











My Unique Skill Makes Me OP Even at Level 1, 5

A VERTICAL Book

Translation: Benjamin Daughety

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

Copyright © 2019 Nazuna Miki

All rights reserved.

Publication rights for this English edition arranged through Kodansha, Ltd., Tokyo. English language version produced by Kodansha USA Publishing, LLC, 2024.

Originally published in Japan as *Reberu 1 dakedo Yuniiku Sukiru de Saikyou desu 5* by Kodansha, Ltd., Tokyo, 2019.

ISBN 978-1-64729-334-5

Printed in the United States of America

First Edition

Kodansha USA Publishing, LLC 451 Park Avenue South, 7th Floor New York, NY 10016 www.kodansha.us



CONTENTS

120. Absolute Defense	136. The Cowardly Guard Dog
121. Poison	137. As Loyal as Hachiko
122. Pandemic	138. Taking Aim
123. Two Inches per Second	139. Trust-Busting
124. A Door Unopening	140. All-Out Warfare
125. Eve's Memories	141. Sato's Sweet as Sugar
126. Bookmarking	142. Ryota's Butterfly Effect
127. I Can't Live Without You	143. Light and Darkness, Carrots and Wheat
128. The Girl Who Spewed Gold Dust	144. Aim and Fire
129. Double Record	145. Tool-Assisted Gameplay
130. The REAL Mine Craft	146. One in a Million
131. The Evil(?) Trash- Disturber	147. Ryochin
132. Harmful and Harmless	148. The Strongest Servant
133. Doggie Says Dig	149. Breaking 100,000,000 Piros
134. Chewing Bones, Chewing Arms	Extra Side-Story: The Family's Day Off

135. All-MP-Consuming Magic

120. Absolute Defense

I was taken to the meeting room in the Cyclo Dungeon Association, where Clint thanked me profusely.

"Thank you! Thank you so much, Mr. Sato! I didn't think you'd manage it!"

"You didn't trust me?"

"I'm not trying to offend you. I was grasping at straws, really. Never in history has anyone been able to stop a dungeon's death. Once it starts raining blood, it's all over. Or at least, that's what everyone thought."

"Really?"

"That's not all. You didn't just stop the blood rain, you even increased the number of monsters. That means mass production from Arsenic will speed up, which means more taxes. It's all thanks to you, Mr. Sato."

"I just did what was asked of me."

Old man Arsenic had offered to make it so Arsenic was in lunar eclipse status whenever I entered, but instead, I asked him to make it happen all the time. What's the point in taking all the benefits for myself, after all?

"Either way, thank you. Ah, right. It may not be much of a percentage, but from now on, I've decided to set aside a portion of tax proceeds from Arsenic to pay you for this."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course. Without you, we'd have lost all of Arsenic. At least let me thank

you this way."

"Then I graciously accept your offer." Now I would receive tax proceeds from both Aurum and Arsenic. Unearned passive income was always appreciated.

"And, while I know it isn't much, I'd like to offer you a year's worth of sugar—"

"Thanks, but I can't accept that," I interrupted Clint, hastily refusing his offer. A year's worth of sugar wouldn't just be unnecessary; it would actively be a huge burden on me.

☆

That night, my four friends and I celebrated a job well done at Villa di H. We ordered the day's selection of beer and raised a toast together. The taste of beer after work was so wonderful that I could picture it spreading through my body.

"Spirits..." Celeste said. "I've heard about them very rarely appearing at the bottoms of dungeons, but there's so little information on them that I don't know much."

"We never could've known it was a rare monster drop," Emily added.

"Hey, Ryota, what are the spirits like? Are they cute like my buddies?" Alice asked, putting her three buddy monsters on the table.

The slime, skeleton, and little demon ran around atop the table adorably.

"Nope, not at all. This one was a little old man-not cute at all," I replied.

"Oh, okay..."

"They may not be cute, but you can make them cute, Low Level the Second," Eve assured Alice.

"Why am I the second?!"

"That makes sense!" Emily agreed. "If they became one of Alice's buddies, they'd turn a lot cuter."

When they got some alcohol in them, my friends became talkative. Even the usually reticent Eve had a jovial smile on her face as she ate her vegetable stick treats.

"That solves one mystery, though. I always found it strange why that Absolute Rock didn't drop anything."

Celeste's words reminded me of something. "Now that you mention it, they didn't drop any items, did they?" After I'd defeated the Absolute Rock, a staircase appeared. The staircase was treated like a drop, though one that could only be obtained with my S-rank drops. "Do Absolute Rocks normally have drops?"

"Yep," she answered. "Though it's just a normal item, nothing all that useful."

"What is it?" Alice piped up.

"For some reason, this bunny has one." Eve stopped gnawing on a carrot stick for a moment to retrieve a stone from the cleavage peeking out of her bunny suit.

She placed it on the table. It looked like any old stone you'd find on the side of the road.

"What's this?" Emily asked, confused.

"Emily."

```
"Yes?"
```

Celeste whispered something to her.

"Okay," Emily agreed.

"Here goes..." Celeste took the stone in hand and kissed it.

In no time, her body started petrifying. It took all of three seconds for her to be like a statue—no, she *was* a statue.

"What's going on-"

POW!

Before I could finish asking, Emily picked up her hammer and slammed it into Celeste.

An Emily Hammer, fired off with the full power of her A-rank strength. It was a strong enough blow to make all the cups and plates on the table jump into the air.

However, Celeste was uninjured. Even when she took a strike that would break most of Arsenic's rocks in one hit, she was in one piece.

"What was that?" I asked.

"An item that makes you as hard as that boulder when you use it."

"That boulder... The Absolute Rock, you mean?"

"Yep."

"Whoooa. So you're invincible?!" Alice piped up.

"Not exactly. You can't move when you're a boulder. You can't do anything."

"Whaaaa?"

"That definitely limits its uses, then," I said.

"Yep. It's the perfect defense, but they only cost 98,000 piros each."

"That's cheap!"

"It really is..."

I knew firsthand just how tough Absolute Rocks were. They were as perfect as defenses could be. Just a hundred thousand piros was a small price to pay for that.

Still, if you couldn't do anything while you were a boulder, then that defeated the point.

After a while, Celeste turned back to normal, and the stone appeared on the table again.

"There you have it," she announced.

"I see. Doesn't seem like this'll be useful, right?" I grinned to myself, gulped down the rest of my beer, and ordered a new one.

The alcohol made my head spin. There was something there. A vision was trying to creep into my mind, but it wasn't quite taking form.

Well, I doubt it's anything important...

"If only you could move while it was active, it would at least be useful for running away."

"Then you could scram while you're safe, huh?"

"Would carrots be chewier if they turned hard, too?"

"I want to make my hammer harder. It might get even better!"

I thought to myself in silence. Move...while you're a rock? While you're a rock... While you're a rock...

Bang! I slammed my hands on the table and jumped out of my seat. "Aaaah!"

"Y-Yoda? What's the matter?"

"Maybe we can move!"

"Huh?!"

 \Rightarrow

At the usual place on the outskirts of Cyclo, I put the stone down and walked away. My friends welcomed me not with words, but with expectant eyes.

They had enough experience with me by now that they knew what I was doing. And they knew what I was after, too. That was why their eyes shone so expectantly.

We waited for a while, and the stone spawned an outsider. Naturally, it was an Absolute Rock, the rare monster of Arsenic's B30.

"Repetition." I fired off my ultimate farming magic, able to insta-kill any monster I'd beaten before, with full MP.

Despite its ultimate defenses, the Absolute Rock fell instantly and dropped another stone that looked like the one from before.

I picked it up and used it. My body turned harder, becoming a rock.

"Is it working, Yoda?" Emily asked. The others watched with bated breath.

I moved. Jumped. Spun around. Finally, I struck a heroic pose.

"Looks like I can move just fine."

"Ooooh!" everyone cheered.

"Emily, hit me."

"Okay!" Emily swung her hammer around and lunged at me.

