropped.

# Ryota's luck went up by 1!

My stat went up, but what a troublesome enemy that was.

Another zombie promptly appeared. In this dungeon where only I farmed, there was no time to rest.

I had Repetition, but I decided to keep that in my pocket for now. No Repetition allowed until I had a consistent strategy.

What to do about this, though... I know. Homing rounds.

Homing rounds came from Frankensteins, outsiders that formed from trash. They homed in on enemy weaknesses. These were a big help even against dungeon masters.

I loaded one and fired. It drew a homing arc and flew into one of the hydrazombie's heads.

The moment it landed, I felt an impact that turned my vision white. "Ghah!" This second impact delayed my recovery, giving the zombie time to charge forward and lunge for a bite.

I quickly punched its biting head.

This seemed to be the invincible head, as it disappeared. Fortunately, that stopped the bite as well.

I kicked off the ground and jumped far back. There, I fired a recovery round into myself.

Phew... That was close. Homing rounds aim for weak points, so why...?

After thinking about it for a moment, one hypothesis came to mind.

I fired another homing round. This time, I kept a recovery round on standby.

Right before it struck, I fired the recovery round at myself.

The impact came again, but instantly after, the recovery round triggered and promptly healed me.

The homing round homed in on weaknesses. Maybe the reflect damage was two to three times the regular attack damage because that head had *lower defense* than the other heads. That was why the homing round went there and triggered the counter.

In other words, it would always go for the reflect head.

"That's fine by me." I smirked.

I loaded three homing rounds, fired them all off in other directions, and charged at the zombie. With intense focus, I triangulated the bullets' flight

paths.

In my SS-speed world, I figured out which head they were aiming for. In that instant, a 1/3 chance turned into 1/2.

If homing rounds always went for the reflect head, then that meant the true weakness head was among the two it didn't go for. And no matter what, neither of those two would be the reflect head.

I moved faster than the homing rounds and shot one of the two other heads. It seemed to hit the invincible one.

I backed off, fired more homing rounds, charged again, and fired-invincible again.

Another go, and once again, it was the invincible one.

"You're awfully lucky right now." A smile crept onto my face.

Still, I decided to just call it proof that the homing rounds were working. With a 1/3 chance, you had a 1 in 27 chance of hitting the same thing three times in a row. But if the chance was 1/2, then that was just a 1 in 8 chance. 12.5% was a much more reasonable probability to hit.

On the fourth attempt, I finally blew away the weakness head and obtained my seed.

I continued farming zombies with this strategy. It took eight tries altogether before I'd killed the fifth one.

"Still..."

I had to wonder if I was okay with this. Even after taking the reflect head out of the equation, I was stuck with a choice between two heads.

The strategy was successful, yes, but I wanted more than that. I wanted to

narrow down the options even more.

"Wait a second..." I hit upon a possibility and decided to give it a try. This test wouldn't cause problems even if my bullets were reflected.

A zombie appeared, and I fired a bunch of recovery rounds—one at each of its three heads.

The bullets struck and emitted healing light.

The zombies heads didn't reset! Bingo.

The zombie heads reset when it was attacked, but not when it was healed. Furthermore, one of the bullets fell onto the ground without exhibiting its healing effect.

That was probably the invincibility head, since I'd felt the reflected recovery.

I reviewed the head isolation flowchart in my mind and loaded a homing round in one gun and a recovery round in the other. As this demanded even speedier movement, I took a deep breath, opened my eyes wide, and charged.

I fired a homing round and used its trajectory to narrow down my options from three to two.

Charging even faster than the bullet flew, I fired a recovery round from pointblank range. It didn't heal. Before my mind could fully process it, I blew off the remaining head. The zombie died and dropped a seed.

I took the seed and raised my luck stat even more.

Bigger than that, though, was the sense of satisfaction. I had put together a consistent strategy.

Isolating the reflect head with a homing round, isolating the invincible head with a recovery round, and using my SS speed on top of those two bullets.

With this, I safely cleared that day.	d B8 of Nihonium	n and raised my lu	ck from F to E on

### 200. Inherited Will

In the morning, I came to Aurum's chamber in her dungeon to drop her off for work.

After a stretch, she pumped a fist and fired herself up. "Hnnnh, okay! I'm gonna do my best today!"

Curious, I asked her, "What's got you so fired up this time? Is something different today?"

"The dungeon shuffle is gonna get a little ugly."

"That sounds rough."

Aurum was a special dungeon that changed shape every time an adventurer entered.

The shuffle being ugly only sounded like a pain from the perspective of an adventurer, but the dungeon was managed based on very specific rules, so it probably wouldn't be very different in effect.

"Low level, hurry." Eve, who'd accompanied us, tugged at my sleeve. "You promised you'd feed this bunny infinite carrots today."

"I know, I know. Okay, Aurum; see you at dinner time."

"Okay! Later..." While Aurum waved and saw us off, her expression suddenly changed. "Huh?"

"What's wrong?"

She looked surprised about something.

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"An injured person left."
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"Injured?"

"Yeah, that's unusual. They're really hurt. They're being transported now."

"That is unusual."

Adventurers in this world didn't really adventure; they were more like producers.

They were specifically primary producers, so 99% of adventurers farmed dungeons with an emphasis on stability. Getting badly injured in a dungeon was less likely here than traffic accidents in my old world.

On top of that, this dungeon wasn't very deep, which meant that monster variations were fewer. There really wasn't any reason for people to get badly hurt in here.

"Think I'll go take a look," I decided. "Which floor, Aurum?"

"Let's see..."

"Wait. Prioritize my carrots." Eve said it as flatly as ever, but she poked her lip out and had a reproachful look in her eye. *I know she changes when carrots are involved, but this is going a little far.* "This bunny will investigate for you. Low level, you go to Tellurium."

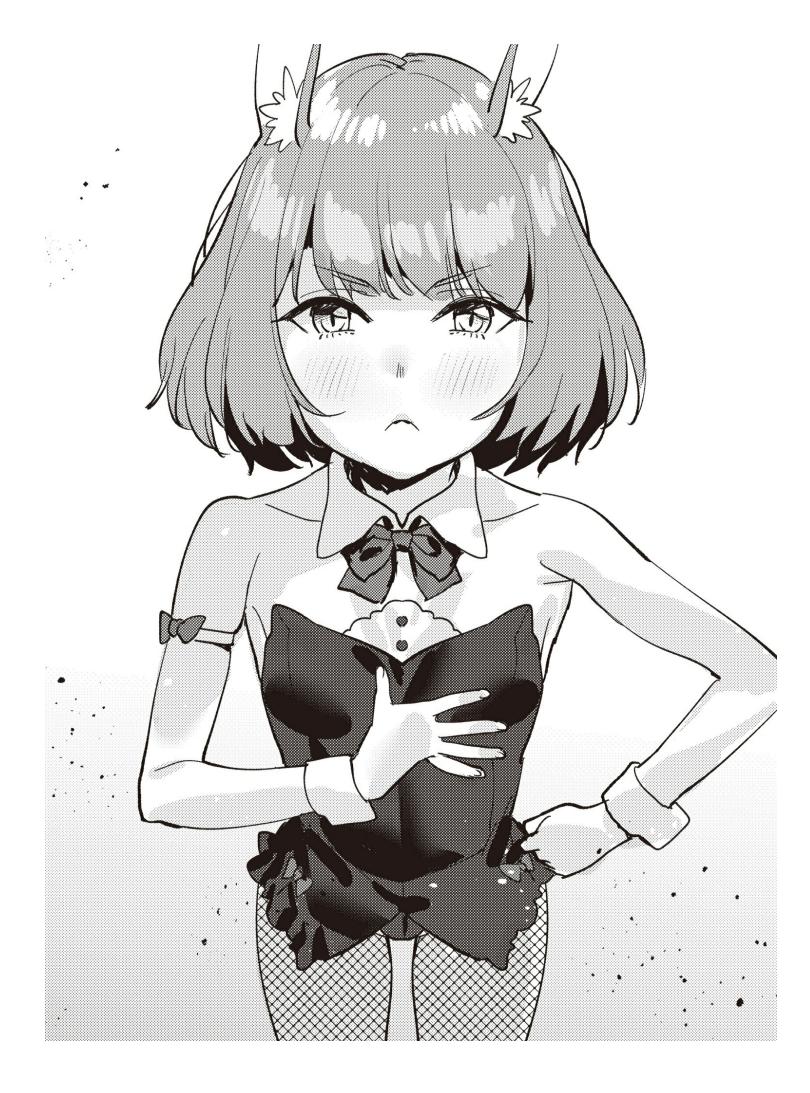
"You'll really check for me?"

"All I do, I do for the sake of carrots."

"You sound very reliable and stable." Leaving aside whether that was a good motto to live by, anyway.

Regardless, if that was the case, I decided to let Eve take care of it and go literally hunt some carrots on B2 of Tellurium.

After noon, I faced Eve and a mountain of carrots in the courtyard of our Cyclo mansion. It was very literally a mountain of them, easily over 100,000 piros worth.



Faced with this, Eve was more excited than ever.

"Wow, Master's carrots! Master, can I have—?" Kerberos started to ask, but he quickly hit the brakes.

Eve's face had turned from joy to a demonic glare. "These carrots are for a bunny."

"O-Okay."

"These carrots are for a bunny."

The guard dog's teeth chattered beneath the bunny's glare.

Our home's hierarchy had shaken out in a funny way.

"So Eve, tell me about what happened," I said.

"Okay. The adventurer's name is Al-Saati. He's a twenty-five-year-old man. His birthday is—"

"You know his birthday? How'd you learn that in so little time?"

"Easy." Eve puffed out her chest. "Bunnies can find out any information on anyone for the sake of carrots. Birthday, bank account balance, the color of their underwear, how old they were for their first time and which position they did it in, and more."

"That's insane! I think I'm scared of bunnies now." How do you even find out when and what position they had their first time? "Actually, don't tell me. What happened to him?"

"He's in an adventurer family that just came to Indole. They have weird rules."

"Weird rules?"

"It's a big-shot and a bunch of new adventurers. They can only use healing magic in dungeons with the big-shot's permission."

"Permission? So they can't heal themselves without his permission? No, that can't possibly be—"

"That's right, low level."

"No way?!"

Whoa, whoa, whoa. Is it possible for people to be that stupid? I recalled when I used to work at my old company and you needed permission to go to the bathroom.

Needing permission to heal was even worse than that. In dungeons, you had to fight monsters. If you didn't heal frequently, you could end up dying.

"Unable to heal himself, he got badly hurt and needed to be transported out."

"...Sounds like hell."

"Also, he went right back into the dungeon," Eve added.

"Huh?"

"He had a drop quota, so he went back."

"They have work quotas, too?"

"Yes. If they don't make enough, they have to buy the difference off the market with their own money."

Eve's explanation of events made me angrier than I'd been in a long time.

"Huh? It's still daytime. What brings you here, Ryota?"

"I wanted to discuss something with you, Aurum."

After hearing about things from Eve, I'd thought to myself for a while and came to see Aurum.

"Discuss what?"

"You can adjust drops, right?"

"In my own dungeon, yeah. Oh, but I can't drop yours to zero. I tried messing with it a while back, but for some reason, I couldn't bring your specific drop rates to zero."

"You've been doing all that?" I chuckled wryly to myself. "In that case, can you make it so that nothing drops if someone's HP isn't fully recovered before a fight?"

"Full HP? That's easy. Some spirits already do that, actually."

"Really?"

Aurum nodded. Are there dungeons like that? I'd better remember this.

"Can I ask you to do that?"

"Sure! In return, go on a date with me."

"A date?"

"Yeah! I can go out now, but I realized we've never been out on a date."

"Huh... Okay. I'll think of a plan for a date."

"Yaaay! I'll hold you to that!" Aurum smiled. With that promise, I'd successfully changed the rules of her dungeon once more.

In front of Aurum, in the central plaza of Indole, people had gathered around a sign erected under the authority of the Dungeon Association.

The message was simple: if you weren't at full health before engaging with a monster, it wouldn't drop any items when it died.

The adventurers clamored.

"Is it going to be like Oganesson...?"

"That's fine by me, but what prompted this all of a sudden?"

"Look... It's his fault."

When one adventurer pointed him out, all eyes around gathered on one man.

The man stared at the sign and hummed in curiosity to himself, but when he noticed everyone looking at him, he became flustered.

"Wh-What do you guys want?"

"Hey, this is about you, isn't it?"

"You're the one who makes your lackeys get permission to heal, right?"

"Wh-What of it? My Family, my rules—" He tried to defend himself, but more adventurers gathered around him.

They were all glaring at him.

"You might get away with that elsewhere, but no more of that in our town, got it? It's a nuisance."

"I-I'm hardly causing any trouble."

"Look at this! It's your fault." One adventurer pointed at the sign, lighting a

fire under the others.

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"Yeah, yeah!"
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"You cut that stuff out!"

"If you won't, then just leave!"

The man shrunk back, realizing that he was alone against everyone else.

The one who'd called him a nuisance outright continued, "Our Dungeon Association chief can't stand unfairness like that. Ryota Sato. Know the name?"

"Say what?"

"He doesn't know him?"

"Whoa..."

"Ignorance is scary."

"Don't cause trouble for all of us with your ignorance!"

The people around him continued to criticize him, and he continued to shrink back.

"I don't even care if you know. Either cut that out, or get out of this town. Those are your two options."

After that, everyone glared even harder at the man, as if to express their unanimous distaste for him.

Under their glares, he gritted his teeth and tried to protest.

"There you are! Excuse me, you there!" Just then, a young woman pushed through the crowd and stopped in front of him. "You! You give your subordinates quotas and make them pay out of pocket when they don't meet them, isn't that right?!"

"Whaaaat?!"

Her accusation shocked and appalled everyone. Their clamoring was even louder this time.

"Is that for real?"

"Dude, just leave."

"The Dungeon Association chief doesn't know yet. Let me deal with this guy, and we can just call this a dispute that went too far."

They continued criticizing the man. Some suggested extreme measures.

Ryota Sato was already well-known among adventurers. When he happened upon unfairness, he couldn't help but intervene. Everyone knew that, at times, he would decide that changing the dungeon was the solution.

Furthermore, the drop rules had already changed once.

Normally, it would be odd for a mere Dungeon Association to announce a change in drops. But in this town, the drop period had already been changed before.

It had changed because of people being overworked.

On top of overwork, this time, it had been revealed that someone had a quota that they would have to pay out of pocket to meet. It was certain that something would change. The adventurers believed that they'd best do something about this man before that happened.

In that instant, he had become the enemy of everyone there.

"Excuse me! Let me through, please!" There was a voice from outside the crowd. A young man yelled, pushing through the crowd and entering the center of the adventurers' commotion.

The adventurer who'd led this public lambasting knew the man who'd just come in. "What's up, Cliff?"

"These people want to speak with him," Cliff replied.

"Who are they?"

"His subordinates."

While Cliff explained, the three subordinates lined up and gave their boss their notice.

"Thanks to Cliff, our eyes have been opened!"

"We're not working for you anymore!"

"From now on, we'll make our own way!"

"D-Do you idiots think you'll get away with this?!" the man screamed, but his subordinates—former subordinates, rather—turned around and left without looking back.

"What do we do with this guy?"

"Let's throw him out of town!"

"No, I say we show him to Ryota! Ryota's lenient enough to people who defy him. Let's have Ryota put the screws on him a little before he does anything stupid again."

While the man roared angrily, the adventurers discussed how they'd deal with him.

After this, the adventurers self-governed.

They effectively exiled the man for life. Never would he be able to enter Indole or Aurum again.

As I left the dungeon Aurum and wondered what to do about those quotas, I noticed a commotion.

Before I could do anything, things proceeded on their own until it had been resolved without my intervention.

The man in the middle of it all came over to me and bowed deeply.

"It's been a while, Ryota."

"You're...Cliff, was it?" Cliff. That was the guy who'd been abused by a corrupt party in Cyclo. I had brought him to Indole because he had good mineral drop rates. "It sure has. Are you doing well?"

"Yes. Thanks to you, Ryota."

"What ever happened to that friend of yours?"

"I was able to get her out, too."

"Really? Great to hear."

"Excuse me!" someone called out from the side.

When I looked over, I saw the adventurers that Cliff had brought with him. They were the people from the corrupt Family that had caused the current mess. People who'd been exploited like Cliff.

They bowed their heads to Cliff and said in unison, "Thank you!"

"You should thank Ryota before you thank me."

"Me?!"

I was surprised, but Cliff said to me matter-of-factly, "I was just doing the right thing like a Ryota Family member would do. The same thing you did for us back then."

"Oh... Is that so?" Indeed, that was very similar to what I'd done. If I'd gotten here sooner, I probably would've done what Cliff did.

"But wow, that's Ryota for you. You changed the way the dungeon works just like that!"

The adventurers Cliff had helped all gasped in surprise.

"Huh?"

"Wait, that was all him?"

"This person did it?"

"Oh, yeah. He changed the drop rules so nobody else would end up like you guys. It was all Ryota," Cliff said, prompting them all to look at me.

They thanked me to no end with deep emotion in their eyes. "Th-Thank you so much!"

And they bowed their heads even more vigorously than they had done toward Cliff.

### 201. Leia's Idea

I went to B8 of Nihonium with Leia.

As soon as we reached the bottom of the stairs, a three-headed zombie appeared. I quickly used Repetition on this one.

My ultimate farming magic killed it without issue, despite the usual requirement to suss out the vulnerable head.

I picked up the seed.

Repetition was strong—the strongest, in fact—but I thought that made it all the more likely that it would lead to me relying on it. If I decided that today was a farming day, then it was okay to use it, but it wasn't something I should use for my first or second time on a new dungeon floor.

No, today, I would hone my skills.

"What should I do?" Leia asked.

"Good question. First, attach."

"Understood." She promptly transformed into a protector.

It was just as glorious as ever, tickling the little boy's heart inside me. I did my best to ignore images of mecha anime robots combining and gave Leia her orders.

"When zombies appear, fire a homing round. Just one is fine."

"Understood. Firing." Leia reached an arm out and fired a homing round.

A three-headed zombie had appeared. Despite it having three heads, Leia

obeyed orders and only fired one bullet. Her loyalty would be a vital weapon in dungeons.

The bullet traced a homing arc as it flew. At the same time, I calculated its trajectory to find out which head it was going for.

Then, I fired a normal bullet. Because it flew in a straight path, the normal bullet was faster. It caught up with the homing round and deflected it.

"Well done," Leia applauded.

Meanwhile, I fired a recovery round to further narrow down the heads. Now that I'd found out which was the weak head, I fired a normal bullet at it.

