



Nazuna Miki

Art by Subachi

6

**MY UNIQUE  
SKILL MAKES  
ME OP  
LEVEL 1**

EVEN AT





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"I'M GOING TO BE  
JUST LIKE RYOTA  
SATO!"

"ME,  
TOO!"

"SAME,  
SAME!"

BWUH? WHAT WAS THAT?  
THEY WANT TO BE LIKE ME?

I LOOKED TO MY SIDE  
DUBIOUSLY. ALICE WAS  
STILL GRINNING LIKE MAD.

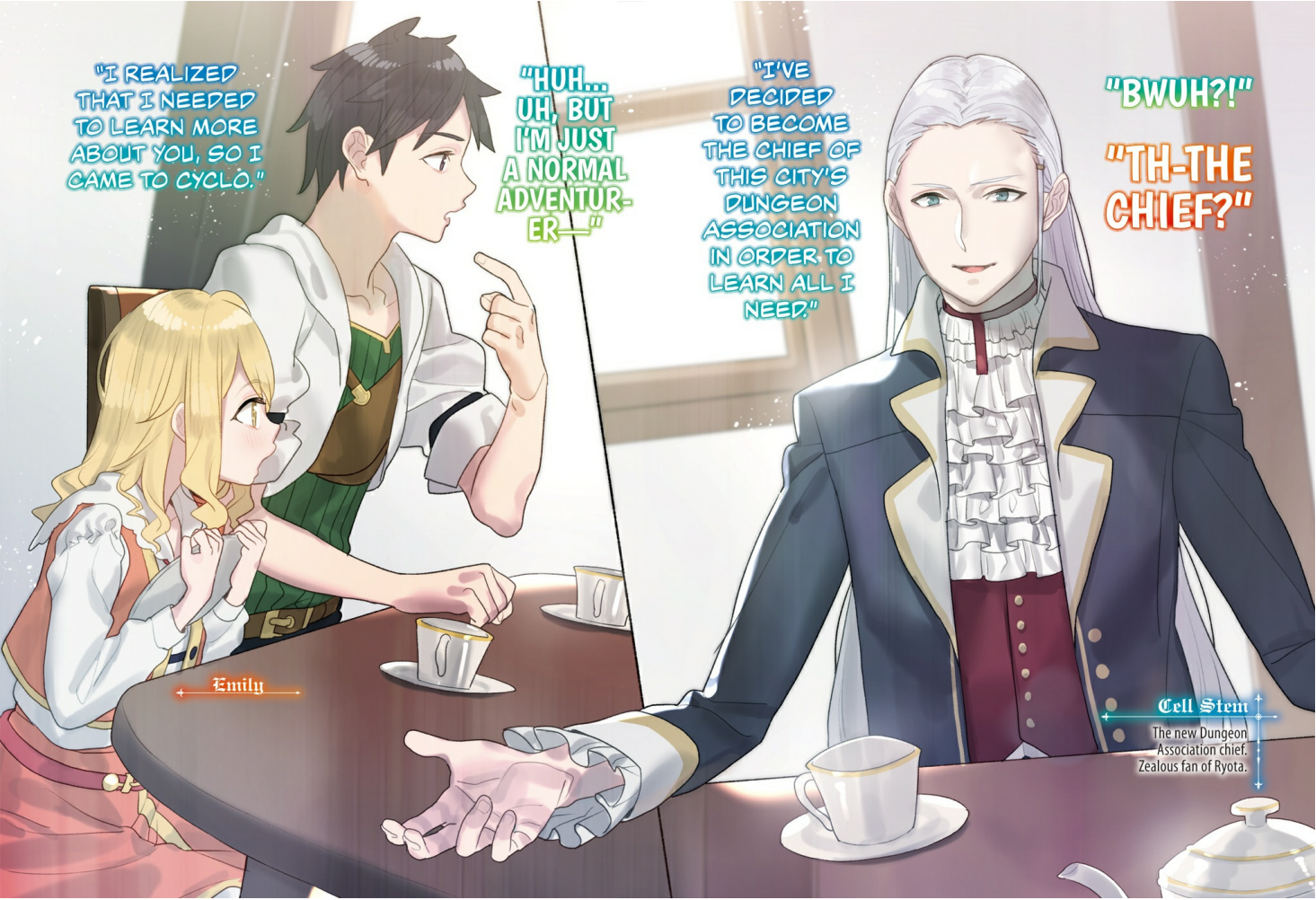


Alice



Ryota Sato







A blonde devil girl with small black horns and wings is shown from the waist up. She has long blonde hair with bangs and red eyes. She is wearing a light purple long-sleeved dress with a white collar and a blue belt with a peach-shaped buckle. She is holding a silver fork in her right hand and has a peach in her left hand. She is looking at the peach with a happy expression, her mouth open as if she is about to eat it. The background is a soft, pinkish-purple gradient with some sparkles.

"DEEEELICIOUS!"

"YOU REALLY  
DREW THAT  
OUT."

"BECAUSE IT'S  
REALLY GOOD!  
IT'S REALLY,  
REALLY, REALLY  
GOOD!"

"THAT SO?"

"YODA WENT  
AND HAR-  
VESTED THIS  
PEACH FOR  
YOU."

Aurum

The spirit of the  
dungeon Aurum.



A black and white manga cover illustration. In the background, a male character with short dark hair, wearing a white shirt and dark pants, stands on a stone wall looking towards the right with his hand to his forehead. In the foreground, two female characters are shown. The one on the left has long, wavy light-colored hair and is wearing a light-colored dress with a dark belt and a large bow. She is holding a long, dark staff or pole. The one on the right has short dark hair with a small white flower accessory and is wearing a dark, strapless dress with a white collar and a large bow. She is also holding a long, dark staff or pole. The background shows a stone wall and some foliage.

# **MY UNIQUE SKILL MAKES ME OP EVEN AT LEVEL 1**

**6**

By Nazuna Miki

Illustrations by Subachi

Translated by Benjamin Daughety



**KODANSHA**



# **My Unique Skill Makes Me OP Even at Level 1, 6**

## **A VERTICAL Book**

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**KODANSHA**



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## 150. Restricted Dungeon Sulfur

When I woke up in the morning and tried to go to the sink, Erza called out to me in a hurry, “Ryota, there’s an emergency!”

I stopped and turned to see her jogging toward me.

“What’s up? What’s going on?”

“Another dungeon has been born!”

“Really?!” The surprise blew all of my sleepiness away in no time. Recalling the stuff with Selenium, I first asked, “Is it *in* Cyclo?”

“Yes! It’ll be the seventh dungeon in Cyclo.”

“So no competing with other cities this time, then.”

“Selenium was a whole mess, wasn’t it?”

“Yeah, but I did get to meet Celeste because of it.”

Selenium was a dungeon that had formed right between Cyclo and another city called Hetero. It was literally in the middle of them, causing a competition between the cities.

As the primary industry in this world, dungeons were an extremely important revenue stream. Cities fought tooth and nail to earn ownership rights over the dungeon. On a request from Dungeon Association leader Clint, I had cleared a dungeon and brought it under Cyclo’s control.

Looking back, that felt like a long time ago.

“If it’s going to be a Cyclo dungeon, then there’s no need to fight over it.”



“Right. The thing is, Clint...”

“So he called us, huh?”

“Yes! He’s requesting that the Ryota Family inspect the dungeon. The reward for success is ten million piros.”

“I see.”

Back when I’d first come to this world, I was a bystander to dungeon inspections. The fact that the request came straight to me this time made me a little happy.



The whole Ryota Family came to the new dungeon on the outskirts of Cyclo, a place that didn’t even have a status board yet.

Me, Emily, Celeste, Alice, and Eve—a five-person dungeon adventuring team.

“Now, what’s this dungeon gonna be like?” I wondered aloud.

“Its name is Sulfur. That’s all we know for now,” Celeste said.

“Sulfur... Combustible rock, huh?”

“Do you know about it, Ryota?!” Celeste, the Family’s well of wisdom, was amazed.

“I’ve just heard the name before.”

Sulfur, atomic number 16.

*I hope it isn’t stinky, or it’ll be hard to farm this one,* I thought to myself.

“We don’t know anything else at all?” Emily asked.



“We don’t. We’re the very first inspection team,” Celeste answered.

“What about you, Eve?”

“Silence is bunny.”

*You make it sound like bunny is golden.*

“So we really know nothing but the name, huh?” I mumbled.

“What do we do, Ryota? It’s dangerous to go in with no knowledge.”

“Yeah...” I thought to myself. “Let’s use the Absolute Rock stones. Then, no matter what happens, we should at least be able to get out alive.”

“Yeah! That’s a good idea.”

“I’ll go in first, too. Follow me in the order of Emily, Alice, then Celeste. Eve goes last.”

“Bunny last? Why?” Eve asked.

“I’m putting our strongest and most experienced people at the front and back to be able to react to any situation.”

“I see. Three days of carrots,” she demanded.

“Okay, sure.”

Once we’d decided our method and order of entry, we each began checking our gear. We checked everyone’s Absolute Rock stones, Emily’s hammer, Celeste’s Bicorn horns, and everything else.

Once that was done, I announced, “Let’s go.”

Everyone nodded in assent.

After turning invincible with the stone, I stepped inside.

The dungeon was spacious, almost like a coliseum. Maybe you could call it a



dome? Either way, it was big. Ridiculously big. There were no stairs leading down. Was it just one floor?

While I surveyed my surroundings, a monster appeared. It was humanoid, about the same size as an adult man. It had a green body and one big eyeball on its face.

One name matched that in my mind.

“Cyclops, huh?” I’d imagined them bigger, though, so I didn’t know if it was a perfect match.

*Doesn’t matter. Let’s take it down.*

I tried to pull out my guns...but they weren’t there! My guns, the core of my fighting style, were gone!

*Where did they go? Did I drop them?!*

While I panicked, the cyclops attacked. It lumbered over with heavy footsteps and swung its club.

*Pow!*

I raised my hands and caught it as it swung down.

It was only strong enough to match its size, so I caught it easily. As clubs are blunt weapons, though, my hand stung—*Wait, it stings?!*

Now that I looked closer, I wasn’t invincible. I didn’t have my Absolute Rock stone anymore. That wasn’t all; I had nothing. No weapons, no kinds of items at all except for the clothes I was wearing.

This existed in my well of gaming knowledge.

“...Is this an inventory-restricted dungeon?”



Some dungeons in games didn't let you bring items into them at all, making them much harder to clear.

*And it looks like that isn't all.*

Nobody was in here with me yet. Over a minute had passed since I'd entered, but none of my friends had shown up. Was it a forced solo, too?

I remembered Aurum. That rogue dungeon was a tough one to deal with.

Racking my brain had cut off my concentration. The cyclops tore the club out of my hand and swung it again.

"Graaaaah!"

I dodged and punched as hard as I could. The body blow tore its stomach apart, proving that my SS-rank strength was still intact.

The cyclops disappeared, dropping a single ear of corn. One of these was probably about 100 puros.

Then, one more thing appeared: a door. A door had emerged out of thin air, giving a glimpse of what was beyond it. It was the familiar sight of the outside of Sulfur.

"It's flickering... Is that a time limit, or...?" I thought for a moment and decided to leave for the time being. Thus, I exited the dungeon with corn in tow.

Emily and Celeste were there.

"Yoda!"

"Are you okay?"

"You two are fine, huh?"

"Yeah! I was so confused!" Emily answered.

“Confused about how you couldn’t take your hammer in, I’m guessing?”

She held her hammer in her hands. My guns and ammo were on my hip again, too. It seemed that though we couldn’t take weapons in, they were properly returned to us when we left.

“Yeah! I managed to make it back by snatching away the enemy’s club and using it against it.”

“So we can’t take tools in... What about your Bicorn horns, Celeste?”

“Same. And one more thing...”

“Yeah?”

“I couldn’t use Inferno. I didn’t have enough mana.”

“Huh?”

“But I was able to use Fireball,” she added.

“...So your level is reset, too?” I quickly understood.

When a dungeon doesn’t let you take items inside, that often comes with a level reset restriction. No matter how high your level is, you have to start over from level 1 in there.

I didn’t have proof, but that was probably it.

Meanwhile, Eve was the next to return. She had scratches on her cheek and shoulders.

“You okay, Eve?” I asked.

“Ignominy.”

“Huh?”

“This bunny was forced to become a low level.”



“Oh, so that really is it.”

I didn't know how, but it seemed Eve had a way of telling what level someone or something was at a glance.

“It sounds like we can assume you're turned to level 1 upon entry, right?” I asked my friends.

“That's right,” Eve said. “I'm never going in there again.”

“Got it. Leave the rest to me.”

Knowing that you had to start over from level 1 was enough. That led me to one more piece of information, too.

My stats hadn't gone down. It was a dungeon that returned you to level 1, and I was already level 1, so my stats hadn't gone down.

In a way, this dungeon was perfect for me.

“But the drops are so crappy. A hundred piros per kill...”

“There were more the second time,” Eve said, displeasure still evident on her face.

“More? Wait, second time?”

“There was a stronger one-eye. When I killed it, it dropped double the first's.”

“Huh...”

“The third one was double that, too. That was why I left.”

“Uh... So basically...?”

While I cocked my head in confusion, Eve started throwing green onions on the ground.

Green onions. Those weren't what I'd gotten.

“And you got about 700 piros worth, huh?”

“That sounds about right,” Emily agreed.

“Yeah,” Celeste backed us up. “Give or take a few...”

We were all experienced at dungeons by now, so we were able to size up drop worth by eye to an extent.







“I got corn,” I said. “A hundred piros worth.”

“And I got a cucumber,” Emily added. “Also a hundred piros.”

“Shiitake for me...” Celeste chimed in. “Again, a hundred piros.”

“So each one is twice as strong and twice as rewarding as the last, huh?” I mused.

“That may be it,” Celeste agreed.

“All right. I’m going back in.”

“Are you sure?” Emily asked.

“I’m level 1 to begin with, so my stats didn’t get reduced.”

“I see!”

“That’s our Ryota. This dungeon is perfect for you.”

“You’re uppity, for a low level.”

Everyone saw me off as I tried to enter the dungeon, but something stopped me.

“I’m back! Wow, Ryochin, you’re so cool!” Alice returned jubilantly with a mountain of tomatoes in tow.

“Alice? Where’d you get all those?”

“Ryochin is awesome! He finished it all on his own!”

“Finished it?”

“Yeah! You’re so strong, even without a weapon!” Alice was over the moon. Ryochin, her summoning magic, summoned a being that perfectly copied my strength.



“Looks like you don’t have to go back in now,” Celeste joked.

“That’s Yoda for you.”

My experiment had already been done for me in an unexpected way. It seemed I could clear the dungeon on my own.

“Those drops... How many monsters did you have to kill?” I asked Alice.

“Nine,” she answered firmly.

A mountain of tomatoes, nine monsters’ worth of drops. With the rules we’d worked out so far and those two pieces of information, I could calculate it quickly. Start from 100, double nine times. The total...

“About 50,000 piros in one run, then?”

Figuring out whether that was good or bad would require further testing.

## 151. Engaging All Forces

Back into Sulfur I went.

It really was set up like a coliseum. When I went in, I was inside a sort of arena surrounded by towering walls. I could see that the tops of the walls were built like spectator seating, but of course, there was no audience.

An empty coliseum. That described this dungeon well.

Just then, a monster appeared: a one-eyed monster, a cyclops, just smaller than an adult man. It swung its club to attack me.

It was weak for a monster, only as strong as its size would imply. I evaded the little man's wooden club and cross-counter jabbed it in the face.

The dungeon forced you back down to level 1, but as I was always level 1, my stats remained the same. My SS-rank strength insta-killed the cyclops, and it disappeared and dropped wheat.

Not much, though—what I'd estimate to be 100 piros.

A door appeared and began to flicker. So far, the same as last time. But what would happen now?

I ignored the door and waited. After about thirty seconds, the door vanished, and a monster appeared. It was another green humanoid cyclops, but it was clearly bigger than the last—larger than an average adult male, about as big as a basketball player or sumo wrestler.

Like the others, though, it attacked with a club. It swung it as powerfully as its musculature implied. I jumped back to dodge. The club struck the ground after



missing me, sending rocks and dust flying.

That would've hurt badly if it hit me. With the level reduction, that could shatter someone's bones with ease.

I guarded this time. The strike reverberated through my body, but it didn't hurt that bad.

My vitality and HP were at their level 1 state, at SS rank. I caught the club and twisted it to wrench it from the cyclops's hands. When I unleashed a full swing, it tore the cyclops's body in half.

It disappeared, along with the club I'd snatched away, and dropped wheat again—about double the previous amount, worth 200 piros.

A door appeared and flickered again. I ignored it and waited for the next enemy.

An even bigger cyclops appeared.

All the dungeons I'd been to before had been divided into floors, but this one was divided into rounds. I defeated the third cyclops. It was clearly stronger, and it clearly left behind double the drops.

With each round, the monsters grew stronger and more profitable. By round ten, the cyclops was as big as a small building.

“Haah!”

Now, it was strong enough to take a single full-power punch. I had to hit it twice to beat it.

Its club attacks had become much stronger, too; even with SS HP and vitality, blocking a hit from it made my arms go numb for a while.

When I defeated it, though, the walls around me collapsed. After the loud

collapse, dazzling light flowed in. This sight was obvious proof that I'd cleared the dungeon.

After the walls all fell, I was taken back out of the dungeon with my drops.

"Welcome back!" Emily and the group greeted me.

But the group had grown bigger because Erza was here, too.

"Good work, Ryota."

"Thanks. Sorry to trouble you so soon, but could you count this for me?"

"Wheat, I see. Wait just a moment," she said.

It seemed Emily had summoned her here while I was in the dungeon so she could count my drops. We couldn't take a magic cart inside, which was part of the reason. But there was an even more pressing question.

"Oh, my..."

"What's up?"

"Umm... I see. Hmm."

Erza seemed confused. She looked at the wheat I'd given her again, wavering over something.

"Something wrong?" I asked.

"I'm not positive, but I think it's exactly 100,000 piros."

"Exactly a hundred thousand?"

"Yes, this would be exactly 100,000 piros at market. There may be some small margin of error, but our shop would just truncate the difference and call it an even hundred thousand. Oh, but only if it was *under*, of course."

"Exactly, huh?"

“Yes. Also...”

“...Did Alice get exactly a hundred thousand, too?”

“Wow, impressive.”

Erza was amazed.

I had a few theories in mind, and that was one of them.

And most of all, I said, “The fact that it’s wheat is a big deal.”

“What do you mean by that?” Emily asked me.

“Wheat... You crashed the price of wheat just recently, didn’t you, Ryota?”  
Celeste said.

I affirmed, “Yeah. The fact that this is exactly 100,000 puros is huge. The rewards might just be fixed per round.”

“I see!”

I put a hand to my chin in thought. We’d have to confirm that, too. Now wasn’t the time to make money; we were investigating this dungeon on the Dungeon Association’s request.

“Alice, go in for me again. Stop at three rounds.”

“Okay! Rounds are the number of monsters, right?”

“Yeah.”

Alice went into Sulfur with her buddy monsters. She was a better fit for this dungeon than our other friends, since being brought down to level 1 didn’t reduce her fighting ability.

Since they only fought for three rounds, they came back shortly after—with a pile of oranges in tow.



“Thanks for waiting!” Alice called out.

“Erza?”

“Yes, sir... Seven hundred piros. Exactly, I think.”

Erza’s appraisal confirmed my suspicions. One round for 100 piros, two for 300, three for 700. Ten rounds for 100,000.

We’d have to confirm the numbers in between, too.

“Let’s divide labor. Alice, how much do you think you can do?”

“I can do all of it.”

“All of it?”

“Yep. Hey, so, listen. I could call Ryochin inside, but I can’t right now.”

“...So in that case, when you go inside Sulfur, you can always call him once?”

“Yeah!”

“Then you really could do all of it...”

“Also, I level up!” she added. “I leveled up to 2 in there, but nothing really changed.”

“I see.” I formed a strategy with the new information Alice had given me.

“Emily, can you do four rounds? Don’t force it if you can’t.”

“Leave it to me! I can probably do it if I just snatch away the club.”

“Celeste, repeat rounds 1 and 2. I want to see if the drop amounts ever vary.”

“Got it. I’ll do my best.”

“As for Eve...”

“Bunny says no,” she quickly refused. It was rare for her to be so clearly

against something. Despite how inscrutable she normally was, she was usually willing to help out.

“No?”

“When I’m in there, I’m a low level.”

“So you don’t want to be level 1, huh? Is there nothing I can do to change your mind? Given your experience, I’d have liked to leave rounds 4 and 5 to you...”

“...” Eve poked out her lip, pouting. “One year of carrots—”

“Sure,” I agreed.

“—with Emily’s cooking,” she added.

“Hmm. What do you say, Emily?” I asked.

“Leave it to me! I’ll make it so delicious that it knocks your stockings off!”

“Then I will bear the pain,” Eve said solemnly. That was probably the most value-added reward she’d demanded yet.

“Alice and I will handle rounds 6 to 10 as needed,” I declared.

“Okay!”

“Erza, calculate exact pricing for us. I think you’ll understand before long.”

“Understood.”

Thus, the entire Family was mobilized into Sulfur once more.

We learned that, indeed, Sulfur’s drops were fixed based on the number of rounds you’d cleared. 100, 300, 700, 1,500, 3,000, 6,000, 12,000, 25,000, 50,000, 100,000.

If you cleared all the way to the end of the tenth round, you’d have 100,000

piros of earnings on your hands.

Perhaps because of it forcing you back to level 1 to start, individual drop rates didn't affect it. Alice had claimed that timing had nothing to do with it, and Celeste's near-bottomed-out drop rates hadn't reduced her revenue.

It wasn't a very attractive dungeon to me, but adventurers with low levels and drop rates might dream of fighting their way to the end and earning 100,000 piros.

The monster pattern wasn't random, either. This dungeon was ideal not for adventurers who brute-forced things, but for ones who were good at chess problems.

In the end, our inspection was complete in just one day.



## 152. I Want You Here

Now that my inspection of Sulfur was done, I'd come to the Cyclo Dungeon Association chief's office to report my findings. Clint greeted me, listened to my explanation in its entirety, and stood up with his arms outstretched.

"Incredible, Mr. Sato. I've never seen an inspection completed so quickly."

"I got lucky, and I had good friends on my side."

"No, no. Nobody could've done this but you, Mr. Sato. Based on your description, it sounds like a nightmare for high-level adventurers and adventurers used to fighting in parties."

"It's rough for people who need weapons, too."

"Yes, very true."

You could level up in the dungeon, but only enough that Emily, Celeste, and Eve had reported barely reaching level 5 by round 3. It also forced you to fight solo, since everyone was sent to different arenas even when we entered together.

It was a place where you could earn money even if your drops were the lowest of the low—even if you were a Failure, someone with all F-rank drops—but it took a very specific kind of person to clear.

"So I'm extremely grateful to you," Clint continued. "With that information, we could open it to adventurers as soon as tomorrow."

He hadn't said it explicitly, but the fact that he'd get more taxes from the dungeon was what really put him over the moon.

He threw a mountain of sugar cubes into the tea his secretary had brewed. Then, he stuck a toothpick into a cube of sugar and tossed it into his mouth. It was so much sugar that just watching made me feel diabetic.

“You’re Cyclo’s lucky charm, you know?”

“Hm?”

*Where’s this coming from all of a sudden?*

“Ever since your arrival, Cyclo has been the very picture of prosperity and smooth sailing. We’ve brought Selenium into the fold, Aurum is effectively ours, and we’re in a situation to send adventurers into Sulfur right away. All of it happened after you came, and all of it is thanks to you.”

“I just do what I’m told, that’s all.”

“I wonder about that. Say, would you accept this year’s annual commendation?”

“Annual commendation?”

I hadn’t heard that phrase before, though it wasn’t too hard to imagine what it meant.

“Right. Every region’s Dungeon Association performs their own. They announce the achievements of their best contributors and award them.”

“That’s not really necessary...”

“I would be grateful if you accepted it.” Clint gazed at me sincerely. It was a weird feeling for the award giver to beg me like this. “Those who succeed are honored, and adventurers witnessing it will be inspired. And that means...”

“...More tax revenue, right? Gotcha.”

In other words, he wanted to raise employee morale. That made sense.

“So again, I would be grateful if you accepted it.”

“If that’s how it is, then I will graciously accept.”

“Thank you! You do nothing but help us, Mr. Sato. Right, the award also comes with a yearly pension. Consider that more motivation.”

“All right. I’ll take that.”

“Furthermore...” Clint continued.

*There’s more?*

That surprised me.

“The Dungeon Association has decided to buy the mansion you’re currently renting out. As long as you live there, we will not charge rent.”

“Hey, now. It’s a big mansion; that must’ve been expensive. The curse is gone now, so we can live there normally. It’s basically flawless now.”

“Furthermore...”

“There’s more?!”

Clint offered gift after gift, never giving me so much as a moment to catch my breath.



I left the Dungeon Association and met up with Alice, who’d been waiting out front. She was squatting next to the building, playing with her four buddy monsters.

Depending on how you looked at her, she almost looked like a little girl



playing with dolls by the street. A heartwarming sight, indeed.

“Thanks for waiting for me,” I said.

“Did you finish your report?”

“Yeah...”

“What’s the matter? That’s a scary frown on your face.”







“Hmm...” I grumbled as I crossed my arms and cocked my head.

Frankly, I was troubled. Confused. I still didn't understand why Clint was giving me so much preferential treatment.

Alice and I walked together and discussed what had happened.

“That's because he wants you to stay in Cyclo!” she said.

“Wants me to stay here?”

“Yeah! The chief and the others were saying the same thing to me, y'know?”

*The chief—probably Indole's chief. That's where Alice was born, after all.*

Back when the dungeon Aurum was born, I'd gone there on business and helped the village out.

“They wanted to give you a place to live, give you a bunch of stuff... Did he offer women?” Alice asked.

“...He sure did.”

Toward the end, Clint had brought up something like that. He said he'd introduce me to nice ladies, take me to shops that “rent out” nice ladies, and the like. Yeah, you know what I mean.

Of course, I refused all that. That just wasn't my thing.

“He's doing all that to coax you into staying in this city forever,” Alice explained.

“But why...?”

“Well, the thing is... Oh!” Before she could reply, Alice stopped in place. For some reason, she was staring straight forward with a big grin—at Cyclo's busy main street.



Up ahead was a group of boys dressed in unsophisticated clothes. Their dress and vibes alike were a lot like Alice when she came from her village.

To me, they looked like young people who'd just moved to the big city for the first time.

"So this is Cyclo, the agricultural city..."

"Let's do our best, boys!"

"Yeah. We're gonna make a name for ourselves here!"

It was heartwarming to see young men encouraging each other.

But they didn't stop there.

"I'm going to be just like Ryota Sato!"

"Me, too!"

"Same, same!"

*Bwuh? What was that? They want to be like me?*

I looked to my side dubiously. Alice was still grinning like mad.

"This is one reason," she said.

"Do you mean..."

"Yeah! All the new adventurers admire you, Ryota. As long as you're here, hopeful adventurers will come in droves."

*Is that what's happening? I had no idea.*

"To Ryota and beyond!" the boys all shouted in unison.

Seeing the circle of boys was so embarrassing.

Even more embarrassing was the fact that people around them accepted it as

normal and encouraged them as well.

## 153. I Can Still Fight

After waking up the next morning, I freshened up, got dressed in the bathroom, and went to the dining room, where I found Celeste lying face down on the table.

That tall, black-haired beauty usually stood with her head held high. Now she slumped down, exhausted, a shadow of her usual self.

“Morning, Celeste. Something wrong?”

“Good morning, Ryota... There’s a magic storm this morning.”

“Oh, really? Are you okay?”

“Yeah. If I just stay inside the mansion, I’ll be fine. I’m just a little messed up because I carelessly went outside before.”

“I see...”

“It’s okay.” Celeste sat up and returned to her usual neat, proper, beautiful state. “I’m safe from it as long as I’m in here, and the forecast says things will be back to normal in the afternoon,” she explained.

It seemed she’d be fine. It wasn’t like we could do anything about it, anyway.

I often had headaches during days with low air pressure back in my old world, so I knew that all you could do at times like this was sit still and weather the storm. Fortunately, it would at least be over by noon.

Celeste smiled and said jokingly, “All of it’s your fault, Ryota.” I knew she was making jokes so I wouldn’t worry about her, but what was my fault? “I hit my

level cap by being with you. Magic storms get harder for you as you become a stronger mage.”

“Oh. Guess that *is* my fault.”

“Right?”

“Well, I’ll have to make it up to you. Is there anything you’d like me to do?”

“Hmm... How about we go out for tea some time? I found a nice place in town. We could go together...”

“Sure. Let’s do that.”

Celeste smiled happily.

*I just hope this helps her forget the pain of the magic storm a little bit.*



I warped to B6 of Nihonium and immediately felt something *off*. The side of my head was throbbing painfully. I wasn’t taking damage; it was the kind of pain that reverberated from deep inside in your head.

I’d heard about this from Celeste and others: this was the pain of magic storms.

*Why?* I thought to myself, but then, I instantly realized.

“Oh... S-rank intelligence...”

Magic storms caused a shift in the bodily condition of mages. Celeste had just told me that the effect was more intense on stronger mages, too.

My intelligence, the stat that boosted magic attack, was up to S-rank now. Of



course I'd be affected.

I stood there and checked my bodily condition. It hurt, but not enough that I couldn't move.

Using the Absolute Rock stone to turn into invincible mode made it a lot easier, too.

*Yeah, I think this won't affect my farming,* I concluded and began culling monsters. The poison zombies of Nihonium's B6, to be specific.

Since the appearance of Sulfur, I felt the necessity of technique over stats more than ever.

Sniping, shooting off limbs... I practiced various methods as I hunted down poison zombies and received their seed drops.

By noon, I'd gathered the number of seeds I'd planned without incident, raising my intelligence to SS.

*Now...my intelligence is SS, too.*

— 1/2 —

Level 1/1

HP SS

MP SS

Strength SS

Vitality SS

Intelligence SS

Willpower F

Speed SS

Dexterity F

Luck F

When I used the portable status board to check my stats, it revealed a neat line of SS-rank stats.

That was six. Three remained.

Just a little longer until my goal. On top of that, I'd probably find a lead to a certain something before long.

Sword, mirror, magatama—I just knew the last one was going to show up soon.

Hoping for the best, I headed to the next floor, B7 of Nihonium. It was like the first to fourth floors, with no dungeon snow or poison mist.

Thinking I had no reason to worry, I turned off the Absolute Rock stone's invincibility mode.

"Huh?" I gasped aloud.

The moment I'd turned it off, I felt that pain from inside my head again: the pain of the magic storm.

It was the same pain as when I'd entered the dungeon this morning, but...

"Wasn't it supposed to stop around noon?" I cocked my head and went back to B6.

B6 dealt health-reducing damage via the poison mist, but it didn't cause headaches.

I went back to the B7. My head hurt again.

It didn't hurt on B6. It did hurt on B7.

"Wind Cutter."

I cast a spell, but it didn't fire.

*Aha. So this is the special feature of B7.*

Dungeons often had special features after B6, which was why going to B6 and below required a license.

It seemed magic was a no-go on this floor.

Not that it was a real problem for me; there was a dull headache, but it wasn't unbearable, and I could fight just fine without magic.