She brought her hammer straight down. Before it could hit me, I whipped around and stuck my backside out.

Her hammer struck it. A shockwave even stronger than the last spread around us. Emily must've been holding back when we were at the pub.

But even her true full power didn't do so much as hurt me. I even had it in me to shake my butt as a joke.

"That's incredible."

"So that's what happens when you make them drop again..." Celeste mused.

"This is awesome. They're cheap, so we should all carry one around!" Alice suggested.

"Agreed. Let's make it standard equipment for the Family."

My friends chatted excitedly.

We had obtained a new, powerful piece of equipment.



121. Poison

The next morning, we came back to the usual field. After I'd made enough Absolute Rock stones for everyone, we came here as a full family to see them in action.

```
"Here I come, then."
```

"Bring it on."

Emily nodded, used the item, and turned herself into stone. Then, she spun her hammer around overhead and tried to jump at me—

THUD! But her jump didn't take her far; she fell straight down, face-first.

It was a spectacular face plant, like something straight out of a comedy.

"Are you okay, Emily?!" Celeste, who'd decided to watch from the sidelines, called out fretfully.

When Emily picked herself up off the ground, she looked unbothered. "I'm fine. It didn't hurt at all."

"Well, you are stone right now."

"She's moving weird."

Eve was right; her motions right now were weird, indeed. She might've been a pure close-ranged power fighter, but that didn't mean she was sluggish. She was usually agile with her hammer, able to leap with ease and unleash powerful blows.

But now, she fell over helplessly.

"Emily, do that again."

In response, she gazed at me sincerely and assented, "Okay." She'd realized it, too—heck, she probably felt it much more personally.

Still a rock, she backed away, spun her hammer around, and tried to jump at me.

THUD!

The results were the same, no, even worse than before. She fell down facefirst, creating a crater at the point of impact and sending cracks even further along the ground.

"Face-planted again..."

"So that's how it is, huh?" I mused.

"I think so." Emily nodded vigorously.

"What do you mean by that?" Celeste asked.

"When we're rocky, we can move just fine." Emily produced a kitchen knife and carrot out of seemingly nowhere and began peeling the carrot with practiced hands.

The carrot, peeled so perfectly that the peel was still in one piece, looked smooth and delicious.

After giving it to Eve, Emily picked up her hammer again and swung it.

"It's only when we attack that we suddenly slow down," she said.

"Wow, that's the drawback?"

"Do you wanna try, Celeste?"

"Sure."

Emily turned back to normal, and Celeste became stone this time.

"Inferno!" She tried casting her specialty magic, level-3 area magic Inferno. This spell could summon hellish flames that burned even Frankensteins to a crisp. But when she saw the result, she cried, "Th-This is awful!"

"It's like charcoal."

"So this is Inferno..."

We were all at a loss for words at the sight. Celeste's Inferno wasn't the blaze we'd come to expect. Heck, it didn't even make fire; it was little more than red-hot charcoal.

Emily smashed her hammer into Celeste.

Now that she was back to normal, her hammer swings could make the earth rumble. When she hit the stone Celeste with that, though, it did nothing to her.

"You're hard now. My hands sting!"

"But in exchange, we can't attack... I see."

Emily and Celeste reached a conclusion together. We had a good idea of the stone's characteristics now.

☆

It was midday by the time we finished preliminary testing, so we enjoyed Emily's handmade lunch.

Various foods lined the blanket atop the ground. Despite being a vinyl picnic blanket, it was as comfortable as the most luxurious carpet. The steaming pre-

prepped dishes tickled my nostrils.

Despite it being outside, this Emily Space was warmer and softer than usual.

Celeste gazed at her notes while she snacked on a sandwich. "It seems like your attacks are a lot weaker when you're stone. Like, as weak as can be."

The results of our testing were listed in those notes.

"It's hilarious how it weakens Ryota, too. He even lost to me in an armwrestling match!"

"Maybe, but this bunny's strongest weapons still work..." Eve turned to stone again and struck a seductive pose. Her natural bunny ears and sexy bunny suit were still very attractive when she was stone. I could see what she meant by her *strongest weapons*. But then she added, "...I'm joking."

You call that a joke?

"But Yoda was able to use his guns! And Alice's buddies fought just fine, too."

"That checks out. Alice's monsters are different entities, and as for Ryota's guns..."

"Either it's because they're outsider drops, or it's just because it's me. I don't know which, but I think it's one of those," I answered, prompting a nod from Celeste.

She'd tried using her Bicorn Horns when she was a rock, but they failed like her other magic.

We gathered our observations over lunch, giving us a better perspective on the stone's quirks.

Invincibility, same mobility, but weakened attacks—that was our rough estimate. It was a shame that it made us weaker, but being invincible without

losing mobility was still huge. I could think of plenty of uses.

"Help, low level."

"What's the matter, Eve?" I replied.

"I can't smell the carrots." The stone bunny looked at me sadly. She was holding a bowl of Emily's carrot soup.

"Darn, that's serious."

So you can't smell anything, either? Maybe you don't breathe while you're stone... I mean, you're a rock, after all.

☆

In the afternoon, we split up, and I went to Nihonium. I was good and done with Arsenic, so this was my next target.

My objective was to gather the Three Sacred Treasures and meet the spirit Nihonium.

I descended through the floors until I arrived at one I'd never been in before: B6. After getting through the dungeon snow on B5, this one was so misty that I couldn't see a thing.

"First snow, and then mist, huh?" I muttered. But as soon as I finished speaking, my field of vision distorted.

My head spun, and I fell to my knees.

What's going on? What just happened? Am I being attacked? Or...

"Ah...!" I quickly stood up, whipped around, and began running.

My legs were unsteady, but I ran as fast as I could—holding my breath all the while—until I was back on B5.

"Haaah... Haaah..." I fell to my hands and knees again, desperately trying to catch my breath.

Breathing in the B5 air cleared my mind a little. I fired some recovery rounds at myself to heal before looking down again.

It seemed B6 of Nihonium was full of toxic mist that drained stamina.

"That was close. I'd be in real trouble if I didn't run away."

Video games had lots of dungeons with toxic mist in them. Or maybe this was of the miasma variety. Either way, breathing it in drained me of my energy.

"...Well, I'm sure I'll be fine. I have limitless recovery rounds, after all."

I checked my physical condition. Breathing in the mist had made me dizzy, but when I came back and fired recovery rounds, I felt fine.

Even if my HP constantly drained, infinite recovery rounds could counteract it.

Just as I began to make my way down with this strategy in mind, I remembered something: the stone Eve, who was visibly sad that she couldn't smell her carrot soup.

Then, I took out the Absolute Rock stone, turned myself into stone, and went into B6 for real this time.

There, I stood still and waited in the mist.

I wasn't dizzy. I felt fine. It seemed the toxic mist didn't work on you in stone form.

That's lucky, I thought to myself as I began wandering around.

I ran into a monster: a red zombie. It looked even more decayed than the B2 zombies. Poisonous-looking mist wafted from all over its body.

"Aha, so the monsters emit this mist. Guess that makes you poison zombies."

The poison zombie attacked. It clung to me and tried to bite me. Of course, that didn't work; I was invincible, thanks to my stone status.

I tried punching it, but my attacks weren't working, either. Heck, I didn't even have the power to push it off me. That meant I couldn't melee fight while stone.

However, we'd already tested all of this. I whipped out a gun and fired a point-blank shot into the head of the zombie, who was still desperately trying to sink its teeth into me. The point-blank headshot sent its head flying.

It fell backward and disappeared.

A seed appeared where it had died, and I picked it up and heard the usual voice.

Ryota's intelligence went up by 1!

122. Pandemic

B6 of the limestone cavern Nihonium was full of toxic mist.

The mist didn't work on me in stone form, but I found myself curious just how strong it was.

Let's give it a try.

I put a normal bullet on the ground and walked away. Monsters wouldn't become outsiders on different floors of the same dungeon, but they would in different dungeons. We'd learned that when Emily and I went to help in Silicon during a magic storm.