While I picked up the seed it dropped, I explained to Leia, "Homing rounds go for the reflection head. I only want to identify it, not hit it, which is why I did that."

"Understood-Master."

"Yeah?"

"What if we tried homing rounds powered up by buffing rounds?"

"...Ooh." I snapped in realization. Come to think of it, I hadn't tried that. "Let's try it. For now, detach and back off."

"Understood."

Leia returned to human form.

Fully buffed homing rounds could lead to one of two things. Considering the worst case, I had her get away from me first.

I reloaded the bullets: one homing round, and all the rest buffing rounds. Buffing rounds were special among special bullets. They didn't fire, but they did boost the effects of other bullets loaded in the gun.

And what would happen with them buffing a homing round—

Immediately after I fired, my vision went white. It felt like I'd been socked in the head. That was the homing round damage reflected by the reflection head.

I quickly healed by shooting myself with a recovery round.

"Master, are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. It must only boost the firepower and not the homing capability."

"I'm sorry for suggesting this." Leia seemed so apologetic despite her usual apathy.

"No, no. It was a good idea," I replied. She seemed surprised when I said that.

"I'm avoiding using Repetition because I want to understand the abilities and effects of my weapons, so in that sense, I'm glad it failed. It leaves a stronger impression and makes it a lot easier to remember."

"Do you mean that?"

"Thank you, Leia. If you have any more ideas, don't hesitate to share them."

She looked down for a moment before replying, "Okay."

I combined with her again and defeated more zombies.

I'd tried having her deflect the homing bullets as well to see if she could handle more, but her accuracy was too low for it to work. Only I could do it, because I had an almost 100% success rate fusing bullets by making them collide in midair.

And so, I had Leia only fire the homing rounds, but it frankly wasn't very different from my first attempt. The efficiency was iffy, too.

While I wondered if this was all we could muster...

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"Yeah?"

"There's something I'd like to try. May I?"

"Sure. Give it a go."

"Okay..."
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More eager than usual, Leia returned to human form. Then, she used the Absolute Rock pebble to turn invincible before going off somewhere.

She hadn't told me anything, so I just waited there for a while until she came back, followed by a whole mob of zombies.

I'd done this before, too. You use your toughness to gather a whole train of monsters.

There were about twenty of them. Not a good situation, given I'd have to sort out the heads of each one.

After gathering this mob and returning to me, Leia said, "I'm attaching now."

"All right."

I let her do as she pleased without asking for details. This was how I preferred it. When I avoided using Repetition, this was what I wanted—to be given no information and be forced to rely on my on-the-fly decision-making.

Leia turned into a protector and attached to me. Then, she fired just as many homing rounds as there were monsters.

Each homing round, fired wildly from the four guns, homed in on a monster. This allowed me to identify the reflection head on each of the twenty zombies, but I couldn't shoot down all the bullets.

Even when I fired my two guns as fast as I could, I couldn't keep up.

"Accelerating." Leia fired an acceleration round into herself. Instantly after, she fired a whole ton of normal bullets.

Gunfire roared continuously, as if she were firing a gatling gun, and normal bullets flew toward the homing rounds. There were over a hundred of them.

Most of them missed, but even a broken clock is right twice a day; the sheer power of numbers shot down all of the scattered homing rounds. She wasted no time and followed up with recovery rounds, revealing ten of the twenty zombies' weaknesses and allowing me to shoot them.

The remaining ten had swapped their heads, so Leia once again fired homing rounds and shot them all down.

With the help of one accelerated Leia, I had killed twenty zombies nearinstantly.

The acceleration ran out, and Leia returned to normal.

She turned back into human form and looked up at me. "What do you think, Master?"

"Very well done."

"Thank you. I believed that this floor was worthy of acceleration rounds."

"Hmm? Oh, I get it. I only stay on each floor of Nihonium for seven days, so I guess it does make sense to use my daily acceleration rounds on them, huh?"

"Yes."

"That's one way of thinking... Thanks, Leia. That was a great idea."

"Good..."

Next to the apparently happy Leia, I thought of more strategies that would use acceleration rounds.

If acceleration was an option, then that could give me a wider range of strategies.

#### 202. Water and Air

In the evening, after I'd finished work and brought Aurum from her dungeon, Emily greeted me from in front of the warp room.

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"Yoda, you have a visitor."
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"A visitor? Did something happen again?"

"It's okay. I don't think anything is happening."

"Hm? You sound sure of that. Did they tell you what they wanted?"

"You'll get it when you see them." Emily offered a sunshiny smile.

You'll get it when you see, huh... Well, guess I'll go see them either way.

"Where are they?"

"I showed them to the reception room."

"Got it."

"Sounds interesting," Aurum piped up. "I'll come, too-"

"Aurum, you come with me," Emily interrupted her.

"Huh? Hey, don't pull my sleeve!"

When Aurum tried to come with me, Emily dragged her off. She was a pretty big deal, given she was the spirit of an entire dungeon, but she was powerless in the face of Emily's raw strength.

Emily pushed Aurum into her room and went in with her. Before she closed the door, she winked at me.

What's going on...?

Curious, I headed to the salon. Inside was a face I hadn't seen in a while.

"Margaret. Long time no see."

"Long time no see," she replied.

"Do you need something today? Oh... That's a nice dress you're wearing. Going to a party, or something?"

She wasn't in her usual princess armor; it was just a dress this time.

"No. I came to invite you out."

"Invite me?"

"Yes, u-umm..." Margaret hesitated. After taking a deep breath, with resolve on her face, she said, "Please go on a d-date with me."

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Margaret and I sat facing each other in the carriage.

She'd changed a lot since we'd first met. It was like...the air around her. The vibe, maybe. Whatever it was, it had changed a lot—for the better.

The carriage had a canopy that gave us a view of the outside as we rode through Cyclo at dusk together.

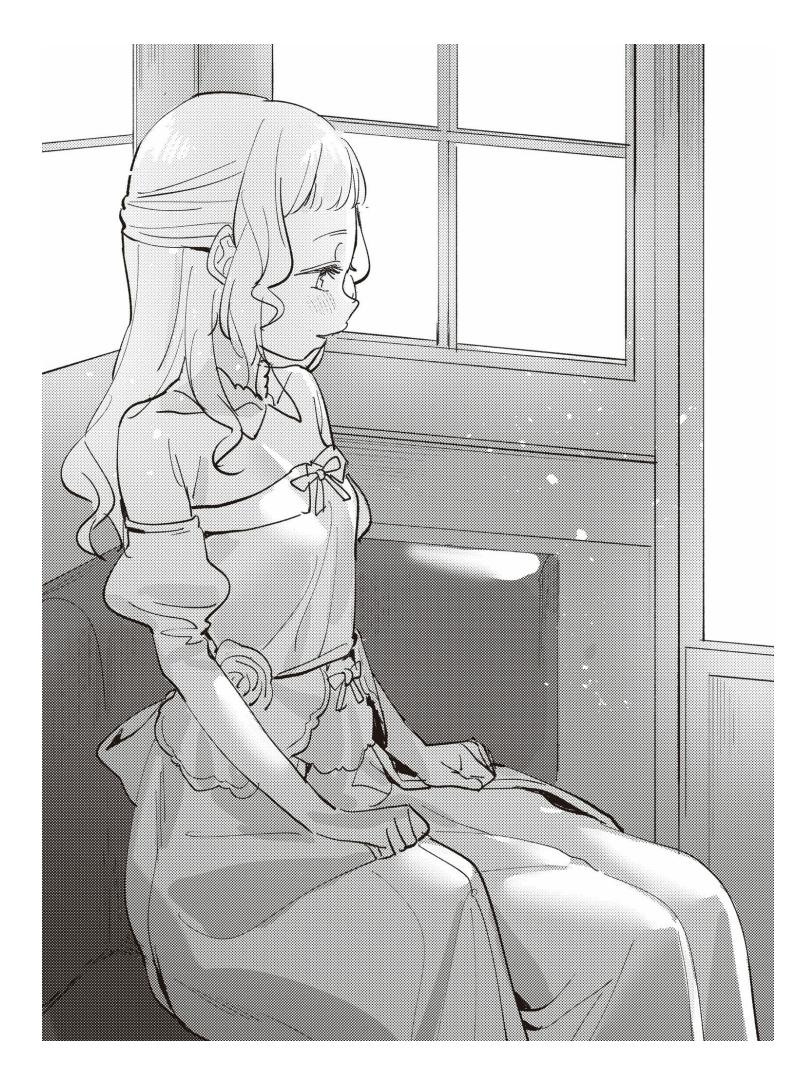
"Where are we going?" I asked.

"You'll have to find out when we get there."

"Yeah? Okay. Is this just a normal date?"

"Yes. A plain, simple date." Margaret blushed slightly and smiled. "I've heard all the rumors about you, and it's nothing like that. It's very simply a date with me."

"Yeah? Well, I'm honored to get to go on a date with the Princess Margaret."



"Huh?"

"I've heard about *your* accomplishments, too. You've done great things as an adventurer, and your air prices are skyrocketing lately, right?"

"Ah..." Margaret blushed a little more, apparently happy about that.

I was referring to her air boxes.

There were pickup boxes that immediately picked up drops you produced and printed the face of the producer—the person who'd finished off the monster—on the box like a photo. Margaret's air had been sold as a kind of fan merchandise for a long time now, but lately, it was selling better than ever.

And it wasn't just men, her usual customer base, buying them. Even women these days. It wasn't just air; it came with a fabulous scent that some people liked to use as a sort of aromatherapy.

When I told her that I knew about that, Margaret was obviously giddy.

"Hm? What's that?" A store outside the carriage caught my attention.

"What's what?"

"Look. That shop over there."

"That would be a water stand," Margaret replied.

"Water stand?"

"Yes. As the name implies, they sell water."

"I didn't know that was a thing."

"Heehee, it was just set up recently. You didn't know about that?"

"What do you mean?" I asked back.

Margaret giggled to herself and called, "Lat."

"Milady."

"Whoa!" I was terribly surprised. So surprised that I leaned back in the carriage.

One of those four knight guys had appeared when Margaret called him. Where had he been all this time?

Currently, he was running alongside the carriage.

"Wh-Where did you just come from?" I asked him.

"We faithful servants of the princess are always in a place where she can summon us at any time."

"You mean you're always with her? Margaret, are you okay with that?"

Margaret just cocked her head.

What about your privacy, and stuff? Or so I tried to ask, but she seemed genuinely confused, so I didn't bother.

Though Margaret herself didn't understand, the knight named Lat did.

"We have undergone special training for our princess. We only hear her calls for us, and we only see what she wishes for us to see."

"What the hell? That's scary!"

Incredible, yes, but incredibly scary as well. Was that loyalty? They almost sounded like cultists.

I'd always found these knights pretty incredible—outstanding, even, but now they were even more so.

"More importantly, Lat, please explain," Margaret urged.

"Yes, Milady. The water stand is a recently opened business. To trace things

back to their origin, well, the majority would say that it's because of you."

"Huh?" Because of me? How, exactly?

"Thanks to your tireless intervention, unfairness in Cyclo has gradually decreased, and dungeon production has increased dramatically in its place."

"Okay, leaving aside whether it's because of me... Aren't those good things?"

"Cyclo is an agricultural city, and crop production has increased. However, it has in turn led to chronic water shortages."

"Huh?"

"As dungeon production rates increase, there is a corresponding decrease in water production due to the lower number of failed drops."

"Oooh." I think I get it.

I recalled what Emily had explained to me immediately after I came to this world.

This was true of all dungeons: when the regular drop did not drop—when the monster proved a dud—water or air would drop. In other words, the production of water and air was inversely proportional to the production of vegetables.

Through my efforts, I'd increased dungeon production and tax revenue. Water production had suffered in the process.

"It's become scarce...so it's more expensive?" I asked.

Lat nodded.

"That's the whole story," Margaret said.

"I had no idea..."

"Incredible, Ryota. When you get involved, you can even make water

expensive. And in the best way!"

"Yeah. It does look like it makes for a good business opportunity."

This way, Failures who couldn't work in dungeons before had a new possible way to make money.

More jobs and business opportunities meant more circulation of money. More circulation of money is a good thing.

"Y'know, now that I really think about it, we're like kindred spirits," I mused.

"Oh?"

"You with air, me with water. We both give value to things that didn't have value before. Our stats are similar, too."

"...That's why I try to be like you."

She'd whispered in a voice that was too quiet to hear.

"Hm? What'd you say just now?"

"No, I think you're much more impressive for giving all water value instead of just some air. That's what I was saying."

"Oh..."

I didn't mind Margaret's lavish praise one bit.

#### 203. The First Two's First Home

I wandered around town for a while, doing nothing particularly special, until we passed by a certain apartment.

A cheap apartment, only 20,000 piros per month. It was the one I'd rented out and shared with Emily when I came to this world. We were still renting it to this day.

Overwhelmed by nostalgia, I headed toward the apartment.

"Oh?" I heard a sound—something from inside the room. I put a hand on the doorknob and turned it in one smooth motion.

"Ah, Yoda, it's you."

"Emily," I greeted her. The person in the apartment was Emily, who was in the middle of cleaning with her sleeves up. "You were here?"

"Yes. Sometimes, I come and clean."

"Really? Thank you," I said and looked around the room.

Despite being cramped, it was bright and warm.

The exterior of the apartment was shabby and tattered. I would believe someone if they said they thought it was haunted or abandoned. But the inside? Full of warmth, all thanks to Emily's handiwork and maintenance.

A home. A place to return to. A place that brought feelings of warmth into one's heart.

"I was so happy back then."

"Huh?" Emily was surprised. I'd said that out of nowhere, after all. But her surprise didn't last long. She quickly settled down and smiled softly at me. "I was happy, too. So very happy that you worked yourself to the bone to rent us this room, Yoda."

"I just wanted you to have a place to live."

"And I wanted to live with you!"

We gazed at each other. Smiles found their way onto our faces simultaneously. We'd both changed a lot since back then.

But still...

"This place is nice, huh?" I mused.

"Yes! Yoda, let's eat here today. I'll put my skills to work to make delicious food for us."

"Good idea. Bean sprout soup, please."

"Okay!" Emily smiled sweetly.

Bean sprout soup had brought us together. Though we were different today from the people we were back then, that bean sprout soup would still be delicious. I was certain of it.

"Then I'll go buy some bean sprouts!" she offered.

"Nah, I'll farm them. You can get the other ingredients."

"Okay."

See you here later, we said to each other without saying. Just as I opened the door to leave, though, things suddenly got hectic outside.

"Eeeek!"

"Everyone, run!"

Emily and I turned tense instantly and rushed out of the apartment together.

I saw a monster. It was a spherical monster, ten feet in diameter and floating above the ground. Its body(?) had an eerie pattern that flickered. On top of it, there were dozens of tentacle-like appendages with an eyeball at the end of each one.

To put it lightly, it was gross.

It was rampaging, sending townspeople scurrying away like ants.

"Yoda!"

"Got it." Just as I nodded and took out a gun, one of the monster's tentacles shot a fireball. The fireball, as big as a slime, flew at me with ferocious speed.

"Too...easy!" Emily swung her trademark hammer down and deflected the fireball.

"Good work, Emily!"

"Ehehe..." She smiled bashfully.

Even here, she was different—different from the time when she'd wait for Tellurium's slimes to hit her once before she attacked. Now, she was strong enough to deflect straight-on fireball shots without issue.

I was different, too.

The monster attacked. Tentacles and eyeballs unleashed magic. Fire, ice, rock, electricity—

Many kinds of offensive magic, around ten at a glance, came at me all at once.

Enough magic to easily blow away the apartment was coming my way. Not

gonna happen!

"Yoda!"

"No problem!" I whipped out my two guns, quickly discerned each type of offensive magic, and loaded bullets to match each one.

Freeze rounds for fire, flame rounds for ice, annihilation rounds for rock. I fired each one, knocking every spell out of the sky.

And the apartment...was undamaged!

"Haaaaah!" Emily's decision was fantastic, as well. The instant I'd indicated I was fine, she had already started charging.

With a full-speed charge, she leapt at the monster, spinning the hammer that was bigger than her own body. It was a devastating, and extremely satisfying, blow.

In the moment it took the monster to recover from its volley of magic, her hammer scored a direct hit. The floating monster was slammed down onto the ground. With a squelching noise, it was crushed.

"Oooh!"

"Look! It's the Ruler and the Killing Mother!"

"Holy cow... That's the Ryota Family for you..."

As people who lived in a city close to dungeons, the ones who'd ran away in a panic before quickly calmed down and admired us.

Uh, come again? Killing Mother makes sense for Emily, but what's this about the Ruler?

While I thought about the meaning of that name, Emily returned with a smile on her face and her hammer slung over her shoulder.

We gazed at each other for a moment before naturally high-fiving.

"You did great, Yoda!"

"You too, Emily."

"No calluses, no bags under your eyes. You were right back then; you're never really working until you're too tired to have them."

"That's not at all what I meant by that, but sure."

I smiled. Emily was right; the calluses on my hands were gone, and so were the black circles under my eyes that I could never get rid of when I'd worked at that corrupt company.

The two symbols of a time when my hard work had gone unrewarded were gone now.

But we were just getting started. We had a future ahead of us. There was so much more to do.

I looked directly at Emily.

"I can't wait to see what we accomplish together."

"Yeah! Me neither!"

#### 204. Treasure Chest

I got my daily acceleration round from the monster village and went back to Indole.

My mansion's warp room was connected to dungeons, but the monster village didn't have a dungeon. Getting there took a damn long time. But these acceleration rounds were precious and powerful, so I still went through the effort to get them.

"This was my first time going there, but..."

"Hm?"

"It's incredible. The monsters all looked at you with so much respect," Celeste said intently. She had come with me to the monster village. "They were all like Kerberos."

"It makes sense that you'd see it that way. They're all outsiders, and they all come from similar circumstances."

"And they're all doing real work."

"That would make them your junior, Celeste."

Celeste smiled softly. Due to her low drop rates and inefficiency in battle, she used to work burning trash instead of going into dungeons. That was the same work that the monster village was doing now.

She spoke intently again, "I know you told me about it, but that was an even bigger group than I'd expected. I guess a picture is worth a thousand words."

It might've been easier for her to imagine if I'd shown her a picture or a video. Unfortunately, in a world where all goods dropped from monsters, such machines didn't exist.

Actually... Cameras might not drop, but maybe you could make something that has a camera's functions. I should ask Orton, the magic cart guy, about that.

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"Oh!" she gasped.

"What's up, Celeste?"

"Look over there. There's a Treasure Chest."

"Huh?"
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In the direction Celeste pointed, there was a treasure chest-like monster. It looked like a mimic. The lid of the chest opened, revealing pitch-black darkness inside and sharp fangs on the rim.