I took my guns out, loaded ammo, and proceeded on. It took no time for a monster to show up.

The B7 monster was another bandage-clad mummy. But they weren't *just* bandages; this mummy's bandages bristled oddly at the back of its neck, and its whole body crackled with electricity.

It attacked with surprisingly agile movements. Though it was fast for its size, it wasn't as fast as the red skeletons. I deftly evaded and fired a normal bullet first. It flew straight—and was destroyed by the crackling electricity.

"That stuff works as armor?"

Without waiting so much as a moment, I fired a piercing round. Then, I switched out all of my ammo to fire a fully buffed normal bullet. Both were destroyed.

*Figures.*

The floor forbade magic through the magic storm, so it was very likely that the monsters themselves had immunity to physical attacks on top of that.

That was why I'd started with normal bullets, piercing rounds, and then a fully buffed normal bullet. The result was what I'd expected: all of them were destroyed by that lightning armor.

The mummy charged, swinging its thick arm to attack. I guarded and jumped back in order to ease the blow a little.

It hurt pretty badly. The mummy was as strong as it looked, making my arms tingle. There was an extra tingle from the added lightning damage, too.

While I jumped back, I fired a flame round and a freeze round with no extra frills. They struck, creating magic circles that burned the mummy's arms and froze its legs.

It roared angrily and screamed in agony at the same time. It seemed those had worked.

A floor where magic was forbidden, with enemies that were strong against physical attacks but weak to magic. It was almost too simple.

*Wait. I have one more.*

I set the limitless lightning round and fired. It created a powerful bolt of lightning—and healed the mummy. That was what I'd expected, too.

I'd had a feeling because of its electrically charged bandages, and indeed, it absorbed lightning attacks.

I had a good understanding of them now, and a rough strategy as well. When I fired several flame rounds into it, the mummy burned and collapsed.

It didn't revive like the ones on the B4; it died normally. That was the moment when my strategy came to fruition.

After the mummy disappeared, it dropped a seed—one of the stat-raising seeds only I could obtain.

**Ryota's willpower went up by 1!**

It seemed B7 dropped willpower seeds.



*All right. Let's get it from F to E today.*

The moment I made that decision, a mummy emerged from underfoot and ambushed me. The sudden ambush made me act on reflex, using my most certain killing method.

“Repetition!” I cast the spell, but nothing happened. Normally, this spell defeated enemies I’d killed before with absolute certainty. “Gah, the magic storm?!”

Despite being the ultimate magic, it was a spell that existed in this world to begin with, so it did not defy the laws of the world. In a place where magic was forbidden, it couldn’t be used.

I’d attempted it on impulse. During the time loss resulting from its failure, the mummy latched on to me and opened its mouth far too wide. I tried to peel it off, but it held on so tight that I couldn’t.

“A...mere trifle!”

I grabbed the mummy’s head and kicked its body. It still held on for dear life, but when I kicked as hard as I could—or rather, pushed it away—its arms and body tore apart at the elbows, sending the rest of the mummy flying.

Its arms *still* held on, but I pulled them off and tossed them aside before firing flame rounds at the mummy to finish it off.

*Good thing I’ve kept practicing.*

Even if I couldn’t use Repetition, even if my bullet choices were limited, I could still fight. And not just that. I could fight so well that I was able to insta-kill the third mummy with an annihilation round.

## 154. Cleaning Up Messes

Emily said that she was making curry tonight, so I warped right over to B6 of Tellurium to procure potatoes for her. Even at this time of night, there were a surprising number of adventurers out hunting monsters.

After walking for a while, I happened to spot one spawning from the ground: a slime family. This was a monster notable for having a huge “parent” slime trailed by several small “child” slimes, like a family of ducks.

Depending on the number of children you slew, the rewards you obtained when killing the parent increased.

Incidentally, while they were called a slime family, the whole thing was technically one monster. The “children” were more like limbs, or hair, or something along those lines.

To make six people’s worth of curry—including leftovers, because it’s *always* better the next day—ten children would surely be enough.

So I whipped out my guns, but before I could strike, a man ran in from the side and started attacking the slime family.

“Hey, that’s mine...” I tried to prevent him from stealing my kill, but I stopped myself just as I reached my hand out.

Because the man was tottering toward the parent slime. He was so pale that I could tell even from the side in the poor lighting of a dungeon.

He looked like a zombie office drone seeing the morning sun for the first time after three days of all-nighters. There was no way he’d be able to fight that

monster.

His attack missed, and the monster's counterattack launched him back-first into a wall. Then, he collapsed like a puppet without strings.

The slime family naturally pursued, but this time, I cut in. I approached while firing normal bullets. After confirming that I'd defeated ten child slimes, I struck it with a body blow with perfect follow-through.

The parent got stronger with each child killed, but ten kills only made it as hard as concrete, so I was able to crush it in one blow.



"Nnh...?"

"Finally came to, huh?"

"...Where am I?!"

He went from dazed to lucid in no time, sitting up and looking around.

"B6 of Tellurium. You haven't gone anywhere."

"Did I lose consciousness...? How long has it been?"

"About five minutes."

"Tch, that long... Am I gonna make it in time?"

He grimaced and tried to stand up. However, he quickly got dizzy and was forced to take a knee.

"Don't push yourself. You haven't slept for days, have you? I can tell from one look at your face."

“If I don’t push myself, I won’t make it in time...”

He tried to whip himself into standing again, but he couldn’t keep his balance, so his efforts went nowhere.

But of course. I knew people like him. He’d been working overnights for days now, and his exhaustion had overwhelmed his misdirected eagerness; no doubt his body was at its limit. No matter what he did, he couldn’t move.

After a while of struggling, the man gave up. Then, he sat cross-legged and slumped over sadly.

“Guess that’s it...”

“What’s going on? If you’re willing to tell me, I’ll listen.”

The man looked at me, sighed, and began to talk.

“I’m Glenn, from the Joel Family. A week ago, my boss Joel accepted this job. We’re supposed to deliver potatoes in bulk by today.”

“Mhm?”

Taking a request, delivering a quantity of crops by a deadline. I often delivered watermelons to Ina’s family and occasionally mushrooms to the gourmand Eric. It sounded like made-to-order production, and it wasn’t exactly rare in this world.

“But the boss messed up and accepted a job for almost ten times our usual capacity.”

“*Ten* times? And that’s why you’re pushing yourself?” I looked around. Now that I was paying attention, I noticed others just as pale as Glenn. Some of them were still at it, but the majority of them leaned against the walls powerlessly. “The boss would be...that woman over there, I guess?” I asked.



“No. The boss isn’t here.”

“Come again?” I stared at Glenn, surprised.

“The boss has low plant drops, so we’re the ones who go to Cyclo’s dungeons.”

“So you’re saying...”

Reading in my eyes what I wanted to say, Glenn grinned wryly.

“We’re cleaning up the boss’s mess. He’s just not cut out for this job, y’know? Mistakes like this aren’t rare with him, and despite *him* being the one who messed it up, he’s off in Selenium farming meat without a care in the world!” he complained bombastically.

When you’re stuck cleaning up after your boss—especially when they’re relaxing without a care in the world—you’re gonna complain once or twice.

*Wait a second, so...*

“Say, how many more do you need?”

“Huh?”

“What’s the time limit? And how many more potatoes do you need?”

“Why bother asking me that?”

“Just answer.”

Understanding my implicit urging not to waste time, Glenn reluctantly answered, “There’s almost no time. As for the amount... We need 500,000 piros worth.”

“Got it.”

I looked around and found a slime family that nobody was attacking. Then, I

readied my guns and loaded bullets.

“Wh-What are you planning?” he asked.

“Just leave it to me.”

I left the dubious Glenn behind and charged at the slime family. I’d plunged into the horde of children, so I fired my two guns in all directions. I littered the area with normal bullets, mopping up the kids.

Now for the maximum-power parent slime—what once took five annihilation rounds to defeat.

“Repetition!” I cast.

The parent slime was instantly killed, dropping a vast quantity of potatoes.

“I’m leaving this to you; pick up all those potatoes,” I told Glenn. “Meanwhile, I’ll go kill the next one.”

“Are you...really...?”

Rather than spare the time to answer him, I ran through the dungeon as fast as possible. Whenever I found a slime family, I used my rapid fire into Repetition combo to mass-produce potatoes.

After repeating this nonstop insta-kill process at maximum speed for thirty minutes, I had successfully produced 500,000 piros worth of potatoes.



In front of Tellurium, I watched as Glenn’s team hauled off potatoes. Some of them really had been at the limit of their strength, so I’d healed them with my

limitless recovery rounds.

Glenn watched alongside me.

“You really saved us, umm...”

“Name’s Ryota.”

“Of the Ryota Family?!” Glenn was stunned. Then, he murmured quietly to himself, “Wow... Your Family must be so happy.”

“More importantly, you should leave that boss of yours. In my experience, when you accomplish the impossible jobs they give you, they only give you more impossible ones. They know what they’re doing, but they still do it.”

“...” Glenn did not reply. I could tell from the look on his face that he already knew that.

“Well, I doubt you need to hear it from me. But think about it.”

With that, I turned to go back into the dungeon. My friends were waiting for me. It was almost time for the curry to be ready.

But before I could go into the dungeon where the warp point awaited me, Glenn called out, “Oh, wait a second! Thanks again for saving us!”

“No problem.” I waved to him and returned to the dungeon.

## 155. Time to Change Jobs

Late at night, I came alone to the beer bar Villa di H.

Sometimes, I wanted to drink alone in silence. Every day was lively and fun, so I needed a change of pace once in a while.

As such, I came alone. A familiar employee took me to my seat, and I ordered the coffee beer I'd fallen in love with.

While I waited expectantly for its arrival, I heard a deep sigh from the seat next to me. That was the kind of sigh you heard often at bars—or rather, at izakayas.

“Huh? Glenn, is that you?”

“Oh?” He looked at me and jumped in surprise. “Ah!”

Indeed, it was Glenn.

He'd ordered beer and fried chicken, a very common meal. But judging from the water trickling down his glass and pooling on the table, he'd probably drank five to six glasses without so much as touching his food.

The man was just guzzling down beer.

“What's got you sighing so deeply?”

“Oh, no, well... Umm, thank you for what you did for us.”

“You thank me, but you don't sound all that happy. Did something happen?”

“Yes... Honestly, you helped us so much. The client was overjoyed, to the point that they want to order from us from now on.”



“That’s great, right?”

“And the boss...got all the glory.”

“Hm?”

“My boss... Joel, he took all the credit. I mean, he is the Family boss, so that’s to be expected, but...”

Glenn guzzled down another beer.

“So your undeserving superior took the credit for your work...”

Glenn nodded. I could just see it in my mind: a boss who’d done nothing, only sticking his nose in when the project was a success, acting like he’d done all the work and taking all the credit with him.

In my old world, there was someone like that at my company.

“It doesn’t matter, though; he’s the boss. But...”

*Bang!*

He slammed his cup onto the table. He was flushed, and his eyes were glazed over.

“I think it’s stupid that he wants to take on that job again. I mean, no other Family wanted it. You can’t make money off a job like that!”

“Yeah...”

I knew that feeling, too. We had someone just like that. They didn’t think about the conditions in the workplace or whether the work was profitable; they’d just accept right off the bat.

Then, the workers would always take the pain. I could understand Glenn’s desire to drink away his sorrows at the bar when he was subjected to such an

awful combo.

I moved over to Glenn's table, took the beer that an employee brought over, and gestured to let them know I'd be moving over here.

Then, I asked Glenn, "Say, how about you just go independent? You might be better off working alone instead of in a Family. You're an adventurer, after all; I'm sure you can do it."

"I can't do that... I'm the Family's number two. If I quit now, it'll make things harder on all the others. There are still so many things I have to teach the younger ones."

"That's what happens when people rely on you... Okay, in that case..."

"Hm?"

"What if you take all the others with you when you go independent?"

When I said that, Glenn's eyes went wide. For a moment, they shone with hope.

"That is an idea—wait, but no..."

"Why not?"

"I'm fine now, but the younger ones all have debt. They're in debt for their equipment."

"For their equipment?"

Even I could tell that I'd just knitted my brows *tight*.

"A lot of the younger ones came with nothing. We'd give them starter weapons, but they mostly broke quickly. That meant they'd pay for new ones out of pocket... And that's where most of them went into debt."

“In debt to Joel?”

“Not directly. He borrows money from the Dungeon Association as the guarantor.”

“From the Dungeon Association... I didn’t know they did that.”

“Since he’s the guarantor... If we leave the Family, they’ll have to pay it back right away. They don’t have the money for that...” Glenn sighed again and downed yet another beer.

There are a lot of reasons you can’t just drop everything and get a new job. Many of them boil down to simple, cold, hard cash.

You might be in debt, you might be worried about your day-to-day life, you might get a lower salary... In so many cases, money is what drags you back.

I thought for a moment before saying to Glenn, “Come with me.”

“Huh? Wh-Where?”

“Just come.” Without waiting for a response, I walked ahead.

Our destination was the Dungeon Association.



Clint welcomed us with open arms, despite how late it was and how much we stunk of beer.

In his office, he put on a smile to cover his surprise.

“What brings you here so late at night, Mr. Sato?”

“I hear the Dungeon Association lends money.”

“That’s a dirty way of putting it. Call it mutual aid for adventurers. We offer far lower interest rates than any old moneylender. Of course, you do need some level of trust as an adventurer if you want to borrow...” Clint looked back and forth between us. “Do you need a lump sum of cash, Mr. Sato?”

“No.” I shook my head and told him about Glenn.

I explained that he was a member of the Joel Family and that he wanted to go independent, but his coworkers’ debt made it impossible.

“Goodness... It had to be Joel.”

“Had to be?”

“Of course.” Clint nodded, glanced at Glenn, and spoke up, “Providing free but shoddy equipment to new members is one thing, but he’s famous for making them buy expensive replacements after they’ve broken. I won’t accuse him of overcharging them, but the equipment just isn’t suitable for their skill level, leaving the young folk struggling for a long time.”

“Is that true?”

“...” Glenn solemnly nodded in affirmation. “It is strong, durable equipment, so I won’t say he’s fooling us, but...”

“But there *is* ill intent behind it.”

Glenn went silent. He must have felt the same way.

I faced Clint. I could pay it off. If it was only enough money to tie down newbies, then that was easily affordable to me.

But part of me felt that wasn’t the way to go, so I faced Clint and brought up the method I’d been considering. “Can you change it so that I’m the guarantor of the debt instead of Joel?”

“Normally, no.”

“Normally?”

“Normally,” Clint repeated. I could sense Glenn’s disappointment next to me.

Glenn had taken that word at face value, but I was able to read between the lines. If he really couldn’t do it, then he wouldn’t use the word “normally.”

“Is there nothing we can do?” I bowed my head.

“H-Hey, it’s not that big—”

“Understood,” Clint replied, making Glenn gasp in confusion. “If you insist, Mr. Sato...” Thus, Clint accepted my request.

Not that I knew why he’d made me read between the lines. Why go about it in such a roundabout way?

But when I saw the emotion in Glenn’s eyes, I was certain that I’d removed the last of his shackles.



A few days later, rumors of an idiotic leader who’d lost all of his subordinates spread throughout Cyclo.



## 156. Fawning Noble

When I used the warp room to go to B7 of Nihonium, I groaned.

“Nrgh!”

This was the floor where magic couldn’t be used—where a natural magic storm raged endlessly.

That alone wasn’t a problem since I could fight without magic just fine, but now that I had raised my mage stat—intelligence—all the way to SS, coming here gave me a bad headache.

It was like feeling tired all over on a low-pressure day, but the way it came on instantly upon arrival made it feel worse in the moment.

It felt a lot better after I took some deep breaths, so I regathered myself and began farming monsters.

The floor was devoid of other adventurers, as usual, but crawling with mummies. These mummies’ bandages crackled with electricity. Simple physical attacks didn’t work on them.

Piercing rounds had almost no effect, and while homing rounds did manage to aim for exposed flesh between the bandages, the electricity the mummies emitted turned them into dust.

“Oh?”

However, restraining rounds worked surprisingly well. They bound the target with ropes of light when they struck.

Even plain ones, unbuffed by buffing rounds, restrained them for quite a while. Much longer than other monsters—almost three times as long, in fact.

Was it just them? Or did it work like that on all mummies? It varied slightly with each individual monster, too, so I fired restraining rounds into every mummy on B7 and watched them without killing them.

Upon doing so, I learned that restraining rounds worked extremely well on the others as well.

*What about sleep rounds, though?* I wondered, so I tried firing them.

I shot sleep rounds, the combination of two recovery rounds, into each mummy. Once again, they were super-effective, causing the mummies to fall asleep standing up. While they were sleeping, they were undead-type monsters, so their expressions didn't change much; they just looked like wax dolls standing in place.

It was kind of surreal to see all the mummies on the floor not moving, as if time had stopped and I was the only person in the world who could move.

After confirming that sleep rounds were three times as effective on them, too, I farmed mummies with a sleep round plus punch combo: put them to sleep, do what you want, rinse and repeat.

In doing so, I'd raised my willpower from E to D.



In the afternoon, I went to the city instead of Tellurium. According to Celeste, there wasn't anything you could do about magic storms preventing you from

using magic, but the headache side effect could be dealt with using normal drugs sold in the city.

While I was walking around, someone suddenly accosted me.

“You there, common man!”

He sounded like a young man, but his attitude and word choice were haughty.

“Hm?”

I stopped and turned around. He had silver hair as long as Celeste’s, a rich man’s clothes, intelligent eyes, and handsome features.

He was the very picture of a stereotypical, good-looking noble boy.

“Where will I find the dungeon known as Tellurium?” he demanded.

“Tellurium? It’s...” I hesitated for a moment. I went to Tellurium almost every day, but since I’d almost exclusively used the warp room lately, I couldn’t remember for a moment.

However, I only hesitated for about three seconds. After using a building I recalled as a landmark, I remembered the route in my memories and told him where it was.

“I see. Thank you, common man.”

He thanked me and left.

While I found it incredible that he’d call someone a “common man” while asking for help, I refocused myself and got back to searching for those headache meds.

*Boom!*

Suddenly, I heard an explosive sound behind me.

The ground shook a little. I turned around curiously, and there I saw a gorilla. That was an outsider I'd defeated before—the one that dropped a gun.

It was on a rampage. City folk scrambled to get away from it. Most people had already escaped, but an old lady shopkeeper hadn't run away yet.

When I looked inside, I saw her withdrawing sales revenue from the safe behind the counter. By the time she'd collected her money and tried to escape, it was already too late.







The rampaging gorilla had come to the storefront, blocking her only escape route.

“St-Stop...” she pleaded.

“Graaah!”

The gorilla thumped its chest and roared before attacking the lady ferociously.

My decision was instant. I was used to creative methods by now, so I judged that I could freeze both the ceiling and threshold with freeze rounds to make a wall and buy time.

I charged forward, loading time-buying freeze rounds to save the old lady. But just then, a man jumped in from the side.

With long, flowing silver hair, he stabbed the gorilla with a rapier. Despite it being a slender sword, it was backed by such incredible power that it sent the gorilla flying.

The beast struck a building that had started to collapse due to its rampage, turning it into rubble.

That man was the one who’d just asked me for directions.

With rapier in hand, he pursued the gorilla. He struck another merciless blow as the beast struggled to get its footing on the debris, defeating it.

Having unexpectedly lost my chance to help, I lowered my guns.

The young man sheathed his rapier and looked around. I knew that look in his eye; adventurers often looked like that when they were checking to see if enemies were still about.

The old lady ran over to him.

“Thank you! You saved me!”

“Don’t mention it, common woman. Someone was in trouble, and someone with the power to help was there. That is all,” he replied, as if it was a natural thing to say.

The young man acted pompous and spoke like a stuffy aristocrat, but it didn’t provoke anger.

People gathered around him, townspeople who’d run away before. They lauded the young man, and some younger women looked at him with respect and admiration.



That night, Emily and I waited together for everyone to return in the living room where we all usually gathered—a place you might even call the house’s salon.

While we small-talked, I told Emily about what had happened in town today. Apparently having heard about it elsewhere, she shared information I didn’t know about.

“I hear it was the same business as last time.”

“Last time? You mean when we defeated the gorilla together?”

“Yeah! It was the same exact business making the same exact mistake, leading to another outsider appearing. They already received a warning last time, so the Dungeon Association ordered them to cease business this time.”

“I see... Yeah, that’s what happens when you put the city in danger twice.”

The gorilla outsiders, despite rewarding me with my two guns, were a huge nuisance to the townsfolk that needed to be dealt with.

“The trash-rummager problem before was a big deal, too.”

“You mean Kerberos.”

“Yes. There are rumors that penalties for littering and outsider-related mishaps will be stricter. For example, you’ll be forbidden from buying takeout foods with inedible parts like bones.”

“It’s like how they banned gum in Singapore...”

“Sin-guh-pour?” Emily cocked her head at the unfamiliar name, but she then added, “Salmon fillets are apparently dangerous, too.”

“Why?! Salmon skin is delicious!”

That was totally unfair. Well, not that anyone bought takeout salmon anyway.

While we chatted in the mansion salon, immersed in the bright and warm atmosphere of Emily’s making, there was a knock at the door. The knocker on the door smacked it twice.

“A visitor?”

“That’s unusual at this time of night,” Emily mused.

*Could it be Clint? If they’re talking about banning stuff, maybe a problem came up,* I thought to myself, heading to the front door with Emily.

When we opened the door, we were greeted by not Clint, but a young man.

“Excuse me. Is this the residence of Ryota Sato?”

Long silver hair, fancy clothes, a handsome face—that was the young man I’d met earlier.

Kerberos lay down next to the door, but his eyes were fixed on the man. Since I showed him no ill will when I came to the door, Kerberos knew that he wasn't my enemy, so he yawned and closed his eyes. His faithfulness to his guard dog duty was laudable.

Relieved, I looked to the young man again.

"Weren't you..."

"Hmm? Do you know me?" he asked. It seemed he didn't remember me.

I mean, he asked if it was Ryota Sato's home, but he didn't recognize me? Did that mean he didn't even know what I looked like?

"Yes," I replied.

"I see. Well, my name is Cell Stem. Is Sir Sato home?"

"That would be me. Ryota Sato."

"Ooh!" Suddenly, the young man's—Cell's—eyes sparkled with excitement. "It's an honor to meet you, Sir Sato. My name is Cell Stem."

"You just said that."

"Pardon me. I'm just so excited to meet you, sir."

Emily and I looked at each other.

The look on her face seemed to say, *What's going on?* to me. I'm sure I was making the same face.



In the salon, Cell and I sat on opposite sides of the table. After gracefully

taking a sip from Emily's tea, Cell gazed directly at me.

"I became an adventurer because I was stricken with admiration by your deeds, Sir Sato."

"Mine?"

"Of course. I've heard of many of your exploits. I strive to be like you."

Next to me, holding the tray she'd brought the tea on, Emily asked, "Are you a fan of Yoda's?"

"That is correct. No, I would go as far as saying I revere you. To this point, I thought that I should follow in your footsteps. But it seems like every day I hear of your latest accomplishments, so I knew that I had to meet you at least once," Cell said passionately. Having someone speak so highly of me was more embarrassing than anything.

To hide it, I decided to compliment him in response.

"I'd say you're the greater man. I saw what you did today. Not everyone can leap in to save someone like that."

"Huh? Was that him?" Emily gasped in surprise. I nodded in reply.

She was even more surprised now, but Cell himself calmly declared, "That was only an imitation of you, Sir Sato."

"Imitation? You were copying me?"

"Indeed. After hearing of your many deeds, a certain phrase came to my mind. It all boiled down to this: someone was in trouble, and someone with the power to help was there."

"Ah... He really is a fan..." Emily murmured. I was even more surprised than she was.



Those were the words Cell had said to the people of the city after he killed the gorilla. I had no idea I was the inspiration for those words.

“I realized that I needed to learn more about you, so I came to Cyclo.”

“Huh... Uh, but I’m just a normal adventurer—”

“I’ve decided to become the chief of this city’s Dungeon Association in order to learn all I need,” Cell said matter-of-factly.

“Bwuh?!”

“Th-The chief?” Emily gasped.

*If you’re the chief, where does that leave Clint? What happened to Clint?*

With no way to know my shock, Cell gazed directly at me. Those eyes looked familiar. I’d seen them somewhere before.

“He’s like Kerberos...” Emily murmured.

Indeed, it was Kerberos. Those were the eyes of a pup who’d wait in front of a Shibuya train station until his death.

The handsome noble gazed at me with those very eyes.

## 157. Noble Stalker

Clint, who we'd called to come over, furrowed his brow and offered his wryest grin.

"Oh, man. Where do I even begin?"

Next to him, Cell ignored Clint and complimented Emily.

"Excuse me, what sort of tea leaves do you use in this? This may be among the top three tastiest teas I've had in my life."

"I bought it from a shop in town. It's just normal tea."

"Goodness! But this taste... I suppose I should expect no less from a friend of Sir Sato."

Overjoyed by Emily's tea, Cell complimented her to the point of embarrassment.

I left them aside and faced Clint again.

"Do you know about Mr. Stem?" he asked me.

"No."

"What about this, then?" Clint pulled a paper bill out of his pocket. It was the common currency of this world, piros. This bill happened to be the largest, a 10,000-piro bill.

"That's just money. Is it special, or something?"

"No, it's simply ten thousand piros. Mr. Stem's Family produces these."

"...Whuh?" I made a stupid noise, unable to comprehend that for a moment.

Everything in this world was dropped by monsters in dungeons. I remembered being half surprised and half understanding when I'd first been told that even *money* was dropped in dungeons.

But I was even more surprised this time—maybe because part of me already understood what Clint was saying.

“They produce it... Money, you mean?”

“Exactly. The Stem Family manages the dungeon that drops paper money.”

“Man, they’re insanely powerful...”

Oil money was one thing; we were talking *money* money here. If that was true, then the man in front of us essentially held the entire world in the palm of his hand.

“It’s exactly as bad as you think,” Clint added with another ironic grin, apparently reading my face. “If I’m told to give up my position as dungeon chief to such a man, I cannot refuse.”

“Yeah, sure can’t...”

While we had a serious conversation, Cell and Emily were talking about something else entirely.

Cell produced doll after doll from his pockets, each small enough to fit in the palm of a hand. He put them each on the table and showed them to Emily.

“This is Sir Sato fighting in bare-handed combat, this is Sir Sato sniping from long distance, and this one is Sir Sato giving his absolute all fighting a dungeon master-rank foe.”

“Incredible! They look just like him!”

“Why have you been making those things?!” I rebutted wildly.

All the palm-sized models were me. At a glance, they were like dolls you'd see in Akihabara—figures, basically—but they were jaw-droppingly high quality. One could almost be convinced that they were me but shrunk by magic.

“Naturally because I revere you, Sir Sato. This is you in Selenium, this is you in Aurum. And this is you when you helped Princess Margaret—”

A horrifying chill ran up my back.

“You’re a stalker!”

I could forgive the close-range and long-range combat ones, but the way he made them for specific situations had gone way over the line and beyond.

“Come, now. I am no stalker. I am simply moved by your deeds, Sir Sato.”

“...” I glared at him incredulously. All stalkers said stuff like that.

“I mean it... These are all situations in which you’ve helped someone in trouble,” Cell said with a sincere look on his face.

“Mmgh.”

I recalled his line from earlier: *someone was in trouble, and someone with the power to help was there.*

“I am simply putting your exploits in physical form so that I may, too, be like you.”

“...Is that true?”

Maybe that made sense. He was going too far, yes, but still.

“Yoda hasn’t just helped them. He’s helped Kerberos, too!”

“Of course. As I recall, this one... Ah!” While Cell tried to take out yet another figure, something bean-shaped fell out of his hand and onto the floor. It wasn’t

a figure; it looked like a jewel.

“A slime’s tear...” Emily could tell at a glance. I could, too. I remembered it because we’d submitted it to the harvest festival on commission.

“I-It isn’t what it looks like!” Cell hurriedly snatched it off the ground and stowed it back into his pocket.

...

.....

“No way. Is that—?”

“It is not what it looks like! I swear, I did not switch my own with the one you submitted to the harvest festival, Sir Sato!”

“You *are* a stalker!”

There was no mistaking it now; he was a stalker. Zero doubt, 100% stalker. An awkward air ruled the salon after the big reveal that Cell was, in fact, a stalker.

After a while, he cleared his throat and spoke up as if nothing had happened.

“I’ll be depending on this city for a while. I will also seek your help as the chief of the Dungeon Association, Sir Sato, so I look forward to your cooperation.”

“R-Right.”

“This is only a small token of thanks, but I understand you rent three properties along with this mansion. I will buy them all and—”

“No, thank you,” I interrupted Cell.

“Hmm? No?”

“I have no reason to have you do that for me.”

“No, but I...”



“I’m not in need of help,” I said simply and bluntly, gazing into his eyes.

This wasn’t a reward for me doing anything, and I wasn’t in any trouble for him to help me out of, so there was no reason for it.

When I threw his words back at him, Cell made a bitter face and backed off.

“Fine. You’re right, Sir Sato.”

“Sorry.”

“But this is troubling. I’ve finally made it to this city, so I’d like to build a relationship with you.”

“...” I was at a loss.

“I know! Would you have your drops delivered to me every day?” he suggested.

“My drops?”

“Yes. My little sister came with me, and she’s a bit of a gourmand. Some just call her a picky eater... But I’m certain she’ll be more than satisfied by any drop of yours. I’ll pay double the market price. Every day, if you’d please!”

“...Hmm.” I put a hand to my chin and thought to myself. “If you say so...then all right.”

“You mean it?!” Cell was thrilled.

“He really is just like Kerberos,” Emily murmured to herself, as taken aback as me.

This guy was a stalker, yes, but the worst part was that it was hard to hate him for it.



After leaving the Ryota Family mansion, Cell and Clint boarded the Stem Family carriage.

Sitting across from Cell, Clint chuckled dryly and said, “I can’t believe he turned down the mansion offer.”

“That is why he is worthy of reverence. Truly, that is the Sir Sato I know.”

Clint was surprised, though he concealed it. The man named Cell before him, a man who controlled the source of all the world’s money, truly seemed to revere Ryota.

He’d planned to suggest after leaving the mansion that Cell surely couldn’t like him *that* much, but his expectations were defied beyond belief.

However, Clint thought that was perfectly fine.

Cell’s genuine admiration made him certain that, thanks to Ryota, Cyclo had just secured the greatest backer of all in case it had need of him.

Indeed, he was certain.

## 158. What a Rich Man Can Do

Back on B7 of Nihonium, the one that forbids magic, I put my all into farming monsters as usual despite the perpetual storm.

Since I couldn't use my ultimate farming magic, I resolved to hone my fighting technique here.

Today, I practiced counters. The only place I could do that without interruption was here in Nihonium, where nobody else came.

I didn't attack the lightning-clad mummies first; I awaited them. When they approached and attacked, I would evade at the last possible moment and hit them with a cross counter.

Sharply, with the minimum necessary motion, timing my counters perfectly with the mummies' attacks.

I blew them away and got my seed drops.

This...felt good.

Waiting for attacks, dodging at a hair's breadth and striking a counter with the perfect timing. I could only do this at maximum efficiency for a narrow instant—maybe a tenth of a second.

When I accomplished that, I felt pleasure shoot through my whole body.

I kept countering, hoping to feel that unexpected satisfaction again. Focusing, waiting for attacks, perfectly timing counters.