I turned the normal bullet into an outsider. After a while, it became a slime, the monster indigenous to the B1 of Tellurium.

The moment it appeared, it melted. Just touching the toxic mist made it melt into a soupy puddle.

"Wow, that's some rough poison. This is tough."

Looking back, I was in real danger. If someone with SS HP and S vitality was affected that badly, then it was easy to see why a mere slime would die in an instant.

I'd definitely have to conquer this floor as stone.

That limited my options; I would have to use my guns or Repetition.

"Repetition!" I hit the next poison zombie with my farming magic. It defeated it and made it drop an intelligence seed.

Next, I readied my guns. I loaded all of my offensive bullets—normal rounds, flame rounds, freeze rounds, limitless lightning round, and homing rounds—and pressed on.

Whenever poison zombies appeared, I used normal rounds for headshots and special rounds on random parts of their bodies.

As a result of my testing, I found that they were just zombies that spewed poison. While the toxic mist was deadly, their endurance and speed were equal to those on B2. I could defeat them the same way, and they attacked at the same speed.

I didn't know how strong they were physically; after all, I was stone. And I couldn't just de-stone and let them attack me. That mist was too scary.

Either way, I knew enough by now. I had a good grasp of Nihonium's B6 monsters.

I gradually farmed the floor, switching between Repetition and normal bullet headshots until I'd raised my intelligence from F to E. With my daily work done, I made my way to the surface.

The moment I reached B5, the mist cleared up.

"Hmm. So the toxic mist can't go to the higher floors?" I noted.

On closer inspection, the toxic mist wasn't coming up to this floor at all, as if there was an invisible lid between floors. That was probably true for the floor below, too.

I bet it's a lot like monster traits. The toxic mist can't exist on other floors of Nihonium, just like the poison zombies, I thought to myself as I exited the dungeon and checked my stats on the board out front.

—— 1/2 ——
Level 1/1
HP SS
MP S
Strength SS
Vitality S
Intelligence E
Willpower F
Speed SS
Dexterity F
Luck F

My intelligence had gone up, indeed. That was the end of my daily Nihonium.

So I left and went somewhere else—specifically, to the place I always went to spawn outsiders: an open clearing with little to no foot traffic.

I opened my pouch and dropped a single seed on the ground.

What sort of special round would the poison zombie outsider drop? I waited a while in hopes of finding out. From the seed emerged a poison zombie.

"Ryota, there you are!"

"Alice?" I turned around and spotted Alice behind me. As usual, her three monsters sat on her shoulders. She approached with an affable smile. "What's the matter?"

"There's something I wanna ask you about. I figured if you weren't in a dungeon, you'd be here!"

"That so? What do you need?"

"Umm, well... Oh!"

"Hm?"

"Ryota, look!" Alice went pale and pointed behind me.

I whipped around. There stood the poison zombie that I'd just turned into an outsider. But it wasn't just the zombie; the toxic mist was spreading, too!

"Tch! Repetition!" I quickly used my magic, defeating the zombie. It fell, but the toxic mist spreading from it didn't disappear.

It rode the wind and spread...directly toward the city of Cyclo!

"What is that?" Alice asked me.

"It's toxic mist. If you breathe it in, it's bad. Just touching it can make your skin melt."

"That's real bad!"

"Kh! Repetition!" I used my magic again, but it didn't work. The toxic mist wasn't a monster, so magic that insta-killed monsters had no effect.

"What do we do? It's spreading more!"

"Tch!" I pulled out my guns and checked my ammo, looking for anything that would work. "Flame rounds!"

I loaded a flame round and fired. But it went straight through the mist. Instead of bursting into flames, it disappeared into the distance.

"Ryota! The ground is melting!"

"I know! Any other bullets that might work... Any others... Annihilation rounds!"

I took out all of my buffing rounds and loaded one gun full of flame rounds and the other full of freeze rounds. Then I fired over and over, aiming for the outer edges of the spreading toxic mist.

The bullets combined in midair and fused, becoming annihilation rounds. Small black holes engulfed the toxic mist.

"You did it! This might work, Ryota!"

"Yeah! Everything should be okay now!"

I loaded more flame and freeze rounds, sucking up yet more of the black mist.

It had spread too much since I took too long to start cleaning it up, so it required four sets—twenty-four rounds—in all to finish the job.

"Phew, that was close... That might've been the worst pinch we've been in so far." If it had spread and reached Cyclo... Just imagining it made me shudder.

"Sorry, Ryota. It's my fault."

"No, Alice, you're fine," I assured her as I headed to where the poison zombie had died and retrieved the bullet it dropped. "That's a trait of these poison zombies. Making them outsiders out in the open like this is too dangerous to begin with."

"Yeah..."

"Besides..."

It was fine since Alice, a friend, was the one to witness it. But I wanted to be careful and avoid letting strangers see me getting drops from outsiders.

The power of S-rank drops was a secret among me and my friends. Doing it in such an open place was already a bad idea. I'd noticed that before, but since obtaining the pouch, I'd put off finding a solution.

"I'd love a place for making outsiders," I said. "One that nobody would ever intrude on."

My own land, or maybe a big building. I didn't know which would be better, but I at least knew that I needed something like that.

123. Two Inches per Second

Before searching for a new home, I decided to check out my new bullet.

I unloaded all of my bullets from one gun. It'd be best to know the effect to a basic level, so I made sure I had no buffing rounds and only loaded the one new bullet. Then, I fired in a direction where nobody was standing.

"...Huh?" I gasped.

A bullet flew out of the chamber—or so I say, but it was ridiculously slow. It was going through the air at about 2 inches per second, as if the bullet was challenging the laws of physics.

"Whoa, this is weird!" Alice loved it. She walked next to the slow bullet and peeked at it from close-up. "It's sooo slow! Boney, try riding it!"

The chibi skeleton rattled as it jumped from Alice's shoulder and onto the bullet. Even with a skeleton on top, the bullet didn't change trajectory. It flew on like a stubborn old man yelling, "I want to go THIS way!"

Two inches per second, that was all-

"Hahahaha! I can hang from it, too! This is fun!" When Alice hung from it, it still didn't change trajectory or speed. The bullet, with a girl in tow, pressed on slowly.

"What is it...?" I wondered.

"I dunno! But it's funny!"

"Funny? Yeah, I agree with that. This thing can't possibly have any offensive

abilities."

Alice stopped hanging from the bullet, stood in front of it, and tried pushing it with her hands. "It has a lot of force, though. Look, it's pushing me back!"

It ignored her force and continued forward, now pushing her along. It seemed strong in a sense, but just not for attacking.

After sixteen feet of progress, it disappeared.

"Aww, it's gone."

"This one's a dud. I'll call it the trash round."

"Yep..." Alice agreed.

We believed it had no possible uses for farming monsters.

☆

Alice and I returned to town and headed to the realtor. When we went inside, we ran into Antonio. He spotted us, put his work down, stood up, and rushed over.

"Hi there, Mr. Sato. It's been a while. These days, your exploits even reach my ears."

"Exploits?"

"The acquisition of Selenium, the changes in Aurum, the revitalization of Arsenic. So many major problems of late have been solved by you and your Family. Everyone is excited to see what you do next."

"Don't expect too much of me, now..."

While I chatted with Antonio, we went into the meeting space. Alice and I sat first, and then he sat across from us.

"So, what sort of building are you looking for?" he asked.

"Well..." I told him the conditions that I'd put together in my mind. "First, I need at least five rooms."

"Five?" Alice cocked her head.

"There are five of us in total, right? While we're at it, let's have you live with us, too."

"Okay! Oh, but what about Eve?"

"I'll have a room ready for her, but we'll leave it to her whether or not she stays."

"Yeah..."

After discussing it with Alice, I looked at Antonio again and summarized, "All right, so we'd like five rooms to fit the whole Family. And we might grow in the future, so really, more rooms are better. Also, we'd like it treated to resist magic storms."