"An outsider?" I asked.

"No. It's a Treasure Chest."

"Is that different from an outsider?"

"Yep. It's one of the rarest of rare monsters. Anyone can get a drop from killing it, but what it drops depends on the person."

"Depends on the person?"

"They're really rare, so it's not easy to research, but some believe it drops mementos—as in, the items are born from your memories."

"Drops based on your memories, huh?" That was interesting. "Guess I'll try killing it?"

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"Go for it."
  "And it drops things for anyone? Even outside of a dungeon?"
  "Yeah. No matter who kills it, the Treasure Chest will drop something."
  "Then do you want to try it, Celeste?"
  "I'm fine."
  "Really?"
  "I mean, if it's based on memories... It might drop you, or something that
looks like you," Celeste muttered to herself.
 I didn't hear it well, but it was clear that she was reluctant.
  "Okay. I'll try it, then."
  "Sure."
 I pulled out my gun and fired a regular bullet to see what would happen.
  Crash! The Treasure Chest shattered like glass.
  "Huh? I-It's that weak?"
  "Apparently. Anyone can defeat them, and anyone can get drops from them.
If you can encounter one, anyway."
  "Really?"
  "Also, those fangs look sharp, but they're actually not at all. They're like
sponges."
 "...Reminds me of that Angler Whelk monster."
 So it's just free, huh?
 The shattered Treasure Chest dropped something. I got closer and picked the
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item up off the ground.

"...It's my phone." I flipped it over and looked at the back. There I saw the scratch I'd caused on it the very day I'd bought it. I felt so bad about that scratch for such a long time. This was definitely my phone.

"What's that?" Celeste asked me.

"Uh, so it's called a smartphone... And it still turns on. Surely it can't get radio waves though..."

"Ryota?"

"Okay. Celeste, stand there."

"Huh?"

I held up my phone and backed off from Celeste. With the camera app started, I got her in the frame and focused on her.

"Say cheese."

"Ch-Cheese?" Celeste was dumbfounded.

*Snap!* I clicked the shutter. After confirming that I'd taken the photo, I showed it to her.

"Check it."

"Huh? Is that me?"

"Yeah. This is called a photo. This eye-like thing called a lens takes a picture of whatever it sees."

"Wow... I've never seen something like this."

"It can make videos, too."

Celeste's voice played from the phone, "Wow... I've never seen something like

this."

"Eep! Wh-What was that?"

"It's a video. It records a period of time instead of just an instant, and it saves sounds, too."

"I didn't know this existed... Is this your memory, Ryota?"

"...Yeah, I guess it is." I tapped around on my phone and deleted every single email I saw at once. They were full of bad memories of my time working for a crappy company, so I deleted them.

It all but confirmed this was my phone, too.

"Treasure Chest, huh?" I mused.

"Hey, Ryota. Do you have other mementos?"

"A few."

"Are they as incredible as that one?"

"They're not far from it. A lot of them are things that aren't in this world. Microwave ovens, for example... Though we all eat Emily's food before it gets cold, so those wouldn't help."

"That's true. Heehee, I can't wait to run into another Treasure Chest."

"Yeah. Same here." I agreed with Celeste and stored my phone in my pocket for now.

## 205. Slashing Rounds

I brought Leia to B7 of Nihonium, which I'd effectively cleared by now.

"Okay. Let's try out what we discussed."

"Yes, Master," Leia replied and made two arms.

One held a gun and pointed at me, and the other used her radar feature to track monster locations and pointed at the closest monster. It was kind of like a compass.

I walked in the direction the arm pointed to. It didn't take long to encounter a monster: a mummy-man, covered in bandages and constantly emitting electricity.

"Repetition!" I reached a hand out and insta-killed it with magic.

The seed dropped by the mummy was sucked into the pouch attached to my waist.

Using the arm's guidance, I searched for the next monster. Upon finding it, I insta-killed it with Repetition and secured another seed.

Leia's gun-wielding arm shot recovery rounds into me with every five mummy I killed to recover my MP. This was so I could be ready for any situation—for example, the off chance that the dungeon master might appear.

Nihonium alone did not have dungeon master forecasts.

Like weather forecasts, most dungeons had publicized forecasts regarding when their dungeon master would appear. That was important because

dungeon masters affected drops.

The one exception was here in Nihonium. Nobody but me could get drops, so it was worthless when it came to business, so nobody bothered with forecasts.

It might appear right now, or it might not appear for weeks, so I maintained nearly maximum MP just in case.

With this perfect system, I gathered seeds with the easiest and most efficient method.

In under an hour, I had over a hundred of them.

☆

I returned to the mansion via the warp room and went to the basement. There, I retrieved the seeds from my pouch and dumped them on the floor.

"What will you do now, Master?"

"We turn these into outsiders and get drops. Nihonium's outsiders drop special bullets."

"Understood. You'd like me to Revive them?"

"Exactly."

Leia nodded silently. She was low-energy and low-reaction, but it seemed like she was motivated enough.

"All right, let's go."

"Yes. Revive."

"Repetition."

"Revive."

"Repetition."

In the mansion basement, we converted seeds into special bullets more easily—more effectively—than ever.

Until now, I had to walk away, wait for the outsiders to spawn, and then kill them. But with Leia's Revive, the wait time was gone.

It was like a factory conveyor belt that changed seeds into bullets with more efficiency than ever before. The reason I'd essentially automated this process was because we still needed to check what the bullets actually *did* later. And so, I wanted to conserve my strength and energy.

Before long, a hundred seeds had become a hundred bullets.

"Okay, on to the next one. I already put some bean sprouts over there."

"Revive again?"

"That, and restrain it for me. After you bring it back with Revive, hold it in place for a second or two. You can handle a slime, right?"

"...Would it be better if I tossed it lightly into the air?"

"Like batting practice, huh?" I gave it some thought for a moment. "Yeah, it's plain, but that would be better than aiming at an unmoving target."

"Okay."

"Good stuff, Leia. Keep those ideas coming, all right?"

"Yes, Master." Leia looked down a tiny bit. She seemed happy.

I was making a point of praising her when she deserved it. She'd been given an emotionless soul in the process of creating her, so I did my best to compliment her and elicit positive emotions.

Incidentally, making her mad or sad might help, but I didn't do that. I wasn't into doing things like that on purpose.

Leia approached the bean sprouts and picked one up. After backing off and making eye contact with me, she cast Revive and lightly tossed the revived slime.

I loaded the new special bullet I'd gotten from the mummies and fired at the slime, which flew in a parabolic arc.

First, its trajectory...was normal. It wasn't like homing rounds.

Its speed, too, was normal. B6's trash rounds had helped in special ways, but they'd seemed utterly ridiculous when I first saw them.

Normal trajectory, normal speed. The bullet flew until it struck the slime.

Slash! The slime was so vividly cut in half that I could almost hear the sound effect. Then, it dropped a normal bullet.

"Slash?" I muttered.

"It seems to have slashed it," Leia agreed.

"Let's do it again, Leia."

"Okay. Revive."

I fired the new special bullet at the next slime in the same way. This time, I strained my eyes and stared carefully at the moment of impact. When it struck, cracks ran sideways from the point of impact.

This special bullet caused a slashing attack where it struck.

A slashing round, then.

Incidentally, I had basically no memories of slashing any monsters since I'd come to this world. I had started off with a bamboo spear, but I quickly grew stronger from there and obtained a gun.

I'd used striking attacks, shooting attacks, and magic attacks using special bullets, but slashing attacks were a new experience.

I had Leia throw a few more slimes for me to shoot slashing rounds into. The slashes could be horizontal, diagonal, vertical, and more, but they always performed *one* slashing attack.

One slash per shot. Got it.

"Master, shall we test fusion rounds?"

"Good idea. I don't know what they might do, so just in case, throw them a little farther this time." Being too close to something like an annihilation round was dangerous, after all.

"Okay. Revive." She made a new slime and threw it twice as far this time, as directed.

First, freeze rounds. I fired a freeze round and slashing round together to make them collide in midair and fuse.

The fused bullet struck the slime and created a slashing attack. It died and disappeared, but the slice in it was frozen.

"Like an icy blade? Let's do the next one."

"Okay."

This time, I tried fusing it with a flame round. It was basically the same as the freeze round, with the gash melted by fire instead, as if it had been burned by a fiery blade.

We tried various things. It fused with everything except for recovery rounds and restraining rounds.

Lightning rounds made a lightning blade, homing rounds made a homing slash, and trash rounds made it a very slow slashing round.

Plain, but versatile. This special bullet seemed like it would have a lot of uses.

"Preparing the next one. Revive."

Finally, we had slashing round and slashing round. I fired both, fusing them before they struck the slime. When it did, the slime just...fell apart.

The basketball-sized slime fell into hundreds of pieces, like it had been instantly minced.

"...Leia, throw the plate I had the bean sprouts on for me."

"Okay." Leia threw the plate as directed. I fired two more slashing rounds.

Just as expected, the hard plate had shattered—much more obviously than the jellified slime.

It had instantly, literally been shattered to bits in midair.

"An incredible effect."

"I have to agree... Guess we can call those shatter rounds."

This new bullet was a good one with a powerful effect.

Today, we all went to the coliseum instead of dungeoneering. Today was the day for the yearly award that people had been talking about for a while now.

Each city's Dungeon Association commended individuals with especially high yearly contributions. The ultimate point of this ceremony was to motivate adventurers.

There were ranks from 21 to 27. All members of the Ryota Family had won some place in the ranking, so we came together.

When I entered the waiting room in the back of the coliseum with my dresswearing Family members, I saw a familiar face: Neptune, a super-famous adventurer and central figure of the Neptune Family.

"Well, well! It's been a while, Ryota."

"Neptune... Hey, don't sidle all close to me out of nowhere. And definitely don't put an arm around my shoulder."

"Don't be so cold, friend. That's just our relationship."

"What relationship?!"

"Hmm, how do I put this..." With his arm still around my shoulder, Neptune put his other hand on his chin and thought. Slim though he was, he had good facial features. His face, the kind of pretty-boy face that didn't piss me off, looked pensive up close. "We're like...best frenemies!"

"Is that our relationship?!" I shouted, dumbfounded. I certainly didn't remember us being like that.

"Then blood brothers. By that I mean brother of my blood, of course."

"I've never heard that turn of phrase before!"

"Y'know, I think it could be fun for the two of us to compete over a woman.

Naturally, in the end, I'd lose and give you my blessing-coolly, of course."

"You act cool about it, but that just sounds irredeemable!"

Also, I couldn't believe him saying he wanted to lose.

"Ahaha! You're such a fun straight man. That's why I love you."

"Yeah, yeah." I heaved an exasperated sigh.

I knew Neptune was mostly joking when he said stuff like that. After all, he had his true loves behind him.

The bewitching older-sister character, Lil. The little-sister character who you naturally wanted to protect, Ran. Despite having such a large Family, Neptune only took the two of them around. Based on what I've seen of their fighting style, they were probably irreplaceable party members.

My theory was that they were his true loves.

"Man, you are incredible, Ryota," Neptune said out of nowhere.

"What about me?"

"Everything, of course, but it's not every day that every member of a Family is selected for this commendation."

"Fair." I glanced at my friends behind me.

Emily.

Celeste.

Eve.

Alice.

All of them were wearing dresses today, except for Eve, who was for some reason in her usual bunny get-up. My dear friends, who I was so very proud of, were all to be awarded.

"I looked into it, and the last time was sixty-seven years ago," he added.

"You researched that?"

"That's just how rare it is. Isn't it incredible, Ryota?"

"...Thanks." I was happy to see my friends' accomplishments recognized. When I turned around, they were all just as happy.

"Ryota!"

"Margaret. You came, too?"

"Of course!"

The person who'd pushed Neptune aside was none other than Margaret, who I'd just spoken to a few days ago.

All kinds of people had gathered in this room. All of them were being awarded today, and all of them were in formal clothes. But all of them, including me, were outshone by Margaret in her regal gown.

She looked like some kind of princess—but she didn't just *look* like one. Her entire atmosphere was princess-like.

Noble, elegant, beautiful, a princess that none could deny. That was Margaret, and her presence easily outshone the rest of us.

"Thanks to you, Ryota, I'm to be awarded as a ☆4 adventurer."

"It's all because of you helping me level up back then."

"No, what they're awarding is your efforts after the fact. A lazy person is still lazy, whether their level is high or not."

"But it's still thanks to you. Say, Ryota?"

"Yeah?"

Margaret fidgeted shyly and looked up at me, blushing. "I-I look forward to working with you again next year."

"Oh? Yeah, me too."

"Good!" Margaret's smile was like a flower in bloom.

I'd braced myself out of worry for what she might say, but it was as benign as could be. When I replied in turn, she seemed overjoyed.

I wonder why?

"Ryota, while I do consider you a bosom buddy, I do think that side of you is no good," Neptune said disapprovingly.

Lil and Ran criticized me as well.

"No good at all."

"The worst, really."

Um, what's no good?

☆

Unfortunately, my question went unanswered as the event began.

It was in the form of a regular award ceremony. Out in the coliseum, new Dungeon Association chief Cell gave a speech. He often spoke with a kind of pompous tone, so he was right at home giving a speech. His skill made it naturally captivating.

After that was the award ceremony, which started with the \$\frac{1}{2}\$1 awardees. A whole lot of people got that award. All of them went out to the coliseum's ring at once. The host called their names and gave a brief outline of their achievements. Each time, the audience-packed into every seat in the coliseum-applauded.

After that round, we went into the  $\cancel{2}$ 2 adventurers. There were about half as many of them as  $\cancel{1}$ 1. They were introduced and applauded likewise. Same with  $\cancel{1}$ 3,  $\cancel{1}$ 4, and  $\cancel{1}$ 5.

The number of adventurers gradually decreased, but they continued doing the same thing. Even when Neptune, the sole 46 adventurer, left, that did not change.

Honestly, I was nervous when I'd first heard about this ceremony.

I'd never had to do anything like this before. I'd worried about what they might do, but in a sense, it was like a graduation ceremony; we all got sent off with the same exact song and dance.

That was a big relief.

Once the awarding was over, Neptune returned to the waiting room.

"You're up next, Ryota."

"Yeah. See you soon."

What I'd seen so far had helped me calm down entirely. I high-fived my

friends and headed off to the ring in high spirits.

When I did, suddenly, cheers erupted like never before.

"Wooooooo!"

"Yaaaaaay! Mister Ryotaaaaaa!"

"Ryota! Ryota! Ryota!"

Girly screams, people chanting my name. The ground shook as a veritable flood of cheers washed over me.

"Wh-What? What the heck is going on?"

"This was to be expected."

"Emily?" I turned around. Emily had come to me before I knew it, with her hands on her hips and her chest puffed proudly.

"Everyone was waiting for you, Yoda."

"Waiting? For me?"

"Yes. These cheers are the result of everything you did this year. The things you did for everyone."

Surprised, I looked out at the ring again.

Everything...I did.

This time, Celeste spoke. "Yep. I think so, too."

My other friends gathered around me, too.

"You're uppity, for a low level. But yes."

"Yeah, yeah! They're cheering because you're not just in it for the money!"

"Celeste, Eve, Alice..."

"There are a lot of people who you've helped directly, but there are even more who you've helped indirectly. That's why." Emily smiled.

The cheers continued. The flood gradually seeped into my heart.

"...Really?"

All of this. What I saw now. That made this the crystallization of all I'd done here, didn't it?

I never could've imagined this back in my old world. Because no matter what I did, my efforts were never rewarded.

"Wooooooo!"

"Ryoootaaaaaa!"

The voices of people calling me, impatient to see me. I'd been rewarded in little ways here and there, but this was the moment when I felt like I had truly been recognized.

I took a deep breath and stepped toward the ring. It was time to show myself and give everyone what they were cheering for.

But I was stopped by a man who'd rushed over with panic on his face.

"Th-This is bad!" He burst through the door and pleaded, his face covered in mud, "It's Selenium! Selenium's dungeon master has appeared!"

There was a clamor in the waiting room.

"What the hell? So the forecast was wrong!"

"Most of our strong adventurers are here at the ceremony. This is bad!"

"Is the Selenium ecosystem about to change?"

The atmosphere here was tense. Disquieting. Yet oblivious of that, the people

outside continued to cheer.

I weighed them both—No. It's obvious what I have to do.

"Emily."

"Yes!"

"Sorry, but I need you to accept the award for me. Tell them what happened."

"Leave it to me!" Emily patted her chest with a big smile. I loosened the collar of my suit and ran out of the waiting room in the opposite direction.

It was a shame that I couldn't receive the award directly, yes.

"Woooooooo!"

But I heard twice the cheers behind me. Cheers from people who'd heard of my absence from Emily.

I knew that this was reward enough.

## 207. An Uncanny Bullet

The bottom floor of Selenium was filled with unusual pressure in the air. There wandered the Bicorn–dungeon master, He Who Defiles Purity.

I'd only encountered it a few times. It was a very rare monster.

Bicorn, Unicorn. Uni means one, while bi means two. As the name implied, the Bicorn was a two-horned version of a Unicorn.

"Repetition."

And I instantly killed said Bicorn.

I'd used up all of my magic in an instant, so I refilled it with several limitless recovery round injections.

I couldn't use training, practice, or whatever as an excuse to take my time against dungeon masters; they needed to be insta-killed. If I took too long, other adventurers wouldn't be able to make money. There was a chance it could change the dungeon, too.

Repetition was the best option. Realistically speaking, it was the only option.

"Phew, that'll do. That's a good place to mark the end of this year's work," I mumbled to myself, having recovered from the exhaustion of spending my magic.

But it seemed that wasn't all. The fallen Bicorn did not drop anything. Instead, a staircase appeared—despite this being the bottom floor of Selenium.

That staircase would lead me to this dungeon's spirit.

"...Time to fight a boss, then?" I murmured, raising my caution level.

I loaded all kinds of special bullets in my two guns so I could be ready for anything.

Then, I went down the stairs. Once I was all the way down, they disappeared. Nothing was there except for a mysterious space full of endless white.

"Same as usual so far."

The white space turned into a path. I walked down this path for a while until I reached a large, open space. Awaiting me was something that...seemed to be a monster.

It was a woman who was about 5'3" tall. She had long hair and a cool demeanor. Glowing, softball-sized balls floated around her. They reminded me of planets revolving around a star.

There were seven of them, each a different color.

Seven different-colored balls... Based on how they shine and their incorporeal look, they must be balls of magic.

"Do you understand language? Or—" Just as I opened my mouth, she reached a hand out. Her fingers were delicate and fair.

An inferno burst from her fingers!

"Figures!"

I dodged the flames by jumping sideways. Then, I fired normal and homing bullets at her to test the effects.