I launched a mummy away, and another seed dropped.

*...A little too early. That wasn't as satisfying as the last one.*

I adjusted my muscle memory timing.

I did the same thing to the next mummy. This time, I was just too late, allowing the mummy's attack to graze me.

I repeated these counters over and over and over again. It was more difficult than what I'd done to this point, but that only intensified the pleasure when I struck a perfect counter.

While I practiced my counters, my willpower stat rose from D to C all on its own.



In the afternoon, I warped to B1 of Tellurium, ready and raring to earn money.

It was the same dungeon I knew, full of slimes and bean sprouts flying about, but something about it was unusual.

It was loud. I followed the noise until I found a single building.

At a glance, it was a 300-square-foot structure that hadn't been there yesterday. Because Tellurium was like an underground tunnel, it made the single-story building look even more out of place.

Adventurers gathered in front of it in a commotion.

"Wh-What is this?"

"I hear it's a break room!"

“A break room?” I cocked my head and looked at the adventurer next to me. I didn’t know his name, but I saw him in Tellurium often, so we were mutual acquaintances.

“Apparently, the new Dungeon Association chief had it made. They say your HP and MP recover faster than usual in that building.”

“So it’s like an inn...inside a dungeon?” That would be convenient if true. “But why was it built here? I feel like that’s not so necessary on B1 of Tellurium.”

And I didn’t just mean for me. This floor had nothing but slimes, the weakest of the weak. I couldn’t imagine anyone would need a recovery facility on a floor with just slimes.

“Nah, I hear they’re on every floor now,” he said.

“Huh?”

“They made them on every floor of every dungeon in Cyclo—except for Nihonium, that is.”

“They did?”

“Sure did,” the man nodded.

*Whoa, whoa... That’s insane. The master of all the money in the world is a terrifying one, indeed,* I thought to myself. Right on cue, Cell emerged from the building.

He was accompanied by a maid whose eyes were hidden behind her bangs.

Cell took a quick look around at the adventurers and spoke as if giving a speech. “Listen well, common folk. This is a recovery facility that may be used by any adventurer.” The adventurers clamored more. “Make good use of it, common folk, and apply yourselves to drop production like never before.”

Some adventurers furrowed their brows at his constant use of the phrase “common folk,” but most of them happily accepted the new break room.

“And we can use it for free...? It’s not booby-trapped or anything, is it?” someone asked.

“No. With the ability to recover in dungeons, efficiency will increase. With increased efficiency comes increased tax revenue. It’s only natural for the Dungeon Association to take what measures it can to increase revenue.”

Some people were suspicious, but the veteran adventurers among us were more likely to accept it.

*Wow... That is incredible, though.*

I didn’t know the exact cost, but making an inn in a dungeon must have cost a lot of money.

*Doing that on every floor in just one night... Rich people are insane.*

“Ooh! If it isn’t Sir Sato there!” Cell found me and came over with a big smile. The maid went back into the inn. She must have been inn staff, rather than his direct subordinate. “You really came! I’m overjoyed.”

“Well, I was just passing by. Incredible, though, that you made something like this.”

“It’s a measure to improve productivity. I’m only doing the obvious thing, nothing more.” He wasn’t bragging, but he was by no means modest either. He said it naturally, and the look on his face said he really meant that it was the obvious thing to do.

What an incredible guy.

“Oh, right. Sir Sato, there’s something I’d like you to have.”



“Me?”

“Yes, wait just a moment.” Cell fished around in his pockets. I waited, wondering what he was about to give me. “Ah!” he gasped as a figure fell from his pocket and onto the ground.

It was me—which was bad enough already, but the pose was the counter pose I’d been practicing just this morning.

Worse, I had only *just* started doing it this morning.

“Stalker!”

“Pardon me. *This* is what I’d like you to have.”

Perfectly composed despite that, he put the figure back in his pocket and took out a tag.

It was just an ordinary-looking, blank wooden tag.

I accepted it, checked the front and back, and asked Cell, “What is this?”

“It’s a communicator.”

“Communicator?”

“Right. Use this in dungeons...”

When he started talking, the wooden tag lit up. As it did, symbols began to appear where it had been blank before.

The text displayed said, *Selenium B4*.

“B4 of Selenium? What’s this about?”

“We’re lucky that one appeared at such a convenient time. The truth is, I didn’t just have these break rooms set up; I also placed dungeon master detectors in every dungeon in Cyclo.”

“Dungeon master detectors?!”

“Indeed. As you know, other monsters cannot appear while dungeon masters are out. If left alone for long, they can even change the biology of a dungeon.”

“Right.”

Dungeon masters were a problem for adventurers and the Dungeon Association—no, the entire city.

“As such, we must defeat them swiftly when they appear. This exists for that purpose.”

“...I see. So when a dungeon master appears, you inform us of where it is.”

“Indeed. I would like all the strongest adventurers to have one, so naturally, Sir Sato, you would be the first choice.”

Cell looked serious. If that was the case, then I had no reason whatsoever to refuse.

“Got it. I’ll take it. And I’ll go kill that dungeon master now.”

“I thank you,” Cell said, gazing at me with strong eyes.

I’d worried what would happen when he pushed Clint aside to be the new Dungeon Association chief, but he was taking this surprisingly seriously.

I went to B4 of Selenium through the warp room and fired off Repetition at the Bicorn dungeon master, killing it instantly. Leaving it alive would stop all production inside the dungeon, so I didn’t bother thinking about practice; I just killed it.

Then, I warped back to B1 of Tellurium to report that I’d defeated it.

Cell wasn’t there. When I asked people, they said that he’d gone down to B2. I went down and found that he’d just finished inspecting the inn on that floor. He

came out of it followed by a maid...dressed the exact same as the last one, with the exact same hairstyle covering her eyes.

Like the last time, he gave a speech about the inn and did his best to fire up the adventurers. I waited for him to finish and approached.

“Oh, Sir Sato!”

“I took down the dungeon master.”

“Yes, I’m quite aware. Well done, as always.”

“You knew? Oh, do you know because you have something like this?” I looked at the wooden tag he’d given me. Now that I’d defeated the dungeon master, it was back to being a plain, boring wooden tag. Since Cell had them made, I would expect him to have one himself.

“You’ve done it, Sir Sato. Allow me to thank you once more.” Cell bowed his head to me.

*I’m still amazed how seriously he takes his job,* I thought to myself.

*Plonk!*

A figure fell out of his pocket.

It was a new figure: one of me thrusting out my hand and casting Repetition. It was very literally me from mere moments ago.

“Whoops, can’t have that happening,” he mumbled.

“Stalker!” I screamed, feeling a tinge of real terror.

## 159. Request to a Joker

Down on B4 of Tellurium, I put mushrooms dropped by the bat slimes into my magic cart and sent them off to the mansion. With this, my day's earnings had crossed 1,000,000 piros.

Lately, I'd been wrapping up my days at 1,000,000 piros unless I had a special reason not to. I could make more if I went all out, but a million was such a nice, round number to cap things off on.

"Hmm. Maybe it's not quite enough?"

It was mental math, so it wasn't perfectly precise. If I ended up with only 990,000 piros when I was trying to hit a round number, I'd feel pretty bad.

*Let's make a little more, just in case,* I thought to myself as I loaded my guns and searched for the next monster.

Just then, my line of sight happened to catch a group of people arguing. Well, not quite arguing—more precisely, one person was saying something, while the rest of them looked unhappy with that person.

"A hundred thousand piros left. You don't have to rush things; just have all the drops by tomorrow morning."

"..."

"Now, I'm gonna go home."

The man, who seemed to be their leader, waved one hand at them and tried to leave with a smile on his face.

I watched in silence.

*You're just telling them to work overtime, aren't you? "Don't rush, but I want it done by tomorrow morning." "Work overtime. Take your work home with you and do it there."*

People had done that to me plenty of times in the past. Provoked by unpleasant memories, I approached, ready to help out.

When the man leaving saw my face, he jumped in surprise.

"Ack! Ryota Sato!"

*Does he know about me? Good. That makes this easier. I'll give him a piece of my mind.*

I opened my mouth to speak. But before I could, he pivoted around and went back to his subordinates.

"E-Everyone! It's gonna be rough, but let's do our best!"

*What's he going to do now?* his subordinates seemed to wonder, but the man feverishly killed a bat slime that had just appeared, as if trying to liven things up himself.

"Come on, everyone. Let's put our backs into it!" he yelled, trying to rouse them yet further.

Since he'd taken the initiative, the others reluctantly followed his lead.

Having missed my chance to get a word in, I watched for a while before heading home.



The next day, the Dungeon Association chief—now Cell—summoned me to his office.

“...If my memories are correct...” I looked around the office, rather than at him. “This place looked like a normal office until yesterday.”

Now, it had dazzling furnishings like some kind of royal palace.

“I requested it be renovated. All of this is necessary, you know.”

“You did all of this overnight?”

This was beyond a simple renovation. I wasn’t sure if I was just imagining it, but the room seemed almost double its previous size.

“Again, all of this is necessary.”

“Is it?”

Was this an expression of the raw power of money? Or monster drops? I didn’t know the details, but it was incredible either way.

“But I’m surprised,” I mused.

“By what?”

“I’d expected you to decorate it with figures of me. Looks like you didn’t, though.”

Cell quietly looked away.

*Hey, what the heck? Why are you avoiding eye contact now?*

He brazenly changed the subject.

“M-More importantly, thank you for coming, Sir Sato. There’s something I’d like to implore you to do.”



*Did he decorate it with them? Forget it, I don't care.*

"What is it?"

"Well, two things." Cell's expression changed. It was serious and sharp now. "This can wait until you have time, but in short, I'd like you to show your face on every floor of Cyclo's dungeon. Really, just showing your face is all you need to do."

"That's it? Why?"

I didn't understand Cell's demand. Just showing my face in the dungeons? What was the point of that?

"There have been whisperings among adventurers—especially leaders. They say, 'Don't let Ryota Sato get involved in your business.'"

"Don't let me get involved? Did I do something wrong?"

Cell grinned, as if to say, *Far from it.*

"It began during the incident with the Cliffords," he explained.

"The Cliffords? The stuff with the wheat?"

Cell nodded.

"Your efforts marked a clear reduction in Clifford revenue. They'd started the ruckus in order to raise profits, but your intervention had the opposite effect."

"Right."

"There have been several cases, too, where your assistance has led to subordinates defecting from parties."

"That's because—"

I tried to rebut, but Cell replied with a serious look, "I know. I know everything

about you, Sir Sato.” Those weren’t the eyes of a stalker; they were those of a sympathizer. “It was all their own doing. Those who tell others not to let you get involved in their business likewise deserve it.”

Were there that many wannabe corrupt corporations out there?

He continued, “Last night, simply passing by was enough for you to change things.”

“...Stalker.”

He was a stalker, but this was a serious conversation.

“Likewise, just showing your face will alleviate a shocking amount of unfairness. That will reduce the number of people facing trouble.”

“Makes sense.”

I’d wondered why that had happened last night, but it seemed I had my answer now.

“As such, I want you to show up on all of the floors. You might just save some people through that alone,” Cell said, gazing into my eyes. “It’s something only you can do, Sir Sato.”

“Got it. I’ll make a point of showing up at random.” I decided to accept.

I’d been trying to go carefully through new floors to gradually increase my zone of activity, but if that was what was needed, then I was glad to go further to make myself seen on those floors.

“I thank you. You never cease to amaze, Sir Sato.”

“You said there were two requests. What was the other one?”

“Indeed. It’s about Aurum.”

“What’s happening at Aurum?”

“They say adventurer hunting is on the rise there.”

“Adventurer hunting?”

I hadn’t heard that phrase before. But it was easy to understand, and it was clear that something had to be done about it.

“Adventurer hunting is common in dungeons that have drops that are highly valuable for their volume. Instead of defeating monsters for drops, they go after adventurers who have gathered the drops to steal them in bulk.”

“Robbery, then.”

“Indeed. Though there is a problem far more serious than mere robbery: sometimes, people are killed in adventurer hunts.”

“Yeah... Figures. Stuff happens in the spur of the moment.”

“Many adventurers bolster themselves with rare items to make their dungeon work more stable. Which means...”

“...Rare monster outsiders will spawn from the adventurers’ corpses.”

Cell nodded in response—gravely.

“I want you to stop them. This, too, is something that I can only ask of you.”

“Why only me?”

“Normal adventurers are specialized toward stable farming—in other words, toward their chosen floors. Ninety-nine percent of adventurers aren’t built for fighting other adventurers.”

“Oh...”

*So it’s like how player-versus-enemy and player-versus-player are totally*

*different in MMOs?*

“I can only ask this of you, because you have high stats and never stop working to make yourself more adaptable to any and all situations.”

“Okay, but stop stalking me.” I chuckled wryly. How did he know everything I did in dungeons?

Though I did laugh, I couldn't overlook what he was telling me.

“Got it. I'll do something about them,” I declared to Cell. He looked both happy and relieved.

## 160. Invisible Deterrent

I thought about the most efficient way to satisfy Cell's request.

I had a rough plan, but there was one thing I needed to consider before it was complete. I'd been racking my brain over it all day.

The long bout of thinking made me lose focus, and when I got home, the sun had already set.

*Clunk!*

The door opened.

Emily entered, and we locked eyes.

"Yoda."

"Emily? What do you have there?"

"I brought a second helping of tea."

Emily approached with a tray in hand.

While I cocked my head in confusion at the phrase "second helping," I noticed a teacup on the table. An untouched teacup, at that.

Emily took it and replaced it with a new, steaming teacup.

"You made tea for me? Sorry I didn't notice."

"It's okay. What's wrong, though? You've been grumbling thoughtfully for a while now."

"Yeah... Say, could I ask you for advice?"

“Of course!” Emily assented with a big smile and sat across from me.

She leaned forward with an excited look. Given her petite figure and 4’3” height, she looked even cuter than usual.

I told her about Cell’s request.

“He says people are hunting adventurers in Aurum.”

“Hunting adventurers...” Emily’s smile faded instantly. Her face went completely flat; that was rare for her.

“Do you know about it?”

“I know of adventurer hunters,” she answered.

Her smile returned.

*What was that just now?*

“Well, that’s happening at Aurum. Gold dust is easy to collect, so they steal it from people who’ve done that... And he asked me to solve that problem.”

“I see.”

“Whether I can defeat adventurer hunters... I won’t know until I try, but there’s a big problem first.”

“What is it?”

“Lately, whenever I’m around, people doing things—well, bad things—actively avoid doing those things.”

“Right. You’re a deterrent, Yoda. That’s incredible.”

“The ideal way to solve this request is to go on patrol, which I can do easily using the warp room. But they might just work around my patrol times.”

Severity aside, it was the same as pedestrians ignoring streetlights.



Sometimes, you cross a road ignoring the traffic lights if you don't see any cars coming. A police officer might yell at you if they saw you, though, so you don't do it when they're watching.

Even if I patrolled now, that would just mean nobody would do it until I left. That wasn't a solution; it was just a small deterrent.

This was the problem that worried me.

"I see!"

"What do we do about it, though... That's what I've been wondering," I groaned to myself in thought.

Emily joined me.

We thought together, but we couldn't find a way to solve it.

"It seems there's no choice but to find the culprits and teach them a violent lesson," she decided.

"Yeah..."

Severe punishment seemed like the only option, after all.

*Which means I'll have to let them attack people a few times... No, but wait...*

"Oh!" Emily gasped.

"What's up? Did you think of something?"

"I'm sorry. I was thinking about that old man instead of a plan."

"Old man?"

*Who is she talking about?*

"I need to go deliver food to old man Arsenic."

"Oh, right. You were friends with that spirit, right?" Not just friends, no. Emily

even had his spirit's blessing. "Do you take food to him every day?"

"No. He isn't human, so he doesn't get hungry all the time. It depends."

"I see... So you have some way of communicating... Hm?"

"What is it?" Emily asked, curious.

A flash of inspiration struck me. It was the kind that lasted only an instant. One that I'd forgotten as soon as it passed.

Kind of like when you want to look something up online, so you open your browser, but you forget what you were going to look up.

Thus, I traced my mind back. In these cases, I often remembered if I traced back the things I'd seen or talked about. I repeated what I'd just said and done.

"A way of communicating, huh?" I mused.

"Yes?"

"...Thank you, Emily! I'm going out!"

"Huh? Yoda?!"

Leaving the astonished Emily behind, I sprinted out of the mansion and went to see Cell.



This brings us to B2 of Aurum.

The whole dungeon was on edge. Now that there were adventurer hunters, adventurers were wary not just of monsters, but of other people as well.

The pervasive mood here was simple: everyone was your enemy.

“Umm... Excuse me?”

An adventurer, who was defeating a little demon using twin swords, immediately went on guard. He whipped around with his weapons at the ready.

“Whoa, no! Look, look here!” The young adventurer who’d addressed him frantically waved his hands. He held out a scabbard. “I found this on the ground. It’s yours, isn’t it?”

“Huh? Oh, it really is.” The other adventurer groped at his hip. He only had one scabbard. “When did I drop that?”

“Here you go.”

“Thanks—” The moment he received the scabbard, he jumped back. That instant reaction must have been because of how guarded he was to this point. But he was still too late. Poison coated the scabbard, making stinging pain run through his hand. “Kh! You’re an adventurer hunter?!”

“That’s right. By the way, you didn’t drop it; I stole it from you. Being wary is a good thing, but this is what happens when you’re only wary of direct attacks.”

“Damn it! This can’t—”

The twin-sworded adventurer fell to his knees. He held his head and groaned.

“Oh, that poison doesn’t just affect your arm. It immobilizes you from top to bottom.”

“Damn...you...”

The young man approached the other with malice bared. He stood before the man, who was immobilized on his knees, and raised a hand.

“Now, let’s just call this your tuition fee.”

“Nobody asked for your lessons.”

“What?!”

Before he could swing his arm, another man appeared behind the twin-sworded adventurer and in front of the young one.

It was Ryota.

Upon appearing out of seemingly nowhere, he struck the adventurer hunter in his side, sending him flying.



I went to the spirit chamber in Aurum. There, I bowed my head to Aurum herself.

“Thank you. You were a big help.”

“I did basically nothing, though. You sure that’s enough?”

“Don’t be modest.” I shook my head. “Your help got me through the hardest part. Thank you.”

“I really didn’t do anything. I mean, all I did was...” Aurum said, taking out a switch and raising it to show me. “I just pressed this when there were conflicts in the dungeon.”







“That’s the biggest help I could ask for.”

The switch was one of Cell’s contraptions. It was a customized version of the ones he’d put in Cyclo’s dungeons to warn us of dungeon master appearances. I had given it to Aurum.

As a dungeon spirit, Aurum knew everything that happened inside her dungeon. When conflicts between people or adventurer hunts occurred in the dungeon, she would notify me.

When I received a notification, I’d use the warp room to rush there and solve the problem. This was the method with minimum casualties and maximum efficiency.

When news of my omnipresent heroics spread, that should act as a deterrent.

“Well, if you say it’s enough, then sure. Fine by me.”

“I hope you don’t mind me asking for your help for a while to come. I promise I’ll take you out again some time.”

“Sure.”

After bowing to Aurum one more time, I left the spirit chamber.

However, it did not take as long as I’d implied. Just as I’d hoped, once news of the adventurer-hunter spread, the trouble in Aurum stopped.

“Very impressive, Sir Sato. I’d never have thought to use the dungeon spirit as such,” Cell complimented me on a job well done, both impressed and amazed.

## 161. Outside of Work Hours

Late at night, on B1 of Aurum.

“Damn! An adventurer hunter?!”

“If you know what I am, then hand it over—”

“Sorry, friend, but that’s enough.”

I pointed a gun at the man’s back.

Where he’d grinned evilly and threatened his victim before, his body now twitched, and his face stiffened.

“Ryota Sato?!”

“If you know who I am, then that makes this easier.”

“No! You got here too fast. I haven’t even—”

“What’s the plan? If you leave Aurum and never come back, I’ll let you go.”

I pushed the gun even harder against him and lowered the tone of my voice, threatening him.

“A-All right, I get it. Let me go. I’ll never come back.”

“Do you mean it?”

“I mean it!”

“Good.”

When I lowered my gun, the adventurer hunter scampered away like a frightened rabbit. He turned around once, clicked his tongue at me, and left the



dungeon.

*I doubt he'll come back.*

Now that Aurum was used to this work, she'd learned how to recognize the symptoms of an adventurer hunter, allowing me to get here before they even managed to hunt any adventurers—even in the middle of the night, when normal people slept.

With Aurum's foresight, she could wake me up fast enough to give me plenty of time to come running.

This allowed us to scour perfectly for adventurer hunters, drastically decreasing the number of robberies. Before long, they'd probably be gone for good.

I put my gun away and spoke to the adventurer.

"You okay?"

"Y-Yeah. Phew..."

The adventurer, a young man, slumped down on the spot.

"What's wrong? Did he hurt you?"

"Huh? Oh, no, I'm just tired. Doing some all-night hunting on the boss's orders."

"All-night hunting?"

"There are fewer adventurers out at this time of night, so you don't have to compete for monsters."

"Oh, I see."

His explanation made sense. There was a limited number of monsters

available in dungeons—or rather, there was a cap to how many could exist at once.

The dungeon would make a new one when one went down, but it couldn't make more than the limit. They could never exceed said limit.

When there were more adventurers than monsters, naturally, there would be adventurers who couldn't hunt monsters. That would lead to conflict, which was why the Dungeon Association banned interfering in people's fights with monsters.

It seemed one method of avoiding this problem was overnight farming.

Naturally, adventurers were people, too; most of us went to sleep at night. It was no wonder that there would be less competition if you went into the dungeons at that time.

"Are you alone?" I asked.

"Yeah. The boss and the others work during the day, and I work at night. They're all getting older, so they're worse at night. Nothing we can do about it."

"Nothing?"

"I wouldn't do this if I didn't have to."

The man shrugged in surrender with a facetious grin on his face.

Seeing the rather haggard man reminded me of a person working an overnight shift alone, but if he was okay with it, then I believed there was nothing I could do about it.



The next morning, I went to Aurum's chamber through the warp room.

This dungeon's spirit, Aurum, was a girl with horns on her head, wings on her back, and wearing gothic lolita clothes.

The spirit, who still showed a hint of a childish side, greeted me with a smile.

"Ryota! Everything's okay today. I haven't found anyone like them in the dungeon yet."

"That so? Thank you, really. You made things so much easier for me, Aurum."

"It's cool, it's cool! Like I said, I haven't even done that much."

"Either way, thank you. So...you said you don't think any hunters are in the dungeon right now?"

"Yep, none. The only people in there right now... Yep, they're all people I recognize who just fight monsters."

"Yeah? How about we go out somewhere so I can thank you?"

"Really?! I wanna go to your house, Ryota. You moved to a new place, right?"

"Oh yeah, you haven't seen much of it, have you? Let's do that, then."

"Okay!"

I took out my gun—and put it away.

"What's wrong?" Aurum asked.

"I just think this way might be better."

Instead, I held out my hand. To take Aurum out, I had to kill her and turn her into an outsider. And so, I'd shot her with my guns to do that.

It was a necessary part of the process, and she didn't mind it, but anyone could tell that pointing a gun at a little girl wasn't exactly a pleasant sight.

So this time, I decided to use magic instead.

“Repetition.”

I cast the spell that insta-killed any monster I’d defeated before.

Aurum turned into the usual three foot long cube of gold—but just then, I felt dizzy. So dizzy, in fact, that I couldn’t stay standing.

I knew this sensation: I was out of MP. Repetition’s MP consumption varied based on the strength, or maybe a rank-like scheme, of the enemy.

The spirit Aurum was the true boss of this dungeon. Insta-killing her required every last drop of my SS-rank MP. That was the biggest MP cost I’d suffered yet.

“Makes sense, though,” I murmured to myself, pointed a gun at one elbow, and fired my limitless recovery rounds to recover my MP.

This wasn’t as bad as aiming it at a little girl. It healed me, and despite it being a gun, it just looked like giving myself an injection.

After completely recovering my MP, I hauled Aurum—the giant hunk of gold—into the warp gate and to the mansion.



Aurum relaxed with me in the evening light of the mansion salon. She sunk deep into the couch, looking more slovenly and relaxed than I’d ever seen her in the dungeon.

“This place is nice. It’s, like, weirdly relaxing.”

“Right? That’s because of Emily.”

“It’s too relaxing—Ryota, what do I do?!” Aurum asked, looking troubled.

“What’s the matter?”

“I don’t wanna leave this place,” she complained, as if at wit’s end. She was acting and talking a lot like a person trying a kotatsu for the first time.

*I get it, though.*

A home maintained by Emily had the magical power to take any person prisoner—perhaps even more so than a kotatsu.

“What if you lived here?” I suggested. “We have plenty of rooms.”

“Can I?! No... I can’t.”

“You can’t?”

“Yeah. It’s fine to just go out and see the sights, but sleeping outside—staying out overnight—would make the dungeon stop dropping things.”

“Oh, that would be a problem...”

“Instead, bring me out again! Going out during the day isn’t a problem.”

“That’s an easy task. Heck, we could do it every day—hm?”

“Something wrong?” Aurum asked, cocking her head at me from her position on the sofa.

I rolled her words over in my mind.

*Sleeping outside—staying out overnight—would make the dungeon stop dropping things.*

Those words looped over and over.

“Hey, really, what’s up?” she asked, worried. “We don’t have to do it every day. Just once in a while is cool! I’m a spirit, so I experience time differently—”

“Aurum!” I screamed.

“Wh-What...?” she cringed.

“Did you mean that just now?”

“J-Just now?”

“About the dungeon not dropping anymore if you stayed out overnight.”

“Yeah... Specifically, I meant if I lost consciousness outside the dungeon, but...”

*What of it?* her eyes seemed to ask.

I thought to myself about many things.

From an adventurer’s perspective.

From the Dungeon Association chief’s perspective.

And from a previous corporate drone’s perspective.

I thought about many things from many angles.

“Aurum, you should live here. I’ll take you back and forth every morning and evening.”

“I just told you, if I sleep outside the dungeon, the drops—”

“It’s nice here at night. Emily will be home, and everyone else—oh, yeah, Boomy will be here too!”

“Boomy?”

“One of Alice’s friends. I’m sure you’ll get along.”

Boomy was born in Aurum, after all.

As I attempted to persuade her, Aurum looked down for a moment. Then, she

looked up at me again.

“Can I really?”

“Yeah.”

“Thanks, Ryota!” she thanked me with a big, happy smile.

Thus, the spirit of Aurum would live in our mansion from now on.



The next day, in the village Indole, I made a public announcement in the name of the Indole Dungeon Association: Aurum would no longer drop items late at night.

Adventurers standing in front of the notice debated various things.

“Not having drops at night is gonna be inconvenient.”

“Nah. Everyone’s asleep anyway, so it won’t make much of a difference at all.”

“But some people farm at night, right?”

“On top of that, it doesn’t say anything about it, but have you guys noticed the drops increased? They increased once before, but they did it again.”

I watched their shouting and debating from afar.

Some of them were unhappy with the news, but most agreed that things wouldn’t change much at all. Most people would be asleep, after all.

*Figures it’d be like this. I thought the same thing when I saw news about restaurants in Japan no longer serving food late at night.*



“H-Hey...” someone called from the side.

“Hm?”

I turned around. A young adventurer stood there. He was the one I’d helped two nights ago.

“That was you, wasn’t it?” he asked.

“Of course not. It’s just the spirit’s whims. Spirits need bedtime, too, y’know?”

“Huh... Well, can you tell the spirit something for me?”

“Hm?”

“Thanks. Now I can sleep at night, too.”

“Sure. I’ll let her know.”

“Thank you so much,” the young adventurer said, gazing into my eyes.

Next time we met, I hoped he’d be less haggard.

## 162. The Super-Powered Stalker

In the Dungeon Association chief's office, which was decorated luxuriously like some kind of noble's office, I reported the resolution of the problem to Cell.

Throughout my report, Cell's eyes widened in amazement. When I told him that nighttime drops had been stopped, he was surprised, but he smiled happily.

"Incredible, Sir Sato. Such a speedy and perfect resolution. I must say, I'm feeling rather smug as the person who entrusted you with the job."

"At night, the problem should be all but gone. This doesn't affect the possibility of adventurer hunts happening during the day, but that shouldn't be a problem."

"Indeed. I will ensure that someone is there to forestall any daytime violence," Cell agreed, even more satisfied now.

With my report done, my involvement in this problem was good and over. Cell complimented me to no end, even more than usual, but I remained on guard.

Having a cute girl compliment you over and over felt nice, but when this rich stalker did it, I was just terrified of the next figure that might fall out of his pocket.

So I was on guard...but it didn't happen.

"Oh, right. There was one more thing I wanted to discuss with you, Sir Sato."

"Mm?"

His expression suddenly changed. He wasn't quite grave, but he was serious.

"I hear that you're to be given this year's commendation."

"Is there something wrong with that?"

"If possible, I would like to have you give a demonstration in front of the crowd."

"Demonstration?"

"It would be similar to the Harvest Festival: you will defeat a monster to prove your strength. Unlike the festival, however, I'd like you to defeat a single powerful monster. Everyone knows of your achievements, but a more visual display will be much easier to understand."

"I see." I was a tiny bit surprised, but this really was serious. I knew what he was trying to say, and both the request and the reason for it were reasonable. "In that case, instead of using Repetition, I should fight normally—or more flashy, I guess."

"Impressive, Sir Sato. You understood before I could even make the request."

"Got it. I accept the job."

This wasn't something I could refuse. Rather, if I was going to accept the commendation, then this was probably necessary. It was like a responsibility.

"I thank you. I'll have the mass production of posters begin right away."

"Posters?"

"Indeed. It is customary to make them for all commendation recipients. You have the highest ranking of ☆7 of your Family, the rabbit is ☆5, the hammer-wielding one is ☆2, and the others are ☆1—"

"Whoa, whoa, wait a second."

That was so much information at once that it was becoming too much to handle. I put a hand on my forehead and raised the other to stop Cell. After thinking for a moment, I finally asked, “What are these posters you’re talking about?”

“I happen to have a sample here,” Cell said, opening a poster that had been rolled up into a tube shape.

It was designed less like a poster and more like a trading card. Under my name, there was a line of seven stars. Below them was a drawing of me defeating adventurer hunters.

“Stalker!”

“I will take the liberty of using this.”

“I expected a figure, but a *poster*?!”

“As with previous years, we plan to issue commemorative handheld versions as well,” he added, taking out a card-sized one. It was the same composition and all as the big one.

“You have trading cards, too?!”

“They’re a hit with newbie adventurers and children. There are enthusiasts, as well.”

“I bet there are! That’s basically a baseball card!”

“We also have a limited edition version. I had it made to commemorate the full Ryota Family receiving awards.”

“How deep does it go?!”

“Also—ah.”

*Clunk.*

A figure fell to the floor. It was the same pose as the trading card, with me defeating adventurer hunters.

“Pardon me,” Cell said as if it hadn’t happened. “We have two shot frames of various combinations of you and your friends, as well. After much consideration, we found that the two shots should be ☆5–”

“Don’t just put the figure away like nothing happened! Hell, you really did make one of those, too?!”

There was so much wrong here that I felt like I was losing my mind. When Cell explained the cards and the commendation ceremony, he was the very picture of a capable man. And yet...

I found myself realizing that a *capable* stalker was a truly terrifying one.