"At this rate, you're looking to buy a mansion."

"A mansion, huh?"

That word had an exciting ring to it. Until now, we'd gradually switched up to bigger homes.

A shoddy 20,000-piro-a-month apartment, a new two-bedroom, a three-story home. And now, a mansion. I was thrilled by our evolving living circumstances.

Whoa, slow down, now. Don't forget the most important condition.

"I do have one requirement that trumps all the others: it needs a large space."

"A large space?"

"Yeah. One that nobody can get into. As for how large... Large enough that things might turn into outsiders even if there are people on the other side of the room."

"I see..." Antonio mumbled, taking notes. "That may be difficult."

"Can't make it happen?"

"Cyclo doesn't contain many mansions taking up that much space, and those that do are already occupied. Adventurers who can afford such places typically won't fall into poverty."

That made sense. Adventurers who made money had one thing in common: they had the abilities, knowledge, and allies necessary to farm dungeons at length. And those who could stably farm dungeons were often prudent people. They probably wouldn't work their way up in the world only to come crashing back down.

"Hmm..." Antonio mumbled in thought.

I'd asked him for a lot of things by now, and every time I did, he'd always come to me with the perfect building. I knew he was a capable man. And if he was at a loss, then clearly I was asking for a lot.

Ah, well. Might as well lower my standards. Which one is the real bottleneck here...?

"There...is one, I suppose," Antonio said, though his frown didn't budge.

I don't like that emphasis there. What does it mean?

Antonio took us to a mansion near the center of Cyclo. It had a big courtyard and a wall surrounding the property.

There was a fountain between the gate and the front door. It was basically a cliché mansion.

"This mansion is awesome! It's so big and clean! I bet ten of us could live there with ease!"

"That is exactly right. It's a 10LLSDK."

"Ten bedrooms, two living rooms, a dining room, and a kitchen... That's huge."

And I mean HUGE. It looks like it's two stories. Is that why it has two living rooms? Also, I get the D is short for dining room and K is short for kitchen, but what's the S?

"Nobody has ever tried to lease this building, so it is new on the inside."

"Nobody's tried? Why not?" Alice asked.

"Was there...an accident, or something?"

A sense of dread filled my heart.

"No, no, not at all. Though you're not too far off, I suppose," Antonio said cryptically.

Alice and I looked at each other and cocked our heads. While I wondered what was up, we arrived at the front door.

Antonio unlocked the thick-looking door with a key he'd brought and stepped

aside.

"Go right in... If you can."

"If we can?"

"Give it a try, and I'm sure you'll understand. There is no physical or mental toll, so don't worry."

The more Antonio said, the more confused I became. But if he was right, we'd just have to go in to find out.

I walked through the door and into the building. And then, suddenly, I couldn't go any further.

The moment I stepped through the door, something enveloped me, making it hard to move so much as a finger.

It wasn't that I *couldn't* move at all, but there was incredible resistance to any motion I made. It was like being underwater, but hundreds of times over.

"What's wrong, Ryota?"

"Go in, Alice. You'll get it."

"Let's see... Whoa." It happened to her, too. The moment she entered, she couldn't move anymore.

I went outside. Weirdly, I could move backward just fine.

"What's the deal with this mansion?" I asked.

"Do you see the crystal in there?" Antonio was pointing at a rather unremarkable crystal.

"The one in the middle of the entrance hall?"

"Yes, that is a monster. Or rather, an outsider."

"A monster...?"

"They're called rejection crystals. They can refuse and expel all beings that enter their territory. Incidentally, like Arsenic's rocks, they do not attack. That's why I said it was safe."

"I see."

"The original owner set it up in order to keep anyone but them from entering the mansion, but there was an issue. Now, even the original owner can't live here."

"Well, that backfired."

"And now, nobody else can lease the mansion. By the way, Mr. Sato, the large space you requested is underground. The basement has the same area as the mansion itself."

That's nice. I like that it's a basement.

If it was the same area as the rest of the mansion, then I wouldn't have to worry about anyone but my friends seeing me making outsiders.

There was just one issue remaining.

"So if I can destroy the crystal, the problem is solved?" I asked.

"Yes, but no attack will reach it," Antonio replied with a grim look on his face.

No attack, huh?

I took out my twin revolvers, trying to figure out which bullet would be best for piercing that invisible barrier. First, I loaded a regular bullet in both guns and filled the rest of the cylinders with buffing rounds.

When I fired the fully buffed normal rounds, they fused in midair to make a piercing round. The piercing round flew forth...and stopped at the barrier. It

went in only slightly before losing power and falling to the ground.

"Guess that won't work..."

"Even fully powered piercing rounds aren't working, huh?"

"So even Mr. Sato couldn't do it... I thought that you might have been able to solve this problem, but alas." Antonio was disappointed.

Well, this is kind of frustrating.

Alice suddenly piped up, "Oh!"

"Alice, what's up?"

"Remember the thing? Remember?"

"The thing?"

"The trash round!"

"...Ooooh."

 $\stackrel{\star}{\nabla}$

I rushed to B6 of Nihonium, turned invincible using the Absolute Rock stone, killed a few poison zombies, and acquired some trash rounds. Then, I returned to the mansion and loaded them.

"Okay, let's see how this works."

"Good luck, Ryota!"

With Alice's cheers at my back, I fired one off. The trash round flew slowly. Two inches per second, like last time—even after it passed through the barrier.

"Ooh, it's still going!"

"And just as fast as before, too."

"That's incredible, Mr. Sato," Antonio said. "It's still going. Goodness. I've never seen a projectile get this far."

He must've tried this with a good number of people by now.

The trash round continued at the same speed, but after sixteen feet, it disappeared. It fell short by six and a half feet.

"Aww, that sucks. Hey, what if you tried with buffing rounds?"

"That's the plan," I replied, loaded new trash rounds, and filled the rest of the cylinder with buffing rounds. Then, I fired.

The bullet was...even slower! Where it went at two inches per second before, it was now only a tenth as fast. It was so slow that I could be fooled into thinking it wasn't moving.

"Buffing rounds slow it down?" Alice asked.

"Well, it probably has more force now to make up for it," I replied.

"Really?"

"It's just a hypothesis, though."

We watched as the trash round slowly continued its journey. But like the last, it disappeared sixteen feet into the mansion.

"The range doesn't change, huh?"

"Yeah. I'll just have to make up the remaining six and a half feet myself."

I thought for a moment before backing away from the front door.

"Ryota?" Alice asked dubiously.

But I ignored her, sprinted toward the entrance, and leapt into the mansion. The momentum of my approach helped, but I felt incredible resistance and stopped short of just three feet.

Running as fast as I could hadn't even earned me three feet.

I reached my arm out as best I could and fired the trash round. The trash round I'd loaded ahead of time advanced at two inches per second. It stopped and disappeared twenty inches short of the crystal.

"Aww! That was so close!"

"Yeah, it really was..."

"Do your best, Ryota!" Alice fired me up.

"Yeah!"

I tried over and over.

Run for momentum, jump in, fire trash round. But the crystal was too strong, and I failed to go beyond three feet.

No matter how I tried, I couldn't break that remaining one-and-a-half-foot barrier.

"Haah, haah... Darn it. I'm so close!"

"Is there anything we can do to make up the remaining distance?"

Alice and I crossed our arms and discussed the problem. We came up with nothing.

For the first time ever, I had a twofold issue that I had no idea how to deal with. I was already using my full power, but I still needed to find a way to go further.

It was then that Emily appeared. She was pushing a magic cart, with her hammer slung over her shoulder. It looked like she was on her way home from dungeoneering.

"What are you doing over there, Yoda?"

"Oh, nothing... Wait, Emily?"

"Yes, I'm Emily."

"You're obviously not doing nothing!" Alice interjected. "Also, what's wrong, Ryota? That's a weird look on your face."