The normal bullet flew straight at her, and the homing round I'd fired in a different direction drew a curved line to aim for her.

A straight line and a curve at the same time.

She reached her hand out again. The blue magic ball became a shield of ice that defended her.

An ice shield? All right, then. I fired a flame round and a slashing round simultaneously.

They collided in midair and fused, becoming a flaming slashing round. The bullet cut into the shield and began to melt it. I followed up with—

"Ghah!"

An impact struck me from the side. I quickly jumped away from it, but I was unable to soften the impact enough to keep me from being blown away.

"Gaaaah!"

A second wave of burning pain rushed through me.

*Is that...electricity?!* 

After landing, I rolled over once, got onto my hands and knees, and jumped onto my feet. The balls flying around her crackled with electricity where I'd just stood.

She didn't give me time to breathe before she lunged at me—not her magic balls, but her.

She grabbed a magic ball and crushed it in her hands.

"Summon: Man-Culling Blade"

It sounded like I'd heard a voice, but also an unfamiliar one.

The woman slashed at me with a magic ball that had turned into a sword. The suddenness of it made it impossible to dodge fully, so I crossed my arms and guarded.

Something uncanny happened.

The sword couldn't cut through my jacket sleeve, but where it struck me, my skin tore and spewed blood. A beat later, searing pain and the sting of the cut ripped through me.

Despite my surprise, I fired off repeated normal bullets and jumped away.

Before recovering, I looked at where I'd been cut. My clothes were just fine, but my arm was torn right open.

I fired several recovery rounds to close the wound.

The woman readied her sword and charged again. Her stance and speed were nothing to scoff at—despite being a monster, she was a master.

Theorizing about my untorn clothes, I fired more normal bullets, followed by a wave of trash rounds.

She deflected the normal bullets with her sword as she closed in. Then, she attempted to deflect the sluggish trash rounds. When that failed, though, she was shaken.

"Too bad. They won't be moved."

No matter what, the super-slow trash rounds moved at their own pace. Her sword could not deflect them. And, as expected, she couldn't cut them either.

I knew it; she had called that the Man-Culling Blade.

It had left my clothes intact while only cutting my skin. It cut humans alone—and nothing else.

I understood that much now, but that didn't solve all my problems.

"I can't take my time against this one," I muttered.

After she'd cut me, the other magic balls began to glow brighter.

Intuition told me something was going on. A long battle was disadvantageous. I had to settle this quickly.

I fired the acceleration round I'd been saving into myself.

The world around me stopped. In the accelerated status, I closed in on her and hit her with my most powerful cross-counter.

It blew her away, but it didn't feel like a solid strike.

The magic balls followed her as she went. Their light swelled for a moment before weakening beyond their original state.

"Defense? Substitution? Either way, maybe I should start with them."

Acceleration rounds lasted sixty seconds. I couldn't waste that time. I charged again and started with her magic orbs.

As expected of a monster who protected this space, she was strong. Even when I moved at an accelerated rate, she counterattacked.

Her blows were mostly slow. In human terms, she moved like a three-year-old child in this state.

I dodged her sword and then a high-speed attack from her orb. I call it "high-speed," but I could easily follow it while I was accelerated.

Then, I fired point-blank homing rounds into every orb. They all shattered almost simultaneously.

Her expression stiffened up, but I held out my gun, pressed the barrel onto her, and dealt the finishing blow with a normal bullet.

"Phew... That was a tough one."

When the acceleration ran out, I exhaled all the air left in my lungs at once. Then, I waited for her to slowly disappear.

I kept my gun ready in case of danger, but fortunately, my worries were unnecessary.

After she disappeared, a single bullet was left along with a staircase leading further down. That was surely the staircase leading to this dungeon's spirit, like all the others so far.

Selenium, spirit of the dungeon Selenium—they were just below.

"But wow. Dropped a bullet directly this time, huh?"

Back when I'd fought Aurum, it had powered up one of my existing bullets, but this was the first time I'd seen a monster drop a straight-up bullet.

The jacket of the bullet had patterns and characters resembling crawling earthworms, making it clearly different from any other yet.

Upon receiving it, I loaded my gun without hesitation.

As soon as I touched it, I knew that it was a limitless bullet much like the limitless lightning and recovery rounds I had now.

Even if I fired it, I wouldn't lose it. As such, I loaded it and immediately testfired it in a random direction.

After I fired it, the cylinder flashed for an instant. I fired again, and the part where I'd loaded this new bullet flashed again.

The bullet itself was a little slower than a regular bullet, and it didn't seem to have a special effect so far... But when I fired it again, it flashed in the cylinder once more.

I recalled the monster from before. Her magic orbs had gotten stronger when she'd cut me. This light was a lot like that. I couldn't be sure, but it seemed like the monster herself had gotten stronger as well.

"...Does it get stronger every time you fire it?"

It brought to mind cursed swords, particularly the kind that became stronger when they tasted human blood.

# 208. Selenium, Walking Porno

A staircase leading down had appeared, so I put away the new bullet for now and went down the stairs.

I was nervous. If it followed the pattern so far, then the dungeon spirit's chamber would be up ahead. Selenium, spirit of the dungeon, would be waiting for me.

Selenium, huh...? I wonder what you're like.

For some reason, the name Selenium had a feminine image in my mind.

When I reached the bottom of the stairs, nobody was there.

"Huh? There's...nobody here?"

"Guess who!"

Squish!

Someone suddenly hugged me from behind. I felt two extremely soft, warm, and squishy things on my back as two soft hands covered my eyes.

Though I was shaken by the surprise, I tried answering, "S-Selenium?"

"Correctimundo! Heehee, you're perceptive. Or are you just lucky? Or well-learned, maybe?"

"C-Can you let me go first, please? If you keep hugging me-"

"You'll get hard?"

"I can't... Wait, what did you just say—?" I quickly shook her off and got away from her. When I whipped around, I was even more surprised. "Ack!"

She was a drop-dead beauty. Her boobs were something like F, G, or H... I don't know which, but they were around that size. She also had a lovely figure, with an hourglass waistline and shapely legs.

And she wore an extremely revealing bikini, as if trying to show off how good her figure was. She only hid the three bits that would immediately make this porn if she didn't, and those meager patches of clothing were connected by little more than string.

"Wh-What's with the get-up? Or...lack thereof?" I stammered.

"Oh? You don't like my look?"

"I didn't say I liked or didn't like it. I'm just asking why you're dressed like that."

"Because I like it!" Selenium puffed out her chest. Her boobs bounced up and down in the process. I couldn't help but gulp.

"Ooh, I see. You don't dislike it at all, huh? You're a man, after all. Hey..."

"Wh-What?"

"You're not a bad-looking guy... Let me do you."

"That's a little sudden!"

"Then you can do me."

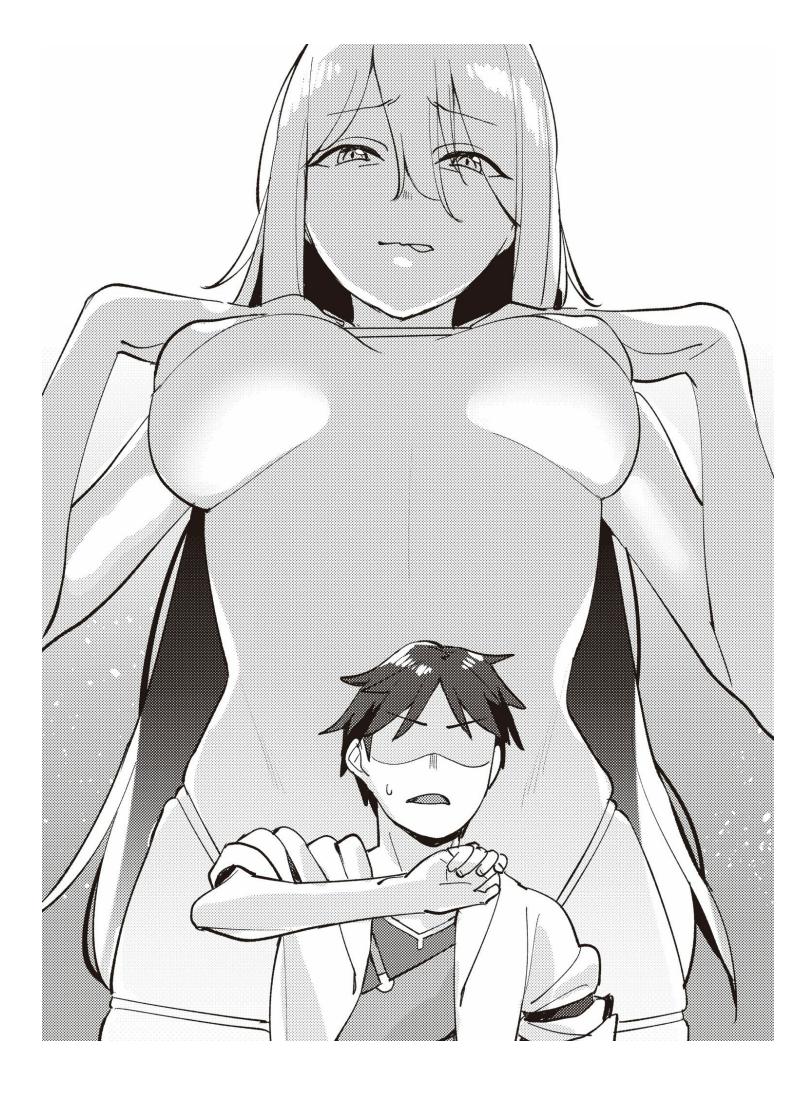
"Is there a difference?! What the hell is the difference there?!"

"Of course there's a difference. Doing someone and getting done are totally different, both for men and women. Virgins are better pickings for my money, but you're hot, so I don't mind."

I remembered a certain monster's title.

"She who defiles purity..."

Selenium's words were calm and unforced. She almost sounded sincere. That was why I'd remembered the Bicorn's title—He Who Defiles Purity.



*Is there a relation here?* I wondered.

More pressingly, though, I wondered how to deal with the woman in front of me. Her revealing clothes, her brazen advances... It'd be no exaggeration to call this woman a walking porno.

"What are you so hesitant over? You guessed my name, so you must know that coming here means you get the spirit's blessing, right?"

"Uh... Yeah, I guess..."

"Then you must know that we want something in return from the people who come here."

That was true. Aurum and Arsenic had only befriended us because we'd granted their wishes.

"Does it really have to be that?" I asked.

"A kiss would be enough to satisfy me."

"Okay... Then that's fine-mmph!"

Before I could even finish that sentence, Selenium closed in and covered my lips with hers. She pushed her lips against mine and slid her tongue between.

"Ah...!"

When I realized that something was off, it was already too late. I was at the mercy of her French kiss. To put it in literary terms, it was like a storm on a summer's day. In gamer terms, it was a 99-hit combo.

Once she had her fill, she released me.

This was a serious shock to my system. I fell to my hands and knees.

"I... I can never be a groom..." I gasped.

"Ahaha! Sorry, sorry. You're just too cute, so I couldn't help myself. Thanks for the treat."

"At least don't say that last part..."

"Ahaha!" Showing no signs of guilt, she smiled dramatically—and bewitchingly. Eventually, I recovered from the shock of her deep, 99-hit-combo kiss. "Okay, I'll go ahead and bless you. That was a good kiss, so I'll make it so you never consume MP while you're in my dungeon."

"Never consume MP? No matter what magic I use?"

"That's right. You've got good magic, right?"

"You know?"

"I know everything that happens in my dungeon."

Oh, of course.

I'd killed the Bicorn with Repetition just a short while ago, so of course she knew.

No MP consumption. I could use Repetition as much as I wanted. Though I had limitless recovery rounds, zero consumption and limitless recovery weren't exactly the same. I liked this blessing.

"Thanks," I said.

"Also... Show me that deadly weapon."

"Huh?!" I reflexively covered my crotch and turned my legs inward.

"Not what I meant. But I wouldn't mind *that* one, either." Selenium smiled enticingly. "I meant the new bullet."

"O-Oh. The bullet... Right." I took out the bullet I'd just received and handed it

to Selenium.

She accepted it and stroked it with those sexy fingers. When she did, something rose from the pattern engraved in it.

It was a 3D image, like a hologram. Said hologram displayed a simple number.

"Level 1?" I asked.

"Yep. This bullet grows the more you use it. Unlike that human weapon we just mentioned." Selenium grinned. Did this lady ever talk about anything but sex?

"I've never heard of it working like that."

"More precisely, it grows the more you hit things with it. I made it easier to monitor that growth."

"Oh... Thank you."

"It's cool. You're an unusually good man, so call it my treat." Selenium smiled again. I'd only just met her, but I was already used to seeing that particular smile.

Beneath that smile, though, I saw a hint of loneliness. Though she acted cheerful, she was lonely—just like Aurum.

Without so much as thinking about it, I approached her and leaned in.

Mwah. When I gave her that gentle and quick kiss, she looked surprised.

"Wait a second..."

"Consider that my thanks," I said.

"You already gave me enough... You really are a good man."

"Bye, then. I'll be back."

"Ahaha! Sure, if you think you can." Selenium saw me off, doing her best to conceal her loneliness.

She didn't believe what I'd just said. That was understandable; getting to a spirit's chamber was extremely difficult, after all.

Once upon a time, Aurum had told me something: "it's a 0.000000001% chance for that door to open."

If someone knew that, they'd never trust someone who said they'd "be back."

But I could do it. I returned to the mansion using the warp gate I'd made when I came to kill the dungeon master. Then, I warped straight into Selenium's chamber.

I gave the stunned Selenium another quick kiss. A quick peck on the lips—and she couldn't even react.

The prank was a success, and I gotta say, her reaction was surprisingly adorable.

# 209. Perpetual Powerleveling

I casually walked around B1 of Nihonium, killing skeletons as I went.

I was using my new bullet, which I'd decided to call the growth bullet for the time being. The reason I'd picked this floor was that Selenium had told me that the bullet grew when it hit things.

If just hitting was all it needed, regardless of drops or anything, then Nihonium was ideal. After all, you couldn't get these raw numbers in other dungeons due to conflicts with other adventurers.

But Nihonium was basically all mine.

Bang! I pulled the trigger and shot through a skeleton.

"Hmm, speed and power less than a normal bullet. About 70%, maybe?"

A new skeleton appeared. I readied my two guns and fired a normal bullet and growth round at the same time.

They pierced the skeleton's left and right shoulders respectively.

The growth bullet was evidently slower and weaker.

That wasn't a problem in itself. It was going to grow. Typically, things like this ended up stronger than normal ones. The weaker they were when they started, the more one could expect from their growth.

I continued to shoot down skeletons without worrying about its current weakness. Finding them, killing them with the growth round, depositing the dropped seeds in my pouch.

I repeated this single-mindedly...except.

"This is a problem..." I couldn't help but mutter.

Even as the number of seeds in my pocket increased to the point that they were worth an entire stat rank, the growth round's level did not increase.

The number display that Selenium had engraved for me remained at level 1.

I wondered if there was something special that I needed to do, but after a while longer, that was proven incorrect. After I'd killed enough skeleton to raise a stat two ranks, the growth round suddenly hit level 2 as if nothing was wrong.

Selenium was right: all I had to do to make it grow was fire it. It just required a surprisingly difficult number of reps.

"What do I do about this..."

I decided to rethink things while I gazed at the level 2 growth round.



I warped over to Selenium's chamber in her dungeon with Leia in tow.

"Yo."

"Wow! You really came back!"

"I told you I would."

"You did, but I didn't think you'd do it. I thought it would be another hundred years at *least*."

"Most people die in a hundred years. I could come every day, if you want."

"I'd get tired of you." Selenium smiled cheerfully.

She was pretty and sexy, but she had a dynamic personality. Looks like a gravure idol, acts like a big sister—that was the kind of spirit she was.

"So, who's that?" Selenium asked.

"Oh, she's my friend. Her name is Leia."

"I am Master's possession," Leia introduced herself.

"Whoa, that's a hell of a kink! I'm jealous."

"It's not a kink..." She's imagining something weird, that's for sure. "Anyway, I wanted to ask you for something. Can you apply my MP consumption rule to Leia instead?"

"The blessing?"

"Yeah. It'd be a big help."

"Hmm... No can do," Selenium refused flatly. I furrowed my brow. I thought she'd be willing to accept since she was so generous, but maybe not?

"No matter what?" I asked.

"I gave it to you, so I can't take it off and put it on someone else."

"I see..."

If Leia had the "no MP consumption" boon then there might've been a chance, but alas.

"Instead of taking it off..." Selenium spoke up again.

"Huh?"

"If you want me to also give it to her, then that's cool."

"Oh, that's it?" I grinned wryly. It seemed I wasn't wrong to think that she'd be willing to help me out. "Could you please?"

"Sure. But asking me for something... You know what that means, right?"

"Yeah, I know." I approached Selenium, put my hands on her shoulders, and leaned in.

She dodged quickly around me and went over to Leia behind me.

"Huh?" I was confused. After evading me, she grabbed Leia's hand. "Why?"

"Obviously the person making the request is the one who has to do it, duh."

"...Fair, I guess."

"Anyway, she and I are gonna need some alone time."

"Uhh..." I looked at Leia.

She nodded quietly, as if to say that it was fine.

I went back to the mansion through the warp gate. After waiting a little while, I returned to Selenium's chamber.

There was an odd sense of distance between them. Selenium had a glow about her, too.

"Phew... Right good stuff right dere," she mumbled.

"Wait, wait. Why did your shtick change?"

"When I'm with cute girls, I'm an old man at heart."

"That doesn't sound like something you should brag about! Leia, are you okay?"

"Yes." Compared to Selenium's silly attitude, Leia was as aloof as ever.

"Okay. Glad to hear that."

"No matter what is done to me, my body and soul belong to you, Master."

"What the hell did she do to you?!" I shrieked.

"It's okay, we didn't do much!" Selenium assured me. "I didn't wanna go too far and make you hate me."

"This is a little overwhelming..." I guess...I can believe her for now.

"Okay, deal's sealed! Now she won't consume MP in this dungeon anymore, just like you."

Despite what we'd been put through, my request was granted.

☆

With Leia attached to me, I went to a remote, comparatively less-trafficked part of B1 of Selenium. It was fine if people saw what we were doing, but I didn't want to get in the way of adventurers producing, so I did it here.

A monster appeared: a slime with a rainbow-colored body. I fired the growth round into it and received my soybean drop.

After collecting them...

"Leia, Revive."

"Understood."

Leia cast Revive on the soybeans, returning them to rainbow slime form.

I instantly killed it with the growth round again, causing the reborn slime to become soybeans again.