## 163. Plus Ultra

On B7 of Nihonium, I farmed lightning-clad zombies. Since I couldn't use magic here, I continued practicing my technique.

I put effort into all kinds of techniques that went beyond mere mindless farming—sniping, maintaining a high accuracy rate, countering, and so on.

After a while of farming, I noticed something. When I noticed it, it became even clearer, until I was absolutely certain of it. It was about Nihonium's drops—the seeds that came from the mummies.

Gold dust dropped along with them.

Aurum's blessing meant that no matter what I killed, I'd also get a small amount of gold dust alongside it. Now I'd realized that the amount had increased by around 50%. Since it wasn't a huge boost all at once, it took me time to notice, and even longer to be certain.

"Aurum's blessing, huh?"

I gazed at the increased gold dust drop in my palm.

Why had it increased? Probably because I'd brought Aurum home. When the sun set, I picked her up and brought her to the mansion to sleep at night.

We hadn't used the word itself, but she was effectively a member of the Family now. She was happy to be one of us. She loved going out already, and she'd taken a liking to Emily's work on the mansion, so maybe that was natural.

I was happy for her—happy for Aurum's happiness.

I put the gold dust away and resumed farming mummies.

My joy had a positive effect on my technique. In the latter half of my morning, until the time I'd raised my willpower from D to C...

I was able to maintain a perfect 100% accuracy rating.



After dinner, our friends dispersed to do their own things. The only people in the mansion salon were me, Emily, and Aurum.

"Everyone sure is busy today," I mused.

"Yeah! Tomorrow marks the start of a two-day-long magic storm, so Celeste said she's going to work hard into the night," Emily explained.

"Makes sense. What about Alice and Eve?"

"Alice is in Sulfur. She said that since you were doing so well today, she wanted to do her best with Ryochin. Eve is busy with her Carrot Committee."

"Carrot Committee?"

It was news to me that my doing well affected Ryochin, but this so-called Carrot Committee was even more interesting.

"Yes," Emily answered without elaborating.

"What is it?"

"Sorry... I don't know, either. She told me nothing more than the name."

"Huh. Well, I'm sure I can imagine what it is." We were talking about Eve, after all. Either it was for talking about how delicious carrots were, or they were



there to pursue greater carrots, or something like that. Her dedication and love for carrots were genuine. “By the way, I hear you’re among the awardees this year.”

“Please, it’s embarrassing...” Emily blushed.

“I heard about the requirements for ☆2. That’s a big deal!”

Cell had explained it all to me. Year by year, those who’d achieved things far beyond ☆1 awardees, yet lacked something decisive, would mostly end up in ☆2.

It seemed to me they were along similar lines as Nobel Prizes and Academy Awards—huge honors only given out once a year.

“I haven’t done that much...” she denied.

“Don’t be silly. The number of devoted users of Emily Hammers only goes up by the day. I hear they’re even designing a new model?”

“Yes. Apparently, they plan to make it easier to swing without reducing the weight.”

“And people ask you to autograph their hammers?”

“Wha?! Wh-Wh-Why do you know that?!”

Emily was flustered all of a sudden. She blushed madly, and her eyes might as well have made the shape of an X together.

The way she waved her hands so frantically was so adorable that it made me want to tease her more.

“I saw an adventurer in town with a signed hammer. He was so proud of it, too.”

“Eep...”

“That’s awesome, Emily. You’re basically famous! I bet that guy will be first in line when the new one comes out. Oh, but I guess those trading cards come first, huh? Say, how about you sign my magic card, too?”

She finally poked her lip out and pouted.

“Urk... Yoda, you’re such a bully.”

The way she pouted was adorable, so I apologized for teasing her so much while I took a good mental snapshot of her face.

Just then, I realized something: Aurum was in the same room as us, but she hadn’t participated in the conversation at all. Curious why such a bubbly girl wasn’t chiming in at all, I turned to her.

“...”

“Aurum?”

“...” She was in a vacant daze—just sitting there absentmindedly, blushing for some odd reason.

“Aurum, is something wrong?”

“...Huh? What?”

“What do you mean ‘what’? It’s like you’re not even here.”

“Hmm...” Still absentminded, she pretended to think and faked agreement, “Mmm, yeah.”

*More halfhearted replies? What’s gotten into her?*

“...Excuse me a moment.” Emily leaned forward and put a hand on Aurum’s forehead. “She has a fever.”

“A fever?”

“Yes.”

I jumped in next to Emily and put my own hand on Aurum’s forehead.

“Whoa, that’s a fever!”

“Yes, a fever.”

“It’s a bad one. It feels like she’s almost 104 degrees.”

“...Hwuh?”

It was an awful fever, but Aurum herself was in such a daze that it was hard to tell whether she even understood.



I waited outside of Aurum’s room until Emily came out.

“It’s probably a cold,” she said.

“A cold? Can spirits catch colds?”

“All of the symptoms match.”

“Yeah, true, but...”

She was in a daze, and she had an awful fever. When we’d carried her off to her room to make her go to bed, she was even dripping snot.

If she was a normal human, I could be readily convinced it was a cold, too.

“I can’t be sure...but I think that because spirits spend all of their time in dungeons, they don’t have much resistance to disease,” Emily explained.

“Oh... It’s like being raised in an aseptic room, huh?”

“Aseptic room?”

“It’s when you have overprotective parents who end up making you really frail.”

“Then yes.”

“I see...”

I looked at the door. Beyond that door was Aurum, suffering from cold and fever. If she really did catch a cold because of her low immunity, then was it my fault for taking her out of the dungeon?

“I don’t think so. It’s not your fault, Yoda.”

“...Stop reading my mind,” I chuckled.

“I know Aurum feels the same way,” she assured me. “It’s okay; it’s just a cold, so she’ll get better at dealing with it once she catches a few.”

“You’re right. I can’t ignore how happy she is when she gets to go outside.”

“Exactly!”

*Now...a cold means...*

“Is this something we can heal with magic?” I asked.

“Staying warm and hydrated is best for colds.”

“So even that’s the same in this world...”

People say you’d get a Nobel Prize if you could cure the common cold, and it seemed there was no magic in this world that could stop it either. In that case, recovery rounds probably wouldn’t work.

Still, it was just a cold. Maybe just letting her rest would be ideal.

“...Peaches would be good for her,” I mused.

“Peaches?”

“Yeah. Canned peaches, or rather peaches preserved in syrup, are a staple for dealing with colds.”

“That’s a wonderful idea. I’ll go buy peaches. If I start making it now, she’ll get to eat it by the time she feels better.”

“...Wait. I’ll go get them.”

“You?”

“Might as well get the best, right? We can use my drop rates to get the tastiest peaches for her.”

“Hmm...”

For some reason, Emily cocked her head in apparent disapproval.

*What? Did I say something disagreeable?*

“What’s up?”

“Cyclo only has one floor with peaches, and it’s a tough one...”

“Is it after B5? What’s it like?”

“It’s a stalwart-slayer floor.”

“Huh?”

I furrowed my brow at the ominous name.

“Monster strength on such floors is based on adventurer stats instead of their own level. Weak adventurers can overcome the monsters by finding and exploiting their weaknesses as long as they have good equipment, but strong adventurers have to contend with stronger monsters. It’s extremely dangerous.”

"I see." So weak people had the advantage—in comparison, anyway. "Where is it?"

"Are you really going, Yoda?"

"Yeah."

"But it's dangerous."

"Dangerous or not, I still—"

I wanted to give Aurum good food, and I wanted to show my gratitude.

"—I wouldn't feel good about myself if I avoided it," I finally said.

"But..."

"We have your perfect cooking skills, so she deserves to have the perfect ingredients to match."

"Yoda..." Emily mumbled, gazing at me. She looked worried, but eventually, that changed right into a smile. "You never change, Yoda."

"Sorry."

"You don't have to apologize. I'll go get ready."

"Yeah. Get ready and just wait for me."

I opened the door a little and looked at Aurum, who slept in her bed with a pained look on her face.

*Just you wait. I'm gonna get you the best peach ever.*

## 164. The Peach

The instant I entered the dungeon through the warp room, I quickly noticed it.

It felt utterly unlike most other dungeons. No adventurers. The entirety of the dungeon was a single arena. It was just like Sulfur.

“Forced solo, huh? Well, I guess they wouldn’t call it the stalwart-slayer otherwise.”

I waited there for a while. There was almost no cover—just an open space that you could see all of at a glance.

If it was the same as Sulfur, a monster would probably appear soon. So I loaded my guns, confirmed that I could use the elementary magic Wind Cutter, and waited.

Eventually, monsters appeared: two slimes on the opposite end of the arena. They were about the size of balance balls, one gold and one silver.

After oozing in out of seemingly nowhere, the two slimes...started flirting with each other.

*Wait, what?* I thought to myself and cocked my head. When I looked again, indeed, they seemed to be flirting.

They rubbed up against each other, flirting so vigorously that I could almost imagine hearts popping out of them. It seemed they were like a slime family, but maybe slime lovebirds or a slime couple.

As an initial test, I fired normal rounds repeatedly from both guns. Simple



metal bullets tore through the air and struck the two slimes, but they had little to no effect.

That wasn't all, though. The way the bullets struck them was slightly different. The golden slime looked unfazed by the impacts, while the silver one hadn't gotten hit at all. There was a sort of thin membrane around it that had deflected the bullets.

Noticing me, the slimes ceased their flirting and came for me.

"Whoa!" I yelled reflexively, crossing my arms to guard.

Instantly closing the nearly seventy feet between us, the golden slime transformed part of its slime form to strike me. The powerful blow pierced through my guard and shook me to my core.

Unable to take it, I was blown backward. I barely managed to right myself and land on my feet.

"Kh!"

My arms were numb and shaking so much that I couldn't move them well.

The gold slime closed in again!

I promptly evaded. While it gouged into the ground and sent stone debris flying, I managed to get my shaking hands to fire a recovery round into myself.

The damage disappeared in an instant. As soon as I was fully healed, I launched a counterattack.

I landed, dug my feet into the ground, and charged. Then, I punched the slime as hard as I could. It was a satisfying blow that sent the gold slime flying.

The slime bounced about seventy feet away, back to where the silver slime was. While making bouncy ball-like sounds, the gold slime landed normally. It

looked like it'd taken almost no damage at all.

*Are you serious?*

While I was astonished, the silver slime rushed me this time. It flew at almost the exact same speed as the gold slime, transforming part of its body likewise to strike.

I fought back head-on.

Digging my feet into the ground, I lowered my hips and punched back.

Our attacks collided.

*BAAAANG!*

Explosive sound and a shockwave shook the entire dungeon.

The silver slime was unharmed, while I was forced to take a few steps back. Despite the direct clash, I'd taken even more damage than I had from the gold slime.

That wasn't all. I knew this kind of damage.

"Magic damage, huh?"

It was the same kind as when I was forced to realize how fragile I was with F-rank willpower. It wasn't the gold slime's damage type, either.

The gold slime's attacks dealt physical damage, while the silver slime's dealt magic damage.

Strangely, that made a lot of sense to me.

Then, the gold slime reached me and struck once more. I decided to go for a block. My arms went numb, but I was ready for this, so I immediately healed myself with a recovery round.

The gold slime's power was almost the same as mine.

This must have been what Emily meant. Stalwart-slayer—the monsters' strength varied based on the adventurer's.

The gold slime's power, and its speed as it charged me yet again, were like mine.

That was a problem. A problem, to be sure.

However, I caught the charging gold slime, threw it away in the opposite direction, and fired homing rounds. The homing rounds, fired with a slight delay between each one, drew arcs through the air to pursue it. This was a time-buying measure.

I faced the silver slime, ready to use every moment of bought time to the fullest.

I raised just one gun and fired repeatedly, shooting limitless lightning rounds—fully buffed by buffing rounds—at the silver slime.

Lightning struck the slime over and over, burning its dull reflective form. The slime writhed in pain—just as expected.

The gold slime's physical stats were just like mine, so the magic damage-dealing silver slime's magic stats must have been likewise. And I still had a low willpower stat.

I'd shot my limitless lightning rounds at what one might consider my one and only weakness: magic defense. The silver slime writhed painfully until it was finally charred and burned out.

*Okay. Now...*

The moment I turned around, the gun disappeared from my hand.

“Wha—” I was given no time to be surprised, though, as the gold slime attacked once more.

It went for a close quarters fight with strength and speed equivalent to SS rank. I tried desperately to guard and evade my way through the confrontation.

Having lost my guns dealt no small amount of damage to my mental health. Losing my guns, the pillar of my long-range combat abilities *and* my source of recovery and support, meant losing half of my fighting ability.

I was left with no time to recover from that shock, allowing the slime to get a clean hit on my cheek and send me flying. That was the first big damage I’d taken in a long time. It hurt more than when I’d fought the dungeon master.

I put my hands on my knees and stood up straight. My jaw hurt badly from that.

*So this is how much a merciless, SS-strength blow hurts, huh?*

The gold slime did not let up. Part of me believed it was—no, it *definitely* was—even more ferocious than before.

It had taken the intensity up a notch ever since the silver slime had died. Its strength and speed were unchanged, but its greater ferocity made its attacks scarier.

I continued withstanding those attacks. Dodging, blocking, withstanding.

It was precisely because we were equally strong that it was extremely hard to recover from such a disadvantage. The gold slime’s barrage overwhelmed me.

*At this rate, I’ll lose before long...*

Despite being fully on the defensive, I came to a clear decision.

I gave up on recovering. On trying to take back the initiative. Instead, I honed

my concentration and watched for an opportunity. My numb arms wouldn't obey orders, and damage was accumulating deep in my core.

"Gahck!"

Something tried to force its way out of my mouth, but I swallowed it back down. The taste of metal spread throughout.

But I still aimed and maintained my concentration.

"Haaah!"

The gold slime went for a powerful blow, as if preparing to unleash a finishing move. I timed a counter to match it—a full-power cross counter.

My fist pierced into—no, *through* the gold slime.

The skewered gold slime twitched and spasmed until it disappeared with a "pop."

After it faded, a big peach and the guns that had been taken from me both appeared in its place.

"Gahck!"

This time, I couldn't stop myself from throwing up fresh blood. However, I turned my head and threw it up to the side so it wouldn't get on the peach.



In our mansion, the pajama-clad Aurum sat up in bed. She had a coat on, and her complexion was rough. She certainly looked the part of a sick person.

Emily handed her the peach. It was cut in half and served with syrup.

“What’s this?” Aurum asked.

“It’s a peach. When you have a cold, you can eat this to help you feel better faster.”

“So it’s...magical medicine?”

“Not quite,” Emily replied with a smile. Aurum cocked her head, but she accepted the peach, stuck her fork into it, and took a bite.

Instantly after, her eyes lit up. They went wide and sparkled with joy.

“Deeeelicious!”

“You really drew that out,” I chuckled.

“Because it’s really good! It’s really, really, REALLY good!”

“That so?”

“Yoda went and harvested this peach for you.”

“He did?”

“It’s no big deal,” I assured her.

“...Thank you for doing that for me.”

“Don’t worry about it. I just defeated a monster, is all.”

“Thank you, Ryota.”

Aurum fell silent, though it seemed she wanted to say something.

“What’s up?”

“If I catch another cold, can you make this agai—?”

Before she could finish, I flicked her on the forehead.

“No more of that. Just get better.”

“Okaaay... Thank you, Ryota and Emily.”

The sick Aurum sat in bed, stuffing her cheeks with peach. Probably as a result of the peach, prepared like canned peaches, she had a big smile while she ate.

I exchanged a glance with Emily and shot her a thumbs-up.

## 165. Ever Competitive

In the morning, I took one fully recovered Aurum back to her dungeon. Afterward, I talked with Celeste in front of the warp room.

I was in a rush yesterday, so I'd gone in with no prior information. But I knew that I'd want information for what I was about to do, so I grabbed Celeste and asked her about it.

The Family's wellspring of wisdom explained readily and stoically, "B15 of Tellurium, the slime couple. Often called the stalwart-slayer. Supposedly, the silver slime is the husband, while the gold slime is the wife."

"Wow, really? I figured gold was usually the husband when it came to stuff like this."

Maybe that was just my own preconceived bias.

"They're known as the stalwart-slayer because the dungeon takes you to a different place alone, with the silver one copying your magic stats and the gold one copying your physical stats."

"Yeah, I learned that much myself. They were so strong, fast, and sturdy that they might as well be as strong as a dungeon master."

"If it were me, I'm sure the golden one would be weaker than a normal slime..."

"It perfectly copies your stats... Yeah, it really is made to kill strong people. If your stats are both high and balanced, then it would be even harder."

"Also..."



“Wait, there’s more?”

“Yes,” Celeste confirmed. “The gold slime is immune to magic, while the silver one is likewise immune to physical attacks.”

“Huh? So that means...”

“Yep. You’re restricted to fighting them with their favored stats. That’s part of their nasty reputation. Weaker folk could get away with just playing house with them, but...”

*I see.*

Margaret came to mind. While she had A-rank drops across the board, her combat stats were all F.

If she went in there, the silver and gold slimes would have F-rank combat stats across the board, turning it into the lamest slap-fight ever.

Even when they matched your stats, there was a big difference between two F-ranks fighting and two A-ranks (or SS-ranks, in my case) fighting: the latter was much more dangerous.

Stalwart-slayer, indeed. Absolutely brutal.

“There’s one more thing, too.”

“Seriously?”

“Yep. This is why they’re called the slime couple: when one of them goes down, the survivor is enraged, causing all of its stats to go up a rank.”

“Avenging their lover, huh?”

“Exactly. There are two strategies. For people with no A-rank stats, they defeat the one that matches their stronger stats first and then move to the weaker one. If you do have A-rank stats, the enraged status can’t put them

above A-rank stats, so they defeat the weak one first and let the strong one suffer from hitting the stat ceiling.”

“Aha. That’s why the one yesterday didn’t feel stronger to me.”

Yesterday, I’d defeated the silver one first. The remaining gold slime would normally grow stronger, but since it copied my stats, they were all SS already. Its stats were already beyond a ceiling that shouldn’t exist in this world, so they couldn’t go any higher.

“That’s a nasty floor,” I mused.

“Some people thrive there.”

*How’s that?* I was about to ask, but it was then that Alice returned to the warp room. Her four buddy monsters rode her shoulder as she pushed her magic cart.

“Huh, you two were here? You didn’t go out to dungeons?”

“Celeste was just telling me about B15 of Tellurium.”

“Ooh! Good timing. I just got back from there!”

“Oh?”

Alice came into the hallway and showed me her magic cart. “See? I brought lots of peaches. Aurum told me they tasted really good, so I’m gonna have Emily work her magic on them.”

Her magic cart had around twenty peaches. Not enough to make much money with, but like she said, she was going to have Emily use them to make dessert for the Family.

*Still...all this, so early in the morning?*

“Ryota, people like her are perfect for it. She is weak, but she has buddy

monsters who are much stronger than her.”

“...That makes sense!”

“Heheh, I had a feeling when I heard about that floor. I really wanted her to use your peaches, Ryota, but I’m sure she can make even my peaches taste great!” Alice said before pushing her magic cart toward the kitchen.

She was ready to get those peaches whether Emily was here or not.

*So it’s just not suitable for me, huh...?*



I came back to the arena-like B15 of Tellurium through the warp room. After waiting a short while, I was greeted by the gold and silver slimes.

Like yesterday, they were loving each other. On closer inspection, it seemed like the gold one was fawning over the silver one. That made the idea that the silver one was the man slightly more convincing.

“Raaaaaah!”

I charged at the slimes.

When they noticed me, they jumped away from each other and both attacked at once.

It happened at lightning speed. I guarded against the silver one’s attacks, seized it, and threw it way off in another direction. The remaining gold slime attacked me, but I evaded at a hair’s breadth, seized the slime, and continued charging.

I pushed the gold slime against the wall of the arena. Cracks ran through the wall.

From point-blank range, I fired my gun repeatedly. Piercing rounds all aimed at one point drilled through the slime and eventually bored through.

*Pop!*

The gold slime disappeared, and so too did my two guns.

I turned around and witnessed a change occurring in the silver slime: its silver body began to take on a golden aura.

*Aha, so this is the power-up...*

“Nice try!”

As the silver slime tried to lunge at me, I thrust a hand out and cast a spell: Repetition.

My ultimate farming magic. No matter how strong an enemy was, no matter how much it powered up, it would instantly kill any enemy it worked on as long as I could use magic.

The silver slime disappeared and dropped a peach and my guns. I picked them up.

If I used my full power, even I could farm this. By insta-killing the gold slime first, I could clean up the silver slime with ease using Repetition.

Incidentally, Repetition didn't work on the gold slime. I had defeated it before, but it was immune to magic.

Suddenly, I felt something trail down my chin and drip down. Though it was only for an instant, I'd used 100% of my full power, resulting in sweat...or so I thought, but when I wiped it up, I realized it was blood.

I touched my cheek and found that it was cut. It seemed I'd failed to fully avoid the slime's attack when I grabbed it.

Things couldn't be that easy against an enemy with SS-rank speed.

...However. I injected myself with recovery rounds to heal my HP and MP while I waited for the next one.

After a while, a new slime couple appeared.

I challenged them with all my might, isolating the silver one and killing the gold one as fast as possible.

Practicing to see how fast I could defeat an enemy as strong as me.

I spent all day on B15 of Tellurium. And in the end, I made 770,000 piros worth of peaches—all for our Family desserts.

Still, I had a feeling I had room to improve.

## 166. Fear of Gold

That night, at the Swallow's Returned Favor branch office in our mansion, I nervously watched Erza. She was adding up the numbers written in the ledger in her hand.

Today, we were calculating my earnings.

For the first time in a while, I was nervous about the result. While I waited in secret prayer, Erza looked up with a smile.

"Congratulations, Ryota."

"Oh? Does that mean...?"

"Yes! Your earnings today surpassed one million!"

"Woohoo!" I exclaimed, pumping a fist out of sheer joy.

I'd often made over 1,000,000 piros in a day's work—effectively half a day's work, at that—to this point, but the reason I was happy this time was that I'd done it through making peaches on B15 of Tellurium this time.

I'd memorized the monsters' behavior on that floor and optimized the path to victory like a chess problem, resulting in a huge leap over my previous 770,000 piros number.

Just making a million piros wouldn't excite me much, but doing so on a floor known for trouncing strong fighters made me feel so much more accomplished.

"Amazing work, Ryota. I think this may be a world first."

"A world first?"

“Yes, for someone to make this much money in one day on that floor. Making this much money in a dungeon requires someone with high drop stats, but 99% of people with high drop stats have high combat stats as well.”

“Huh...”

“You impress yet again, Ryota.” Erza’s compliments made me feel even more accomplished. “And the fact that it was done in just half a day is even more impressive.”

Half a day. That was a personal rule I’d set for myself.

Because of the long period of time I spent as an overworked corporate slave in my old world, I made a point of never being in dungeons after evening.

In other words, I only went in during the day. I spent half of that time raising my stats in Nihonium, so the only time I was making money was from noon to 6:00 PM, to speak in my old world’s terms of time. You could call that just a quarter of the day.

Of course, our loaned employee Erza knew that well. That was directly connected to her admiration.

I didn’t like excessive flattery, but I genuinely appreciated praise for a feat that I’d worked hard to accomplish.

I was doubly happy from the accomplishment and Erza’s compliments.

“Hey, how about we go drinking tonight?” I suggested.

“Okay!”



Erza, Aurum, and I walked back together from our usual bar.

Everyone else had stuff to do today, so we couldn't get them to come along. The only people who were free for our little celebration were Erza, who'd tabulated the sum, and Aurum, who I always went to pick up at a specific time.

"Delicious, delicious. Just delicious!" Aurum gleefully exclaimed. She was excited the whole way home. Apparently, she'd taken a real liking to Villa di H's beer. Even now, she ran circles around me and Erza like an excited kid.

"Who knew alcohol could taste so good?"

"Did you like it?"

"Yeah! It's all nice and fluffy."

"That so? Well, let's order you something new next time."

"Are there other kinds?"

"Yeah. There's wine, champagne, whiskey, all that stuff."

"Ooooh..." Aurum moaned emotionally. She'd still only just started coming out of her dungeon, so she reacted to everything she didn't know about like an innocent child. Seeing her like that made me want to teach her and show her new experiences. "There are so many kinds!"

"Sure are. Come to think of it, this place has drinks with gold leaf in it, huh?"

"Gold leaf? They put gold in the drink?"

"Yeah. It can go in lots of different kinds of foods. They say it's a good analeptic—oh, but I guess I can only say that's true for where I was."

"Huh. Okay, then I'll help Emily put gold in her food starting tomorrow!"

"Hm? Oh, right, you can just make gold."



“Yep! You can eat as much as you want!”

“Now, now...”

The spirit of gold, Aurum, could probably create as much gold as she felt like. Eating all the gold we wanted just sounded funny to me.

“Huh?” Erza gasped.

“Why’d you stop walking, Erza?”







“Over there... They’re building a house.”

“Hm?”

I stopped and followed Erza’s line of sight. Even in the darkness, it was all too clear, even though there was no movement because it was nighttime.

There was large-scale construction going on.

“Sure are. Looks like a big one, too.”

“I think it’s a mansion. It doesn’t look like a business facility.”

“A mansion, huh? A mansion of that size, now of all times... Do you think it’s Cell?”

“I’ll go ask,” Erza said and ran off.

*Ask? Ask who?* I thought, but I spotted someone on night watch in the direction she was running.

Erza asked the man a few questions before coming back.

“He says it’s a mansion for Cell Stem.”

“Figures.”

“Also, he said that it’s going to look more like a castle than a mansion in the end.”

“Wow... I guess with as much money as he has, a castle isn’t out of the question.”

You don’t necessarily need to be a king to have a castle. That was common for European nobility, as far as I’d heard.

*The guy who served as inspiration for Dracula had a castle, after all. I know because I saw a news article about his descendants trying to sell it. But a castle,*

*huh?*

I thought to myself for a minute.

“Is something wrong, Ryota?” Erza asked.

“Oh, nothing. Hearing it was a castle just reminded me of bronze statues.”

“Statues? Castles would contain those, yes. What about them?”

“I’m just overthinking things...surely.”

With that, I dispelled the bad thoughts from my mind. Surely even he wouldn’t, right?

“Wait just a moment.”

Erza ran back over to the man, asked him more questions, and returned.

This time, she had an odd look on her face.

*Oh, no. Really?*

“Umm...Ryota?”

“Don’t tell me.”

“Yes... They are making statues of you.”

“They’re seriously doing that?!”

“Apparently the statues are posable, as well. Magic can switch them to various poses.”

“What a serious waste of cool technology!”

I shuddered at what Cell the Stalker had done.

*I’d better go see him tomorrow and tell him to cut that out.*

“B-But it seems like it’s going to be a very nice mansion!” Erza said, trying to

change the subject.

“Mm? Yeah, I guess. People with power and money do like to build stuff like that.”

“Do they?” Aurum asked, head cocked curiously.

“Typically. For example...there was a guy who built a golden castle. Or...hm, wait, was it a temple?”

*Does Osaka Castle count?*

I searched through my memories.

“Is it more impressive if it’s gold?” she asked.

“Well, it’s more imposing, and anyone can tell at a glance that you’re a big deal. Hmm... You could maybe call it cool.”

“I see... Okay! I’m on it.”

“Wait, what are you—Hey!”

Before I could stop her, Aurum ran off like the wind.

“What’s gotten into her?” Erza wondered.

“...Oh, no.”

What Aurum had just said replayed in my mind. I broke into a mad dash after her.

*No, no. Don’t do it,* I thought to myself as I desperately followed.

When I finally made it home, I saw that while it did maintain its former shape, our mansion was covered in gold now.

Aurum stood in front of it with her hands on her hips and a proud smile on her face. She turned to face me.

“What do you think, Ryota? Is it better now?”

Aurum, spirit of the dungeon Aurum and master of gold. She had used her power to turn the mansion golden.

“S-Sure, but can you not, please?”

“Aww, why not?”

“I can’t relax like this. No way.”

“But isn’t it better? Didn’t you say this was cool?”

“I mean, sure, but...”

Breaking into a cold sweat, I desperately persuaded Aurum to stop and turn the mansion back to normal.

“Okay, then I’ll make a gold statue of you instead of a bronze one—” Aurum said something horrifying due to Cell’s bad influence.

“That would be even worse!”

This was almost bad enough to turn gold, a symbol of wealth, into trauma.

## 167. Like a Little Girl

On B7 of Nihonium, I waited for a mummy to attack me before striking it powerfully in the side.

The bandage-covered monster flew away, spun in midair, and struck the ground head-first, bending its body in half for a moment. If it was human, it'd be dead for sure.

But it wasn't quite enough damage to kill the monster. The mummy struggled, stood up, and approached. Electricity still crackled all over it.

I fought it bare-handed—no magic, no guns. Just my two hands.

This was even more restricted than my usual restricted farming style.

Using my experience from B15 of Tellurium, I fought the mummies without tools at all so that I could safely handle any situation in any dungeon.

I slipped close to the mummy faster than it approached and kneed it right in the belly. When it fell to the ground, I grabbed the back of its head and slammed it into the wall. Then, I kicked it to grind it even further in.

With a perfectly flowing combo, I defeated the monster. It disappeared and was replaced with a seed. After raising my stat with the seed, I searched for the next one.

In a clearing, I encountered three of them. When they noticed, I punched the first one that approached, grabbed its head, and swung it around. The mummy mowed down the others like a giant club.

I used no magic, no guns, nor any weapons at all. It almost felt like I'd gone

back to the time before Emily had given me that bamboo spear.

Though it took some time, I managed to raise my willpower stat from C to B.

And yet...

“Hmm.”

Still in the dungeon, I cocked my head and crossed my arms.

Judging purely based on results, I didn't do too badly despite the restrictions.

There were some awkward parts, and I occasionally got hit by counters. But tomorrow, I would be more practiced. If I went carefully, prudently, I could probably make it through without taking damage once.

I could make that prediction based on my experience so far.

But it just felt like something was missing. When I really *had* been restricted on B15 of Tellurium, both during and after...there was something there that I didn't have here.

After a moment of thought, I concluded, “Is it the difference between being restricted and restricting myself?”

When you restrict yourself on your own terms, there's always going to be a level of control and safety. Even now, I could pull out my guns if I wanted.

If I wanted, I could unrestrict myself any time. There would be no penalty for it.

But on that floor in Tellurium, or a dungeon like Silicon where I could only use magic, there was no way to do that. That must be making the difference in how seriously I take it.

*In that case...*



“I’ve restricted myself so far, but maybe I should be doing this in a dungeon where I really am restricted.”

My way of thinking directly opposed that of the adventurers of this world. Adventurers prioritized stable farming, while I put more importance on overcoming challenges at this time.

Exact opposites, but I felt like I was better off for doing it. As proven in the past, I needed both power and technique—with a bit of experience on top—when the going got tough.

My only choice was to challenge myself.

“In that case...”

A moment later, I returned to the mansion through the warp gate.

“Oh, Ryota!”

“Celeste, perfect timing. I have a question for you,” I said to Celeste as she approached from the hallway.

She tilted her head curiously and asked, “What is it?”

“You know a lot about dungeons.”

“Well, maybe a little,” she replied humbly. “Is your question about a dungeon?”

“Yeah. I want to know about challenge run floors... Er, sorry. I mean dungeons that have floors with restrictions.”

“...”