"Emily!" I crouched in front of her, took her hand, and gazed directly into her eyes.

"Yes?!"

"You're the only person I can ask for this, Emily."

"Wh-What does that mean ...?"

☆

After explaining things to Emily, I had her stand next to the door. As I'd done many times by now, I stepped away to prepare for a charge.

"Let's do this."

"Okay!"

I gave Emily the signal and began running as fast as I could—a mad dash, straight for the front door.

The moment I got through the door, Emily swung her hammer. It was a

glorious full swing with plenty of momentum behind it.

The hammer struck me. But just before it could, I used the Absolute Rock stone to turn myself to stone.

Emily's hammer struck a perfect home run hit on my perfect defensive body. I had my momentum from running, plus her power.

When I entered the mansion, I felt the usual resistance, but my body kept moving forward. It went even further than three feet this time.

My pace slowed down. Even with Emily's power on top, I didn't reach the crystal. But this was enough.

My full-power dash and Emily's full-power home run combined to earn us six and a half feet.

I held my gun out and fired. The trash round launched and slowly advanced at two inches per second.

Pushed out of the mansion, I watched the bullet with my friends.

Slowly, slowly, it slowly went on...until it struck the crystal!

"Ooh!"

"How do you like that?!" I roared triumphantly.

Even after hitting the crystal, the bullet kept going.

It gouged a hole into it as it went. Then, it pierced through.

The immobile crystal was run through by the overpowering trash round. It disappeared shortly after.

A sudden gust of wind blew out from within the mansion. It was so powerful that we struggled to stay standing.

"Ooh, we can go in now!"

After it calmed, Alice charged in first and danced around with her buddies in the entrance hall.

"Wow... You've really solved it..." Antonio said, amazed, from further away.

Now that I'd defeated the crystal, I had a new mansion.

124. A Door Unopening

The basement of the mansion was empty and vast. It had an eerie, mysterious air. Added to the fact that it was beneath the mansion, it seemed like the kind of place that a secret society might gather.

I stood alone within.

While I waited, I checked the size of the basement. It was a rectangular room, about the size of two tennis courts. The basement was just so *big* that I could think of plenty of uses for it.

On the other side of the basement, outsiders spawned. Slimes popped out of the bean sprouts I'd left and bounced toward me.

I pulled out my guns, aimed, and fired. Each of my bullets took them down in one shot, making them drop normal bullets.

I turned and looked at the stairs. Up above, my friends were waiting. I'd asked them to come in if they heard anything.

The fact that they weren't coming meant that the basement was soundproof enough that gunshots couldn't be heard.

I fired again, circled around as fast as I could, and caught the bullet in my hand.

SS speed. I'd be out of breath if I ran too far, but at this short a distance, I could run faster than normal bullets.

Next, I fired a trash round. It came out slowly at its usual two inches per second. I circled around this one, raised my fist up, and punched the bullet as hard as I could.

A shockwave spread out, accompanied by a boom. Despite how hard I'd punched it, the bullet continued at its usual slow pace. In a way, it was incredible. Still useless, though.

I was certain now: no matter what I did in here, nobody would ever hear it. That meant I'd never be interrupted.

☆

The Ryota Family moved into the ten-bedroom mansion.

Naturally, a mansion in the best district in town cost a heck of a lot of rent. Two million piros a month, in fact. Piros was about equal to yen, so it was like living in a 2,000,000-yen-per-month home.

Two million... That was about how much I made yearly as a fresh graduate.

And here I am, living in a mansion that costs that much monthly ...I was moved by this realization.

Suddenly, I found Emily in my line of sight. She was carrying a whole mountain of fabric including sheets, curtains, and the like into room after room.

She looks busy... But I think she's having fun, too.

Despite the furrowed brow and thoughtful look on her face, her lips were fixed in a grin. Perhaps those were the joyful cries of a homemaker with much to do in a new home.

The thought of how this mansion would change into a bright, warm place by tomorrow thanks to Master Emily excited me.

I decided to go to all my friends' rooms so I'd stay out of her way. The closest one had a name plate on it that said Eve.

I knocked, and she responded, so I opened the door and entered.

"The low level arrives." Instead of her usual bunny suit, Eve was wearing a onesie. Naturally, it was modeled after a soft, white bunny.



"You brought a onesie, too? This might be the first time I've seen you wearing anything but your bunny suit."

"Bunny-ception."

"Okay, now you're making zero sense."

"Bunny in bunny."

"Kinda like a matryoshka?"

Eve was half-animal, with natural bunny ears. She must have been proud of her bunny features, or maybe she just liked them, because she always loved to show off the fact that she was half-rabbit. I mean, she even called herself "this bunny" half the time.

"You need something, low level?" she asked.

"Just wondering if you've taken a liking to your new room."

"Worry not. I brought carrots."

"Yeah, it's pretty normal, apart from the carrots." I surveyed the room and found that it was surprisingly normal.

It had shelves, a dresser, a desk by the window, and a single bed. Maybe plain, but normal. Very normal—except for the part where half of the room was taken up by carrots.

Thanks to that, it turned from normal room to carrot storage.

"In a way, it's very like you, Eve."

"Praise me all you want, but I will give you no carrots."

"Don't eat too much and mess up your stomach."

"If I could die of carrots, then that is how I wish to go," she replied, her voice

as deadpan as always, but her cheeks flushed.

It was terrifying that she genuinely wanted that.

I left Eve's room and knocked on the next door. It had Alice's name on it.

"Who's there?" she called out.

"It's me."

"Ryota? Come in, come in!"

The ever friendly and affable Alice invited me in, so I opened the door.

I was amazed. This room had clearly been remodeled the most by far. The theme? Dungeons.

Alice's room was like a miniature dungeon now.

Boney, Bubbly, and Boomy were spread out through this dungeon. My first impression was surprise, but having her buddy monsters around made it oddly convincing.

It reminded me of an old friend who'd filled his house with model trains.

"Welcome, Ryota!"

"I'm amazed. Did you do this all yourself?"

"Yep! I brought it all from my old room."

"Wow. I bet this is more relaxing for your buddies, too."

"Actually, it's most relaxing for me," Alice said with a laugh. "It's just so much more calming to be in a dungeon-like room than a normal room, y'know?"

"Because you were born in a dungeon?"

"Maybe!"

After taking a look around her room, I left for the next one. Next stop, Celeste's room.

I knocked and called her name.

"R-Ryota? What's the matter? This is so sudden..."

"I'm just curious what your room is like."

"My room? W-Wait just a sec." Celeste stopped me, so I stood there and waited.

I heard...a whole lot of noise in there. I knew that sound well. Very well. It was the sound of frantically cleaning your room when you had an unexpected visitor.

I mean, I doubt she's hiding porno mags, or anything... I thought to myself as I waited.

After a while, Celeste opened the door.

"C-Come on in."

"Pardon the intrusion."

I entered and found a cute room. Like, really cute. It wasn't anything like Eve's mountain of carrots or Alice's miniature dungeon.

Celeste's room was very respectable and clean. If pushed to say, it was even girly. It smelled sweet, and while I personally felt antsy in it, it was a very nice room.

"Very cute," I mused.

"Whaaat?!" Celeste panicked for a moment, but she calmed down and replied, "O-Oh, you mean the room, right? I just packed up and brought my old room over as it was. It's a little bigger now, so I'm thinking of doing something

with the extra space."

"That so? It's nice to have space. I hope you like it."

"Of course! I have no complaints about the room you so graciously let me use!"

"Thanks... Hm? What's that scrap of cloth over there?" I noticed some fabric peeking out of the closet. Did she stuff it in there while she was cleaning?

I thought for a moment that it might be some kind of underwear, but based on the material, I guessed not. It was thicker. Not the kind of thing you'd use to make clothes.

When I casually grabbed it, the closet flew open.

An avalanche overwhelmed me. A whole lot of something fell out.

I was buried in it all. Apparently, it was fine that she'd stuffed her closet beyond what it could hold, but me just touching the bit sticking out had caused things to spiral out of control.