"Again, Leia."

"Revive."

She cast Revive, I insta-killed with the growth round, Leia cast Revive *again*, and I insta-killed *again*.

Leia's MP was unlimited, and my growth rounds were unlimited.

Fire, Revive, fire, Revive.

We continued this loop.

"Master."

"Yeah?"

While we mindlessly repeated this process, Leia stretched out an arm and held up a gun. "I will do it. You rest."

"I appreciate the thought, but let's not. My guaranteed drops are necessary for the loop. If you do it, the drops will run out."

"I see. Very wise, Master."

We continued raising the growth round.

It took a long time, but it went up to level 3. The perpetual motion machine had proven a success.

## 210. Hard-Working Ryochin

In the morning, I went into the dining room.

There, Emily busily ran around making breakfast. Eve was picking at the food lined up in front of her.

They both greeted me.

"Good morning."

"Morning."

"Morning..." I replied. "What in the world are you eating?"

"Carrot diced steak," Eve answered. Emily retreated into the kitchen with a smile.

Carrot...diced steak?

"Is it not just diced and grilled?" I asked. That was what it had looked like at a glance, at least.

The carrots were cut thick and round, like big carrots you'd put into curry. It was worthy of being called diced steak, especially with the delicious-looking grill marks seared into it.

"You are naïve, low level. Goddess Emily would not stoop to such simplicity."

"G-Goddess?"

"She simmered carrots, pureed them and mixed them with butter, and then stuffed them into carrot molds. Then, she grilled the whole package."

"Oh?" I looked at the carrot diced steak again. The bite-sized chunks had

traces of being opened on one side like boxes.

"Goddess Emily's carrot diced steak is crispy on the outside and melty on the inside. When you bite into it, two types of carrot tastes and aromas spread through your mouth and mingle like an astral symphony."

"It's funny how you're always such an eloquent poet when it comes to carrots."

Funny though it was, I knew how she felt. Emily's dishes, especially the elaborate ones, were bound to be delicious.

Incidentally, they weren't delicious just because she made them elaborate.

While Eve and I talked, Emily brought plenty of ordinary breakfast items to the table. All of them were delicious, too. For example, ham and eggs, a breakfast staple. To give it a monetary value, I'd be willing to pay 10,000 piros for ham and eggs made specifically by Emily.

That was just how good they were.

Any good day had to start with breakfast this delicious. With that expectation, our friends woke up one after another and gathered in the dining room.

Celeste, Erza, Kerberos, Aurum, Leia. Everyone gathered in order, except for one.

"Huh? Where's Alice?" I asked.

Erza and Celeste answered me.

"She left early today."

"Apparently, 'Rawry' was calling her."

"Rawry? Sounds like a new monster buddy," I mused.

"That's what I think. Rawry... Is it a dog, you think?" Celeste wondered.

"Just like me?!" Kerberos's eyes sparkled with joy.

"That's what it sounds like to me."

Convinced by that hypothesis, I got a little excited to see the new friend Alice would bring home later.

Everyone but Alice was here, so we got right to eating.

"Today, I'll take Arsenic his daily meal and then go farm in his dungeon," Emily said.

"Magic storm today, so I'm taking off," Celeste added.

"None can stop the union of carrot and bunny," Eve said flatly.

We each reported on our day's plans while we ate Emily's breakfast. This wasn't a requirement, but it was kind of an unspoken rule here in our home now.

"What about you, Ryota?"

"After I take Aurum home, I'll be in Selenium all day leveling my bullet on B1."

"It's not good to overwork yourself," Emily reminded me.

"Don't worry. I'm not overworking at all."

"You lie, low level." Now that we weren't talking about carrots anymore, Eve was back to her low-energy state.

"Lie? No, I'm not."

"Goddess Emily tells me you're not working until the bags under your eyes are gone."

"I guess I did say that, huh?"

"I think you're fine," Celeste disagreed.

"Me, too," Erza backed her up.

"Ryota only overworks himself when he's doing something for someone else."

"Right. I think he's...leveling a bullet, was it? At a pace that works for him. He takes his time raising his stats, too, after all."

"...I see." Eve seemed convinced by them.

I felt a little ticklish hearing them talk about me like that, but I'd never planned to raise it all the way at once anyway. For now, I was satisfied with just being able to predict how it would grow and how it would end up once it was done growing.

"Anyway, there you have it," I said. "Kerberos, let everyone at the village know I'll probably be coming for my acceleration round this evening. I'll also pick up Aurum then while I'm at it."

"Okay! Leave it to me!"

After a lively breakfast, those of us going out to work started getting ready. Just then, I heard Alice's voice from outside the dining room.

"I'm back!" Her footsteps rushed down the hallway, approaching us until she burst into the dining room. "I'm back, everyone! Look, it's Rawry!" She was clearly excited as she held out a plushie-like monster in the palm of her hand.

Boney, Bubbly, Boomy, Spiky. Like her other buddy monsters so far, this one was like a chibified plushie. And its form was...

"A lizard?" I asked.

"Rawr!" The monster in her hand suddenly got mad.

"Rawry says, 'I ain't no lizard!'"

"Oh, okay. Sorry. You just kinda looked like one."

"Yeah! He was on the bottom floor of Bismuth, after all!"

"I see."

The dungeon Bismuth had many reptilian monsters there, much like the needle lizard Spiky that she'd already recruited. It was natural that it resembled one.

"Huuuh?! The bottom floor of Bismuth... A Master Dragon?!" Erza was shocked.

"Do you know about it?"

"Yes; it's a famous monster. There can only be one Master Dragon in Bismuth at any given time, and it's said to be extremely stingy with its drops."

"Aha. I can see why it's famous." I looked at the so-called Rawry in Alice's hands again. It was small and chibified, yes, but it was in fact a dragon.



"Oh, it's a dragon..." Kerberos whimpered.

"Don't feel down. You'll have a friend soon, Kerby," Emily assured him. "When she gets a friend named Puppy, that's when the fun really begins."

"She's right!"

"Still, something called a Master Dragon must be strong. Good job beating it," I complimented her.

"Yeah! Boney and the others got beat up a lot of times, so it was close, but it was super easy when I called Ryochin!"

"Omnipotence, huh?"

Omnipotence was a spell that could summon the strongest person someone knew. It was usable only once per day, and it only lasted sixty seconds, but the one she summoned would be exactly as strong as the original.

And the one she summoned with it was me, but in Ryochin form.

"And that's how you won, huh?"

"Yep! At first, nothing Ryochin tried worked, but he suddenly got a lot faster in the last ten seconds."

"An acceleration round, huh? That must be a recent development."

"Then, he filled Rawry full of holes. It was awesome! I mean it, too. It was kinda terrifying how many holes he put in it."

"Ryochin's merciless, huh?" I could imagine the sight, though.

"Hey, try summoning it!" Kerberos said. "I wanna see it full-sized."

"I gotta do it outside. Rawry's way too big normal-sized."

"Even bigger than me?"

"Yep! Ten times bigger."

"It is a Master Dragon, after all..."

Everyone gathered around Alice and Rawry in spirited discussion.

This was a monster that could force Ryochin, a copy of me, to bring out an acceleration round at the last moment.

My hand naturally reached for my gun and felt the growth round.

I won't push myself... But I do know that I need to get stronger.

#### 211. A Fair CEO

On B1 of Selenium, I spent my time raising my growth round even more. Leia held the rainbow slime down, I fired, she cast Revive, and I fired at the revived slime.

We repeated this process over and over.

All told, it took about two hours to raise the bullet one level. This was true for every level; it didn't get harder as you went, or anything. We had an efficient process and performed it for two hours to raise the bullet one level.

"I wonder if it's pure repetition," I mused.

"Repetition?" Leia asked back. We didn't need to be fused, so she was in human form.

"Yeah. It might be an exact number of shots to raise the level. Rather than leveling up based on experience points, it might be more accurate to call it raising its proficiency based on the number of times it's used."

*In gaming terms*—I almost said, but I stopped myself.

"I will count." Leia didn't waste time with impressions and instead began counting the number of shots to test my hypothesis. She was typically robotic, so she was naturally adept at such work.

"Thanks."

When I thanked her, Leia blushed a little. "It's no problem."

Given her background-that she was an emotionless soul given life-I'd decided

to do things that would provoke emotion whenever I had the chance.

Positive emotion, of course. I just wasn't meant to be negative.

While we continued leveling the bullet, I happened to notice a commotion further away from us.

What's going on? I wondered, pausing the process.

"Let's stop for a sec."

"Okay."

Leia and I headed over to the source of the commotion.

It had happened in front of the rest area.

These rest areas had been set up in every dungeon by Cell, the new Cyclo Dungeon Association chief—except for Nihonium, which served no economic purpose.

Adventurers could rest and heal their wounds there. A young adventurer eyed one such rest area dubiously.

"A rest area...?" he muttered.

Another adventurer came over and pushed him aside. "Hey, if you're not going in, you should move aside. You're right in the way of the door."

"H-Hey. This place... What's going on here?"

"What do you mean? Did you just blow into town?"

"Yeah."

"Makes sense. It's nothing special, just a rest area built under the authority of the Cyclo Dungeon Association."

"How much does it cost?"

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"It's free."
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"Huh ...?"

While the young adventurer was astounded, the one answering his questions shrugged lightly and went into the rest area.

Left behind, he muttered to himself, "Free? That can't be right. It's a place where you can heal in dungeons. That can't possibly be free... There must be something going on here."

When I was about to tell him that it was totally free and there were no strings attached, someone else addressed me from behind.

"Mr. Sato, it's been a while."

"Huh... Ina? It sure has."

There I saw Ina, an employee from the Swallow's Returned Favor. She was one of Erza's friends. We'd met in Cyclo, but these days, she'd been working in Indole.

"What brings you here?" I asked her. "Is Indole fine now?"

"Yep, they can stand on their own two legs now. I've got a new job here."

"A new job?"

"They decided to build new branch offices inside of dungeons. Just like the one you built for us, Mr. Sato."

"Yeah?"

The Swallow's Returned Favor branch office in our mansion worked using my magic cart's teleportation feature. Before, it was *only* implemented in our mansion.

"So, they decided to expand into dungeons, too?"

"Yep. They think it'll bring in more customers, and we can lower purchase prices in dungeons in return for convenience, so it might boost profits."

"Huh. Well, that's logical."

Considering adventurers typically had to haul drops into town, being able to sell them directly in dungeons was much more convenient. There were surely people out there who'd be willing to make a little less money if it meant skipping that labor.

"It's thanks to you that we were able to start doing this. I hear the boss plans to come thank you in person."

"That so? And are they only doing it in Selenium?"

"Nope, they're setting these up in the others as well. Other than Nihonium, anyway," Ina said with a smile.

Wow. Making money in dungeons will be more convenient than ever.

It didn't benefit me, but there was no doubt it would help other adventurers earn. That was a good thing.

While I was talking with Ina, someone called out to us from the side, "E-Excuse me!" It was the young adventurer from before, the one who was leery of the rest area. He timidly asked Ina, "I heard what you were just talking about. Are they really building drop-buying shops in dungeons?"

"Yep. It's the truth," Ina replied with her customer service smile. "It'll be a few days before we open for business, but you should come check it out when we do!"

"Umm... Do you need any qualifications to sell?"

"Qualifications? No?"

"That's impossible... It's too good to be true..." The young man was shocked.

"Oh, but prices in the dungeon will be a little bit lower than in town, so you'll make a bit less money," Ina added, but the man's shock remained. He looked as if he didn't believe her.

Thus, he left, grumbling things like "It's not possible" and "There must be a catch" along the way.

"What was his deal? Did I say something weird?" Ina asked me.

"I'm guessing..."

I knew a phenomenon like this. When employees of corrupt companies found new jobs at ones with good working conditions—or even *normal* working conditions—they became paranoid.

I'd heard a story like this from a coworker of mine who'd changed jobs. His new company was too good to be true. There had to be a catch. And frankly, when he told me about how kind they were there, I also thought it was too good to be true.

It's the tragedy of being domesticated by corrupt companies, really.

"He must've been in a sad Family, farming in sad dungeons."

"Is that what leads to this?" Ina asked me.

"If your environment suddenly improves too much, you tend to become suspicious. It'll take time before he gets used to a better working environment."

"Huh." Ina watched the man leave and looked at me with a mischievous grin.

"Then it's your fault that he's that way, isn't it?"

"Huh?"

"It's all because of you that Cyclo and Indole have improved so much, don't you think? The building of rest areas, us building these drop-buying shops in dungeons. And look how the adventurers around us have improved in both quality and vibe." After a pause, she looked at me with a big smile. "You caused aaall of this, Mr. Sato."

Maybe she's right.

If that was true, then that made my efforts worthwhile.

#### 212. Hottie Round

I spent another day in Selenium leveling up by growth round with Leia.

I'd stopped all of my other daily activities to level it up. At this point, it had reached level 10.

### Ryota has awakened the Drain effect.

"Oh?"

"Is something wrong, Master?"

"I just heard a voice saying something about a Drain effect... Is it this?" I took out the growth round and gazed at it. The engraving Selenium had added to it now displayed level 10. "It said it awakened. Did it add that because it reached level 10?"

"A special effect?"

"Seems like it. It called it Drain."

"Drain... It must absorb something."

"That's gotta be it. But what does it absorb? Leia, cast Revive for me."

"Yes, Master." In a smooth motion, Leia cast Revive on the item that had just dropped, turning it back into a rainbow slime.

I reloaded the growth round and fired at the slime. It had reached 90% of a normal bullet's speed and power. It was steadily improving over time.

But more importantly...

"Hmm," I mumbled to myself.

"How is it, Master?"

"It's definitely absorbing something. I feel something being drawn into me, though it's faint."

"Something? What is it, though?"

"That, I do not know. It's neither HP nor MP," I said as I loaded a recovery round and shot it into myself. Recovery rounds healed both HP and MP. "Yeah. It definitely feels different."

"Neither HP nor MP?"

"Yeah. Let's test it out a little more. We'll take it to level 11."

"Understood, Master," Leia assented, and cast Revive again.

I followed up by firing my growth round as usual.

We repeated this assembly line over and over. Along the way, I felt something gently flowing into my body, but I just could not tell what it was.

We didn't end up figuring it out before the bullet reached level 11.

"Thoughts, Master?"

"Nope. Can't make heads nor tails of it."

"I see."

"It's not a bad feeling, so I guess I don't need to worry about it. Let's call it a day and see about asking Selenium tomorrow."

"Very well."

We'd been leveling the bullet since morning, and it was getting to be closing

time. We went toward the warp gate to prepare to go back to the mansion.

When we did...

"E-Excuse me!" someone suddenly stopped me.

"Hmm?"

A girl in her teens gazed at me, looking extremely desperate. Was someone up to no good again?

I braced myself-but then...

"I'm in love with you!" she screamed.

"...Bwuh?"

"You're so handsome and strong, and I love you... Thank you!" After that one-sided rant, she ran away just like that.

Thank you? Uh... Is that something you say after a confession? I didn't even answer her.

"Umm..."

"That's my Master for you. You're quite popular."

"Hey, now. Don't tease me."

"Tease?" Leia said, sounding confused.

Right. She doesn't have emotions to tease with.

The fact that she was genuinely impressed and thought I was popular with women made it somehow even more embarrassing.

What an odd little event that was. She was gone, so I might as well go home-

"Master."

"What's up?"

"You're being watched."

"Watched?" I looked around upon Leia's warning.

Indeed, I was being watched—by women. All the women I could see were watching me.

Some of them were blushing, and some of them had passion in their eyes. All of them had the same look on their face as the girl from before.

I was just stunned, left with no idea what was going on. Nothing in particular happened, though; I just went back to the mansion through the warp gate.

When I got back to the warp room, I ran into Celeste.

"Yo, I'm back."

"Welcome back... Huh?"

"Something wrong, Celeste?" I asked, but she did not respond. Instead, she just stared at me with evident surprise. "What? Is there something on my face?" I asked again.

This time, she had a look of realization and said, "N-Nope! Nothing's wrong!"

Then, she ran off right away.

She sure isn't acting like nothing's wrong. Something is happening.

And that something had to be...

"The growth bullet, surely."

The confession in the dungeon, those passionate looks, now Celeste. Considering the timing of this chain of events, it all started just after the Drain effect was added to the growth bullet.

I left Leia behind and went back to Selenium's chamber using the warp chamber. There I found the voluptuous spirit with the extremely indecent bikini.

"Hello there, hottie," she greeted me.

I ignored the words of the alluring woman and got right to the point. "What is Drain, exactly?"

"Wow, so that's what it got? Crazy, that's the rarest one. Beyond the probability, it can still be impossible if you don't have the right stuff. But..." Selenium approached, got a good look at my face from point-blank, and seemed to convince herself of something. "Yeah, wow, Drain."

"Okay, so it was Drain. What's the deal?"

"Heheh, so, here's an example. If you saw me sighing blissfully and experiencing an unusual glow, what would you think happened?"

"You...had sex, I guess?"

"Correct! Ding ding ding!" She went out of her way to mimic a "correct" sound effect. "When you have sex, you glow, obviously. Drain's a lot like that. It sucks up vitality—stamina, y'know—instead of HP or MP and gives it to you. I bet you don't feel tired right now, do you?"

"Yeah, actually. I spent all day leveling, and I don't feel tired at all."

"Right? That's what it is."

"That's great and all, but why does everyone look at me different?"

"Hello there, hottie."

Selenium gave a seemingly off-kilter reply.

"Um?" I was confused. That was the same thing she'd said when I came in. I

thought about it for a moment. "Does Drain make you look more attractive as a side effect?"

"Ding ding ding!" She made the sound effect again, obviously enjoying herself.

"I had no idea it did such a thing."

"You gave the bullet a name, right? How about changing it to the hottie round?"

No, no. I don't think I'll do that.

☆

I came home through the warp gate.

Though the bullet apparently made you more attractive, the effect went only as far as finding someone you already like more attractive. I've heard that people who are in love secrete more sex hormones, making them seem more attractive.

That made sense. It wasn't negative, at least, so I gave up and came home... except.

I felt eyes on me from outside the warp room.

"…"

"..."

Celeste and Erza were hiding and stealing glances at me. Their cheeks were flushed from embarrassment, too.

I didn't mind being appreciated, but this was kind of awkward.

Well, now what? I wondered.

"Low level discovered." Just then, Eve entered the warp room. "I want carrots."

"..."

"You're uppity, low level, staring at me like that. I demand a carrot within the next ten seconds."

"Nothing at all?"

"What?" Eve cocked her head in blank confusion.

I looked at her, then back to Celeste and Erza who continued to glance at me.

"It's amazing how much you love your carrots."