“Aurum’s a rogue dungeon, only magic works in Silicon, B15 of Tellurium, B6 of Nihonium—special ones like those. I’d like to know what kinds of other restricted dungeons there are.”

“And you want details?”

“Yes...” I stopped and corrected myself, “Oh, uh, just the dungeon names and floor numbers are enough.”

If I asked Celeste, she’d be sure to tell me what kinds of restrictions they had. But knowing those ahead of time would defeat the point. Taking those floors on *without* knowing the details would help me learn flexibility.

“Okay... Here.”

Celeste held out a folded sheet of paper.

“Hm?”

It was folded small. The edges were crumpled, like those of a receipt that had been jammed in a wallet for a long time.

I accepted it and unfolded it. It had a list of dungeons and floors.

“What’s this?” I asked.

“The places with restrictions.”

“Why do you have this on hand?”

“I heard you were training in dungeons, so I thought you might need this someday.”

“...”

I was amazed. I couldn’t believe she’d prepared this for me.

I looked at the paper again. The letters and numbers written on that plain piece of paper were all subtly different ink colors, sizes, and line thickness.

It was evident that she’d started writing it down at one point and gradually added to it, bit by bit. In other words, she’d spent a long time making this.

I was touched by Celeste's consideration. So I took her hand, gazed right into her eyes, and said, "Thank you!"

"I-I didn't do much. I just recorded some of the stuff I know, that's all—"

"Thank you anyway!"

When I thanked her, she blushed. She smiled like a little girl and looked up at me shyly.

"I'm just...happy I could help..." Celeste said happily.

I gazed at the notes. As proof of her dedication to finding these floors for me, the majority of additions made to the list were dungeons outside of Cyclo.

The fact that she'd investigated dungeons that we normally never interacted with moved me even more.

"Celeste, I have to thank you somehow."

"That was enough—"

"No," I cut her off, held up the note, and looked directly into her eyes. "These notes are worth as much as all of Nihonium to me. Nihonium raises my stats, and these notes will help me gain the technique to back them up."

"..."

"I want to thank you for that... Please, let me."

Celeste was surprised for a moment. But then, her usual mature smile returned.

"Don't worry about it. We're friends, right?"

"But that—"

"I get it. Let me think about it, though. If you care that much about it, then I

want to give it some serious thought.”

“Yeah. Please do!” I’d do anything. I had to convey my gratitude somehow. If she needed to give it careful thought, then I was happy to wait. “All right. I’m gonna get right to work, then.”

“Okay. See you later!”

With Celeste seeing me off, I used the warp room to head to another dungeon.



After Ryota left, Celeste turned around in the mansion hallway and went to her room. The sun was still high in the sky, and all the others were out at dungeons, yet to her bedroom she went.

Immediately after entering and pushing the door closed behind her...

“Heehee... Heheheheh!” Celeste giggled madly.

Then, in her plushie-filled room, she jumped at the biggest one—the one just like Ryochin—and held it in her arms, nuzzling it with her cheek.

“Yay! Heheheh, I got to help Ryota!”

Unlike her usual calm demeanor, Celeste rejoiced openly like a little girl. She rolled around on her bed with the plushie in her arms.

“Heeheehee! Whee-heeee!”

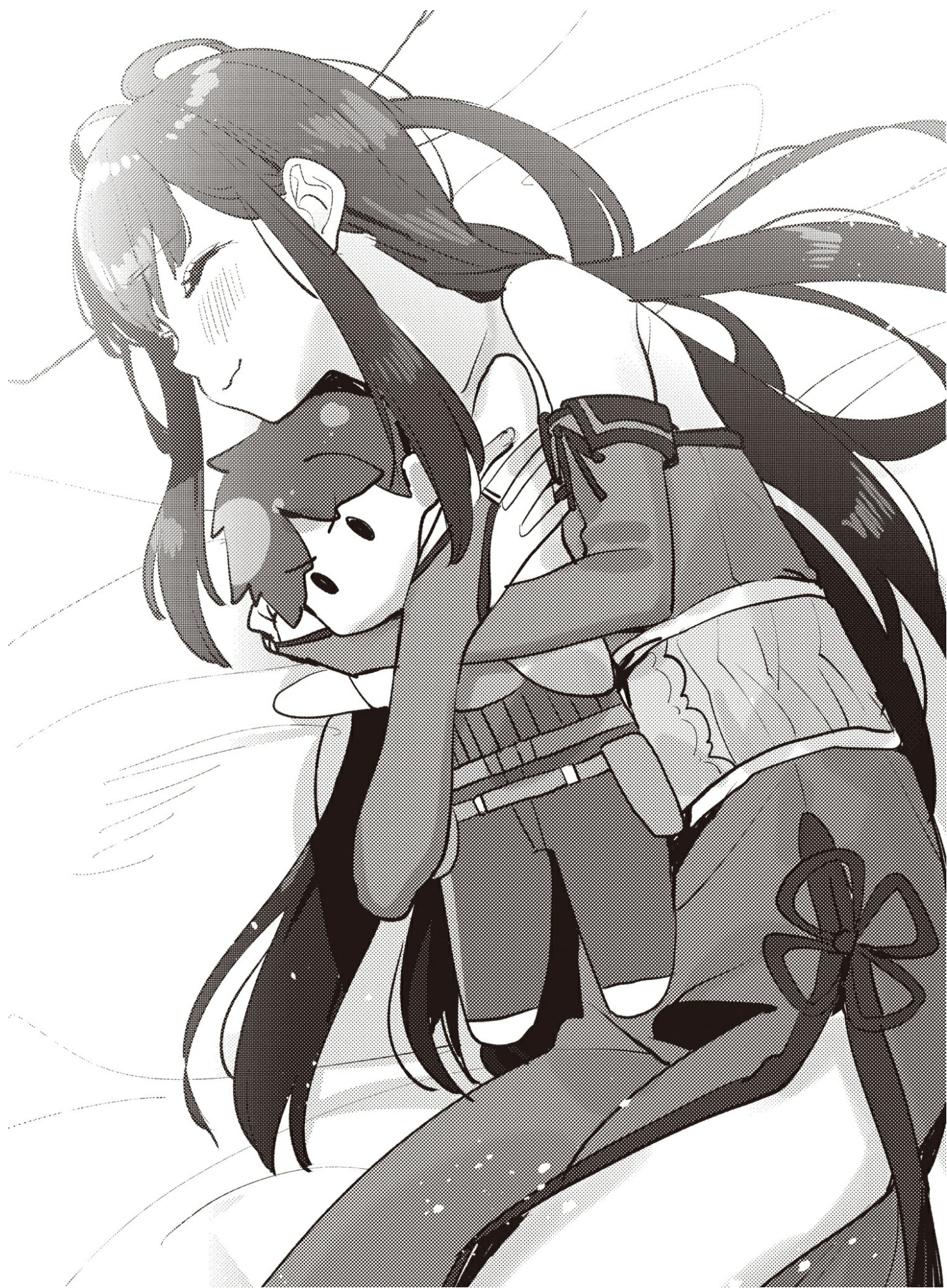
She threw the plush up into the air, caught it, and nuzzled it again. Between her overt joy and being in the privacy of her own room, she was free to

innocently celebrate. And she did celebrate all day, never letting go of the handmade Ryota-like Ryochin plushie.

“Ryota... Heehee...”

Despite the lack of a magic storm, she did not get an ounce of work done on that day.







## 168. Ryota's Intuition

Using the information Celeste gave me, I went to B19 of Tellurium first.

Of course, I'd gotten there through the warp room. Thanks to Eve, we could warp anywhere in Cyclo.

I'd only been here the time she brought me here, so this was my first time coming here to actually do something.

The floor was teeming with both dungeon snow and tons of adventurers fighting monsters.

I'd prepared myself for this to be a special floor, but it was almost disappointing how normal it seemed.

While I wallowed, a slime appeared before me. The fresh-born slime locked eyes with me. I knew that look well; it had chosen to attack me.

I pulled out a gun, planning to preempt it and see what happened—but then, the slime split apart.

It reproduced asexually, as monsters like it often did, and became three slimes that all looked the same.

I wasted no time, pulled the trigger, and shot through one of them.

*POW!*

There was an explosive sound right by my ears, accompanied by an impact that felt like I'd been punched firmly in the face.

Everything went white. I saw stars. I reflexively crossed my arms to guard.

Then came the next impact.

Something struck me, like a slime tackle. This one didn't damage me at all, thanks to my SS-rank HP and vitality.

But, knowing that I couldn't let this continue, I promptly used the Absolute Rock stone to make myself invincible. My vision gradually returned to normal, and I saw that the slimes were three once more.

The slimes started sliding violently left and right, changing places like someone shuffling cups.

Instinctively recognizing what was happening, I looked around during the invincibility period. I watched other adventurers fighting. They were all confronting similarly split slimes, but they carefully picked a target and killed that one.

When they defeated one of the random numbers—some split into three, some five, and more—the remaining ones disappeared as well and dropped round heads of cabbage.

Other adventurers defeated them normally, but their visible caution made me certain: only one of the split slimes was the correct one, and you had to figure out which it was.

I loaded a homing round and aimed directly above the three slimes. It drew a twisting, turning arc until it finally pierced through the left one. The slime fell and dropped cabbage.

*So you do have to hit the real one.*

My invincibility was dispelled, and I encountered the next slime. It split up, but this one started shuffling right away.

I watched in silence. It finished shuffling, and all three slimes came my way.



I fired a normal bullet at one. The slime went down with ease and dropped cabbage. Now I understood why people around me were choosing one slime to attack. If you watched carefully while they split, you could keep track of which one was real even when they shuffled.

They swapped with quick and tricky motions, but it wasn't hard enough to trick an adventurer.

This was good training, though. Watching the high-speed shuffle and guessing the real one was good training on the eyes, so I decided to stay here today.

I encountered slimes, waited for them to split, watched, and fired. Pushing my magic cart around the dungeon, defeating slimes one after another.

"...Hm?"

By the time the cart had filled up and I'd sent a round of cabbages to the mansion, I realized something. It was just a suspicion. A *maybe* in my mind.

To confirm it, the next time I encountered a slime, I closed my eyes while it split. I heard noise—the sound of them moving around and shuffling their order. After the noise ended, I opened my eyes.

There were five slimes in front of me. Lucky me, I got a larger group. I stared carefully at the approaching five slimes.

One of them was different. I'd be lying if I said something concrete about it differed; it was almost like intuition.

Someone once said that intuition is instantaneous synthetic judgment based on rule of thumb. Maybe this was the result of my experience from working in dungeons.

I fired a single normal bullet at the one that seemed off. There was no counterattack; the slimes disappeared, replaced by cabbage. One was too small

a sample size, so I decided to keep doing this.

“Right.”

Normal bullet fired. Cabbage dropped.

“Wrong.”

My vision went white, and an impact to my head dazed me.

“Right.”

Reeling from the blow, I fired into the next slime and received a cabbage drop.

I repeated this many times, and I managed to succeed every time. Somehow, I knew which one was the real one. How it worked I didn't know, but my body just knew.

Having achieved my goal, I bathed in a sense of accomplishment. I'd have to thank Celeste again later.

Just as I thought that...

“Hm?”

I noticed a certain man. Something was off about him. I quickly realized what it was: he wasn't pushing around a magic cart, a nearly essential item for adventurers. Heck, he didn't even have a weapon.

It was as if he was just sightseeing, or something. Or so I thought, but for some reason, he seemed to be sneaking around. He walked on, wary of his surroundings, and slunk off to the floor above.

“...He's suspicious.”

Something about him was suspicious, even if I didn't know what it was.

Adventurers' actions in this world were easy to understand because I'd watched them so much. Their actions naturally aligned with their top priority, safe farming.

The guy from before was doing something wholly different. Thinking maybe I should follow him, I started in the direction he'd gone. It was a one-way path. A dead end, at that.

No adventurers there, no monsters either.

*Nothing, huh?* I thought as I turned to leave.

Then, I turned right back around again, gazing into the dead-end dungeon path.

"What is this...?" I muttered to myself. I had a weird feeling about what was happening, like something tugging on my mind.

It was an empty dead end, and yet *something* about it was strange. If pressed to say...I'd say it was the air.

For some reason, the air wafting here was familiar to me. Nostalgic, even. I looked carefully, but it really was just a dead end, and exactly the same as the scenery behind me.

But it bothered me.

"Something is here," I muttered, making myself even more certain of it.

*Something... Something must be here.*



In the Dungeon Association chief's office, Cell bowed his head to me.

"On behalf of the city of Cyclo, I must thank you."

I hadn't figured anything out about that dead end, but I couldn't shake the feeling, so I'd left the dungeon and ran to see Cell.

What came of me asking him to look into it? That would be the stone sitting on the table between us.

Just a stone. Same kind of stone you'd see anywhere.

"When I sent someone to search the location you mentioned, Sir Sato, they found this."

"What is it?"

"Dungeon debris."

"Like...trash?"

"No. It is a drop item called dungeon debris."

"...Mm?"

A drop item. Something dropped by a monster. In that case...

"This is dropped by the dungeon master of Uranium, the Grand Eater," he explained.

"Uranium's dungeon master..."

"Monsters typically drop one of three things: water, air, or an item particular to that monster."

"Yeah."

"Apart from the usual water and air, the Grand Eater also drops this stone. The stone itself is merely a stone like any pebble you might find elsewhere.

People of all backgrounds have looked into it, and they've concluded that it is but a stone. And yet..."

"It is a drop..."

Cell nodded gravely.

"Unlike other pebbles, this stone will turn into an outsider if left in a place without people. Into an even more troublesome Grand Eater. And once it's been placed..."

"Nobody will find it..."

"Indeed. After all, until the moment it turns, it is but a pebble."

So that was how I knew. Drops turned into outsiders. I knew how the air felt in that moment.

Other people of this world avoided them because they had no need for them, but I had a reason to use outsiders. In fact, I had such a need for them that I'd purchased the mansion in search of a space to make them in.

I was probably the person who'd seen the most outsiders appear in all the world. That was why I'd noticed this stone's presence.

"Why would they do this?" I asked.

"To kill the dungeon, I presume."

"Huh?"

"The Grand Eater is often called another name due to its characteristics."

"Another name?"

"Dungeon Devourer. Normal dungeon masters will change a dungeon's ecology if left unchecked, but this one will devour and destroy the dungeon

itself. If no recourse is taken, you know what happens next...”

“The dungeon dies...”

“The perpetrator has yet to be found, so this is only my speculation, but Cyclo has made explosive progress of late and gained many dungeons. Some may find this displeasing.”

“So they kill the dungeon and hope it ends up being reborn with them...?”

Cell nodded. I had no idea people did such things.

“However, Heaven is siding with us. Now that you’ve found this, there’s nothing to worry about. The Grand Eater’s proximity range is high; it can only become an outsider if nobody is on the floor at all. No doubt they did this hoping to wait until Tellurium’s dungeon master appeared and drove everyone out of the dungeon.”

“I see...”

“A dungeon is never empty of adventurers unless the dungeon master is out. We will slowly, thoroughly examine the other dungeons as well.”

“Okay, then I’ll let you—”

Just then, I felt a shiver crawl down my spine. It happened exactly at the moment when I thought we were done here.

“What’s the matter, Sir Sato?” he asked.

“...Oh, no!”

I instantly recognized the cause of it and ran out of the room.

After sprinting out of the Dungeon Association building, I sped through the lively streets of Cyclo. I went all the way out of Cyclo and to a dungeon on its outskirts: Nihonium.

Nothing dropped but air and water here, so it was typically empty. An abandoned dungeon—perfect for making outsiders.

I let momentum carry me into the dungeon. I was relieved. It was too late, but also not *too* late.

The air in here was that of a dungeon with a dungeon master inside. But there were skeletons around; Nihonium had its usual monsters, even though dungeon monsters were supposed to disappear when a dungeon master appeared.

A different dungeon master was present.

I was too late to stop it from becoming an outsider, but I'd made it before it could destroy Nihonium.

I noticed a small figure next to me. She was a translucent, spectral woman wearing a ceremonial kimono, who looked like she was at her wit's end.

"Don't worry. I'll get rid of it," I said. Relief spread on her face, and she disappeared.

*Now let's do this.*

## 169. Grand Eater

I charged through the dungeon, obliterating Nihonium's skeletons with Repetition and recovering my MP with limitless recovery rounds as I went. I'd normally put a little more effort in, but there was a powerful enemy waiting for me, so I used Repetition and my recovery rounds to keep myself armed and ready for the boss.

It didn't take long for me to find it.

A humanoid figure, with a head, body, and limbs. The size of an adult male. But it had no eyes, nose, nor mouth. Its whole body was flat and smooth, and a creepy pattern swirled around it.

"It's like Jupiter..." I muttered to myself.

The pattern looked like a picture of the planet Jupiter I'd seen in a textbook. The Grand Eater looked like someone had taken a photo of the planet and cut a human shape out of it. It was so eerie that I felt like I'd get sick just looking at it.

It trudged along slowly and reached out to a nearby skeleton. Then, it devoured it.

Like an eraser, its hand only had to pass through the skeleton to make the monster disappear, leaving only a few bones to fall to the ground.

Now wasn't the time to be stunned. A skeleton emerged from a fresh hole in the wall right next to it. The humanoid thing reached out its arm and devoured wall and skeleton alike.

The Grand Eater, also known as Dungeon Devourer. I could already see how it



had gotten that name.

*So it's a monster that erases whatever it touches, huh?*

“First off...let's test this out!”

I repeatedly fired normal bullets from my twin guns on a trajectory that would make them fuse. In total, twelve piercing rounds struck it.

They tore through the air as they flew. Unable to react to their speed, the Grand Eater was hit by them. But then, they disappeared—literally disappeared. The instant the bullets touched the Grand Eater, they vanished like the skeletons from before.

“In that case...!”

I quickly swapped out the bullets. This time, I loaded freeze rounds, flame rounds, and limitless lightning rounds. If physical bullets were no good, then this time, I'd fire my elemental magic rounds.

The bullets landed and created magic circles—

“What?!”

This was the most surprised I'd been since I first started using my guns.

The freezing rounds made ice, the flame rounds made fire, and the lightning rounds made lightning fall from above, but all of them were devoured by the Grand Eater. It hadn't just devoured ice, the only one with solid mass; even the fire and electricity, including the magic circles that had created them, disappeared on contact.

What shocked me most was that it ate the magic circles along with the matter. Did the Jupiter-like pattern on its skin have the power to destroy anything it touched?

Suddenly, I remembered Nihonium's dungeon master—the spectral one with a transparent body.

As long as it was a monster, it should be beatable. The fact that it was brought here as an outsider meant there must be a way.

*In that case, I'll use a homing round to find its weak point—*

I quickly jumped sideways.

The Grand Eater had charged at me right when I fired the homing round.

Its speed was ferocious; I hadn't expected that given its sluggish movements before. If I'd moved a tenth of a second later, I would've been erased. It swung its arm, devouring the homing round.

I shuddered.

It hadn't just eaten the homing round. When the thing's arm grazed the tip of my nose, I realized that it was eating *everything*.

That was no exaggeration. Bullets, the air around them—no, all of space—seemed to disappear in its wake.

I landed. Cold sweat rolled down my back. The all-devouring Grand Eater did not pursue me. It reached a hand casually for the dungeon walls next to it, destroying them as well. Erasing whatever it could get its hands on.

*If I let this happen, it'll eat the whole dungeon...*

I had to stop it, so I fired every bullet I had yet to try. Restraining rounds, sleep rounds, recovery rounds... I tried every last one I had.

But it devoured all of them.

The ropes of light from the restraining rounds, the effects of the sleep rounds, the healing light of the recovery rounds. Anything that touched the Grand Eater

was devoured and erased.

The only one it *didn't* eat was the trash round, and that was only because it was so slow that it couldn't reach the enemy.

I put my guns away. This time, I'd try magic. Repetition naturally didn't work. I tried every spell I'd learned on it, from Wind Cutter on.

Every failure made me shudder worse, for they were devoured just like the special bullets' magic circles.

It ate and erased even magic.

"Okay... How about this?!"

I picked up one of the bones it hadn't eaten off the ground.

With the skeleton thigh bone in hand, I raised it and used the Absolute Rock stone. When you use an Absolute Rock stone, you turn harder than any substance. That effect extends to anything you're holding.

The skeleton bone I held was invincible now, too. I approached and swung it at the Grand Eater.

My speed and strength were equivalent to F while invincible, but the Grand Eater took the blow head on. The result...was the same as everything else. It ate the invincible bone, leaving only pitiful shards behind.

The Grand Eater counterattacked. I managed to evade while invincible, but it still grazed my hip.

It took one of my guns in the process.

"Kh!"

I desperately retreated, trying to put space between us.

If I stayed near it, I'd be done for.

Despite my invincibility, despite my SS vitality and HP, I was certain that it would devour me.

The Grand Eater didn't pursue; it prioritized the closer walls of the dungeon. I wasn't about to die, but the danger was ongoing.

The dungeon would die at this rate.

Here, I experienced the true terror of the name Dungeon Devourer.

What could I do? How could I defeat it?

There had to be a way to kill it. The fact that it was here meant that someone had defeated it and brought its drop here, after all.

There had to be a way. A means of victory existed.

But what was it?

The Dungeon Devourer swung its arm.

A single human-like motion, as if swatting away a fly.

It had erased a trash round. The one I'd fired earlier had finally gotten close to it.

"...!"

A revelation came upon me. I took out my other gun.

After removing all the bullets in it, I loaded it full of trash rounds instead. I fired a round and backed off.

Fire, step back. Fire, step back. I continued this on my way to the entrance of the dungeon. Even after I'd left the dungeon, I continued firing trash rounds.

The trash rounds, each fired one step apart, sluggishly proceeded through the

air. They looked like railroad tracks together.

I sensed the Grand Eater's presence. It came from inside the dungeon.

It swatted its arm over and over, eating trash round after trash round.

Swing, step forward. Swing, step forward.

It followed the trail of trash rounds until it exited the dungeon, at which point the Grand Eater suddenly disappeared.

No matter how strong it was, even as a being that could erase anything...all monsters in this world disappeared the moment they crossed a dungeon's threshold.

The Grand Eater was no exception. Baited by the trash rounds, it had stepped out under the sky and immediately died.

## 170. Food Fight

After defeating the Grand Eater, I slumped down on the spot.

I couldn't believe I'd managed to defeat it. That might've been the strongest enemy I'd ever faced.

That was just how much it had cornered me.

"..."

*No... I didn't defeat it, did I?*

I looked around at the entrance to B1 of Nihonium. Beyond the entrance, I could see the scenery outside. That familiar dungeon was behind me, teeming with skeletons that I recognized better than my own parents now.

But there was nothing. No drop.

My unique skill, my S-rank drops... In a world where everything dropped in dungeons, this skill was all-powerful. It could make any monster drop *something*.

Nihonium's monsters didn't drop anything for the people of this world. Neither did outsiders. But if I defeated them, I got drops.

That hadn't happened this time—because I hadn't defeated the monster. Strictly speaking, I'd just weathered the storm.

I'd exploited the immovable laws of this world to guide my enemy to its own self-inflicted death at the dungeon's boundary. I hadn't defeated it, so it dropped nothing.

This was the first time that had happened to me. For the first time, my all-powerful drop rates had done nothing.

“...”

I was a little... No, I was extremely frustrated by that. I wish I hadn't noticed, but now that I had, it felt like a fish bone stuck deep in my throat.

It bothered me so much. I had to get rid of that feeling. The unpleasantness of it...

*How do I deal with this?* I thought to myself.

Just then, the woman from before—doll-sized and wearing a kimono—appeared again. This woman, who I was certain by now was Nihonium, bowed.

It was a graceful bow that you'd expect from someone wearing such a nice kimono.

*Thank you.*

She didn't speak, but it felt like she was saying that.

“Don't worry about it. I'd be in trouble if this place went away, too.”

“...” Nihonium turned and walked away. She was so graceful that you might use her as an example in a class on manners.

After a while, she stopped and looked at me again.

“...Do you want me to come with you?” I asked. She continued walking.

I didn't know what she wanted, but I followed her.

“You really are Nihonium, aren't you?”

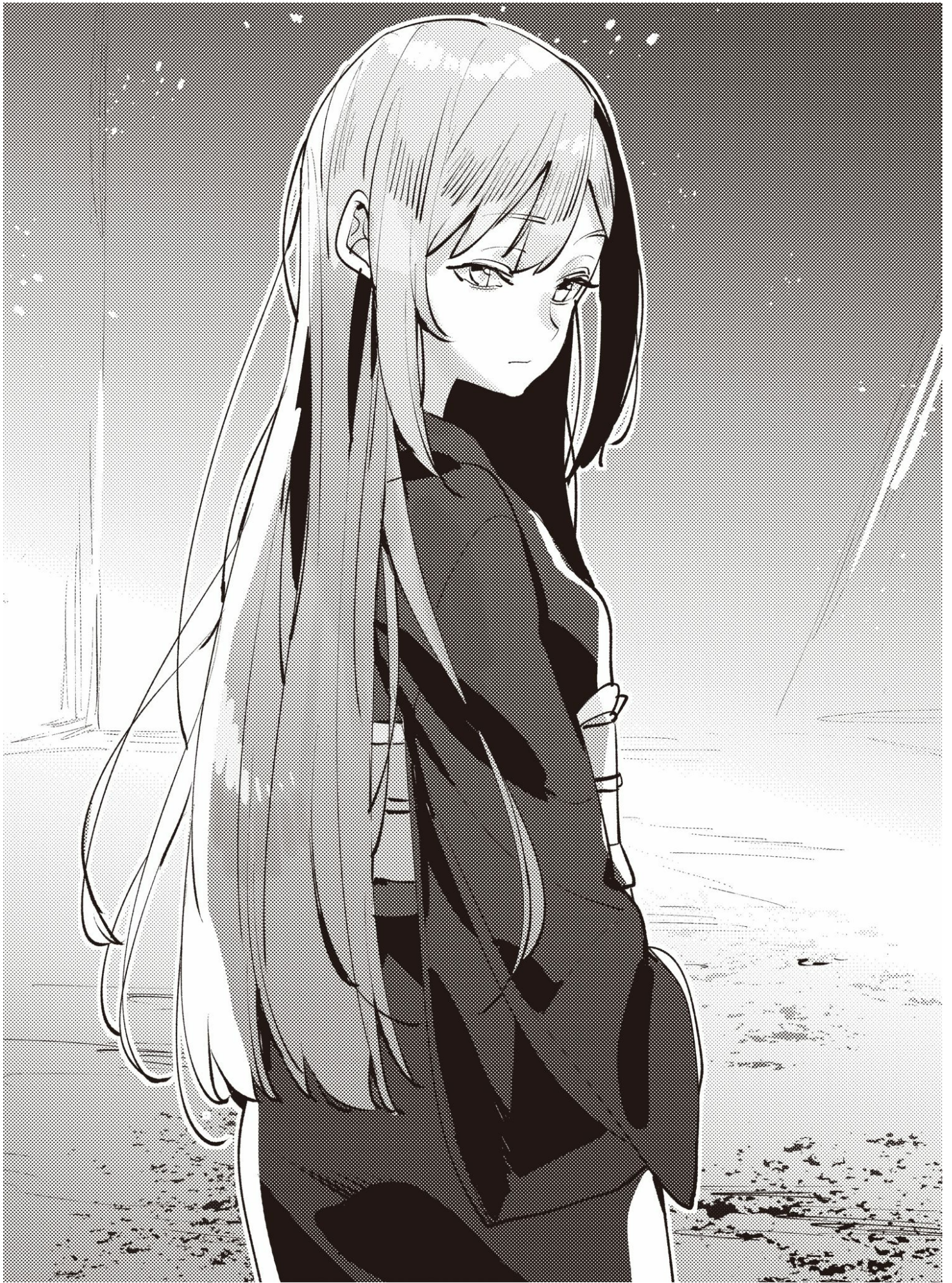
“...?”

While she led me onward, she turned just her head and tilted it in confusion.

“Don’t look at me like that. Anyone could tell just by seeing you right now.”

I pointed to the side. We were on B2 of Nihonium, the one full of zombies. Normally, the zombies would groan and attack you, but they didn’t do that now.







They opened a path for her. They put their hands on their knees and bowed to her.

“You’re like the wife of a yakuza boss, or something.”

“...” Nihonium smiled, but she did not respond.

She continued to lead the way. On B3, B4, and B5, the undead monsters bowed and let her pass through.

Nihonium finally stopped at a spot deep on B5. There was a stone next to her. She gazed at it and then looked at me.

“Oh. There was another, huh?”

Nihonium nodded.

*It really is you... You’re this dungeon’s spirit.*

It looked like just a stone, but the Grand Eater stone was foreign to this dungeon. Just as Aurum could detect adventurer hunters, Nihonium could sense this.

I gazed at it. The stone that turned into a Grand Eater—the stone dropped by the same monster.

The stone...that I couldn’t get to drop.

I stared at it and sat down on the ground in front of it. There, I thought to myself.

*How do I get this bone out of my throat?*

I thought of a way.

*I bet Celeste could tell me.*

If it could be mass-produced for sabotage’s sake, then there must be a known

way to defeat the Grand Eater. But I decided to think about it myself.

I gazed at the stone and recalled our fight. Sure, that fight was basically a total loss on my part, but I wondered if I could learn anything from that.

In a way, the Grand Eater was simple to a fault. It erased everything it touched like a literal eraser. It was a lot like annihilation rounds, the way everything just disappeared on contact.

“It’s invincible...”

It erased matter and magic alike, so that was an apt descriptor.

Did you need something unerasable to defeat it? If so, I’d have to give up...

“Hm?”

Something tugged at me for just an instant. What was it that tugged at my mind?

I retraced my train of thought, inch by inch.

It erased everything. Like an eraser. The Grand Eater erased all with a mere touch.

“Erase?”

*Wait. Does it erase?*

The Grand Eater, AKA Dungeon Devourer. Eater, Devourer. Not Eraser. *Eater*.

They say a name expresses the meaning of a thing, no? Well, both its original name and its nickname indicated that it *ate*.

It didn’t erase things; it ate them.

“It eats them, huh...?”

My eyes remained fixed on the rock.



Right next to the entrance of Nihonium, I put down the stone and backed off. I hated to do this, but I needed insurance.

If my theory proved wrong, I would have to guide it back to the entrance with trash rounds.

Though I prayed that my theory *was* correct so it wouldn't come to that.

I waited for it to spawn. After a while, the air of a dungeon master began to waft about.

The stone turned into the Grand Eater. I readied my remaining gun and loaded two kinds of bullets: lightning rounds and recovery rounds, both limitless thanks to my dungeon clears.

I fired the limitless lightning round—not *at* the Grand Eater, but just to its right. It reacted and swung its arm, eating the bullet.

Next, I fired a recovery round. Once again, I aimed just slightly to its other side.

Once again, it reacted, swung its arm, and ate the bullet.

Lightning, recovery, lightning, recovery. I alternated my usage of limitless rounds.

In a way, this was like when I'd used the trash rounds.

I fired on both sides, manipulating the Grand Eater to follow. It ate the bullets, almost doing lateral jumps back and forth all the while.

I continued to fire. Ten, twenty, fifty, a hundred rounds...

Using their limitless status to my advantage, I fired left and right endlessly. The Grand Eater's body gradually grew larger. It was one—no, two—sizes bigger than before.

There was no mistaking this; it was getting bigger.

The Grand Eater was not an eraser, but an eater. If it ate, then it must have a limit.