By now, I was so buried that I couldn't even see.

"Eeeek!" Celeste shrieked. She dragged me out, still screaming, and pushed me out of her room.

Bang! The door slammed shut, and she hid behind me.

"Haaah... Haaah..."

She started gasping for breath.

What's gotten into her?

"D-Did you see that?"

"No, not really... What's in there?"

"I-It's, umm... I know! Underwear! Yeah, underwear! I put all my worn underwear in there, and then you just had to go and yank it all out, silly Ryota!"

I stared at her, remaining silent.

Celeste, are you for real right now? It's obvious that you're hiding something, but you cover it up with an underwear lie? Is that something a woman should do?

"A-Anyway, I love the room. Thank you. Bye!" Celeste suddenly rattled off sentences without pause and went back into her room.

I happened to notice something at my feet. I picked it up; it was a plushie, the kind of palm-sized one you might see as prizes for a crane game. And...it looked an awful lot like me.

I recalled Celeste's panic. And the look on her face when she lied about it being underwear.

I'll just pretend I didn't see that, I decided, left the plush there, and left.



While I wandered aimlessly around the mansion, Emily approached me.

"Yoda!"

"What's up, Emily?"

"There's a weird room here."

"Weird?"



"Come this way." Emily turned around and started walking.

What's it like? I wondered as I followed her. We arrived in front of a room at the far back of the mansion that had double doors leading inside.

"Here it is," she said.

"What's weird about it?"

"It won't open."

"It won't? Let me try." I tried opening the door, but noticed something was wrong. I touched it all over and looked over it from top to bottom.

"Isn't it strange? There's no doorknob, no keyhole, or anything."

"It's outright featureless. Are doors like these a thing? It's almost like it's just a picture of a door drawn on the wall." Since there was no clear way to open it, I tried pushing it. The door did not move. "Think it's not just a wall?"

"I thought so, too, but..." Emily stood in front of the door and knocked firmly. I went into dungeons often, so I could tell. Her knock made a hollow noise—the noise made when there was a cavern, or a space, behind the wall. "There's definitely a room in there."

"Seems like it..." I pushed again just in case, but nothing happened.

I even tried pushing with my shoulder. Still nothing.

Well, maybe it IS just a wall... I thought.

Just then, Emily gasped, "Oh!"

"Got an idea?"

"It opened up just a little when you were pushing with your body just now."

"What?" I looked at the door in surprise. Of course, it was tightly shut now.

I tried pushing with my shoulder again, using all my strength to open it. And indeed, Emily was right; it opened just slightly.

When I let go of the door, the opening closed again.

"It really just opened a tiny bit, huh?"

"Could it be that it's just a very heavy door?"

"It seems like it. I'll try pushing more." I lowered my hips and pushed with all my might. It opened wider than before—just enough to slip a coin through.

That was my limit, though. Even when I pushed for ten seconds, hard enough that it felt like my veins would burst, it never opened more than enough for a single coin to fit.

"It's too heavy. If your SS strength can't open it, then this must be wrong."

"Maybe it's a pull door, right? Haha, as if..." There weren't any handles, after all. This door could only be pushed.

We tried taking one door each and pushing, one with A-rank strength and one with SS-rank, but it only opened enough to fit another coin. It was a door that could be opened by force, but not by our combined might.

"This is a problem... I don't like having a useless room." Emily was visibly disappointed. For someone who loved housework so much, having a room that she couldn't get into must have been stressful.

While I wondered what we could do about it, I remembered something.

"Oh, I know. I have these."

"Excuse me?" Emily cocked her head. I took out my guns and showed them to her.

I loaded trash rounds into my twin revolvers, pressed them against the doors,

and pulled the triggers.

Bullets came out at two inches per second. Despite their slowness, they pushed every obstacle out of the way—and that included the doors. They gradually opened, and eventually, they were ajar enough for a person to fit through.

"Wow! It opened, Yoda!"

"We managed to open the door. Now, what's inside?"

I entered the room expectantly, given all the effort it took to get inside.

I heard a voice from somewhere in the room.

Please choose a dungeon and a floor.

"Who's there? Where are you?" I asked, but the voice only repeated itself.

Please choose a dungeon and a floor.

What did it mean by that?

Guess we'll just have to find out.

I loaded all my special rounds in my guns to be ready for any situation and replied, "Nihonium, B1."

Suddenly, the scenery before my eyes changed. I was in a room before, but in the blink of an eye, I was in a dungeon.

A limestone cavern-like dungeon. A skeleton charged at me.

It looks like I've been warped to B1 of Nihonium!

125. Eve's Memories

The skeleton mechanically attacked me, unsurprised by my sudden appearance. I killed it with Repetition, and its seed went into my pouch.

I looked around again. There was no mistaking that this was B1 of Nihonium.

I recognized this cavern, and when I listened carefully, I could hear the voices of Margaret and her coworkers. They were the only people who frequented this dungeon other than me. No doubt they were farming boxed air.

Those voices made me even more certain that I was in Nihonium.

I looked around more and found a light shining at around waist-level nearby. It was the size of a marble, and it emitted as much light as a light bulb.

I'd never seen something like this before.

Warily, I touched it. Light poured out and covered me. I closed my eyes and put my hand in front of them.

When the light faded, I was back in the room in the mansion.

Beyond the still-open door, Emily called my name from outside the room, "Yoda!" She looked a little worried. "Thank goodness, you're back." Emily was relieved.

I confirmed that there was an HP seed in my pouch—proving that wasn't just a hallucination—and went to Emily. The trash rounds had disappeared long ago, but the door was still open. Yet when I exited, it slammed shut.

So it stays open as long as someone's inside? I surmised as I asked her, "Did I

```
disappear a minute ago?"
  "Yes. Where did you go?"
  "Hmm... It might be easier to show you than to tell you." I fired trash rounds
to wrench the door open again. "Step on in, Emily."
  "Hm? Will I understand if I do?"
  "Yeah."
  "Okay."
  Emily stepped through the open door.
  "Hwuh? Wh-Who's there?"
  "Wow, so that's what it looks like to an observer."
 The voice didn't reach me outside the room, making it look like Emily was just
flustered and confused.
 After a while, she disappeared. She must have gone to some dungeon.
 I waited for a while. Even after the trash rounds disappeared, the door stayed
open.
 Maybe it really doesn't close as long as it's in use.
 After yet more waiting, Emily returned. She came home with a carrot in hand.
  "I-I'm back."
```

"Yes, I think so. This room is amazing." She returned to me with the carrot. The door slammed shut.

"Get it now?"

"Looks like we can freely go to and from dungeons with it. You went to B2 of Tellurium, right?"

"That's right. I'll make tasty carrot soup for Eve later."

"Hmm... I want to test this out a bit more." I opened the door with more trash rounds, stepped inside, and designated B1 of Aurum this time.

I was warped to Aurum instantly. While adventurers rushed here and there for gold, I exited the dungeon. It constantly changed shape, making it difficult to get out, but I managed it after some time.

I was in the village of Indole. The place was even more developed than I remembered it.

New buildings had been erected, storefronts were overflowing with goods, and everyone was lively. It was all thanks to Aurum—to the power of gold.

I wanted to look around more, but the supervisor at the entrance to the dungeon announced that it was time for the next set of entrants, so I decided to join them and go home.

As a rogue dungeon, Aurum changed shape every time someone entered it, so they had set up specific times for people to go in so nobody's farming was interrupted. If I missed this opportunity, I wouldn't be able to go home for a while.

Leaving a better look at Indole for the next visit, I joined the other adventurers, entered B1, wandered until I found the point of light, and went back to the mansion.

Celeste, Alice, and Emily were there.

"Welcome home, Ryota. Emily told us all about it."

"It's awesome! This mansion is crazy, having a room like this!"

"Where did you go this time, Yoda?"

"Aurum. I decided to check out the outside-Indole, that is-while I was there."