"My dream is to be put to sleep by a poison carrot, to become a sleeping beauty, and to be awakened by a carrot-adorned prince who feeds me a carrot with his mouth."

"That's a very specific dream." I had to laugh at how Eve never changed.

Infected by the mood, Celeste and Erza approached, though still blushing, and talked to me like usual.

We lived in the same mansion, after all. Hopefully they'd get used to it soon.

Incidentally... After this day, I'd end up getting confessed to and receiving gifts often in dungeons.

### 213. The Man of Her Dreams

When Celeste woke up in her room the next morning, her eyes were bloodshot. Put bluntly, she was sleep deprived.

After she'd gotten into bed last night, she saw Ryota when she closed her eyes. Her heart had beat so fast that she couldn't sleep.

"It's not fair, becoming that hot..." She stuck her lip out, hugged the plushie she was sleeping with, and buried her face into it.

Celeste had a bit of a crush on Ryota. Normally, she was able to restrain it, but it had suddenly blown up out of nowhere. When she saw Ryota, her heart screamed like never before.

She hadn't just fallen for him recently, so what had changed all of a sudden? She was surprised at first, but it made sense when Ryota had told her about the effects of his new special bullet later.

It made sense, yes, but the nervousness didn't go away.

And it was because of that that she couldn't sleep all night.

"It's not fair..."

With her face buried in the plushie, she recalled seeing him yesterday and felt another pang in her heart.

Celeste came alone to B12 of Silicon.

It was one of Cyclo's dungeons. Its monsters were weak to magic while being extremely resistant to physical attacks.

As such, mages were typically the only ones to come here.

Almost all the drops were leafy vegetables, so the price of said vegetables fluctuated wildly due to magic storms at times.

Celeste was there facing B12's monster: the evolving caterpillar.

She used her magical item, the Bicorn horns, to cast a volley of fireballs. The caterpillar, as big as a medium-sized dog, burst into flames and stopped dead in its tracks.

After it stopped, it began spewing thread—not toward its enemy Celeste, but on itself.

The thread wrapped around the caterpillar, incorporating dungeon rubble and smaller scraps of vegetables that had been left due to their relative worthlessness, and became a cocoon.

Celeste lowered her Bicorn horns and took a deep breath. "Pure flames, incinerate the void born of the void—Inferno!"

Her magic power billowed and erupted from her hands as an inferno, enveloping the cocoon. It burned. Though it endured the high heat for a short while, it slowly began to melt.

The evolving caterpillar was a monster that could transform from caterpillar to butterfly. It was one of the special monsters that began appearing beyond B5. When defeated in caterpillar form, it dropped nothing.

It had to be killed as an adult to yield drops.

However, the butterfly had over ten times the power of the caterpillar, which was what had earned it its name.

Its health was inherited from its caterpillar state, however. Celeste continued to accumulate damage on the motionless cocoon.

After a while, by the time it had half melted, Celeste clenched her fist tight and raised it upward.

The flames stopped.

Celeste waited.

After a while, the cocoon began to wriggle. The butterfly tried to exit.

Celeste took out the Bicorn horns again and fired more fireballs, the weakest fire spell. But with the damage she had accumulated on it so far, that was enough to finish off the butterfly.

With that, she was rewarded with this floor's item drop: spinach. Spinach sold for a good price these days, owing to its wide use in ramen and other dishes.

She picked it up and placed it in her magic cart.

Other adventurers around her fought in similar ways. They accumulated damage from caterpillar to cocoon and then finished it off the instant it became a butterfly.

However, that was easier said than done. If they didn't deal enough damage, then the adult butterfly would emerge and give them trouble. If they failed to control their damage well enough and killed it too soon, they would receive no drops.

Despite this, Celeste always dealt calculated damage, and she always finished it off with the Bicorn horns alone.

People looked upon her with respect and admiration.

"See, that's what you can expect from a real member of the Ryota Family."

Celeste did not notice this. She simply continued to farm the dungeon as an adventurer, using her stats raised by Ryota's Quicksilver and drop rates boosted by a potion.

It was then that a girl appeared before Celeste.

"E-Excuse me!"

She was a short, doll-like girl with fluffy hair and an adorable one-piece dress. The girl might not look the part of an adventurer based on those features alone, but Celeste did not overlook the magic-boosting ring on her finger.

Indeed, she was a real adventurer.

Celeste turned to face her. "What? Do you need something from me?"

"U-Umm, well...!" she stammered. She was constantly getting louder and more incoherent, blushing madly, until she finally managed to shout, "Can I call you Big Sister?!"

Celeste was stunned.

"Ooh," people around her piped up.

"Umm... I mean, I guess that's fine-"

"Th-Thank you very much!" She bowed quickly. Seemingly ready to cry—from sheer joy, of course—she turned her back to Celeste and sprinted away.

"Why do you... Aaand, she's gone." Celeste was utterly confused by this situation.

How did the adventurers who'd witnessed this react?

"That's so sad."

"Sad that she doesn't understand her feelings."

"How bittersweet."

Such commentary only confused her further.

☆

After finishing this round of dungeon farming, Celeste returned to the mansion through the warp gate.

What was all that? She'd wondered about that girl's roundabout confession all day long.

Maybe she could ask someone. With that in mind, she pushed her magic cart on. Just then, someone else warped back just behind her.

Celeste turned around. Immediately after, her heart pounded and screamed anew. It was Ryota Sato, owner of this mansion and leader of this Family, and the object of her faint crush.

"I'm back."

"W-Welcome back."

He'd leveled up his growth-slash-hottie bullet again today.

Celeste's heart fluttered with joy upon seeing him. It was then that she realized—tonight would be another sleepless night.

## 214. True Ruler Emily

It was just after breakfast, when everyone prepared to go out to their dungeons.

I heard a loud voice from outside the mansion scream, "I challenge thee!"

"A visitor?" Emily tilted her head.

"I challenge thee? Wow, how old-fashioned," Celeste chuckled dryly.

"Sounds like fun. I'll go check it out!"

"Me, too!"

Alice and Aurum ran out of the dining hall to go out front. At this point, I had no choice but to go with them.

Others aside, I needed to get Aurum back to her dungeon. I couldn't leave until she came back, so I'd have to join her.

Understanding that, Erza grinned wryly and suggested, "Shall we all go take a look?"

"Good idea."

We nodded to each other and headed out shortly after the girls.

When I went out the mansion door, I found Alice and Aurum facing a whole gaggle of people. At the front of them was a young, arrogant man. Behind him were three men, seemingly his friends or his party.

They were all wearing similar equipment, and the man in front alone had gaudy decorations, making him seem like the leader.

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"Ryota."
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"This guy says he has business with you."

The leader smirked at me and took a step forward. "You Ryota Sato?" Then, staring directly at me and as smug as ever, he introduced himself, "I'm Philip. Philip Crown."

"Philip the High-Ranker?" Celeste spoke up.

I turned around and asked her, "You know him, Celeste?"

"Yeah. He has the highest level in all the world. I think it was-"

"Heh. Two hundred fifty-five," Philip said proudly.

Wow, level 255. That's a big deal.

The highest level I'd seen so far was Margaret's 99. Level caps varied depending on the individual, so I'd figured there were people with caps over 100, and here was one such person.

"Okay. What do you need from me, Philip?" I asked him.

"I'm here with a declaration of war."

"Excuse me?"

"Ryota Sato, I hear you earned the most out of any man in this town last year."

"Sure, I guess."

"But that's over. Now that I'm here, your time is over."

"Umm... So you're saying you plan to earn more than me? In Cyclo, that is?"

"Exactly."

Philip's buddies immediately started sucking up to him.

"That's our young lord!"

"Damn, son!"

"He's already about to piss his pants from fear!"

Philip turned even smugger with their praise at his back.

I thought to myself, Y'know... I wonder. Isn't this a good thing? If people who can make money come to this city, then that leads to more tax revenue.

"That so? Good luck, my man," I replied.

"Heh. Sore loser, huh?"

"Come again?"

"You think you can pretend you didn't lose if you act like you weren't competing at all, but that ain't gonna work. Let me be clear: no matter what you say, the numbers will show who wins or loses. Everyone will be able to tell at a glance."

I sighed. He really doesn't get it. I don't care, but it's a pain, so I'll just shoo him away.

"Is that all you wanted to say? We're heading to the dungeons soon, so I'd appreciate it—"

"Pfft. Running away that easily, huh?" he laughed. *Dude. No.* "I feel bad for you girls, getting tricked by a coward like him. But you get it now, right? I won't blame you. You just gotta get away from this guy soon. If you want, you can join us."

#### Crackle!

While Philip shared his opinions with the audience, the air tensed up, and I thought I heard an odd cracking sound.

No, I didn't just think I'd heard it; on closer inspection, my friends were pissed. A heat mirage flickered around Celeste, and Erza seemed ready to murder, if only looks could kill.

The scariest, though, was Leia. She had the biggest smile I'd ever seen on her. When people who don't normally smile do smile, it sure is scary.

"I think these girls have all been brainwashed!" one of his lackeys piped up.

"Hmm? They do look like that. All right... Ryota Sato."

"Huh?"

"I demand a duel."

"Um...?" What the hell is this guy talking about?

"You. Me. Right now. I'm going to reveal your true character here and now."

"Ooh, that's what you mean." Based on the conversation, his plan was to beat me to a pulp and free them from this supposed brainwashing. Well, this is a pain. What do I do now?

"Do not bother, low level."

"Eve?"

"Goddess, now is your time to shine."

"Huh? M-Me?" Emily was surprised. Eve quietly, yet firmly, nodded.

"Wait, wait. My business is with Ryota Sato-"

"You, high level," Eve interrupted Philip. It was kind of funny how she said "high level" in such a scornful tone. "You will not fight him until you defeat my goddess."

Eve's proposal was to pit him against Emily. The others agreed as well. Philip's

lackeys were already jeering at her.

Emily looked at me. I thought to myself and eventually nodded to her.

"Understood." Emily nodded back, brought her favorite hammer from inside the mansion, and confronted Philip.

"Guess I got no choice," Philip said. "I didn't wanna do this, but... Hey, you! If I beat her, you'll fight me. Is that right?"

"...Yeah. I promise," I replied.

"Good!" Now motivated, Philip took out his weapons: claws that attached to his hands. After attaching them, he charged at Emily fast enough to leave afterimages behind.

He's fast!

That's someone at level 255 for you. Crappy as his personality was, his stats were undoubtedly high. He rushed like the wind and dug his claws into the defenseless Emily's shoulder.

"Emily!" I couldn't help but shout.

However, immediately after he struck her shoulder, there was a loud metallic sound. Sparks flew.

"I'm...okay!" She'd taken the claw attack head-on and swung her hammer down.

Ah, nostalgia.

I remembered when we'd first met.

This was exactly the monster-killing strategy she'd shown me back on B1 of Tellurium. Our true-born power fighter took the blow head-on and knocked him out with a counterattack—the same exact fighting style she used to use.

Apparently satisfied with his attack, the smug Philip didn't have time to evade her counter and ended up taking the hammer head-on.

"Phew..." Emily slung her hammer over her shoulder and wiped sweat from her brow.

I looked at Philip. His lackeys timidly looked as well.

After being stricken by Emily, he had fallen splayed onto the ground. The injury didn't seem to be life-threatening, at least.

"Y-Young lord!"

"We gotta get outta here!"

"You'd better remember thiiis!"

Philip's lackeys carried their unconscious leader off, spitting a few parting clichés as they went.

Left alone now, we all surrounded Emily and congratulated her.

"That was great, Emily! Just one blow!"

"You are a goddess."

"What was that? Are you okay after taking that hit?"

"I'm fine. Old man Arsenic gave me the power to freely harden parts of my body at will."

"Arsenic... That's one of his blessings?" Wow. Emily's gotten a lot stronger without me noticing. That's great.

"I've seen a lot of adventurers, but I think those guys are gonna leave with one big misunderstanding. They'll think Emily's the real leader of this Family!" Celeste joked. "They might not be wrong about that."

"Yeah, yeah! Emily's like the secret big boss!"

"Without our goddess, this Family would be in shambles."

Still not used to praise, Emily blushed madly. "That's not true at all! You're all exaggerating."

But I agreed with them. A bright and warm home, the most delicious of food...

I might've been the leader, but the Family's ruler might just be Emily.

"Emily, you're awesome," I said.

"Even you, Yoda... You're all so mean." Emily pouted a little.

But our faces made it clear that we were all serious.

### 215. First Place Gets Serious

I swung by Villa di H alone tonight and ordered today's recommended beer. I also ordered a sausage sampler to enjoy dinner with my drink.

The beer and sausage were both delicious. Just as I was starting to get nice and tipsy, though, Philip appeared with his buddies in tow.

"Ryota Sato," he said as they beelined toward me. "We've been looking for you."

"Do you need something else?"

"That duel from earlier. A loss is a loss, I'll deign to accept that," he said smugly. *Deign? Uh, a little pompous for a loser, aren't you? Not that I care.* "But that was meaningless! We're adventurers, so the real contest is who can make more money in dungeons." He thrust a finger at me.

I sighed. If my Family were here, they'd get pissed off again.

"And," he added, "I won't lose when it comes to earning in dungeons."

"Okay, sure. You've got yourself a challenge."

Carelessly striking a nerve would probably just make this more of a pain, so I replied with something I thought would make him happy. Though I couldn't help that it came out...stilted, at best.

"Heh. Now that's what I like to hear!" As expected, he smirked in satisfaction, turned around, and took his buddies away.

I watched them off...and then, I gasped. My tipsiness cleared up all at once.

A lone woman passed by Philip as he gleefully made his exit. She was an adult clad in a dress that you might see at a fancy party.

But her vibe was different. It was clearly different. I could tell.

She was probably like me—someone who sought out strength in ways that stats couldn't reflect.

She passed by Philip, who paid her no mind whatsoever, and came straight for my seat.

Then, she stopped in front of me and smiled elegantly. "I'm pleased to make your acquaintance. My name is Rebecca Neon."

"O-Okay?"

"You're the Aurum man, aren't you?"

I gasped in surprise again. Then, I realized one more thing about her.

"You're..."

"I received my name from Neon," she said.

"Neon?!" I hadn't noticed because of how naturally she'd introduced herself, but how she'd mentioned Aurum, and how she said she'd "received" the name...

Atomic number 10, Neon. That had to be the name of a dungeon.

"Did you meet the spirit of Neon?" I asked her.

Rebecca smiled again, quietly.

Rebecca Neon, also known as the Flawless. When she showed me her portable status board, the meaning of that nickname became clear.

Level 50/50
HP A
MP A
Strength A
Vitality A
Intelligence A
Willpower A
Speed A
Dexterity A
Luck A

—— 2/2 ——
Plants A
Animals A
Minerals A
Magic A
Special A

"Flawless, for sure," I mused.

"You're too kind."

"Did your stats start off this high?"

"Yes, from level 1."

"That's even more amazing."

Rebecca sat across from me in the same restaurant booth.

I complimented her on the stats she'd shown me. She was like an upgraded Margaret. While Margaret had all F's on her first page and all A's on her second, Rebecca had all A's on both.

"And what does the Flawless want with me?"

"Do you recall my asking if you were the Aurum man?"

"Yeah."

"I was curious about my peer who had also met a spirit and received their blessing. The rumors say that Aurum has taken quite a liking to you."

"Oh... I see."

Maybe that was true.

I'd changed a few of the rules of Aurum. You couldn't do that without a strong relationship with a spirit.

"Yours must like you a lot, too," I replied. "You even got their name."

"We were like-minded people. Like real sisters, if you can believe it."

"Really?"

I can tell she's a person of high caliber. When complimented, she doesn't act smug, but she also doesn't act overly modest. That's rare in a person.

If she could carry herself respectably when she was complimented for such a major feat—meeting and befriending a dungeon spirit, among the highest-level beings in this world—then she was clearly a big deal.

"I'm impressed that you got to meet a dungeon spirit, though," I said.

"I'm blessed. You see, I was born in a dungeon."

"That means you know the exact timing that will cause the door to open?"

"Indeed. Though I'll have you know it wasn't that easy; I needed to sleep inside the dungeon for three months to find the right timing."

I'd thought she was an upgraded Margaret, but she was actually an upgraded Alice as well.

Alice had been born in a dungeon, too. Though her drop stats were low, she could tell exactly when she could kill a monster to receive its drops. It was like being able to tell exactly what number the ball would fall into in roulette.

And it seemed that Rebecca's A-rank drops, on top of being born in a dungeon, had allowed her to meet Neon.

"That's incredible."

"You're too kind."

"And you're strong, too."

"Well, I'm so specialized toward Neon that I have no choice but to be there for the rest of my life." Rebecca smiled.

Yeah, she's one hell of a person.

"By the way, what did you get from Neon's blessing?"

"I'm one-of-a-kind."

"One-of-a-kind?"

"Only I may receive drops from Neon."

"...Ooh." That was even more incredible than I'd expected. "That means that you've monopolized the whole dungeon, then."

"Yes. Neon and I were of like minds, after all." The words she'd spoken before

now took on a new meaning. Like minds can only take you so far, surely. "Along with the events in Aurum, I found myself curious about the man who threatened my position last year."

"Threatened?"

"The sales ranking."

"Oh, that... I was third in the world, so... Does that mean what I think it means?!" I stared at Rebecca in wide-eyed shock.

Her gentle smile was unwavering. Third place in the world. Threatening. Monopolizing a dungeon.

"Were you first place?" I finally asked.

"I was," Rebecca calmly confirmed.

I hadn't expected that I'd meet the worldwide top-ranker here. And that she'd come to meet me, of all things.

I'd expected her to be a big deal, but not this big.

"So what have you come to meet me for?"

"Nothing in particular. If anything, to ask about Aurum, I suppose. I'm quite curious about other spirits."

It sounded like she was genuinely just curious.

It felt like my perspective of her had changed since I'd learned she was first place. Now she seemed like a being above me. Aloof.

But her eyes suddenly widened. She looked behind me, surprised. While I wondered what was wrong...

"Found you, Yoda!"

"We were searching for you, Master."

I heard two very distinct terms of address from behind me. Emily and Leia had appeared.

"Hey, girls. Is anything wrong?"

"Nope. I heard you'd come to drink tonight, so I wanted to join you," Emily replied.

"That so?"

"I joined her so that I may return you to the mansion in case you drink to excess," Leia added.

"Don't worry about that. If you want, join us. It'll be more fun."

"...Okay. A little, perhaps."

I talked to Emily and Leia like normal since they were here, but Leia's gaze reminded me that I was sitting with Rebecca.

I should introduce them, I thought to myself. When I turned back around to do so, Rebecca's eyes widened more. Come to think of it, she looked so surprised when they appeared... But why?