Erasers might have limits, too, but how much it could eat would be even more restricted. With that thought in mind, I continued to feed it limitless rounds until I saw results.

*This is working!* I thought as I sped things up.

Instead of shooting to the sides, I started feeding it the limitless rounds directly. The Grand Eater's body inflated at an exponential rate.

It continued to eat at the same pace, instilling some doubt in me.

“...Is this really going to work?”

No matter how many bullets I fired, it devoured them all without issue through a mere swing of the arm.

But I shook off doubt and kept going.

Believing in myself, I fired on into the Grand Eater that was now ten times its original size. And then...

*Psheew...* I heard the sound of air leaking out.

Part of the inflated Grand Eater's body ruptured. Instantly after, it began deflating rapidly.

While it deflated, the Grand Eater continued to swing its arms to attack me. Yet it deflated far faster than it could. Eventually, it shrunk smaller than its original size before finally disappearing.

Having taken bullets beyond its limit—roughly a thousand by now—the Grand Eater disappeared.

A shiny stone dropped where it had stood.

“...Nice!”

Still holding my gun, I pumped my other fist in triumph.

## 171. Bottomless Belly

The instant I picked up the shiny stone dropped by the Grand Eater, it melted into my hand. It then turned into a pale light that spread all over me.

I recognized the feeling of it melting. I knew it well, in fact. It was just like the seeds of Nihonium.

Did that mean this only worked for me, too?

I'd have to test it some time. Now that I'd properly defeated it, I could use Repetition on it.

Cell should have tons of those stones, so I'd ask him for one.

What mattered more right now, though, was this light. The dungeon master outsider's drop had turned into light that enveloped me the moment I'd touched it.

This had to mean something. What would happen? What would it mean?

Excited, I watched carefully for any changes in my body and waited. The glow eventually turned smaller, yet deeper.

It finally condensed into one speck of light in my pocket—my pants pocket. The light had gone in there and totally disappeared.

I reached inside after it, where I realized something was wrong.

My pocket had no bottom.

Most pockets, you can just reach your hand in and you'll quickly feel the bottom. But there was no bottom now. It was an odd feeling, like the whole

pocket bag was just gone, as if I'd just shoved my hand into a giant, bottomless sack.

I took my hand out for a second and tried the other pocket.

It felt the same way. Both pockets seemed bottomless.

I put the other hand back, which meant I had a hand in each pocket.

“Wah!” I made a weird noise.

Something unexpected had happened: my hands had touched each other.

If you shoved your hands deep into pockets that had holes in them, you could do this, but that just meant that your hands had met in the middle.

Right now, my hands were in their normal positions by my thighs. *Both* of them.

But they also felt like they were right next to the other.

I interlocked my fingers. Then, I got silly and tried a weird version of thumb-wrestling myself. It seemed my left and right pockets were connected.

Inside was an uncanny space.



When I got home, I went to my room.

Currently, there was almost no furniture in there. No bed, no desk, nothing that had been there before.

Alice came into my room and shouted in surprise, “Oh, Ryota, you’re home—What the heck?!” Anyone would react upon seeing such an empty room.



“What happened?”

“I just put the stuff away.”

“Away?”

“I can take it out, too.”

I took the bed out of my pocket. It was pretty heavy, but it was no big deal since I had SS-strength.

I put the bed back in its original position.

Then, I easily picked it up again and deposited it in my pocket. “And away it goes again.”

The bed was huge compared to my pocket, yet it went in with ease.

“Wow! How do you do that?”

“It’s an item...or ability, I guess, from a monster called a Grand Eater.”

“Oh.” When I told her that it was a monster drop, she was quickly convinced. “That’s awesome, Ryota. So hey, can you put *anything* in there?”

“Yeah. See?” I took a bunch of things out of my pocket: a bean sprout I’d put in to see if drops would fit, my clothes to see if processed goods would fit, and a normal bullet to see if outsider drops would fit. I showed her all the things I’d tested. “I can put ice cream in, too. See?”

“Ooh, it’s really cold! Is it cold in there?”

“Not at all.”

“Steak! And it’s piping hot!”

“It can preserve heat, but I don’t know what it’s like inside. I can put my hands in, but my head...” I said, bending over. They were pants pockets, so my head

wouldn't go in. I mean, it couldn't even reach them.

"Okay, then I'll go in!"

"Huh? What do you mean—Aah!" I had no time to stop Alice before she reached her hands into my pocket and made a giddy face as she disappeared into it. "So people can go in, too..."

Alice poked her hand out. A human hand poking out of my pants pocket was kind of a bizarre sight. It made a peace sign before diving back in.

"Having fun in there?"

Knowing how she was, that seemed likely.

I waited for Alice, ready to ask her all about it. But she did not return. When I reached a hand inside, she pinched the back of it.

*Must be having fun down there.*

"All right, if you're not coming out, then too bad. I'm gonna keep testing."

I decided to resume testing the pocket's features. So far, I knew that all kinds of things could go inside. Even people could.

What to test next, then? I thought of some things. The first question that came to mind was, was it the pants themselves? Was this 4D pocket, like a certain famous robot cat's, only accessible from that pair of pants?

I took off my pants and switched into new ones. When I put my legs through them and tried to pull them up, Alice poked her head out of the new pants' pocket.

"Hey, Ryota! It's all—whoa, whoa!"

The suddenness and surprise of it made me drop the pants back down. Part of the hem turned inside-out around my calf, and Alice's head fell and hit the

ground.

“Oww! Why’d you do that?”

“Sorry, sorry. Don’t just pop up out of nowhere, please.”

“It wasn’t out of nowhere—ah.” Alice abruptly fell silent.

“Ah?”

Curious, I followed her eyes. But I already knew. Alice looked up at my half-stripped pants.

“P—”

“Don’t say a word! Go back!”

“Ack! D-Don’t push me!”

“Just get in there!”

“Okay, okay, geez—”

With a knock, the door opened, and Celeste entered.

“Ryota, the Association chief—”

“Huh?”

This was the worst possible timing. My pants were down, and I was pushing down on Alice’s head.

How could one not misunderstand what was going on?

“No... She beat me to it...” Celeste groaned as she backed away to the wall in horror.

“I didn’t! And I’m not gonna!” Alice roared as she jumped out of my pocket in a hurry.

It took a good while to explain that one.



“S-So that’s it...?”

After hearing my explanation, Celeste was visibly relieved.

Now with my pants back on, I took the bed out of my pocket. I specifically chose an item that was comically too large.

Upon seeing it, Celeste let out a gasp, “Wow...”

Meanwhile, I was relieved to have cleared things up.

“So it works even if I change pants. And they’re connected, too.”

“It must be your power instead of the pants’ power!” Alice piped up.

“It seems so...” Celeste agreed.

“Hey, do you think you can carry people around in your pockets?”

“Carry people?” I asked Alice.

“Yeah! Like this.”

“Whoa! Alice, hold up!”

Once again unable to stop her, I was subjected to her jumping into my pocket.

Then, she popped her head out.

“You come too, Celeste!”

“Huh? M-Me?”

Celeste looked at Alice’s disembodied head, then me, then back at Alice.

“Me...in Ryota’s pants...”

“In my pocket!” I screamed.

“Just get in here already!” Alice reached a hand out and pulled Celeste in. Celeste squealed in protest, but she was pulled into my pocket without issue.

“All right! Onward!”

“...Okay.”

She’d forced me into this, but I understood what Alice wanted to try out. I put the bed back into my pocket one more time, left my room, and walked down the hallway.

Despite several pieces of furniture and two people being in my pocket, I felt no weight. Not because of my SS-rank strength; there just was no weight at all.

I wandered through the halls and into the courtyard.

“How’s it going?” Alice asked.

“As you can see, we’re in the courtyard.”

“Ooh. So you can move us!”

“It’s true...” Celeste said, amazed.

“Hey, what if we’re like this?” Alice asked before she and Celeste both poked their heads out of either pocket.

“I feel like a kangaroo.”

“What’s that?” Alice asked.

“An animal. It has a pocket on its body, and it carries its baby around in it.”

“Wow... So like this?” Alice brought her hands out as well.

She grabbed the edge of my pocket with them, making her look even more

like a kangaroo baby. It was adorable.

I walked around the courtyard with Alice and Celeste looking out of my pockets. There was still no weight, presumably because they were in the pocket.

The Grand Eater's powers seemed even more convenient than I'd thought.

"Ryota?" Erza called out from the mansion.

"Erza? What's up?" I turned around.

She looked at me, and then down at my lower body—at Alice and Celeste.

"Oh, my..."

Suddenly, she fainted on the spot.

"Wh-What's wrong?!"

"Oooh. Figures."

"Hmm... I suppose it would look like he's cut our heads off."

The Grand Eater pocket was convenient, yes, but it caused a bit of a ruckus.

## 172. Fools

With Aurum's help, I retrieved the dungeon debris—the Grand Eater pebbles—from her dungeon and left to visit the Cyclo Dungeon Association.

"Six in total, hm?" Cell furrowed his brow from across the table as he looked upon the six stones. "And as I recall, the dungeon Aurum..."

"It has three floors in total."

"Two on each floor, then?"

"Yeah," I said firmly.

I'd had Aurum—spirit of the dungeon—search for them, sense them, or whatever, so I knew that there couldn't be any more than these six. It just wasn't possible that any had been left behind.

Seeing the six dungeon debris stones, Cell looked solemn.

Finally, he looked up.

"Somebody, come."

"You called, sir?"

A woman came in from outside the room. She had short and pretty hair, wise-looking features, and a perfectly fitted suit.

This woman was Cell's secretary, who I had to go through when I visited him.

"I want a thorough search of every floor of every dungeon in Cyclo," he said. "Discard the preconception that there is only one on each floor."

"Certainly."

She bowed courteously and left the room.

After seeing her off, Cell gazed at the six stones again.

“This was my mistake. I wasn’t careful enough. I assumed there would only be one on each floor.”

“Don’t worry about it; anyone would think that. Even I did.”

“Then how did you know?” Cell asked.

“Nihonium only had two in total, so I started to wonder if they weren’t necessarily spread out one per floor. To go even further, there might be two or more on one floor.”

“Hmm.”

“So I asked Aurum to check her dungeon for me.”

“Ah, of course. You are able to put the dungeon spirits to work, after all,” Cell said, looking both impressed and reverent.

I wasn’t exactly putting them to work, but I let that go because there was no real need to correct him.

I explained, “I think you already understand this from the adventurer hunter system we set up, but Aurum...no, all dungeon spirits know what happens in their own dungeon. When there’s something foreign inside, they somehow know. So I had Aurum find them. We know there aren’t any more there.”

“I would never doubt a word you say, Sir Sato,” Cell replied and gazed at the dungeon debris again. The six stones, the six Grand Eaters, had been placed in the three floors of Aurum.

We felt pure, murderous malice behind that fact.

Compared to the two-to-nine ratio of the dropless Nihonium, the literal gold



mine that was Aurum had a six-to-three ratio. It was evident that they were trying to do whatever they could to kill Aurum and have it appear somewhere else.

“Wait a second...” I said.

“Hm?”

“Do you know who’s doing this?”

“Yes, with ninety-nine percent certainty,” Cell answered. “We simply haven’t caught the perpetrator red-handed yet.”

“Who is it?”

“The Methylene Dungeon Association.”

“...I see.”

That made sense. A whole lot of sense. More sense than anything else possibly could.

The Methylene Dungeon Association was the one we’d quarreled with during the Aurum and Indole kerfuffle. The village of Indole, where Aurum was located, had been created with funds from a city called Methylene.

Sometimes, in anticipation of a dungeon rebirth, cities would invest money in the development of villages. Methylene had done the same and settled the village Indole.

However, Methylene neglected Indole. Left with no options, Indole asked Cyclo’s Association for aid, and I was sent there. I resolved the issue of Aurum, helped Indole become independent from Methylene, and brought them under Cyclo’s control.

In other words, Methylene was extremely unhappy to have Aurum in Indole.

To take that even further...

“I wouldn’t be surprised if they tried to destroy *all* of Cyclo’s dungeons, not just Aurum,” I theorized.

“That may be those fools’ belief. However, that is meaningless now. The Grand Eater is a brutal foe, yes, but their sabotage will be fruitless as long as staff are stationed in the dungeons.”

“For sure.”

Like when I’d defeated the first Grand Eater, no matter how strong a monster was, it couldn’t deviate from the rules of this world. As long as people were always in the dungeons, they wouldn’t become outsiders.

Suddenly, Cell looked up to the ceiling and laughed.

“Heh... Heheh, ahahahah!”

“What’s gotten into you now?”

“It’s simply hilarious how those fools miscalculated.”

“Miscalculated?”

“Indeed. They placed dungeon debris, essentially Grand Eaters, in every dungeon in Cyclo. Their main target is surely Aurum, but they must plan to take down whatever other dungeons they can in the process.”

“Yeah?”

“But you discovered it, Sir Sato. You were the first to find the debris. You were also the one to realize that there may be two or more on any given floor. Thanks to you, Cyclo’s security posture is ready for anything. Now there isn’t the slightest chance of an outsider going wild in Cyclo’s dungeons!” Cell said excitedly. “You have undone all of their foolish schemes!”

“Huh.”

“And...”

“And?”

*There's more?*

“Discarding out-of-place item drops in dungeons is a serious offense.”

“Yeah. Leaving things from the same floor would just increase the number of monsters, and therefore drops. But a lot of adventurers are specialized toward killing particular monsters, so having the wrong monsters there is so much more dangerous.”

“Right you are. Once upon a time, that led to casualties. There was an accident; an adventurer had died in an unpopular location, and their equipment turned into outsiders.”

“Wow.”

I imagined for a moment myself dying in some corner of a dungeon and having all of my equipment turn into outsiders at once. I had more than ten items from dungeon masters and rare monsters, and I always kept a large stock of bullets on hand, so they would turn into a whole army of monsters.

If they attacked a group of adventurers specialized toward stable farming...it would be tragic.

“As such, an agreement was made among the Dungeon Associations. Intentionally discarding drops in other dungeons or floors is a felony.”

Even in the scenario I'd envisioned, it made sense. That would easily be an attempted murder charge. What charges would come with mass murder? They were sure to be hefty, at any rate.

“I thank you, Sir Sato.”

“Why?”

“You haven’t just helped us protect the dungeons and adventurers. You’ve also helped us find the mastermind thanks to the information that they use Grand Eaters.”

“You’re going to take them down?”

“If our enemy is an entire Association, then that is even more convenient. We will take them down, strengthen the agreement, and create a system where no outsiders will ever be used for evil again.”

“Really?”

That sounded like a really big deal. Laws could only have a deterrent effect if they came with penalties. If we were able to crush a faction the size of an entire Dungeon Association, then that would be a major deterrent.

I looked at my equipment again. If all of these things became outsiders, one could only imagine the number of casualties. That made me even more certain that Cell needed to go all the way—to make a system that could allow adventurers to farm and hunt with more peace of mind than ever before.

“I’ll do anything in my power to help. Just say the word.”

“Thank you.”

Cell put his hands on his knees and bowed. For a moment, I was moved by the fact that someone of his status could be so thoughtful toward the people doing the work. But that didn’t last long.

*Thunk!*

Something fell out of his pocket as he bent over.

It was me firing a single gun over and over—from when I'd fought the Grand Eater.

“Why do you have that, too?!”

“Ahem! Oh, thank you, Sir Sato. Those fools will rue the day they tried to mess with Sir Sato's home!”

“Seems to me like you're the biggest fool here!” I rebutted, but Cell had already regained his usual composure.

## 173. The Siege of Methylene

Cell and I traveled to Methylene from Cyclo by a rickshaw shaped like a horse-drawn carriage. While Cyclo's streets were styled similarly to medieval Europe, the people and streets of Methylene were more Chinese.

But it was just as lively and bustling as Cyclo.

I was curious about what kinds of dungeons were here and how the people lived their everyday lives in this peculiar world. Of course, I was curious about the dungeon names too, but now wasn't the time for that.

I asked Cell, who sat across from me, "So, we're here in Methylene. Where are we going?"

"The Dungeon Association. There, we will hunt down Linus Ronin, their chief."

*Makes sense. He did say he wanted to use this opportunity to strengthen the agreement and rules.*

"That's fine and all, but why bring me?"

"I need your help, Sir Sato. Help that only you can provide."

"Only me?"

"But of course. I might be able to manage it on my own, but having you around will settle things much more easily."

"Really...? What should I do?"

"Just be by my side and play along here and there, and that will do."

"That's all?"

Cell nodded. His eyes were calm, but there was a sadistic gleam in them. I wondered if he had an ambitious side he'd yet to reveal to me.

The rickshaw, pulled by two powerful men, reached its destination. When we got out, we saw a five-storied pagoda up ahead.

I entered with Cell. He must've made an appointment, because they let us in right away and took us to a luxurious reception room.

After a short wait, a familiar face appeared. It was Methylene's Dungeon Association chief, the guy who Clint had taken down a peg during the Indole dispute.

His name was...Linus, according to Cell.

"Thank you for waiting," he said.

"A pleasure to meet you. I am the chief of Cyclo's Dungeon Association, Cell Stem. This is the Indole Association chief, Sir Sato."

Cell introduced us both.

*Oh, right. I forgot I had that position.*

It was mostly a matter of convenience; it was effectively subordinate to the Cyclo Dungeon Association, so I'd almost never actively done much with it.

*I see. This is why he wanted me to come, huh?*

They would probably ask me to say something as the chief, so I mentally prepared myself.

"I am Methylene's Dungeon Association chief, Linus Ronin," Linus introduced himself nervously. He seemed like he was trying to figure out why we'd come.

"Apologies for the sudden visit," Cell said. "You see, something awful has happened in Cyclo and Indole."

“Wh-What could it be?”

“Somebody has placed dungeon debris in the dungeons.”

“Wh-Who could ever do such an outrageous thing?” Linus condemned the act, but his voice trembled. He looked down and occasionally glanced at us, gauging our reactions. His demeanor practically screamed that he was guilty.

“Has anything of the sort happened in Methylene?”

“I-I’m afraid I don’t know. I suppose I haven’t heard any reports of it.”

“Hmm. As you know, leaving such items in dungeons is an extremely serious crime. As someone in charge of Cyclo, I cannot overlook that. I must find the culprit...and the one pulling their strings.”

“O-Of course,” Linus replied, his voice quivering even more.

Cell continued to threaten him in a roundabout way. He was so roundabout and persistent that it surprised me.

Unable to do anything but give token answers, Linus could only flinch every time Cell opened his mouth.

It reminded me of Osaka Castle, reaching the peak of prosperity just before being brutally laid bare. Cell just kept on refilling that moat every time Linus emptied it.

“However, the culprit made a foolish mistake,” Cell said.

“Huh?”

“There’s a saying in Cyclo: ‘Don’t let Ryota Sato get involved.’ There are more than a handful of people who have done unreasonable things, earned Sir Sato’s ire, and had everything fall apart because of his interference.”

*Yeah, I guess people do say that. Ever since the Clifford incident, I think? I’m*



*really just doing what's normal, though.*

However, his threat worked. As someone who had done something unreasonable, Linus became even more terrified.

“Sir Sato can even change when items drop in a dungeon if he so chooses. Incidentally, I’ve never heard of you doing so, but I wonder if you could eliminate drops entirely?”

“Hm?”

*Why are you asking me all of a sudden?*

But then, I realized: this was what he meant by playing along.

“Sure can.”

“Ooh, really?”

“Yeah.”

I didn’t even need to play along; I *could* actually do that. All I had to do was not take Aurum back to her dungeon the morning after she spent the night at our mansion.

If I wanted to, I could.

“That’s Sir Sato for you. Goodness, you can’t do anything too outrageous around him.”

“I’d appreciate it if you didn’t.”

That was how I really felt. Back when I’d worked at a corrupt company, I’d always get involved in things I thought were outrageous. I’d be happier if nothing like that happened to begin with.

“By the way, Sir Sato...”

“Yeah?”

“We’ve come all this way to Methylene. Would you like to experience their dungeons?”

“Experience the dungeons? Yeah, I am personally curious what they’re like.”

*Play along.*

Remembering that, I finally asked Linus, “May we?”

That was a threat, too.

He’d brought up the fact that me getting involved in something would end badly for people doing outrageous things. Then, he’d pointed out the possibility of turning off drops based on what I did with Aurum.

Cell had lumped those together to threaten Linus. The poor guy looked like he’d aged ten years in a second. Part of me felt bad for him.

After threatening him, Cell and I left the Methylene Dungeon Association without directly accusing him.



We left in the same man-powered carriage.

“Thank you, Sir Sato.”

“Was that good enough?”

“Of course. Thanks to you, we have the initiative now.”

“I’m glad I could help. But are you sure we shouldn’t have made any demands, or anything?”

“We control the situation, so there’s no need to rush things. Linus Ronin knows his position well; no doubt he will come forth of his own volition.”

“I see.”

“Besides, the moment before the tree falls is the most delightful of all.”

Cell spoke such terrifying words so calmly.

To be fair, Linus was getting his just desserts.

“If you weren’t there, things wouldn’t have gone anywhere near as well. Allow me to thank you again.” In the perfectly stable, comfortable rickshaw, Cell put his hands on his knees and bowed. “Thank you,” he said.

## 174. Black Hole

“I have a request for you, Sir Sato.”

“Hm?”

“Would you be willing to stay in this city for a few days?”

“Stay? I don’t mind, but...why?”

“I plan to drive him into a corner.”

*Even more?*

I recalled Linus’s terrified look. At this point, part of me pitied the guy.

Cell continued, “I plan to use every means at my disposal to push him from every angle.”

“Do you want me to help, too?”

“No, no,” he replied, looking at me sincerely. “Just your being here is enough. That will put pressure on him.”

“Just being here exerts pressure...? Surely you’re exaggerating.”

The corner of his mouth curled into a smirk, but he didn’t give a straight answer.

“Either way, I would appreciate your presence.”

“Okay... Do you think I should hide once in a while, too?”

“Genius as ever, Sir Sato,” he said, gazing at me respectfully. “That would be even better. Then, he’ll become overly paranoid.”

“Got it. If that’s what you want, then I’ll do it.”

I accepted Cell’s request and decided to stay in Methylene for a few days until this matter was settled.



Methylene was a prosperous city with nine dungeons. I entered the one called Cobalt.

B1 of Cobalt was surprisingly spacious and forest-like. It was covered in trees. When I looked up, the sky (not that I knew one was there) was covered by the thick canopy.

From a prosperous city to a thick forest. The contrast between city and dungeon was kind of funny.

There weren’t many adventurers inside; I just saw a few here and there. There was no magic storm, nor was it a twin sun day that would decrease drops, yet it was oddly devoid of people.

*I wonder why...* I thought to myself just as I happened upon a monster.

It was about as big as a human. It was hunched over, with arms as long as its legs dangling down. Bat wings adorned its back, and its body was covered in a purplish glow. On closer inspection, it had no eyes. The monster wandered about seemingly at random.

“A devil?” I muttered to myself based on my impression of its appearance.

I actually hadn’t heard anything about this dungeon. While I had asked an adventurer in town the number and names of dungeons here, those were all

the details I had.

This was essentially an unprepared blind run. Intentionally, of course, since that was part of my training. Going into an unknown dungeon was practical training that helped me think better on the fly.

I followed the same policy as I had been for a little while now. First, I took out my guns—*Oh*.

“Right, I only have one gun now... Wonder if I can buy tuna in town.”

Making a mental note to replace the gun I’d lost fighting the Grand Eater, I loaded a normal bullet and shot a monster. The sound of gunfire was immediately followed by the normal bullet piercing through the eyeless demon’s head.

One headshot sunk the demon, yielding an item drop.

“Pretty weak... I guess that’s about right for a B1, though.”

Disappointed at the lack of a training opportunity but understanding that was how it worked, I picked up the drop. It was a dark gray, rectangular mass.

“The texture and luster... An iron ingot? And it weighs...about two pounds, huh?”

I touched and felt the item the demon had dropped. I even tried knocking on it with the second joint of my middle finger. I was pretty certain it was iron.

Back in Aurum, defeating little demons yielded gold dust. These demons dropped iron.

There was clearly a general relationship between monster types and their drops. Based on experience, I judged that Cobalt was probably home to mostly demon-type monsters that dropped ore.

I put the two-pound iron ingot in my pocket.

I hadn't expected to stay long, so I didn't bring a magic cart. Fortunately, the Grand Eater pocket solved that problem.

After a bit more walking, I ran into another demon.

The way it wandered around was kind of similar to Nihonium's zombies. Its skin color was close, too. I wondered if it was called a zombie demon, or something.

When I hit it with another normal bullet headshot, it dropped a second iron ingot. Again, about two pounds.

I picked it up and deposited it in my pocket. The iron ingot slid right in. Normally, this would leave my pockets heavy and belt area struggling to hold up the pants, but that didn't happen now.

"...Kind of ruins the sense of accomplishment."

I chuckled to myself and walked around, killing zombie demons as I went. Headshotting, beating them down without the gun, tearing their jaws open when they tried to bite me. That was how I defeated the B1 monsters of Cobalt and collected iron ingots.

As I aimlessly wandered on, I learned something: the adventurers here were just like Cyclo's.

They defeated monsters with the most efficient motions for farming and put the iron ingots they received into magic carts. However, they left before their magic carts were full. I thought they might as well fit more in there, but the carts they pushed were unusually wobbly.

It seemed they'd reached their weight capacity before their volume capacity.

*Aha. Well, that would happen with iron.*

Iron was far heavier than vegetables, after all.

Thus, I continued to observe the city's adventurers while defeating monsters in this new dungeon.



"So this is the drop buying shop?"

I left Cobalt and found a shop I'd heard about from people in town.

The sign said "Singing Birds."

I joined the magic cart-pushing adventurers and walked into the shop empty-handed.

Unlike the Swallow's Returned Favor, it was pointlessly big inside. Instead of counters, they'd put what were like supermarket cash registers against the walls. I went to an empty register.

"Welcome! Is this your first time here, sir?" the man at the register asked with a customer service smile.

"Yeah. Can I still sell you stuff?"

"Of course. We will buy anything dropped in the dungeons of this city...but you don't seem to have anything."

"Looks can be deceiving." I plunged a hand into my pocket and took out a single iron ingot, which I placed on the register counter. The moment I did, the numbers on the register moved.



“Oh, okay. So when you put them here, it weighs them.”

“That’s right. But one gin of iron—”

*Gin. That’s a weight measurement.*

I hadn’t weighed it on a scale from my old world, so this might be inaccurate, but one gin was basically equal to two pounds.

“I have more.”

I pulled another ingot out of my pocket and put it on the counter. The number went up. I took out another.

Out of pocket, onto counter. I repeated this process over and over.

“Whaaat?!” After the first few, his face seemed like he wanted to say, *Wow, you sure fit a lot in there.* But after a point, his mouth was wide open from shock. By the time I’d put a hundred 1-gin ingots down, he finally asked, “W-Wait a second. How many did you bring, sir?”

“I’ve got plenty more.”

I took them out one after another and put them down.

They formed a veritable mountain on the spacious counter. Even I started to wonder how many I had after a point.

The dumbfounded clerk was joined by a gathering of adventurers.

“Whoa, whoa. What’s going on there?”

“Is that new magic cart technology?”

“Or magic? No, maybe a unique skill?”

I continued as they watched. When the number finally went over a thousand, cheers erupted from the crowd.

The mountain of iron, weighing over a ton, had all fit in my pocket.

## 175. Pocket Money

At the Singing Birds shop, I looked around while I waited for them to finish calculating my sale.

There were adventurers of all kinds here, but they were all bringing in metals of various colors, lusters, and sizes. They took them out of their magic carts and had them appraised.

It was like Cyclo, yet fresh and different in subtle ways.

“St-Stop, please!”

“Hm?”

Suddenly, I heard a man scream, so I looked that way. An adventurer who’d just sold off his metal was surrounded by three bad-looking dudes.

Two stood at his sides, and one was in the middle, taking money out of his hands.

*What’s going on?*

“One, two, three... Not bad, buddy. Congrats, you’re all paid off.” It seemed they were debt collectors. The debt collector took 10,000 puros and left the man with a paltry sum. Then, with a wicked smirk, he said sarcastically, “Thanks for paying your debt. We look forward to your next loan.”

“Thanks for your business!” the others said.

“W-Wait, please. If you take all that—”

“You can’t drink tonight? That it?”

“Ulp...”

The adventurer fell silent.

As far as I could tell, one of them was a guy who'd fallen on hard times due to alcoholism, and the others were squeezing him for a repayment. The adventurer desperately persisted, but they only smirked and ignored him. Worse, they urged him to take out another loan.

“I need more! Ten... Twenty, no, thirty thousand!”

“Sign right here, my man.”

Apparently, he really wanted to drink, because he immediately borrowed again despite having just paid his debt off.

I watched distantly, idly thinking, *I've seen guys like him in manga.*

Just then, my clerk returned.

“Thank you for waiting.”

“No problem.”

“Based on my measurements, this is 1,198 gin altogether,” he informed me. I remembered when I'd taken out the iron. I could probably assume gin was roughly equal to two pounds. “The market price today is 19 piros per gin, so your total will be 22,762 piros.”

“It's that cheap?”

“Iron is cheap.”

“Is it really?”

“Yes. This iron must be from Cobalt, yes? If you go deeper, you may find copper or aluminum. It does depend on your individual abilities, though.”

“And how much would those be worth?”

For comparison, he gave me a rough estimate.

“Copper’s market price today is roughly 800 piros.”

Though it wasn’t exact, there was clearly a huge difference.

*Still...iron really is cheap...*

Gold was worth around 4,000 piros. Compared to that, iron was basically worthless.

Not that it mattered much. It might even be a good thing, I thought, as I looked upon the 23,000 piros I’d earned today.



I left the purchasing shop and wandered around the city of Methylene under the dark of night.

In my pocket was the 23,000 piros I’d earned. It was a lot less than my usual earnings, but it was plenty for dinner and a hotel.

Come to think of it, I’d usually put my earnings in my passbook so I could see the amount at a glance, but keeping cash in my Grand Eater pocket might be a good idea.

If I recalled correctly, a hundred million yen weighed about twenty pounds back at home. The paper bills dropped by monsters in this world were similar to Japanese yen in both size and value. My pocket could fit a literal ton of iron with ease. I could sell off all my assets, and that still wouldn’t be enough to fill those bottomless holes.

*Keeping all of my assets in my pocket...*

“Reminds me of my childhood,” I mused.

It reminded me of filling up my pockets with coins from medal games or going shopping with a 500-yen coin and getting so many coins in return that I felt rich.

One time, there was this thing that you could take coins in and out of freely. Silly kid that I was, I thought you could take coins out of it forever and get rich quick.

So many memories centered around money came to mind that I had to wonder, “Have I been obsessed with money since childhood?”

Suddenly, I found a place where I could withdraw money. I went inside and withdrew 10,000,000 piros with my passbook and biometric authentication.

Ten million piros weighed two pounds, about as much as an iron ingot. I put it in my pocket. As usual, I felt no weight.

A 19-piro ingot, a bundle of money worth 10 million... It was funny how both weighed the same and both fit in my pocket.

While I walked around town, I passed by a busy bar. It was lively and looked nice, so I looked over the prices on the menu. Those were reasonable prices for a bar; my 23,000 piros from today would be enough to fill my belly with food and drink just fine.

*Places like this help me calm down,* I thought as I entered.