"Indole?! You just warped there?!" Alice was surprised. As a former resident of Indole, she knew just how far it was from here, so that came as a shock to her. "Hey, I wanna go to Indole, too!"

"Sure. I'll open the door now."

"May I try it, too?" Celeste asked.

"Be my guest. Heck, see if two people can use it at once while you're at it."

I opened the door with trash rounds again.

Since I'd opened it before, I tried Repetition on it, but that did not work, which meant I wasn't defeating a monster in the process of opening it.

Alice and Celeste excitedly entered the room.

Alice disappeared first, and then Celeste-

"Ah!" Celeste gasped.

"What's up?" I asked.

"It said I can't go to that floor since I haven't been there before."

"You can't?"

"Yeah. This one time, I heard of a place called Uranium, and I wanted to try going there. But it said I can't, since I haven't been there before."

"What happens if you try Aurum?"

"Umm... Nope, doesn't seem like it works."

"B1 of Nihonium, then?"

"Also no."

```
"B5 of Tellurium?"
```

"Let's see—" Celeste disappeared. Like Emily and Alice from before, she'd been warped into a dungeon.

"What does it mean?" Emily asked.

"It's not about whether it's warped someone to a floor before; it's whether that person has personally been to the floor."

"Oh, okay. That's why she could go to Tellurium instead of Nihonium."

"That's right." I had a good grasp of it now. Just opening the door once allowed multiple people to use it at the same time.

```
Now, let's try this...
```

"Help me out for a sec, Emily."

"Okay."

We entered the room together. I heard the voice asking me to pick a dungeon and a floor. Emily looked up at me, asking with her eyes what she should do.

After holding a hand to my chin in thought for a moment, I took her hand.

"Yoda?"

"Stay still."

"...Okay."

She did as directed, bashfully squeezing my hand back.

With her hand in mine, I picked B1 of Aurum—a place that I'd been to, but Emily had not.

We were holding hands. What would happen in this case?

In the next instant, I'd been taken to Aurum. And...

"Where are we?"

Emily had been brought with me. A success!

"This is B1 of Aurum," I explained. "Looks like we can go to places as long as at least one of us has been there."

"Wow! So many amazing surprises."

We touched the point of light and returned to the mansion. Coming back was no problem, either.

"The question now is if there are any drawbacks... Like, can we carry things with us?" I wondered.

"I already brought a carrot back, so I think that's fine."

"Come to think of it, you're right," I replied. I was getting the hang of this room's functions and rules. Now, I had my next objective. "Let's divide up the labor among everyone and start bookmarking all the floors in Cyclo. It'll be convenient if we can go anywhere at a moment's notice."

"Okay."

Eve arrived and said calmly, "I heard everything."

Her outfit's bunny ears, on top of her natural bunny ears, were a cute sight. She was looking unusually smug.

"This bunny has conquered all five dungeons of Cyclo."

That's it! We had a veteran in our midst all this time!



126. Bookmarking

"Is that true, Eve?"

"Bunnies never lie." She puffed out her chest proudly. "My old party and I went through all of them."

"Them, huh?" I recalled when I'd first met Eve.

As I remembered, some of her old friends were pretty rude, while others were surprisingly polite. After that, she'd left them due to "differences in dungeon priorities." But I guess they'd already conquered Cyclo's dungeons by that point?

"Five? Which five?" Emily asked. "Cyclo has six dungeons now."

"Huh?"

"Tellurium, Silicon, Arsenic, Bismuth, Boron, and Nihonium. Six."

"Oh, you're right!" I'd only heard of Bismuth and Boron; I'd never been to either. But I often heard their names during my daily life, like at the Swallow's Returned Favor and the bar. "Selenium, too. That's under Cyclo's control now."

"I totally forgot! That's right. Selenium is another of Cyclo's dungeons, so there are seven now."

Emily and I looked at Eve in unison.

Eve replied, in her usual monotone voice, "The five excluding Selenium and Nihonium. Selenium is new and far, and Nihonium doesn't drop anything."

"Makes sense."

"But that's surprising," Emily said. "I thought you only went to floors that dropped carrots."

"That isn't true," Eve replied flatly before entering the room. Then, she used the room's feature to warp somewhere.

"Wh-Where did she go?"

"Dunno..."

I waited with the dubious Emily for Eve's return. Three minutes passed, and the bunny was back.

"Eve!" Emily called out.

"Keep waiting," she said and disappeared again.

"What's going on?" I asked.

"She had something yellow in her right hand just now."

"Something yellow?"

Did she? I cocked my head. She was only here for a moment, so I couldn't tell.

After a while, Eve returned—and warped again.

"She disappeared again."

"I saw it this time, too. Something yellow in her right hand, and something green in her left."

"Right."

We still hadn't had enough time to discern what she was holding, but it seemed like the yellow one was a drop from the place she'd gone the first time, and the green one was a drop from the place she'd gone the second time.

"Yellow and green... Think red might be next?"

"What does that mean?" Emily cocked her head.

"Like a traffic signal... But you wouldn't know what that means."

Now that I think about it, why did we call traffic signals blue in Japan when they're green?

Wait. There's something more important to focus on here. Eve's been disappearing and reappearing in here over and over. Based on what she's holding, she's been going to different dungeons. Or at least different floors. And in that time, she never left the warp room. That must mean you can warp over and over if you don't leave.

At this point in time, I needed trash rounds to open the door. If the door wouldn't close as long as we didn't leave the room, depending on how we used it, we might be able to leave it open indefinitely.

For example, I warp to the closest floor—B1 of Tellurium—and walk back home rather than using the warp point. I'd have to test that later.

We waited yet longer, and finally, Eve returned. Her third item wasn't red, though; it was another yellow one.

"I'm back."

"A...banana?" Emily cocked her head.

Eve nodded. "Bunnies can eat bananas, too. Not just carrots."

"Why did you choose bananas? Do you like them?"

"They're okay. But bananas are booming right now."

"Booming?"

"Bananas drive people crazy. When you count bananas, you go crazy."

"Come again?" I had no idea what she was talking about.

Heedless of my confusion, Eve took a carrot out of her bunny outfit.

She did it like a sexy lady pulling something out of her riding suit, but instead, she was taking a carrot out of a onesie.

That's not sexy at all—I mean, is she okay with this? Taking a carrot out of that thing isn't just not sexy; it's like going all-in on crudeness.

After taking the carrot out, she spoke as if she were counting.

"Carrot, carrot, banwanwa!" One carrot, two carrots... She counted normally, but when she got to the banana, she made a weird face and screamed in a shrill voice. "Carrot, carrot, banwanwa! Carrot, carrot, banwanwa!"

Eve was right; she went bananas when she counted bananas. Emily and I stood there in open-mouthed amazement. Was this always Eve's gimmick?

"...I'm joking," she finally confessed.

"O-Oh. Okay."

"But bananas have the power to drive people bananas. Just having them as a late-night snack can make everyone go crazy."

"This sounds like a weird advertising line for a crappy diet."

"Eve, can I have that banana?" Emily requested. "I'll make cake, and we can all eat it together."

"Mm... Carrots, too."

"Of course. I'll make carrot cake just for you."

"Half and half."

"Sure."

Could it be...that she really loves bananas, just like she does carrots? She was kind of serious about that joke.

"I'll prepare eggs, flour, and sugar, too. I might as well get the freshest ingredients for our cakes."

"Leave it to me." Eve went back into the room and warped to another dungeon.

Dungeon, warp room. She went back and forth a few more times. Before long, she had retrieved the flour, eggs, and sugar necessary for Emily's baking.

"Flour and sugar aside, does Cyclo have eggs?" I asked.

"They come from the big frogs on B2 of Manganese," the bunny answered. "I went there once a long time ago."

"Big frogs... They come from frogs?"

I took an egg and stared at it. It clearly looks like a chicken egg, not a frog egg.

Ignoring my concern, Emily took the eggs and ran off to the kitchen. It seemed we'd be having some delicious cake before long.