"Have you two...been blessed by spirits, too?" Rebecca asked them.

"Oh!" I clapped my hands once in realization.

That had to be it. Emily had Arsenic's blessing, and Leia had Selenium's. All four of us here had received spirits' blessings.

"Let me introduce you," I said. "This is Emily, and this is Leia. They're friends of mine. Your assumption was correct, too."

"Nice to meet you! I'm Emily Brown."

"Leia."

As they introduced themselves, Rebecca's surprise surpassed a limit—causing her to suddenly regain her composure.

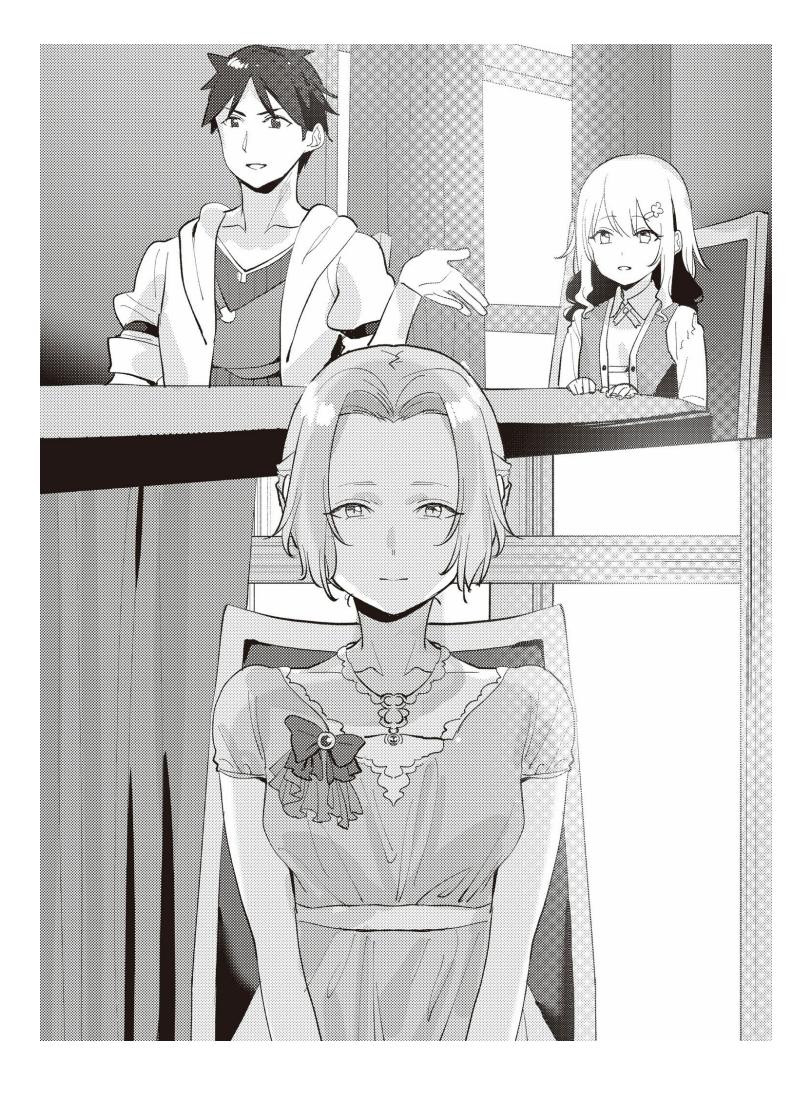
"You've far exceeded my expectations. *Three* spirit-blessed, my goodness. And...they obey you." Rebecca stood up elegantly. "I'm glad I came to see you today."

With that, she left. Her footsteps were just as elegant.

"Umm, what just happened, Yoda? Did I do something bad?"

"She was wary of us. Master, is she an enemy?"

Wary, huh? I can't say I like having the worldwide top-ranker's eyes on me, but... Meh. Guess there's no helping it now.



## 216. The Most Ridiculous Request

With Emily and Leia in tow, I went to the Cyclo Dungeon Association chief's office for the first time in a while. We were about to go home after meeting Rebecca, but Cell had sent a messenger to fetch us for something he needed to discuss.

In his office, Emily and I sat while Leia insisted on standing next to me. Across from us sat Cell.

"I hear you've met Rebecca Neon," he said.

"You sure found out fast. Is that something worth summoning us over?"

"The Flawless, she who controls Neon and bears the name Neon, first place in all the world. I've had my eye on her from the moment she arrived in Cyclo. Then, she came into contact with you, Sir Sato. I can hardly stand to *not* be concerned."

"First place and third place. That was an amazing scene to see!" Emily said, prompting Cell's agreement.

I see. From that perspective, it is a situation the Dungeon Association chief should be aware of.

"If you don't mind, I would like to know what you discussed."

It wasn't something I needed to hide, so I gave him the honest truth. "She said she came because she was interested in me."

"...I see."

"Do you know that she's spirit-blessed?" I asked him.

"Did she confess to that?" Cell furrowed his brow.

"Had she denied it before?"

"She hasn't said so publicly, but everyone believes that she is. Just like you, Sir Sato."

"Yeah. I haven't made a public statement on it either." I mean, I'd only just found out that was a thing. I hadn't said anything publicly since I didn't know, but I'd changed the rules of Aurum a few times, so adventurers around the world probably assumed I was spirit-blessed.

"I see... So it really is true." Cell put a hand on his chin in thought. Rebecca Neon was spirit-blessed by Neon. Apparently, there was a big difference between announcing it and not announcing it.

Suddenly, Leia spoke to Cell. "I do not know what troubles you, but..."

He looked up and replied, "What? Go on."

"There is only one of her, and there are three of us. Even if the presence of a spirit's blessing is somehow meaningful, I believe we will be fine."

"Three of you? Could it be?" Cell gasped and looked at all three of us, one by one.

"Selenium," Leia replied.

"Arsenic here," Emily chimed in.

Shock colored Cell's face more and more. "No... Do you have three spirit-blessed in your Family?"

"I guess we do," I said.

"Incredible, Sir Sato. You always exceed my expectations and more."

"I mean, it's not because of me..."

"It is. He's incredible," Emily cut me off. "Without him, I never would've met old man Arsenic."

"And I would not have Selenium's blessing. It is all because of him."

"Goodness... I see."

Emily and Arsenic, Leia and Selenium. They weren't wrong in saying that I was the one who'd introduced them and the spirits. If I wasn't there, sure, maybe they wouldn't have met.

"Then this must mean that you've effectively made contact with three spirits... Impressive as ever, Sir Sato."

I didn't bother telling him I'd be meeting Nihonium soon. If I did, he would be even more impressed.

Suddenly, Cell looked down silently as if lost in thought. His dignified face frowned thoughtfully. He must've really been thinking.

"Whatcha thinking about?" I asked him, but he did not respond.

"So deep in thought," Emily mused.

"Is something bad happening?"

"Maybe. I'm certain he's thinking of asking you for help with something."

"Ooh... You might be right."

Emily might've been correct. I didn't know how serious he was about it, but Cell acted like a real Ryota fanatic. Whenever anything troubled him, he believed that I could take care of it for him.

He had that same look on him this time, too. And judging from the flow of this conversation...

"Do you think he wants me to make contact with the other spirits, too?" I asked Emily.

"It seems very likely."

"I predict he will have you conquer all of Cyclo's spirits."

Leia's assumption was a likely one.

Cell knew all about my history with Aurum. Like how Rebecca ruled Neon, I could rule all of Cyclo's dungeons—Tellurium, Silicon, Arsenic, Bismuth, Boron, Sulfur, and Selenium. If I ruled all of Cyclo's seven dungeons, then I could increase Cyclo's production volume and, by extension, its tax revenue.

"He might just demand that."

"Is it possible, Master?"

"I wouldn't know until I tried, but...probably." I felt something close to certainty.

It wasn't that difficult for me to meet a spirit. The problem was what came after I met them.

Combining those factors, I figured it was probably possible.

Cell continued to think for several minutes while we discussed it.

Eventually, he looked back up and directly into my eyes. "Sir Sato, I must ask a favor. There will be much negotiation and politics to go through, but if it all goes well..."

"If it does...?"

I heard a gulp. It came from Emily right next to me.

That was evidence of just how ghastly the look on Cell's face was.

"Would you be able to meet the spirits of the dungeons controlled by my family?" he asked me.

"Huh?" I was confused; that came far out of left field. "The dungeons controlled by the Stem family... The money ones?"

"Indeed. I want you to meet their spirits."

In this world, everything was dropped in dungeons—including money. Paper bills, coins, all of them came from dungeons. And it was Cell's family, the Stem family, that controlled them. In other words, they were like this world's Federal Reserve.

Cell looked sincere as he asked me to meet the spirits of those dungeons. It was unexpected...but an incredible idea.

He turned even more serious while Emily complimented me, "Whoa... Yoda, you're amazing..."

I was taken aback for a moment by the scale of it all, but that look on his face...

"Is this absolutely necessary?"

"It is." His all-too-serious face nodded in return.

If it was that important, then I could hardly refuse.

#### 217. Leia Selenium

That night, in the mansion reception room, I chatted with Aurum about what had happened today.

"Wow. So that's how they treat people who we give our power to?"

"As 'spirit-blessed," I replied. "Did you not know that either?"

"I never saw anyone a second time until you came along, so there was never a chance to hear about it."

"That makes sense."

Apparently thinking of something, Aurum suddenly fell silent and gazed at me. "Hey, Ryota..."

"Yeah?"

"You can use my name too, if you want."

"Like Rebecca Neon, you mean?"

"Yeah! For example... Sato was your last name, right? In that case, Ryota Aurum!"

"You make it sound like I'm a stepson marrying into the family."

That would be kind of funny.

"You don't wanna?"

"That's not it. It's just, if I call myself that, I think-"

Speak of the devil, and all that. Celeste happened to pass by, fresh out of the

bath. She had a big frown on her face.

"Ryota... Are you and her...?" she murmured.

I had to call her over and explain things to correct that misunderstanding.

Once it had been cleared up, she laughed, "O-Oh, okay... That's all it was."

"We'd have Emily Arsenic and Leia Selenium, too," I said. "Only if the spirits are okay with it, of course."

Celeste smiled and replied, "That would be wild."

"Yeah, it might be."

"I mean, Ryota, why don't you just go for completion?" Aurum suggested.

"Completion?"

"Yeah. Keep your old name and just put our names after yours."

"Ryota Sato Aurum... Like that?"

"And then keep adding to that. From what I hear, you'll be meeting Nihonium soon, right? So it'll be Ryota Sato Aurum Nihonium."

"You'll sound like an aristocrat," Celeste joked.

"More like Ryota Sato HHeLiBeBCNOF," I mused, remembering the old periodic table mnemonics.

"What's that?"

"Sorry, inside joke."

And if I was really going to meet every single spirit out there, it might be better to just call myself Atom or something. Not that I would.

Not that I would...but.

"Hm? What's up?" Aurum asked me, noticing that I was deep in thought.

"Nothing, nothing."

Aurum, Arsenic, Selenium. All of the spirits I'd interacted with had hungered for something. Names aside, they all needed something, and to sate that hunger...

"I have to do this," I realized.

☆

The next day, I went to Selenium's chamber in her dungeon. I'd come to see her with Leia.

Hoping to sate the hunger of spirits who were effectively locked inside their dungeons, I decided to visit someone I knew first: Selenium. But she said outright, "I'm not interested in the outside."

"Really?"

"Yep. That outside world is all whatever to me."

"You sound like you really don't care."

"Because I really don't. Because I..." Selenium walked over seductively and rubbed her finger on my shirt over my chest. "Like this."

A chill ran down my spine. Despite her just touching through my shirt, it tingled a lot.

"Th-That so?"

"Ahaha, don't be all scared. I'm only interested in virgins. Oh, but you wanted

my name, right?"

"I didn't mean it like-"

"Then let's do this." Selenium clapped her hands. Things proceeded on without me being able to correct the misunderstanding. "If you come here once in a while and fondle my boobs a bit, then it's a done deal."

"Is that what you want?"

"You can let me touch yours instead, if you want."

"I don't even wanna imagine that!"

A girl in a string bikini fondling my man-boobs? The sight of it was something that even I, the guy in question, didn't want to imagine. It was a billion trillion times better to imagine the opposite.

Leia finally spoke up after staying silent the whole time. "Master, I have a proposal."

"A proposal? What?"

"What if you have her do the 'Puff-Puff' you told me about?"

"Puff-Puff? What's that?" Selenium immediately latched on.

Oh... Puff-Puff. Is that something I've ever told my friends about in casual conversation?

This was a very video game-like world, with stats, dungeons, and monsters to be killed, so Puff-Puff had probably come up from that line of conversation.

"I believe you said it was every man's dream?" Leia asked.

"It is, but..." I glanced at Selenium. "Puff-Puff isn't the same as sex."

Right. It isn't. To me, Puff-Puff was the stuff of dreams, but not sexual. I

wasn't sure if the walking porno and She Who Defiles Purity, Selenium, would be interested in it.

But she'd expressed interest, so I explained it to her: "When you squeeze someone's face between your breasts, that's called Puff-Puff."

"Someone's face..." Selenium pushed her boobs together and imagined it. "I like that. I like that!"

"You said it twice. Do you like it that much?"

"You think of some crazy things. I love that!"

I'm not the one who came up with it, though... I'm amazed how much she likes it.

Nobody's face was there, so you could call it an...air Puff-Puff? Practice Puff-Puff? Either way, she was really going at it. She apparently loved it.

"Selenium, I will allow you to Puff-Puff me every day," Leia declared.

"Really?!"

She was crazy enthusiastic about that.

You're not going to be on the receiving end, so why are you so excited?

"So please allow me to use the name Selenium," Leia said politely with little intonation, gazing with sincere eyes at Selenium.

"Okay, you got a deal. Let's get to it."

"Very well."

Selenium started stretching and doing warm-up exercises.

Leia turned to me. "Well, Master."

"Hm?"

"I will receive a spirit's name. This will put me on the same level as Rebecca."

Oh...

I had a feeling I understood what she was thinking.

Leia and I were in a master-servant relationship. As the servant's status rose, the master's naturally did as well. She was trying to receive the spirit's name in order to naturally put me above Rebecca in status.

I didn't stop her. Rather, I appreciated it. Leia had her emotions extracted long ago, and even now, her face and tone of voice were short on any feelings.

It made me happy that she would feel such an "emotion" now. As such, I let her do as she pleased.

Thus, just as I would go to pick up and drop off Aurum, Leia and Selenium made Puff-Puffing an everyday thing.

And now, Leia could call herself Leia Selenium.

# 218. Ryota-Blessed

On B1 of Selenium, Leia and I spent more time leveling my growth round.

I fired the growth round, Leia cast Revive, and I fired again. It was our usual level-up work...with one difference: our surroundings were noisier than usual.

Normally, this dungeon was full of adventurers hunting monsters in their own unique ways. But for some reason, everyone was watching us from afar today. Not just one or two people, but ten or twenty.

"I wonder what their problem is," I muttered.

"They're looking at me."

Surprised, I stopped and looked at Leia. "You think?"

Blushing a little, she answered, "A minute ago, I heard someone say, 'Is that girl Leia Selenium?'"

"...Ooh, I see."

That made sense. This dungeon was Selenium, and Leia had just received the name Selenium from its spirit. Maybe it was natural that she'd attract attention.

Just in case, I listened closer while I continued leveling the bullet.

People were envious of and admired Leia.

"So that's a spirit-blessed... You can really feel their different aura."

"Liar. You don't feel nothing!"

"But wow, being acknowledged by a spirit? That's insane. I've always wondered why she could cast magic forever, but I bet that's the spirit's

blessing."

Some of them were more astute, quickly guessing what her blessing was.

"Master."

"Hm? What is it, Leia?"

"Give me an order."

"An order?" I looked at her again, confused by the sudden request. Her expression remained flat, but her eyes stared straight into me, seemingly pleading for something. I didn't know what was going on, but I figured I might as well do that. "Okay. Let's try raising the pace a bit. About twice as fast."

"Understood." Leia focused on her hands.

It was repetitive work, so we'd settled into a sluggish pace. That tends to happen when you do the same thing over and over.

Avoiding that was part of why I used Nihonium to train, but the sheer number of shots we needed to fire with the growth round turned it into such work by necessity. And so, we upped the pace. Instantly after the rainbow slime dropped soybeans, Leia cast Revive. It happened the instant the drops appeared, at a speed almost too fast for the naked eye.

I matched her pace. The moment she cast Revive, the instant the rainbow slime was reborn, I shot the growth round and killed it—again, at speed almost too fast for the naked eye.

Revive, fire.

Revive, fire.

We put our all into it.

When we did, we saw basically nothing. We could see neither the drops nor

the slime. It looked as if space was just continuing to blur.

It felt good. The pursuit of maximum speed was the best way to break out of the last few days' rut.

I focused so much that the sound around us was almost inaudible.

"She sped up. That's awesome!"

"He gave orders to a spirit-blessed? What is that guy?"

"You don't know? He's Ryota Sato of the Ryota Family."

"Whaaat?! He's the one?"

I focused to the point that it felt like I was in the zone. The voices of people around us were inaudible to me.

And on this day, we'd doubled our usual growth and brought the growth round to level 15.

☆

In the evening, before I went to pick up Aurum, I stopped by the monster village. I hadn't used my acceleration rounds lately, so I had a few stocked up. This allowed me to put off getting them.

When I got to the village, the clayman and other monsters saw me and ran over.

"Ryota!"

"Good work today, everyone," I greeted them. "What's got you all together here?"

"We want to ask a favor."

"What is it?" *Did something happen?* I furrowed my brow, worried. The clayman and other monster residents all had grave looks on their faces. "Is something wrong, guys?"

"We want your name, Ryota."

"My name?"

"Yes! We want to name this village after you."

"That's..." I took a good look at all the monsters and the village they lived in.
"You want to name this village Ryota?"

"Yes!" The monsters who could speak cheered along with the clayman. Those who couldn't, made what noises they could.

Naming this village after me... Ryota...

"No, no, no." I waved my hands in flustered refusal. "That's just too embarrassing, naming a whole village after me."

"You won't let us?"

"Why'd you come up with that to begin with?"

Beyond the monsters, Celeste appeared from the back of the village. "I'll explain."

"Celeste, you were here?"

"Yep. I'm giving them work pointers."

"I see."

I had mediated a process to have this village dispose of Indole's trash.

Celeste had also disposed of trash before she joined us. It made sense that

she was here to help them do their job better.

"Okay, I get that, but what about the whole naming thing?"