“Welcome, sir. Table for one?”

“Yes, please.”

“Right this way!” The female employee showed me to a seat. “What would you like today?”

“A few of your popular dishes and drinks that suit them well. More food and a bit less alcohol, I’d say.”

“Understood!”

I watched as she left, then I looked around the restaurant. Based on their vibes, most customers seemed to be adventurers.

I’d been in this world for a long time now, so I could tell immediately whether people were adventurers... Not that it was a very useful skill.

*I wonder if I’ll learn anything about this city,* I thought to myself as I eavesdropped a bit on surrounding conversations.

“Isaac’s coming back tomorrow, so I’m gonna go talk to him. How ’bout you?”

“Isaac? Is that the guy who went to Aurum?”

“Yeah. Apparently, you can make good money there. If he says it’s good, I might go too.”

“I’ll pass. I’m used to the floor with aluminum. No point in forcing a move if I don’t need it.”

Hearing those familiar words and that familiar tone made me chuckle. The adventurers of this world really did prioritize stability.

“Stop it, please!”

In an instant, the boisterous restaurant turned quiet. All eyes turned to the source of the scream.

“Those are the debt collectors from before.”

*And the waitress who’s just taken my order.*

The three men surrounded her in the exact same formation as they had

earlier with the adventurer.

“Hey, honey, how about you give up and pay us back?”

“I promise I will, I just need a little—”

“A little? Don’t test me!” the man in the middle roared. At the same time, the other two men kicked tables away as a threat.

She was petrified from fear.

“I’m sorry! I just need a little...a little longer!”

“Then at least give us the interest, eh?”

“Tomorrow! I get paid tomorrow, so please just wait until then.”

She desperately begged them to wait, and they insisted she pay now.

Was this a common sight? Or did people just not want to get involved? Either way, nearly half of the customers looked away as if they didn’t care.

“I’ve got a deal for you, honey. Spend a night with us, and we’ll give you a day. How ’bout it?”

The men all began grinning madly. Vulgarly.

The woman looked down, clutching her skirt tight. She bit her lower lip so hard that it looked ready to bleed.

I stood up and approached them.

“That’s enough.”

“What the hell do you want?”

“How much is her debt?”

“Say what?”



“I’m asking you how much she owes you.”

“And what are you planning to do with that information, huh?”

“Bro, I saw that guy at the drop-selling shop!”

“He was selling iron!”

“Say *what?*” When he heard that from the younger ones, the men looked at me condescendingly. “You think you’re a hero, or something?”

“Who cares? Just tell me the amount.”

“It’s a million piros. A guy scraping up scrap metal could never—”

I took a bundle of a million piros out of my pocket and thrust it at him.

“Wha...”

“Take it, and don’t let me see your face again.”

“How in the...?”

“Whoa, bro, this is real!”

“A guy selling iron had all this...?”

The loan sharks were surprised and confused. When I thrust the money at him again, his face turned red, and he became enraged.

“Get over yourself!” he roared as he tried to punch me. He seemed used to punching people, because he didn’t hesitate. But it was far weaker than the average monster.

I easily evaded and struck him in the face with a counter.

“Bro!”

“You little...”

The others came at me this time. They were about equal to their “bro,” so I dodged their attacks and took them down in one blow. The three of them fell to their hands and knees. I threw the wad of bills down at the one they called “bro.”







“Take it. Don’t come back.”

“D-Damn you... You’ll pay for this!”

They took the money and ran, leaving that parting shot.

I turned around and saw the woman looking apologetic.

“U-Umm... Sorry for that...”

“Are you okay?” I asked.

“Yes... Thank you for helping me. I promise I’ll pay you back.”

Knowing that she wouldn’t let it go if it was totally unreasonable, I asked, “Sure, fine, but what in the world was that debt?”

“Umm... A while back, I messed up and let my belongings turn into outsiders, causing damage to the town. It started when I borrowed money to pay for the reparations...”

“I see.” If it was compensation for an accident, then there probably was no need for me to go further. I put an end to the talk of debt and instead asked, “So, can I have the food I ordered, please?”

“Huh... Oh, yes!”

She rushed to the kitchen in a flurry. After that, I brushed off the curious looks from other customers and went back to my seat.

A different man was sitting there. He said, “Not bad, dude.”

“Uh, that’s my table.”

“C’mon, we can share a table, dude. Hey, waitress! Get us another set of utensils, would you? And bring us your oldest alcohol!”

He leisurely, yet forcefully pushed the conversation forward. He was a middle-

aged man wearing well-made clothes.

This guy seemed dangerous to me. He had the vibe of not an adventurer, but someone used to wielding *power*.

*I don't want to get involved with this guy. Maybe I should ask them to move me,* I thought to myself.

“Call me Nicholas Likefield,” he said, prompting me to sigh. “I’ll treat you. Let’s have a drink together, dude!”

“Really, I’d rather...”

“Ryota Sato.”

“...!”

I hesitated, unsure what to do about this guy who somehow knew my name.

## 176. The Untouchable Is Born

I sat in front of the man, Nicholas Likefield.

“Apologies for the wait,” the waitress greeted us.

“Oh, there you are. Is this really the oldest one you’ve got, miss?”

“Yes. The price is—”

“Ah-ah-ah, no. I’ve heard enough about money.” Nicholas accepted the bottle, sniffed it, and then poured two glasses of it. “Go on, now. Drink up! Drink up.”

“I’m more interested in why you know me.”

“Mmm?” Despite urging me to drink, Nicholas didn’t raise a toast; he got straight to drinking. He was like a dandy when he kept his mouth shut, but his expression and behavior were...childish? Comical? Along those lines. “This is why! See?”

Nicholas produced a card and put it on the table. It was my card—the ☆7 one that Cyclo had issued as an award.

“Gaaah!”

*Cell AGAIN?!*

“This is you, isn’t it, Ryota Sato? I couldn’t tell at first! This card’s just so crappy.”

“Crappy?”

“It’s not like you at all! It doesn’t have a tenth, no, a *hundredth* of the real

Ryota aura!”

“Aura...? I mean, it’s a card.”

Whether I had one or not, it was a ridiculous to expect that from a trading card.

Either way, that aside, I looked at the card. It made sense how he knew my name and face now.

“C’mon, drink, drink! Chug, chug!” Nicholas urged me to drink, so I took a sip.

Because of how he’d ordered, I had no idea what drink it was, but I could tell that it was distilled alcohol. It was refreshing and easy to drink.

“Maaan, I never thought I’d run into you here. I’ve wanted to meet you since forever, y’know?”

“You wanted to?”

“The boss of the Ryota Family, the Untouchable Ryota Sato!”

“Untouchable? What’s that?”

“It’s you, man! Whenever people are unreasonable near you, you interfere. You don’t just stop them; you even curse them with bad luck, right?!”

“Oh...”

Come to think of it, I had heard things like that. People often said that lately, especially after the Clifford Family stuff.

“So people call you Untouchable. ’Cause they know better than to get near you.”

“Makes sense. Not exactly a welcome title, though.”

“Hey, man, wanna fight me?”

“...Come again?”

“Get your ears checked. I’m saying I wanna fight! If you ran into a ☆7 adventurer, wouldn’t you wanna fight them?”

“Absolutely not! What are you, from a warrior race, or something?” I put down my glass and refused outright. “No fighting. I have no reason to fight you.”

“Why not?! C’mon, just a little, yeah? A tiny little!”

“Pester me all you want; the answer is still no.”

“Just until one of us goes down. C’mon!”

“That sounds like a serious fight! But no.”

“Whyyy?! Let’s fiiiight!” Nicholas started throwing a tantrum.

“What are you, a kid?!”

A gentleman’s face, a refined voice—but the words and behavior of a child being selfish. The way he acted quickly tired me out.

“I know what to do,” he said. Sweat trailed down my back. Nicholas stopped his tantrum and rose to his feet like the living dead. “You just fought those guys before. I’m gonna go mess with the same waitress—”

“Stop,” I quietly, but firmly warned him.

Nicholas, who still looked ready to attack the waitress who was busily rushing around the restaurant, ground to a halt and looked at me. His eyes had a devious gleam.

“Stop?”

I remembered what Nicholas had told me.



*Untouchable.* When people misbehaved, I wouldn't just interfere; I would curse them with bad luck.

When I remembered that, I glared and warned him, "Yeah. If you do that...I'll never, ever fight you, no matter what happens."

His motivation instantly faded, he sat back in his chair, and he began to beg, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, hey! Don't be like that! Okay... If I try to provoke you on purpose, you'll just do the opposite, huh?"

"..."

"Hmm... Mmgh..." He groaned and grumbled. Then, he held his head and let out a weird scream. "Gaaaah!"

*He really is just like a giant child.*

Finally, he sighed. "Ah, fine. Guess I just gotta give up."

"Why do you want to fight me, anyway?"

"You're strong, right?"

"...Yeah, maybe a little."

"When I fight strong people, y'know...my crotch starts tingling..."

"Come again?"

"It gets all sensitive, like it wants to burst, and then, aaaaaah... It gets to where it's just about to explode—"

"You're a pervert!"

There was a pervert here, and a dangerous one at that.

"Don't you understand? It's a lot like when you're with a woman, but it's ten times—"

“I get it, geez! I knew you were that kind of pervert the moment you said it!”

*Also, don't explain it! That's just creepy!*

Nicholas sighed again. He slumped onto the table, looked up to me pleadingly, and asked, “Hey... What do I have to do to get you to fight me?”

*An adult, but a kid... I guess you could call this guy a kiddult. But that almost sounds cute, so no.*

“I would really appreciate it if you just gave up.”

“I'll never give up! No matter what!”

“Stop trying to say cool lines. You're making it sound like I'll have to fight you someday.”

He didn't seem like he'd force me into a fight. Horrifying pervert though he was, I decided he was harmless and joined him in drinking.

Just then, there was a commotion at the restaurant's entrance.

“Wh-What do you think you're doing?!”

I looked to see what was going on this time. The debt collectors were back.

There were more of them this time. Had they brought friends to try and get their revenge?

The thugs seized the woman from before and demanded with a threatening tone, “Where's the guy from before?!”

“U-Umm...”

“Answer me!”

“Eek!”

The man raised a hand and slapped her on the cheek, causing her to lose

balance and fall.

*You bastards...*

“Hey, hey! Hey!” Nicholas sprung into action before I could. He jumped up and ran over to the entrance to confront them.

I decided to wait and watch. If he wanted to challenge me, a “☆7,” then he should be strong. Surely he could handle this. But this led to surprising results.

One of the men bowed his head and said, “B-Boss! It’s so good to see you!”

The others followed suit all at once.

“Yeah, it’s so great to see you here!”

*Wait. Boss?*

“Hey, hey, hey. What the heck are you all doing?”

“Huh? I mean, we’re just collecting... This lady borrowed money from us.”

“I literally saw her repaying you. What the hell do you think you’re doing to a dear customer who repaid us?”

“W-Well...”

The man stood still and straight, but he began to tremble.

His lackeys did the same. They were scared stiff, as if they’d just encountered a terrifying monster.

When the man offered no answer, Nicholas punched him. It came with no warning. He spun in the air as he flew out of the restaurant.

Nicholas slowly walked over and stood in front of his victim. Then, he kicked him. He kicked, kicked, and stomped, torturing the guy. After delivering much pain, Nicholas squatted down and lifted his head up by the hair.

“I keep telling you, man. If they don’t pay us back, they’re just customers. When they pay us back, they’re *dear* customers.”

“Agh...”

“So? What the hell do you think you’re doing to a dear customer? Huh?”

“St...op...”

“Huh?!”

He slammed the man’s head back into the ground. Then, he picked it up again and—

It was then that I had to intervene.

I put a hand between the man’s head and the ground, catching him. It was a heavy slam. If I hadn’t stopped him, the guy’s head might’ve been pounded into mush like a tomato.

“What?” Nicholas demanded.

“I think that’s enough.”

“This guy’s my henchman. I’m teaching him what happens when a henchman messes up. You get it?”

“There’s no point if you kill him. That’s a wasted lesson.”

“Wasted?” Nicholas tilted his head and looked up in thought. “Yeah. You’re right.” He then smiled and let go of the guy’s head. He stood up and gazed right at me. “Yeah, yeah! You are absolutely right. If I kill him, then the lesson’s wasted, yup.”

“I’m glad you understand.”

That was a relief. At the least, we’d avoided a tragedy that would’ve left an

awful taste in my mouth.

“Man, you sure are a good guy. Are you sure you don’t wanna fight me right now?”

There was almost a charm to how Nicholas acted. I wondered if he’d infected me.

“If you’d ignored that scene, you might’ve gotten to fight me.”

“Whuh?”

“If I’d trounced your henchmen and you came to punish me as their boss, we might’ve fought, right?”

“...Aaaagh! I messed up bad! One more time! Let’s do it again—”

“Also, going out of your way to contrive that situation again would just make me refuse to fight you.”

“Gaaaaaah!” Nicholas held his head in frustration. “Damn it... God is a cruel one.” He slumped over sadly.

*Yeah. There’s a charm to this guy.*

## 177. Business as Usual

After we'd finished eating and drinking, I decided to make an early exit—especially since I was drawing a lot of attention. When I paid at the register and left, the woman I'd helped before ran after me.

"E-Excuse me!"

"Hm?"

"Thank you! You saved me, even though I'm a stranger... I don't know how I can repay you."

"Don't worry about it. It was just a coincidence."

"A coincidence?"

"Yeah. I happened to be there, and I happened to have the means to help you."

Indeed, a total coincidence. It wasn't as if I was expecting it.

"But..."

"Someone I know once said something. 'Someone was in trouble, and someone with the power to help was there.' That's all there is to it."

"But still...thank you! I swear, I'll repay you someday!"

"Okay, but..."

"I swear!"

She gazed at me with earnest eyes. Her enthusiasm was no joke. I could tell that she would do anything it took.

“...Okay. Well, my name is Ryota Sato. I usually live in Cyclo.”

“Huh?”

“If you want to repay me, then I won’t stop you, but don’t push yourself too much. I won’t run or hide.”

“O-Okay...”

“If you *do* push yourself and end up in trouble somehow, then someone like me might end up having to interrupt again,” I said jokingly with a wink.

She stared blankly at me for a moment. Then, she bowed deeply again.

“Okay! Thank you!”

After that, I watched her go back into the restaurant, and I got back to walking away.

*Tap tap. Tap tap. Tap tap.*

There were two people’s worth of footsteps. Someone was following behind me. When I stopped, so did they.

I’m sure I don’t have to tell you, but the person following me was Nicholas.

“Why are you following me?”

“That was cool, dude! You sounded so cool!”

“Not really.”

“That girl was totally in love with you. If you tried, you could totally get laid!”

“I didn’t say it because I—”

“I fell in love with you, too. I’m all wet!”

“I *definitely* didn’t say it for that!” I shuddered.

“Hey, how about we drink back at my place? You don’t wanna fight, but drinking is cool, right?”

“You’re inviting someone you just met back to your house?” I chuckled.

“Yeah! Going out is cool and all, but drinking at home is the best. It’s convenient when you can get hella drunk and just conk out right there.”

“You’re just assuming you’ll get that drunk?!”

“C’mon, let’s get back to drinking!”

Nicholas locked arms with me. He was really forceful.

And so, he dragged me away.

I didn’t mind guys like him. It’s a lot easier to hang out with someone who isn’t secretly scheming. As for being pushed around...well, I could accept this much.

We went to an old district in the city. Unlike the fresh and new buildings of downtown, the ones here were all run-down and shabby.

“Do we have to go through this area?” I asked.

“This is where I live, dude!”

“Here?”

“See? Here we are! This is my place.”

Nicholas took me to an old building.

It was maintained well enough, but anyone could tell at a glance that it was getting on in years. It could easily be fifty, no, a hundred years old.

“You live here?”

“Yeah.”



“...Why? You could live in a mansion instead of a dilapidated place like this, couldn't you?”

He was probably the leader of a Family, with countless henchmen. We'd only just met, but as far as I could tell, he was some kind of mafia-like Family's boss, so he should be able to afford a nicer place.

And yet he was living in a shoddy shack that was probably a hundred years old.

“You don't get it at all. This here is the oldest building in Methylene!”

“The oldest?”

“Yeah! It was built when this city was first founded. All the others from back then are gone, so this is the oldest.”

“The oldest... Huh. You did order ‘the oldest alcohol’ they had earlier, huh?”

“Sure did. Do you know what the greatest luxury in the world is, dude? Time,” he said.

“Time...” I repeated to myself.

“You can make as many good things as you like, even the best things. We humans, if we put our minds to it, we can make one thing after another.”

“I get it. You can't make old things.”

“Yeah. It takes time for a thing to be old, so humans can't do anything about that. That's why it's the biggest luxury.”

“Makes sense.” Old alcohol, old homes. I had to wonder why he was so interested in that, but it made enough sense. “That must be an expensive preference, though.”

“I've got more than enough money. I run a sort of jack-of-all-trades business

in this city. We do whatever is needed, and we make money.”

“You’re not an adventurer?”

I could tell when he’d locked arms with me: Nicholas was strong. Probably equal to Neptune, who was the strongest person I’d met so far.

My impression was that all of the strongest people in this world were adventurers, so I’d assumed he was one as well.

“Thing is, I’m a Failure.”

“Wow. I had no idea.”

That was a surprise. The second page of your stats, unrelated to your strength, was drop stats. When people had F’s across the board there, they were called Failures. They couldn’t get drops in dungeons even if they tried. It was a bit of a derogatory term.

“No idea...” I repeated.

“Forget that, though. Let’s go in and drink!”

When Nicholas took my hand and tried to lead me inside, someone ran out of cover and stopped him.

“B-Boss...”

“What?” Nicholas immediately looked displeased. He opened an eye wide and contorted his lips furiously.

A man had appeared. I hadn’t met him before, but I could sense it. He was one of Nicholas’s henchmen, just like the guys he’d chastised earlier.

He timidly approached Nicholas.

“What do you want?” Nicholas demanded.

After glancing at me, the guy whispered into his ear, "You see..." Nicholas's earlier displeasure from being interrupted gradually turned into surprise, and then finally into a wicked smirk. "...So I'm told."

"Gotcha. Tell them we'll do it."

"Are you sure, Boss? There's no pay..."

"Wanna say that again?"

"I'm sorry, sir! Understood! I'll let them know!"

When Nicholas glared at him, the man straightened up, saluted him, and just about ran away.

*What? What's going on?*

I reflexively leaned my upper body back. Just then, something sharp and chilling grazed the tip of my nose.

I kicked off the ground and jumped away. As I landed, I grasped the situation. Nicholas had whipped out a dagger out of nowhere and swung it horizontally at me.

The tip of it emitted a reddish-purple aura. That weapon looked like bad news, and it had just grazed the tip of my nose.

"What are you doing?!"

"I just got a job."

"A job?"

"Yeah. My usual top customer made a request to get rid of a certain guy."

*A certain guy... Obviously, me.*

"I kill often, so it's just business as usual."

*“That’s business as usual to you?!”* I retorted. Nicholas licked the blade with ecstasy on his face.

*Oh, man. Those are crazy eyes.*

*“Now I can finally fight you... This is just business as usual, after all!”*

*“Kh!”*

His figure seemed to flicker—and then, he appeared right in front of me. He’d stepped forth at super speed; that must be A-rank speed.

There was a flash of steel, once again perfectly horizontal. I squatted to evade it.

*Rrrumble... Boom!*

There was a boom behind me. I was shocked to realize that Nicholas had cut the building behind me—the oldest one in this city, the one he’d just invited me into—in half. The two parts separated at the angle he’d sliced.

His power was incredible, too. Or was it an attribute of the weapon? Either way, he was a formidable foe.

*“Ooh... Yeah, yeah, yeah, that’s the good stuff! I’ve always wanted to fight someone like you!”*

Nicholas charged at me, his eyes still crazed.

I watched calmly, evaded the slash, and slipped forth to counter-punch him in the stomach. It went deep into his gut, launching him away just as fast as he’d charged in.

He bounced with the momentum of a Superball. After crashing through and destroying several old, empty buildings, Nicholas finally fell.

My full-power blow was a perfect hit.

*Surely he won't stand up after that—*

“Ow, that hurt! Heheh!” Nicholas stood up. Though he was writhing in pain as he did, he was still grinning.

He continued his charge.

It was extremely fast. His dagger also looked ominous, like it'd hurt me in more ways than just cutting if it made contact with me, but I calmly fended it off and countered.

For a fifth time, I struck him and blew him away.

“S-Surely you can't possibly get back up—”

“Wooooooooohoo!”

Nicholas charged and leaped from the debris of a destroyed building. All the while, he cheered triumphantly.

“You must be kidding!”

I braced myself for his next attack, but it did not come. When he landed, he did not move anymore.

“...”

Slowly, guarded and wary, I approached to check on him.

Nicholas lay sprawled out on the debris, unconscious. His well-tailored clothes were bloody from his vomiting blood, and they were torn in the torso from where I'd hit him.

Though he'd fainted from taking too much damage to bear, his face bore a big, satisfied grin.

“Phew... Should be fine now. But...” I looked around.

This corner of the city was full of old buildings. It was devoid of people, though, probably because Nicholas had bought all the property.

His slashes had destroyed far more than my attacks. It was all basically ruined by now.

“I won, but if any of those swings had hit me...” I shuddered at the thought of it.

## 178. Self-Destruction

“Bweheheh, I loost...” Nicholas said with a weird laugh as he lay upon the ruins.

*I beat that guy up with all my strength, but he’s still so energetic...*

“You really are incredible, man. I knew I had an eye for talent.”

“R-Really?”

“Hey, dude...” Nicholas sat up on the ground, put an arm on one upright knee, and smiled. “Let’s do this again sometime!”

“Again?”

“Yeah! It’s been a long time since I had such a satisfying little fight.”

“Little...?” I surveyed our surroundings. Everything was basically ruins now. We’d almost killed each other in that “little” fight. In terms of damage, it definitely wasn’t little.

Not to say I was *unsatisfied*, but that wasn’t something I’d call *satisfying*.

“C’mon, you wanna? You wanna?”

“No, I’d rather—”

“All right, it’s settled. Let’s go drinking! I know a joint with super-aged meat. Let’s go have some old meat and old liquor.”

“W-W-Wait a second. You’re moving way too fast here. What happened to ‘business as usual’?” I protested.

“Shop’s closed for the day. I don’t do overtime.”

Nicholas half-forcibly tried to drag me off.

When I looked closer, I noticed he was struggling to stand up straight. He was so hurt that he couldn't walk in a straight line, either. If I wanted to shake him off, I could do it with ease.

"Hoo, man, I feel so much better. I came twice during that little fight."

A pervert, but a carefree one. I doubted I'd be close friends with him, but I didn't hate the guy.

*Might as well join him for drinks,* I thought to myself as I walked with him.

"Also, what is super-aged meat?" I asked him.

"You heard of a dungeon called Bromine? It's in Hetero. Super-aged meat is meat dropped and processed in Bromine."

"Processed...in the dungeon?"

"You know how things that drop in dungeons turn into new monsters when they're left alone, yeah?"

"Yeah."

I recalled the slime families from Tellurium. Slime families dropped multiple potatoes at once, but the size and quality of the potatoes varied greatly based on your drop stat. Sometimes, you might even get worthless garbage potatoes. When they were left in a dungeon, they'd create new slime families.

Many adventurers in this world specialized their stats and gear toward farming particular floors.

Though we were strictly forbidden from spawning monsters on the wrong floors, there was nothing wrong with abandoning items on the floor they came from. In fact, that was welcomed due to the added monsters.



“They use that. Leave the meat drop there and spawn a monster when it’s about to rot. Defeat that monster and get the meat again.”

“Why would they do something that sounds so...tedious?”

“Meat tastes best when it’s been aged, man.”

“Hmm... Well, maybe.”

I heard that argument often, though I didn’t understand it.

“Let the meat start to rot, and revive the monster right when the flavor’s starting to come out. The flavor stays, and it turns nice and fresh again.”

“Does it really?”

“Yeah! They call that reincarnation. Repeat it one, two, or three times, and the meat gets tastier every time.”

“Whoa...”

“But it’s not easy. You gotta have an eye for the meat’s freshness level, and you won’t always get your drop back. Even with A-rank drops, you can’t *always* get a drop, y’know?”

“Right.”

“That’s why the ones with more reincarnations go for higher prices.”

“Huh.”

I was kind of amazed. I could see why they cost so much.

Each added reincarnation introduced another possible point of failure. If you failed, all of your effort to that point would go *poof*. That reminded me of weapon upgrade systems in some online games.

That was what made it so expensive and precious.

At the same time, I understood why Nicholas liked it. In a way, it was like alcohol.

He liked old things. As someone who believed that time was the greatest luxury of all, it made total sense why he enjoyed it.

Nicholas told me all about super-aged meat while we walked together. He lectured me about how delicious it was. Eventually, I became curious about the taste.

We left the nearly ruined district and returned to the busy downtown.

There, we saw the woman I'd helped at the restaurant.

"Oh, sir!" She must've been searching for me, because she came running when we made eye contact.

"What's up?"

"This was in your seat. I was wondering if you'd forgotten it," she said, handing me my gun.

"Oh? Man, I just realized you didn't use any weapons earlier!" Nicholas shouted.

"Sure didn't."

"No fair!"

"F-Fair?"

"Let's fight again, but you use that this time. Round two! Right here, right now!"

"No way..."

*Didn't you say you don't do overtime?* I thought to myself as I tried to accept

the gun.

But then, I realized something.

I had a gun already—my gun.

One. Not two, but one. Add the one the woman was handing me, and that made two.

That delayed my reaction. I'd had two guns for so long that it took me a moment to realize.

The gun glowed. The barrel cracked, and light poured out from within. By the time I felt a chill at the sight of it, it was too late.

The world stopped...no, slowed down.

Amid a world that seemed to move frame by frame, the other two had yet to react.

Only I knew what this light meant. It was a terrorist bomb meant to kill me, using the woman as the vehicle.

The moment I realized that, I took out my Absolute Rock stone.



After the dazzling light had engulfed our surroundings, I withstood the burning pain and opened my eyes. Nicholas was in front of me.

"Hey, are you okay, dude?" he worried, through the Absolute Rock invincibility.

I took a deep breath and pulled out my gun. I fired multiple limitless recovery

rounds into myself—the damage was so great that I *had* to—and exhaled all of the air that had collected in my lungs. Then, I took a moment to breathe.

“I’m fine. How about you?”

“All good here, thanks to this thing you gave me.” Nicholas put the Absolute Rock stone on his palm and held it out to me.

I’d thrust it into his hands and activated it during the moment the light had poured out.

I knew that light was dangerous. It might’ve been too much for him, already wounded from our fight, to withstand. But because I’d activated the Absolute Rock stone, he made it out just fine.

The same could not be said for our surroundings, though. While the buildings around us hadn’t been damaged, the air was different.

It was almost chilling how *empty* it felt. Almost like when a typhoon passes through and cleans up all the dirt, leaving the air feeling simultaneously refreshing and chillingly empty.

“What just happened?” I asked.

“Someone’s trying to kill you, bro.”

“What?” I looked at Nicholas and shuddered.

His smile was different from before. It was still a smile, but there was chilling malice in it.

“And they used me as bait,” he continued.

“...So they hoped that you’d kill me, but even if you hadn’t, the second attack would’ve dealt with me once I was weakened.”

“Exactly.”

“ ... ”

Nicholas smiled, though his eyes were anything but happy. He looked pissed off that he'd been used.

“I just feel bad for that poor lady,” he said. “She didn't deserve to get caught up in this.”

“Oh, no worries there.”

“Whuh?”

While Nicholas looked at me blankly, the woman poked her head out of my pocket and took a big gasp of air. “Haaah!” It almost looked like a freshly severed head was sticking out of there.

“What the hell is that?”

“I sheltered her in my pocket.”

“Holy crap. Good stuff!”

“ ... ”

Even if you use the Absolute Rock stone, that doesn't mean you're perfectly invincible. I'd given the stone to Nicholas, who was wounded but strong, and sheltered the woman—who was just a normal person—in my pocket.

Then, I withstood the magic to the best of my ability. It was a split-second decision, but it seemed it had worked out just fine.

Knowing that, I breathed a sigh of relief. Then, rage billowed up.

I had a feeling that I knew, but I decided to ask, “Nicholas. Who made that request?”

The answer he gave me was exactly what I'd expected: Linus Ronin. The

Methylene Dungeon Association chief who Cell and I had been driving into a corner.

*He's going to have to pay for this one.*

## 179. Untouchable

I finally let the waitress out of my pocket.

“Be careful. It might be better for you to go back in and come out feet-first.”

“I’ll be fine. Just a little more, and—Eep!”

We’d gotten her upper body out fine, but when her legs finally came out, her feet got caught on the edge of my pocket. This led to her tripping, losing her balance, and falling forward.

“Whoa. New underwear, huh?” Nicholas said next to me, disappointed. “Dude, you gotta wear old undies. It’s better if you take the time to wear those things out. New ones just won’t—”

Indeed, my pants had fallen along with the waitress. I ignored Nicholas’s unwanted opinions and rushed to pull them back up.

“I-I’m sorry! How rude of me!” she apologized.

“No, no. Don’t worry about it.”

“But I really am sorry!”

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

*Awkward.*

We both knew it was a total accident, but having my pants pulled down and underwear seen (gawked at, rather) was beyond awkward.

The one who saved us from the mutual silence was Nicholas, who had failed

spectacularly at reading the room.

“Man, he sure used me. Heheh, me, of all people.”

Those words pulled me back to reality.

“Used you... Does that mean you know who did it?”

“Yeah. He’s the same guy who asked me to kill you.”

“How do you know?”

“He made a trap modeled after your weapon; that means he’s been after you for a while, right? I’ve heard about you guys’ little spat.”

*You guys... He means me and Linus.*

“It might be more than a little spat,” I replied.

“Yeah, maybe. You took one of his dungeons from him, after all.”

“So he’s held a grudge since then and prepared that trap just in case he got the opportunity to use it?”

“That, or all the stuff that’s happened was just for the sake of bringing you here.”

“Huh? Yeah, maybe... That is a possibility.”

I was famous for sticking my nose into things often. And while I couldn’t be certain about this, the fact that Cell was so obsessed with me—the fact that he was having *statues* made of me—probably added to that fame.

If anyone messed with Cyclo, I’d step in. It wouldn’t be strange for him to know that and take advantage of it.

Yet...the woman.

Nicholas was to be expected; it was a request made to him, after all. He was



an outlaw and a guy who did any work asked of him. When asked to assassinate someone, he gleefully accepted. That made sense.

But the waitress was different. Linus had gotten an unrelated person involved in this.

It made me mad. Furious, even.

“What are you gonna do? Kill him?” Nicholas asked.

“...No.”

“Whoa, what a softy! You gotta kill a guy when he goes too far.”

“More importantly...”

I thought to myself. I was Untouchable. Or at least, people called me that.

When people did bad things where I could see them, the resulting backlash would make their situation worse. I *made* it worse. That was how I’d gotten that title.

And I wanted to do just that now. Normally, it was just the natural result of things. This time, though, I wanted to do it on purpose. I thought and thought, trying to find a way to intentionally make Linus’s life worse.

I considered everything I’d learned about the city of Methylene since I came here.

“Say, about Cobalt...”

“Yeah?”

“Is it a profitable dungeon? In terms of drops?”