"Spirit-blessed came up in conversation," Celeste explained. "Leia having Selenium's blessing, adding the name to hers. They decided they wanted their village blessed, too."

"The village?"

"Yep. This is a village of monsters, and it's your prestige that protects them from persecution."

"Yeah..."

"To make that clearer, they decided, what if they added your name to the village?"

"Like Kerberos's collar?"

Celeste nodded back. The monsters watched on expectantly.

The monsters of this village were formally my pets. Outsiders were typically killed to keep them from rampaging, but if someone took responsibility to manage or raise them...keep them as a pet, in other words, they could be spared.

That was what we'd done for Kerberos and this village alike.

"Hmm..." I thought to myself.

"If they make it your name, then that'll make it even less likely for anyone to bother them. Unless they're stupid enough to pick a fight with you head-on, that is," Celeste declared outright. She probably wasn't wrong.

I looked at the monsters, who looked back with pleading eyes.

If that's how they feel...I'm not one to refuse.

"Got it. From now on, this village is called Ryota."

The instant I said it, they cheered. Some of the monsters even raised their hands with joy.

I did it because it was necessary, but it was still ridiculously embarrassing to name a village after me.

"Heehee!" Celeste smiled.

I misunderstood the meaning of that smile. At that moment, I'd thought she was happy that her own idea had borne fruit.

But at a later date, Cell told me something. "Fantastic, Sir Sato. You've finally lent your name to aid others."

When he said that with respect in his eyes, I finally understood the truth of Celeste's smile—and the truth of her little scheme.



## 219. 10,000,000% Returns

The next evening, I went to Ryota to pick up my acceleration round. Ryota... the village of monsters, that is.

When I entered the village, I gasped in overwhelmed admiration. "Ooh..."

The village was full of trash, but not in a disorderly or scattered way. It was piled up here and there, ready for the monsters to do their job of disposing of it.

It was more than double the usual amount. Faced with all that garbage, the monsters began to attack. From afar, it all looked like a diorama based on a mob of kaiju attacking a city.

"Ryota!" The clayman found me in the trash-filled village and came over. "Good afternoon... Uh, good evening, rather!"

"Evening. So, what's going on here? That's a lot more than usual, isn't it?"

"It sure is. When we went around telling people the new name of the village, villages and towns all over started asking us to take care of their trash. We accepted, and it ended up like this."

"You got more work, huh?" I knew this phenomenon: celebrity marketing. Companies would hire famous people to advertise for them and increase sales. "Did your new clients ask you to pass on their regards to me?"

"Yeah! Wow, Ryota, you really know everything."

There you have it. The celebrity marketing worked, but some of them probably just want to have a connection to me. Not that it's a bad thing that they have

more work, of course.

"Are they paying you a fair price?" I asked.

"Yes, of course! Oh, and this is the amount I should give you this time." The clayman held out ten 10,000-piro bills—100,000 piros. He'd given me 20,000 piros the first time, so it was clear that work had increased substantially.

They would feel bad if I didn't accept it, so I took it and put it in my pocket.

They'd given me nearly a million by now. If anything happened, I planned to return it to them.

With that in mind, I went to the middle of the city where the Great Kaiju War took place.

I happened to pass by an exhausted-looking monster.

"Phew..." it sighed. It was a giant, purple frog. As I recalled, it was called a poison frog.

"You okay?" I asked the frog.

"Huh? Oh! Master Ryota, is that you?! I'm okay! I've got plenty left in me!"

The poison frog jumped onto his feet and started spewing poison breath from his mouth.

The breath engulfed his share of trash and melted it. He'd disposed of the trash, but I didn't miss his complexion getting worse by the moment.

"Don't push yourself. When you're not feeling well, rest... Actually, stand still for me," I said, taking out a gun and firing limitless recovery rounds into him.

"Th-This is...filling me with energy!"

"That was just a temporary healing measure. Don't push yourself too much, okay?"

"Thank you very much!"

"Thank you, Master Ryota. You're too kind."

The poison frog and the clayman thanked me, and I casually looked around. "Y'know, I'm seeing a lot of folk who don't look well."

"...Yes, you're right," the clayman replied, troubled. "Frankly, we all haven't recovered much."

"Because you have too much work on your hands?"

"That's part of it, but...we monsters don't recover much outside of dungeons."

"Hm?"

"This might not come as a surprise, but we recover much better in an environment like the dungeon we were born in."

"By that, you mean you need to be in an underground tunnel or a limestone cave?"

"Yes. It may just be due to a feeling of comfort, but..."

"I see... A lot of you look unwell." I looked around again while I listened. Even I could see the deterioration of their speed, magical power, fire and ice breath, and so on. Many of them just couldn't perform as they were meant to.

"You're right."

"Okay, gather everyone interested. I'll heal all of you right now."

"Oh...! Thank you!" The clayman thanked me and ran off to gather his friends.

It would be easy to heal them all with limitless recovery rounds, but that was no solution.

To solve this...

☆

At night, I went to my favorite real estate broker in Cyclo. There, I sat across from my scrawny acquaintance Antonio.

After we drank some classy tea he'd made and exchanged some small talk, he got to business.

"So, what brings you here today? Are you looking for a new mansion?"

"No, I'd like to build a home."

"Oh? Well, thank you for coming to me." Realizing that this would be a big windfall for him, Antonio's voice rose in pitch a little. "What kind of home do you desire?"

"A dorm."

"A...dorm?"

"Yeah. A building where a lot of people can live..." Realizing that dormitories might not exist in this world, I decided to check, "Uh, do you not know what that is?"

"No, no, I am aware of them. But a dorm... Hmm."

"Not just a normal one, either. I want the interior to be like a dungeon."

"Like a dungeon?"

"Yeah." I took a folded sheet of paper out of my pocket and unfolded it on the table. It was a drawing I'd made before I came here.

"This...seems more like a tower than a home," Antonio noted.

"Yeah, it's a tower. Consider the first floor a dungeon like Tellurium, and the second a dungeon like Nihonium. Dungeons each have their own characteristics, right? Some are like underground tunnels, others are more like limestone caves."

"And some are like mansions," he added.

"Is that true?" That was a bit of a surprise, but I ignored it for now because that wasn't the main focus of this conversation. "I want each floor to be built like a different dungeon. Is that possible?"

"Any special features...?"

"Not necessary. Just imitate the environment, and that's enough."

I told him what the clayman had made especially clear. No ley lines, no magic, that all wasn't necessary; he just needed to imitate the environment.

In other words, it was like a more exaggerated version of not being able to sleep on a different pillow. Therefore, we just needed to replicate the appearance of the area.

"In that case, it is possible."

"That so? I want you to build this in the new village... Uh, it's called Ryota."

"That's the monster village built under your protection."

"If you know that much, that makes this easier. What do you think?"

"It'll be a few hundred million... Perhaps even a billion, depending on circumstances."

That was a high price, but it was within expectations.

"If you'll let me split up the payments," I answered.

"Understood. I can hardly refuse a request from you of all people."

"Perfect, thank you. For collateral—"

"No, no. I know you're a trustworthy man, Mr. Sato. I should be the one to thank you for putting in such a large order."

"Really? Well, let me thank you, too."

With the understanding that Antonio needed time to gather workers and materials, we planned a meeting for another day, and I left.

It looked like renovating the monsters' habitat was going to be a great success.

## 220. Like Soothing a Child

The next day, in the village Ryota, contractors hired by Antonio had already begun building homes here and there.

We'd decided to build a few homes. There were different types of dungeons, after all. Some like tunnels, some like limestone caverns, some like holes dug in the ground, and some like ninja houses.

There were many types of monsters in this village, from all sorts of environments. I wanted to cover all the patterns as best I could and create a space that everyone could acclimate to, relax in, and recover in.

With that in mind, we'd decided to build several.

While I picked up my acceleration bullet and watched the work being started, the clayman came over and greeted me, "Ryota!"

"Hey, clayman. Things are about to get a little loud from the construction, but try and bear it."

"Don't be silly! You're doing this for everyone, so we hardly need to bear anything. We're all more than excited."

"I can see that," I chuckled.

Monsters had already started gathering next to the frames of buildings.

They were all enjoying themselves. The bird-like monster flapped its wings, the gorilla-like one drummed on its chest. The few slimes' faces had melted into relaxed smiles, turning into those bubble slimes I'd seen in a certain role-playing game.

Even I could tell from afar that they were all happy.

"But are you sure it's okay to do this for us?" he asked me.

"Hm?"

"We're monsters, but we know that things like this cost enormous amounts of money."

"Yeah, it's a little expensive."

"If you're going this far for us, how can we possibly thank—"

I flicked the clayman on the head and interrupted him. "Don't you worry about that. I'm doing this for myself."

"Oh...?" The clayman didn't seem to understand.

That made sense, but I was telling the truth.

For *myself*. As long as these lost monsters were called outsiders, I could never overlook or abandon them. I couldn't help but compare their situation to my own time at my corrupt company. It made me want to help.

So really, I was doing it for myself. And because of that, when I saw the outsider monsters jumping for joy, their joy infected me as well.

☆

In the afternoon, after I'd left my meeting with Antonio, I happened to run into Cell.

"Sir Sato."

People called me a lot of different names, but he was my only long-time

acquaintance who called me Sir Sato. It wasn't him being superficially polite, either; that name came with an air of genuine respect.

"Whoops." A passerby accidentally bumped into Cell, causing a figure to fall out of his sleeve. With a composed look on his face, he picked up the figure.

I'd gotten a clear view of it for just an instant. It was a scale model of me, reaching my hand out and flicking an invisible somebody on the head.

"You work too fast! It hasn't even been a few hours!"

"I know not what you speak of," Cell feigned ignorance.

If only he didn't have this weird habit of making figures of me every time I did anything. By the way, I still had no idea how he did this, including how he somehow monitored everything I did.

His respect was genuine. Hell, maybe it was closer to fanaticism...in no small part thanks to the figures.

Exasperated by his antics, I sighed.

Meanwhile, he spoke as if nothing had happened. "I heard about what you did. The Sato Clan becomes ever more prosperous. What a joyous day."

"Clan? Not Family?" I'd gotten used to it being called the Ryota Family, so this was new to me.

"Indeed, the Sato Clan. You have the core in the Ryota Family, its effective descendants in the Margaret and Cliff Families, the City of Gold Indole, and the Village of a Hundred Demons known as Ryota." Cell listed them off like he was counting. I could understand City of Gold, but Village of a Hundred Demons was certainly a new one. "All of them have gathered beneath you to create the Sato Clan. One could consider it a force rivaling even the Neptune Family."

"I'm more amazed by what that says about the power of his Family," I mused. If Cell was to be believed, then the five factions he'd listed were barely enough to match the Neptune Family.

"Do not worry. They have already peaked, and you have only just begun to rise."

"I mean, I'm not here to compete with them."

Like I'd said, I didn't really care about size-measuring contests between organizations. Though I did appreciate the size of ours, if only because it acted as a deterrent.

A clan, huh? I feel like it'd make more sense to call us a group, but whatever, I thought to myself while I chatted with Cell.

Suddenly, someone shouted at us from the side. "Hey!"

Curious, I turned around and saw a young man with spiky hair looking directly at me.

"Need something?" I asked him.

"Yeah! You're Ryota Sato, right?"

"Yeah...?"

"All right, let's duel!"

"...Huh?" The unexpected demand left my brain lagging behind. "A duel...as in?"

"C'mon, you know! Men always duel with their fists!"

"You want me to fight you? Just like that?"

"Yeah! I'm gonna trounce you and make the whole world know my name!"

Oh, I see what this is. It's like dojo-storming, right? Well, this isn't my dojo. Or my home, even.

"Sorry, but I don't have any reason to—"

"Gonna run, coward?"

Snap!

Rrrrumble...

Suddenly, the air froze. I heard a deeper sound immediately after.

A shiver ran down my spine. Scared, I glanced to my side—Cell was smiling. That was the scariest kind of smile, where someone's rage meter had skyrocketed past its limit and made it so they could do nothing but smile.

This is bad. If I let Cell act, he won't just stop at turning this guy into mincemeat.

"I'll expose you-"

While the guy continued talking smack, I instantly circled behind him and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Huh?" The man was shocked to speechlessness. "Wh-What? What are you doing?"

He whipped around and distanced himself from me.

But I circled around him again and tapped his shoulder once more.

"Wha?!" He backed off again, but I repeated the process once more.

SS-rank speed.

Even without an acceleration round, I'd easily gotten behind him.

"Wh-Wh-What..."

I tapped his shoulder from behind.

"What kind of trick-"

I tapped his shoulder from behind.

"It can't be!"

I tapped his shoulder from behind.

"C-Cut it out already!"

I tapped his shoulder from behind.

Even when he started crying, I didn't stop. I continued circling behind and tapping his shoulder until he finally screamed and ran away.

Of course, I wouldn't bother following him. It wasn't necessary, and I'd already accomplished my goal.

People cheered and applauded around me.

Since it had happened on the side of the road, onlookers had gathered in no time. Cell stepped out of the crowd of onlookers and came to me.

"Magnificent, Sir Sato. You used your overwhelming power to treat him like the child he is."

"Because fighting in the street isn't cool," I replied. That wasn't my real reason; I'd needed to act just so Cell wouldn't.

"You never disappoint, Sir Sato."

"That aside..." Remembering something, I slowly approached Cell and tapped his shoulder from the front. When I did, a single figure fell out of his sleeve and onto the ground.

It was me in the shoulder-tapping pose from mere moments ago-except

depicted 30% cooler.

"Seriously, how do you do it?! You're too fast!"

"It's all done by my subordinates. I know nothing." Cell played dumb like a real politician.

Good grief.

**Bonus Story: Satonium** 

Terry Riders was the owner of a garbage disposal company called Rip Van Wrinkle.

Garbage was always generated by humans going about their lives, no matter where, when, or even what world one was in. Garbage disposal was therefore something that always followed.

In this world, trash would turn into outsiders called Frankensteins if left alone, making trash disposal an even more vital process. Perhaps as a reflection of that, Terry dressed affluently. Those who saw him might consider him nouveau riche.

On this day, Terry was in a place that was like a dungeon but not quite one.

He entered the tower-like building and looked all around as he proceeded inside. He was surrounded by monsters.

Terry had lived for forty years now. As part of his job, he often went into dungeons. However, he had never seen a dungeon with such a variety of monsters.

Slimes, goblins, lizardmen—a quick glance around him would reveal over ten different kinds of monsters on this floor.

Normal dungeons were typically divided to one type of monster per floor, so this was unthinkable.

Despite knowing the reason, Terry found it funny. He continued onward and went up a floor, where he was welcomed by a familiar face.

"I've been waiting for you."

"Pleasure to work with you again today, Mr. Clayman." Terry reached out and shook his partner's hand.

Said partner was an outsider monster called a clayman, the second-most important figure in this tower—and therefore this entire town.

The clayman welcomed his number-one business partner, Terry.

Now that he'd met his business partner, Terry surveyed his surroundings again as an excuse to start small talk. "This is my first time here, and I have to say, this place feels just like a dungeon."

"That's all thanks to Master Ryota." When the clayman spoke the name of his revered master, his lips curled up into a slight smile. "He built it for us without batting an eye at the cost."

"How nice. By the way, is it okay for you to move floors?"

"No worries there. He said there was no need to recreate it with such realism."

"Interesting." Terry looked upon the pseudo-dungeon's interior again. Monsters dotted the place, and each of them had brought in so-called sturdy trash and attacked it to dispose of it.

This was Ryota's village, a village where outsiders "kept" by him stayed. A dungeon's form better suited it than that of a normal village, so he had paid to have this pseudo-dungeon built.

After it had been completed, the unique monsters had all moved into the tower.

Incidentally, no adventurers attacked this place.

The monsters here were all outsiders. They would drop no items if killed. In this world, there were essentially zero adventurers who would go out of their way to attack a harmless outsider.

Knowing that, Terry half-joked, "This might be the only dungeon in the world where adventurers won't attack."

"Dungeon?"

"It might as well be a dungeon. The 119th dungeon. To give it a name... Satonium, perhaps?"

"I don't know if it counts as a dungeon, but we do all the work for Master Ryota."

Though he acted humble, the clayman looked happy.

Monsters nearby who heard the conversation looked happy, too, though it was a little difficult for a human to see.

Uplifting one's business partner, putting them in a good mood—Terry had done the natural thing for a businessman to do. At the same time, he believed it wasn't such a far-fetched belief.

The 119th dungeon, Satonium, governed by the spirit Ryota Sato. Given the fact that Nihonium didn't drop anything, it was by no means a far stretch to call this a dungeon as well.

"Now, let's discuss details in the back."

"Of course."

Terry went to the back of the tower by the clayman's guidance.

Though it was a joke at first, the name Satonium began to spread.

Adventurers naturally understood it as a joke, but that was less clear to the general public.

Word of Satonium continued to spread throughout the world. It was accepted by many as the 119th dungeon, only expanding Ryota's fame.

## **Afterword**

People write novels. Novels are written by people.

Nice to meet you all. Or perhaps, good to see you again. I'm Nazuna Miki, a Taiwanese light novelist.

Thank you so much for picking up volume 7 of *My Unique Skill Makes Me OP*Even at Level 1.

Thanks to you, we got to release another volume. A series can only continue because of the people who continue to buy it, after all. It is 100% because of you customers that we've made it to the seventh volume.

Thank you. Thank you so very much!

This volume maintains the focal concept of the series. Conquering dungeons, making money from drops, getting stronger with a unique skill and special items. I've done my best to deliver a taste similar to what you've seen so far from this work.

If you've read the rest of this series, I would be happy if you'd read this volume as well. To those picking up this series for the first time and finding it interesting, I'd be delighted if you caught up on previous volumes too.

Like the fifth and sixth volumes, this volume will be released in the same month as a manga volume. Mawata's incredible skills have brought the manga to life in a fun and easy-to-digest fashion, so consider giving that a try as well.

Finally, I have many thanks to give.

To Subachi-sama, who continues to make wonderful illustrations.

To K-sama, who continues to edit my awkward writings.

To K Light Novel Books's editorial department, who made this publication a reality.

To the bookstores who stocked this book, and to those of you who bought it.

I offer my deepest thanks to every single person involved in this work.

Here I'll put down my pen, praying that the next volume will someday reach your waiting hands.

Respectfully yours,

Nazuna Miki

November 2019

Author: Nazuna Miki

Formerly a wannabe voice actor, now a light novelist.

Imagine if Ryota gets a Nobel Prize with the discovery of the new element Satonium. It could happen!

Illustrator: Subachi Lately, I've been trying out 3D modeling as a time-saving measure. I'll do my best to make it worth the money I spent on the software.

My Unique Skill Makes Me OP Even at Level 1 vol 7

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