“Hmm, I dunno. You know how I am, so I don’t go in—”

“It’s very profitable,” the woman answered for Nicholas. “Many floors drop

copper. A sizable number of our regulars have been able to build homes with the profits.”

“Copper, huh? All right.”

*As I recall, copper was thirty times more expensive than iron. In video games, iron equipment is typically more expensive than bronze, but it's the opposite for the material itself.*

And said copper was in Cobalt.

“...Okay. I've made up my mind.”

“What are you gonna do?”

I smirked at Nicholas.

“I think I'll stay the night in that dungeon for a while.”

“Wha?”



The next day, I went to B1 of Cobalt. Heaven sided with me, and a magic storm had started this morning.

There hadn't been many adventurers when I came yesterday, but it was even emptier now.

I took out my guns and readied them. Before I came in, I'd replaced my second gun using a tuna I had Cell order for me.

With my two guns, I mowed down zombie demons.

I thought of nothing as I killed zombie after zombie. Chunks of iron dropped

one after another, but I didn't pick them up. I left them all where they'd fallen, leaving ingots all over the dungeon.

Abandoning drops on the floor they came from wasn't a crime, so nobody would complain. After all, those drops would become the same monsters that had dropped them, adding to the total number on the floor.

They'd turn into more zombie demons while the normal number of zombie demons continued to respawn.

I killed them all and once again abandoned the iron ingots. And those iron ingots turned into more zombie demons.

The number of monsters increased dramatically.

Adventurers were troubled by the spiking population. Those trying to pass through to the next floor were blocked by a crowd of monsters.

Yet the monsters kept on multiplying.

Defeat, abandon, multiply.

By noon, B1 of Cobalt was so teeming with monsters that even the term monster house was an understatement. It was then that I stopped.

I sat down in a place where I could see the entrance and equipped the slime's tear. This item reflected monster attacks.

I'd obtained this back when I had S-rank HP and vitality, at which point I'd used it to farm monsters while I slept.

Now, my HP and vitality were both SS. Trash mobs hurt me even less now, allowing me to reflect more damage.

I plopped down with the tear equipped and did nothing.

Zombie demons attacked me and died from the automatic counters.

I continued to do nothing.

Having the iron ingots nearby would get in the way of me relaxing, so I threw them away from me, but nothing more. As I relaxed, the zombies increased.

Before long, I didn't even need to do that much, because the zombies naturally pushed the ingots away in their attempts to attack me.

I just relaxed there in the dungeon.

A pattern began to emerge, creating an infinite loop of zombie demon births and deaths.

At night, there were so many that adventurers couldn't even enter the dungeon, let alone go to the next floor.

Thus, B1 of Cobalt had become a sea of monsters.

## 180. Just Sitting There

Adventurers clamored outside of Cobalt, unable to enter.

The dungeon entrance was crammed full of iron—specifically, the iron ingots dropped on B1 of the dungeon. They blocked the way like a collapsed tower of coins, barring all entry and exit.

“Hey, quit wasting time and get those things out of the way!”

“I can’t!”

“Yeah! No matter how many we move, they keep coming back... They’re appearing faster than we can move them!”

“Then get more people!”

“But we can’t! There isn’t enough space at the entrance for more people to work!”

Some people tried to move it all, like trying to clear out landslide rubble. But as the people doing the work had complained, iron ingots flooded out faster than they could move them, and the entrance itself didn’t give them much room to work.

They’d cleared away nearly a thousand ingots by now, but they weren’t making any headway.

The adventurers started to get mad. Not being able to go into dungeons meant not being able to make money. I couldn’t blame them for getting mad.

“What is this? What the heck is going on here?!”

“I heard from someone who got out before it filled up. Ryota Sato is in there.”

“You mean the Untouchable leader of the Ryota Family?”

“Yeah. He’s just sitting there, but apparently, he has an ability that reflects attacks. Monsters attack him and die on their own, and that’s what led to this.”

“Why’s he doing that?”

“Well...” The adventurer put a hand over his mouth to stifle his voice. “That guy says someone tried to assassinate him last night.”

“Assassinate?!”

“Yeah. Apparently, they tricked a woman into giving him an explosive.”

“What idiot would do that?! Everyone knows that’ll just earn the Untouchable’s ire!”

“You’ve heard the rumors, right?”

“Rumors? You mean...the ones about dungeon debris being planted in Cyclo’s dungeons?”

“Yeah.”

“So you’re saying it was Linus Ronin? What is he, stupid?!” The adventurer who’d been yelling this whole time got even angrier. The one telling him about it kept his voice down, but there was no point now. All ears were on their conversation. “What happens when you trick a lady into blowing a guy up?! Exactly this!”

“Yeah, exactly this. The Untouchable said it was too dangerous with people trying to kill him, so his only choice was to hide in the dungeon. And since he doesn’t know when they’ll try again, he can’t stop his automatic counters.”

“And he’s got good reason, too! Damn it, Linus...”

The adventurer spat. Others piped up in frustration.

Countless voices denounced Linus one after another.



In the Methylene Dungeon Association office, Linus furiously threw aside the documents he'd just skimmed. Nearly all of them were grievances.

Grievances from adventurers, grievances from the shops that bought their drops... All of the complaints about the profitable dungeon Cobalt's shutdown had been sent to him.

They were ostensibly requests for him to do something as chief, but it was evident that they were all blaming him in a roundabout way. Despite it being his own fault, now that he was in the line of fire for his misdeeds, Linus furiously tossed the papers aside.

Not just the documents, either; he threw everything he laid eyes on, letting his rage explode.

It was then that Nicholas visited him.

"Heya."

When he appeared before the enraged Linus, Nicholas was as aloof and impenetrable as ever.

"How's it hanging?"

"What are you doing here?!"

"Not much. Just wanted to thank you."

“Thank me?”

“For giving me a reason to fight him. Thanks, dude. I had a nice little sparring match for once.”

“How dare you show your face after you failed me?!”

“Don’t blame me. When you pick a fight with a guy and lose, it only makes sense to obey him.”

“Obey?”

“Yeah. He sent me here with a message.”

Nicholas kept smiling, but Linus’s face tensed up.

“He says the ball’s in your court now.”

“In my court... What? Does he want money, or something?” Linus demanded.

Nicholas laughed scornfully at that.

“What, then? An apology?!”

This time, he shrugged in exasperation.

“Look, I passed on the message. I’m gonna head out now.”

Still aloof, Nicholas turned to leave. Just as he put a hand on the office doorknob, he stopped and said, “Oh, yeah. I hear Cobalt’s dungeon master is forecast to appear tomorrow. It’s expected on the bottom floor.”

“...!”

“Later.”

After saying what he wanted to say, Nicholas left for good this time.

Left alone, Linus began to tremble.



Pure fear.

Dungeon masters were difficult-to-handle beasts that could change the ecology and drops of a dungeon if left alone. Because of their difficulty, the forecast was a serious matter.

And one had just been forecast now, in a dungeon that nobody could enter.

Yet more justified bashing awaited Linus.



That night, Linus held his head at his desk, surrounded by documents. He looked as if he'd aged ten years in the span of half a day.

Cell entered the room.

"Coming in."

"Wh-What do you...?"

Cell walked boldly over to Linus and looked down upon him arrogantly.

"I see you're getting quite the pen-lashing."

"Kh... I-It has nothing to do with you."

"True. But I just can't bear the sight of it."

"What?" Linus was suspicious. Cell threw a document down in front of him.

"What is this?"

"Read it."

On Cell's urging, Linus read the document. He looked suspicious at first, but his face gradually turned pale.

“Th-This is...”

“I hate to kick a man while he’s down. That is an anonymous report that you embezzled Indole’s money.”

“...”

“Almost all of the money meant to support Indole ended up in your coffers. I received this from someone who wants to use this opportunity to bring you down.”

“Wh-What do you plan to do?”

“I have no interest in seeing this brought to light, even if it isn’t my city. But things have already developed this much. As someone with so many enemies, you’re sure to have much more dirt dug up on you.”

*Isn’t that right?* Cell’s eyes seemed to ask.

Linus recoiled. Between the lines, Cell was telling him that the dirt had already been dug up—and that he knew what it was.

No, even if he didn’t say it, Linus knew. As a stakeholder in the dungeon debris incident, there was no way that he didn’t know. If Cell revealed that now, Linus would be well and truly done for.

Hesitation. Agony. Finally, resignation.

Many emotions passed through Linus’s mind until, because he knew himself and how terrifying Cell could be, he gave up.

“I will resign. Just...no more, please.”

“I’ll pass that on to Sir Sato,” Cell said before leaving.

Just before he closed the door, he glanced back at Linus. The man looked as if he’d aged ten more years, like a haggard old man.

“As impressive as ever, Sir Sato.” Cell gazed forward with reverent eyes as he walked on, thinking about the man who had not come with him. “You forced the man into resignation by just sitting there. Truly a feat that only you can accomplish.”

The aristocratic Ryota fanatic became even more infatuated with him after this.

## 181. Reparation

At the entrance to Cobalt, I used annihilation rounds to obliterate the iron ingots that had blocked the way and stepped out. There, as expected, many adventurers had gathered.

They were people who couldn't enter the dungeon while I'd blocked it. And, also as expected, their faces were covered in rage and displeasure.

*Now, it's about time I—*

"Oh, finally came out, huh? I've been waiting."

Nicholas came from the side and locked arms with me. He'd almost jumped at me, as if we were long-time friends.

Since I didn't expect this, I had my guard down. His forcefulness caused me to stumble a little.

"Nicholas."

"Were you bored in there? You must have been. Let's go a round!"

"Well, I wasn't really—"

"Don't be like that! You were in there all day, so you must've been bored! C'mon, man! Just a little! Just a little fight is all I need," he pleaded with one hand, since his other arm was locked with mine.

*Geez, do you want to do it that badly?* I thought to myself as Cell approached me this time.

"Let him go," he said. "That is disrespectful to Sir Sato."

“Huh? Who the hell do you think you are, bud?”

“That guy is Cyclo’s—” I started to say, but Cell interrupted me.

“I am Sir Sato’s greatest believer. My name is Cell Stem.”

“Whaaat?! Believer? Why are you calling yourself that?!”

*Surely you could introduce yourself in a better way! Like you could say you’re Cyclo’s Dungeon Association chief like I was trying to say, or you could say where you’re from, or...anything!*

But he’d skipped all of that and said the most bizarre thing possible instead.

“Believer...?” Nicholas said, taken aback.

“Indeed. Take a look at this.”

Cell produced a figure from his pocket. It depicted me fighting.

“Wow. You weren’t kidding about being a believer. So does that mean you’re gonna interrupt our sparring match?”

“Of course. I mustn’t let anyone force him into unnecessary fights. If you mean to do that, then I will eliminate you.”

“That’s just what I wanted to hear. I’ll start with you—”

“Hold up, hold up. We’re not doing this here.”

I intervened in this potentially volatile situation. We had work to do, so it’d be a problem if they started fighting here.

I stopped them and urged them to at least take it somewhere else.

“Ah!”

In the process, though, I accidentally bumped into Cell. The force of it caused another figure to fall out of his pocket. Me again, of course—but it was me trying

to put something in my pocket, which was full to overflowing.

“How did you do that so fast?!”

Cell snatched up the figure and hurriedly shoved it back into his pocket.

*Seriously, what is with this guy?*

“Huh? What was wrong with that one?” Nicholas asked. He didn’t seem to understand at all.

*Of course. It’d be more of a problem if he DID understand the meaning of that one. One stalker is enough for me.*

For now, their argument seemed to have settled, so I gathered myself, left them behind, and went to the other adventurers—the adventurers who’d been stuck outside the dungeon while I monopolized B1.

The people I’d inconvenienced.

I stood before them and put a hand into my pocket. A few of them reflexively braced themselves, but I took something out of my pocket and began lining it up.

They were ingots, but not iron ones. They were the more valuable ones: copper, aluminum, and more.

I took them all out, lined them up, and piled them high.

The adventurers were wary at first, but they gradually let their guard down and watched me.

I finished taking all of it out—all of the drops that had filled my pocket to the brim, as depicted in that figure.

After I’d blocked off B1, I had gone down to the lower floors and farmed there. Using the combat skills I’d accumulated, my two guns, and my ultimate

farming magic Repetition, I'd farmed these drops.

A literal mountain of metal had formed in front of the cave.

As the adventurers looked upon me dubiously, I bowed my head to them.

"I'm sorry, everyone!"

"Sir Sato?!" Cell shrieked behind me, but I ignored him.

"I'm sorry for monopolizing the dungeon and inconveniencing you all for my own needs! It may not be much of an apology, but please take these."

"Sir Sato! There was no need for you to do that. You know exactly who's at fault."

"It doesn't change the fact that my actions caused trouble for them," I replied to Cell, still bowing my head. He gasped and recoiled slightly. Then I spoke to the adventurers again. "I want you all to take this as reparation for what I've done."

A stifling moment of silence fell upon the place.

I doubted they'd forgive me for this alone, but at least it would be material compensation. That was why I'd put these drops here.

Then...

"Hey, Quatre! You take some first."

"Huh?"

A man who looked like a veteran began dishing the ingots out.

"You're barely staying afloat, right? Hurry up and take what you need."

"O-Oh, okay. Thank you!"

A slender, timid-looking man started loading copper ingots in his magic cart.

“Oliphar and Sai, you’re up next. Your mom and dad are sick, yeah? Go sell that stuff and get ’em some medicine.”

“Got it.”

“Much obliged.”

Under the adventurer’s leadership, the mountain of drops was gradually chiseled away.

I was a little relieved. Between distributions, I spoke to him.

“Thank you.”

“Don’t worry about it. You didn’t have to do all this.”

“But—”

“I know, I know. You don’t feel any better hearing that, so we’ll accept it for you. That makes us even.”

“...Thanks.”

“So...” The man turned to me. He turned his whole body and faced me head-on. “Thank *you*.” He bowed his head just slightly.

“Huh?”

The adventurers who saw it stopped what they were doing and looked at me the same way.

“You really helped us out by forcing that guy out of his position. So many people have suffered because of him. We all knew we had to do something, but we haven’t had the opportunity.”

“There were many informants. It was hard to pick just a few,” Cell added from behind me.



“Thanks for giving us that opportunity,” the veteran said.

“Thank you!” the adventurers followed up in unison.

It was a little imposing, leaving me bewildered. While I racked my brain for a response...

“Okaaaay, all done here? Looks like you’re done. So *now* we fight!”

Nicholas locked his arm in mine from behind and once again demanded a fight.

“Wait a second. Now isn’t the time.”

“You’ve been bored in there all day! It was tedious, right? Let’s fight and get refreshed!”

“Were you even listening?! I wasn’t relaxing in there; I was farming on all the floors half the—”

“Let’s fiiiight!” Still arm-in-arm with me, Nicholas—failing to read the room once again—dragged me off.

Incidentally, he took me to an empty place where I beat the tar out of him.

## 182. The Demon Satanachia

On the bottom floor of Cobalt, B45, I stood ready for battle. There had been a report that the dungeon master would appear today.

Due to the conflict with Linus, I'd sealed off B1 and caused trouble for the people of the city.

When a dungeon master appeared, all other monsters in the dungeon would disappear. Combine that with what I'd done, and that meant the adventurers of Methylene would be out of work for the second day in a row.

To avoid that and minimize the time they were unable to farm, I waited here so that I could defeat the dungeon master as soon as it appeared.

After half a day of waiting, there was a change in the air. Other monsters disappeared, and at the same time, all other adventurers left like the tide.

Only I remained.

Immediately after, the dungeon master appeared.

Purplish blue skin, an exposed upper chest, cloth tied around the waist. Dragon-like wings, horns almost as long as its body.

It was the demon Satanachia, Cobalt's dungeon master.

Satanachia swung its giant sword down upon me. I predicted it and evaded with an oblique stance.

*Thud!*

The sword struck the floor, shaking the dungeon up and down.

“That’s some incredible power... I don’t wanna take that head-on.”

I loaded bullets into my two guns. First, as a test—“Gack!” An impact came from behind me.

I stumbled and nearly fell, but I managed to plant a foot down and stay upright. I turned around; there were three adventurers there.

All of them were women dressed like mages. They had vacant eyes as they held up their staves and cast spells.

“Why now?!” I roared and jumped to the side as hard as I could.

Satanachia had the power to control all women as it pleased. No woman was an exception; as long as one was biologically female, they could not escape its control.

I knew that because I’d gathered information to help score a quick kill. The other adventurers should have known that, too. But there were three women here.

Recalling the mages who’d been stranded in a dungeon during a magic storm, I yelled angrily, “Good grief! It’s always something!”

I guarded against the magic, evaded Satanachia’s sword swings, and loaded recovery rounds into my guns.

While fending off their ferocious assault, I fired the recovery rounds at the adventurers. They fused into sleep rounds.

One of them struck and put the target to sleep, but one of the other mages put up a magic barrier to deflect the rest of the bullets.

“Damn it! I guess you gotta react fast to be able to get this far down!”

I didn’t know if it was their own reaction time when they were being

controlled, but either way, I reloaded my next bullets.

The moment I took aim and moved to pull the trigger...

“Huh? Why am I here?” one adventurer spoke and started looking around, confused.

“Did you come back to—Ghah!”

But then, she thrust out her staff and unleashed her spell. Flames surged up and engulfed me.

“Graaaaaah!”

I reflexively crossed my arms to block the fire engulfing me and crouched down to endure.

My willpower stat still wasn't SS yet, so I'd taken hefty damage from that.

I looked up and locked eyes with Satanachia. It had a triumphant look on its face.

Then, I looked at the adventurers. They chanted their next spells, all the while giggling innocently.

Satanachia could manipulate women into doing anything... Of course—it was making their words and actions contradict. I thought they'd escaped from its control for a moment, but I'd fallen for its trap and suffered as a result.

However, as long as I knew that...

“I-I'm sorry! I didn't mean to do that!” one of the women yelled.

“You won't fool me a second time!”

I neutralized the incoming fire magic with freeze rounds, then shot fused sleep rounds at them. Their magic barrier didn't go off in time, so they were put

to sleep and fell to the floor limply.

*Now I can just focus on Satanachia—*

Suddenly, my stomach hurt, as if it was burning. When I looked, I saw spears of fire, ice, and rock had pierced my stomach, as if they'd grown from inside me.

"How...?"

When I turned around, I figured it out.

The sleeping adventurers had unleashed this magic. They were sleeping. Their eyes were closed, and they had peaceful looks on their faces.

But their bodies moved, and they attacked like any other adventurer. It was as if they were sleepwalking under Satanachia's control.

"Then I'll just have to make it so you can't move!" I swapped out my bullets. This time, I didn't hold back. With five buffering rounds loaded, I fired restraining rounds, reloaded, and fired again.

My maximum-power restraining rounds struck the three of them. Ropes of light bound them. Even while they were restrained, I kept my guns aimed at them. After watching them guardedly for a moment, I became certain that they couldn't move now.

Then, I faced Satanachia once more. A demon with giant wings and horns. It was still unwounded, and its pressure remained immense.

"Now we can fight one-on-one."

I knew I couldn't lose anymore.

This thing had caught me off guard twice. Both times, I'd boosted my focus. Now I was certain that I wouldn't lose.

I deftly, narrowly evaded the incoming sword and unleashed a cross-counter punch along the blade.

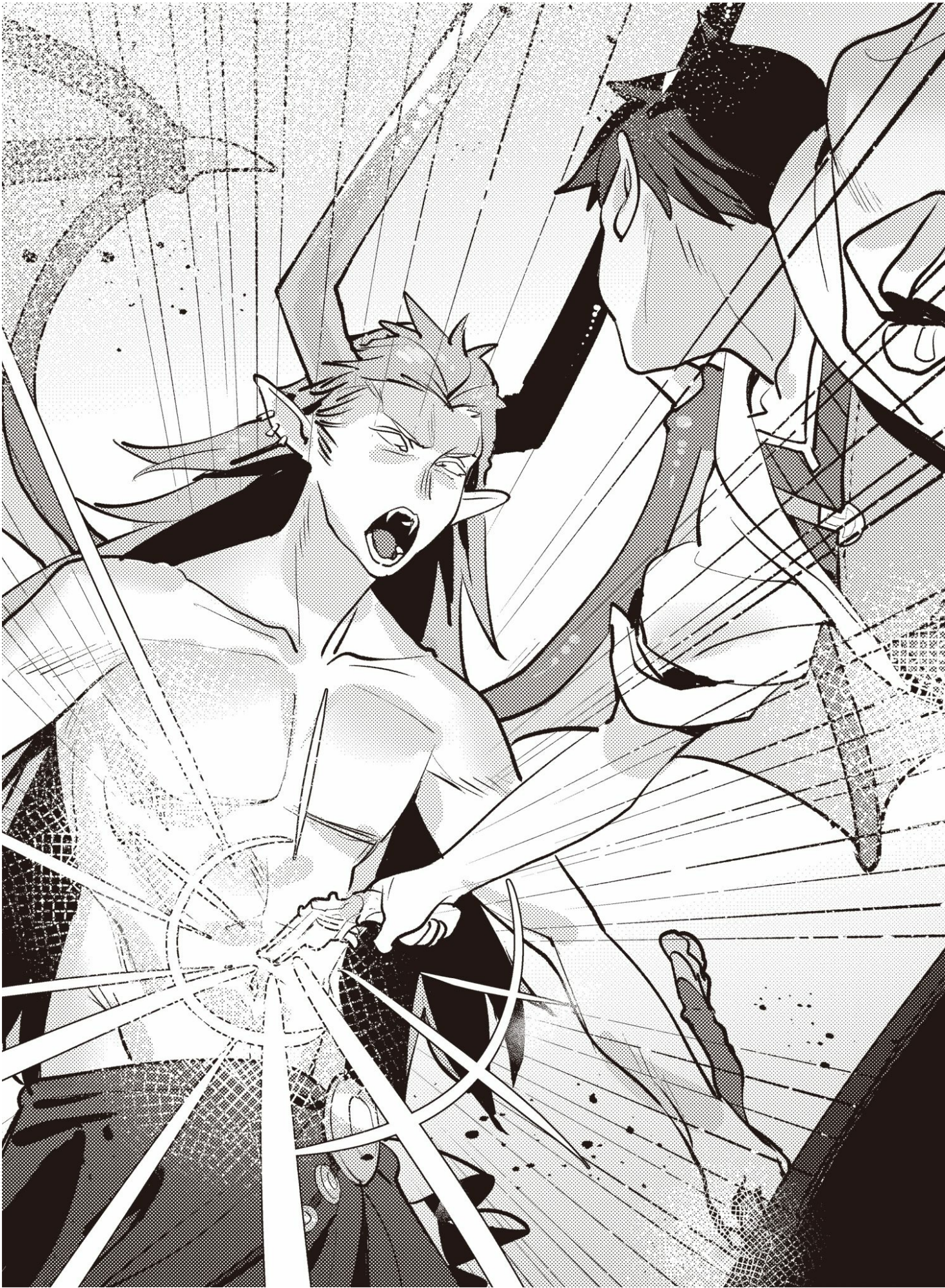
Satanachia flew away, but I caught up with ferocious speed and fired multiple bullets from point-blank range. Fused normal bullets—with tens of times the piercing power.

I fired them over and over into its abdomen.

They drilled into and gouged out Satanachia's stomach before finally piercing through.

It let out a scream of indescribable rage and flapped its dragon-like wings, but I grabbed them firmly and tore them off.







*Now, let's get those horns—no, no.*

I suppressed the abusive urges that reared their ugly head.

Sure, I was pissed off now that this thing had taken me by surprise twice, but I couldn't afford to let myself get distracted. If I let this go on long, it might surprise me again. Furthermore, the dungeon wouldn't produce drops in that time.

Instead of getting revenge, I decided to finish it off quickly. I evaded the final desperate attack unleashed by its horns and unloaded all the piercing rounds I could muster into its brow.

Demon Satanachia, ruler of all forty-five floors of Cobalt and manipulator of women, had successfully been defeated just as soon as it had appeared.



## Bonus Story: The Bunnies

“I’m kinda bored!” Alice said, trampling over the relaxed mood that had permeated the room.

On one afternoon off, Alice, Emily, and Celeste relaxed in the salon together.

A magic storm raged on this day. Magic was unusable from morning to midnight, so Celeste was naturally unable to fight. Alice’s buddy monster Boomy also could not fight at full power without magic, so she’d decided to take the day off as well.

Since Celeste and Alice would be staying in the mansion, Emily decided to follow suit. Thus, the three relaxed with Emily’s tea and fresh-baked cookies.

“Hey, hey, hey! Is there anything exciting we can do?” Alice asked, unsatisfied with relaxation alone. She sat on the sofa and flapped her legs as she complained.

“Anything exciting? Like what, exactly?” Celeste asked. She was the most directly affected by the magic storm. She lay somewhat slovenly atop the sofa.

“I dunno! Something fun.”

“Well, that’s hardly helpful. Why don’t you try giving an example? I’m up for anything.”

“Hmm, weeell... Oh!” Alice snapped and flashed a big smile. “What if Ryota wore Eve’s clothes?”

Celeste and Emily grinned wryly at Alice’s example.

“That would be exciting, I suppose...”

“It would be...something else...”

Their reaction was essentially, *Exciting is a fitting word, but...*

“Okay, what if we all wore Eve’s clothes?” Alice suggested.

“Oh, my...” Celeste sat up with a sparkle in her eye. “That does sound fun.”

“I’ll go get them!” Alice ran out of the salon. “I’m back!”

“That was fast!”

“You got them that quickly?”

“More than that, she’s already changed into them,” Celeste muttered, half amazed and half exasperated.

Alice returned almost instantly, wearing Eve’s usual clothes—the bunny-girl getup. Her shoulders were bare, and she wore tights and heels. On her head was a hairband shaped like bunny ears. Apart from the fact that her ears weren’t real, she was just like Eve.

Alice put a hand on her hip and thrust her other hand forward, making a peace sign.

There was a big cloth bag at her feet, probably containing the other suits she’d borrowed.

“I threw some carrots around and caught an Eve!”

“Is that girl okay...?”

“It’s anybody’s guess,” Emily joked.

“I brought some for everyone. C’mon, change, change!” Alice urged them.

“Sure. I’m a little interested.”

Celeste was fully on board.

“Okay...”

Emily was a little hesitant, but in the end, her interest won out.

The two of them accepted their bunny suits and moved to leave the salon.

“Where are you going?” Alice asked.

“Huh? We’re going to change clothes, no?”

“Just do it here! Ryota’s not around, and we’re all girls here.”

“...I guess you’re right.”

“Okay, then.”

Celeste and Emily began changing clothes right there. There was rustling as they took off what they were wearing and put on the bunny suits.

Shortly after, Celeste and Emily were bunny girls as well.

“How do I look?” Celeste asked as she showed her stuff confidently.

“This is...a little embarrassing...” Emily mumbled as she hid her exposed skin with her hands bashfully.

“You both look great! It’s perfect!”

Upon Alice’s praise, Celeste stood up straighter to emphasize her lovely proportions. But Emily only became more embarrassed. The bits of skin that were still exposed flushed red.

“Hey, when Ryota finishes work and gets home, let’s throw a welcome party! I bet he’ll be really happy if we’re all dressed like this!”

“Whaaat?! A-Absolutely not. I’d be too embarrassed to let Yoda see me like this!”

Emily's cheeks and skin blushed even redder.

"...Y'know, that's not a bad idea," Celeste readily agreed to it. Her feelings for Ryota made her bold.

"I know! I have just the idea."

"What is it?"

"Wait just a minute!" Emily said and ran out of the salon. Like Alice, she came back in no time.

She had changed out of the bunny girl costume and into Eve's bunny pajamas. She held carrots in both hands. Unlike the sexy bunny-girl outfit, this one was specialized toward cuteness.

"Aww, cute!" Alice clapped.

"So you borrowed a different one."

"Yep! I caught her with carrots. I'm just fine with this one."

"Okay, then I'll get one, too! This one can go on Boney!"

"A bunny skeleton... Well, it's innovative," Celeste laughed. "I think I'm fine with this one, though."

It was then that Erza and Ina entered the salon.

"Whoa! E-Everyone, what's going on? You're all dressed like Eve."

"What's with the getups? Did I miss a party?"

Since Emily and the others had taken the day off, they had little to do in their branch office, so they'd closed up shop early and gone out together.

"You got here just in time! Basically..." Alice explained things to this point and took out two bunny suits for them.

“Ooh, that does sound fun!” Ina answered promptly.

“I’ll...try one on, too.”

Erza glanced at Celeste and then accepted a bunny suit.

They, too, changed there.

“How do I look?”

“I’m so embarrassed...”

While Ina struck some seductive poses right away, Erza hid herself with her hands much like Emily had.

“Heheh, how about we wear these when Ryota gets back home and give him a little welcome party? I’m sure he’ll appreciate this little treat,” Ina said.

“Huh?” Celeste and Erza both gasped.

Meanwhile, Alice loved the idea.

“Good idea! Let’s do that!”

To match Alice’s enthusiasm, Ina took the carrots out of Emily’s pajama-clad hands and shoved them in her own and Erza’s cleavage.







“Hyahn! Wh-What are you doing, Ina?”

“*C’mon!* Every bunny needs a carrot, right?”

“Maybe, but why here...? Why... Eep...” Erza looked at her costume and the carrot again. She blushed so hard that it looked like her face would burst into flames. “No! I can’t do this, after all!”

“You might lose if you don’t, y’know?” Ina teased her. “Are you fine with that?”

“I-I...” Erza trailed off, glancing at Celeste again. “Urk... I-I’ll do it...”

“There you go! Don’t worry; I’ll show you the most effective position to put it in.”

“Ulp... Yes, please.”

Tears built up in Erza’s eyes, but she seemed determined.

“Losing? Effective? What does she mean?”

Alice cocked her head in confusion.

“Wh-Who knows...”

Celeste forced a smile and brushed her question off, but she snuck glances at the “effective positioning” lecture that Ina had begun giving Erza.

Because nobody had told them to stop, they ended up spending the whole day in bunny clothing until they all turned in for the night.

## 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 6 of *My Unique Skill Makes Me OP Even at Level 1*.

Thanks to you all, we made it to the release of the sixth volume. When a series becomes as long as this one, every single copy you purchase directly drives the next volume's release. Thank you. Thank you so, so much!

As for this volume, it's very different from past ones—in a good way. Conquering dungeons, making money from drops, getting stronger with his unique skill and special items. Sometimes punishing adventurers who do things corrupt businesses would do, receiving thanks and praise.

I've done my best to deliver a taste similar to what you've seen so far from this work and its basic concepts.

I believe any of you can rest easy and read it. Those who bought up to the fifth volume can confidently buy this one, and I hope those who only skimmed this one and found it interesting will start from the beginning.

Like the fifth volume, this one will be released alongside a manga volume: the second one! The second volume of the manga begins with Ryota obtaining stat-boosting seeds from Nihonium for the first time and continues until he obtains a gun. The early stages of clearing a dungeon are in many ways the best part as



you get so many new things. Give it a read, if you'd like!

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 writing.

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

March 2019

Author: Nazuna Miki

Formerly a wannabe voice actor, now a light novelist.

Check out the manga release, too.

Illustrator: Subachi

The kotatsu was so comfortable that now I'm wondering if I should stay in the living room during the summer to save on AC costs.

**My Unique Skill Makes Me OP Even at Level 1 vol 6**

KODANSHA COMICS Digital Edition

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