With Eve, who'd procured all of those ingredients in no time, and this warp room, we now had the power to teleport to any floor in any of Cyclo's original five dungeons in an instant.

127. I Can't Live Without You

In the morning, we all had breakfast together. Like any noble mansion, it had a huge dining hall with a long table in the center.

Through a democratic tyranny of the majority, everyone made me sit at the head of the household seat. You know it—the single seat on a short edge of a long rectangle.

They told me this was where I belonged. It was kind of embarrassing.

The girls all sat on the longer edges, two on either side. It really was like a noble meal you might see in a work of fiction.

I tried to convince them to let me switch it out for a round table that we could all sit around, but again, I was overcome by the tyranny of the majority.

My hands were tied.

☆

After breakfast, instead of leaving, I warped to B6 of Nihonium. There, I used the Absolute Rock stone to turn invincible and mopped up poison zombies using Repetition.

Today, I decided to do all my zombie-killing with that spell. By defeating them, I obtained intelligence seeds and raised my stats. It was my usual stat-boosting farm, but at max efficiency.

Through farming at maximum power, I raised my intelligence from E to D. Then, I used the point of light to return to the mansion.

I checked the time.

Like the piro-to-yen conversion, time in this world was a lot like my old world. But instead of dividing the time into twelve-hour portions, they unified it to a 24-hour clock.

I'd warped out at 8:00 and returned just after 10:00.

Normally, my morning stat-boosting would go past noon. But through the warp-gate and Repetition-only efficiency, I'd finished things in half the time.

☆

In the afternoon, instead of going out to make money, I went to the warp room.

Thanks to Eve, we could go to any of the floors in any of Cyclo's original five dungeons. We'd confirmed that. But there was one more thing I wanted to check about this convenient warp room.

So I stepped inside and thought of a destination.

Aurum. Aurum's room.

"Now, will this work?" I muttered to myself. The world before my eyes changed.

As requested, I landed in Aurum's room.

Yep. Looks like it worked.

It seemed I could even go to the dungeon spirit's room, on top of normal floors.

I found her bored in the empty space.

She was 4'6", just bigger than Emily. She also had bat-like wings and devilish horns, with a gothic lolita dress. As the spirit of the dungeon Aurum, her name was just Aurum.

"I'm here to hang out, Aurum," I called out.

"Huh? R-Ryota? Why are you here? How did you get here?"

"Oh, can you tell?"

Aurum was confused. Based on what she was saying, it seemed she could tell I'd come through unusual means.

"I can. This dungeon is mine, so I know how many monsters are killed, where it's done, and how much gold they drop."

"And you can tell whether the rare monster necessary to come here has been defeated, too?"

"Yep." So why? her face seemed to ask.

"Anyway, do you wanna leave? I'll take you somewhere different today."

"Okay!" Aurum eagerly agreed. It seemed being able to leave was more important to her than how I'd come here.

I fired my gun into the excited spirit and turned her into a hunk of gold. Then,
I returned with the giant gold chunk in tow and turned her into an outsider in
the underground room at the mansion.

"Where are we? I've never been here... But there's nothing here."

Disappointment cast a shadow over her face. Maybe being in an empty place reminded her of her prison.

"This is my house," I explained. "The room is empty because I want it to be."

"Wow. Ryota's home..."

"Things are different upstairs," I said and began climbing the stairs. Aurum followed me.

"Whoooa..." The moment she reached the top of the stairs, she was enveloped in pure bliss.

Barely a day had passed since we'd moved in, but the place was already full of Emily's influence. A warm, bright, soft mansion.

Any home that Emily lived in would turn out this way. Any person who visited one for the first time would, without exception, be taken aback by the warmth of it.

That applied to Aurum, too.

"This place is awesome! Awesome! Your house is awesome!" She complimented it the same way three times. It seemed like the sheer warmth and softness of it all had made her abandon her vocabulary. "Wow..."

"Do you like it? I'm glad I brought you, then."

"Yeah! Thanks! Oh, what do I do ...?"

"Something wrong?"

"You're bringing me to such awesome places. I feel like I can't live without you anymore..."

"You exaggerate."

Not that I minded her being so happy about it.

"Oh, I have to thank you somehow... I know. Ryota, take this!" Aurum handed me a chunk of gold. It weighed about two pounds. Since it was gold, it alone would be worth 5,000,000 piros. "Consider it a token of my gratitude!"

"Pretty huge token."

"This is the most I can do outside of my dungeon. When we go back, I can do it a hundred times over!"

"I don't need that much!"

A two hundred pound chunk of gold was just too scary. I knew I'd feel worse having it.



Aurum and I went out into the city together. Her appearance was obviously unusual, but adventurers often dressed even weirder, so nobody cared.

In fact, I was getting much more attention. All kinds of people spoke to me throughout the city.

"Ryota, it's almost festival time. I'd love to batch order your pumpkins!"

"Ryota, I moved from Benzene to Cyclo because I admire you! It's an honor to meet you! Can I have your autograph?"

"Hey there, Ryota. There's going to be a three-day-long magic storm next week, so could you make sure you dungeoneer on those days?"

People would occasionally greet me here and there while I walked before, but

ever since the stuff with Arsenic, it had started happening a lot more often.

It was like I was famous. Exciting, but a complex feeling.

After dealing with everyone who approached me, I returned to Aurum, who was looking all around the city.

```
"How do you like Cyclo, Aurum?"
```

"It's awesome. There are so many kinds of people and things I've never seen."

"That so?"

"Yep! Hey, what's this?"

"That's called a bamboo-copter."

"Bamboo-copter?"

It was a bamboo-copter being sold at a general store. So this world has these, too?

I paid the shopkeeper, spun the shaft, and sent the bamboo-copter flying. The well-made toy flew straight up and slowly rotated as it fell back down.

"It's a toy. You do it like this."

"Wow! I've never seen something like that."

"Really?"

"Yeah! There are so many new things to see and do! This city is awesome. Oh!"

"What's up?"

"See the couple behind that man? They've been to my dungeon before, so I've seen them. Oh, and that old man, too!" Aurum pointed out a bunch of adventurers. Next, she stopped in front of a magic cart shop. "Oh, and these are

magic carts. Wow, they line them up like this?" It seemed she knew about magic carts, too.

Her knowledge was all lopsided; she only knew things that came into dungeons.

Seeing her, I knew that I should use our new warp room to bring her out more often.

"Hey, Ryota?" Aurum suddenly said.

"Yeah?"

"Have you noticed people staring at me for a while?" she asked, concerned.

"Staring?" I looked all around us.

Now that she mentioned it, almost everyone around was staring at her. People of all backgrounds, occupations, and status—probably 99% of everyone we passed were looking at Aurum.

But why? I observed them for a moment, but I couldn't find an answer.

They didn't *say* anything; they just watched her in silence. Their eyes were greedy, but again, why?

"Hey Ryota, what's this?!"

"Hm? Oh, those are marbles."

"Marbles... They're pretty."

"I'll buy one for you." I fished around in my pocket, ready to buy a marble for the sparkly-eyed Aurum. When I did, a gold chunk fell out.

It was the two pound chunk Aurum had given me.

All eyes moved from Aurum to the fallen chunk of gold, as if a loud noise had

drawn their attention. It was that same greedy look as when they'd looked at her.

```
Oh... I get it.
```

"I've figured out why everyone is staring at you, Aurum."

"Really? Why?"

"They love you, Aurum."

"Hwuh?"

"Everyone loves gold. I mean, who in the world wouldn't?"

Surely nobody.

When told this, Aurum cocked her head in utter confusion.

I picked up the gold chunk and bought the marble with pocket change.

When I tried to give it to Aurum, I saw a young man had stopped in front of her. He gazed right at her, as if thinking deeply about something.

"When I first saw you, I knew I was in love! Please go out with me!" he suddenly confessed.

"Whaaaat?! Wh-What's going on? Ryota, help?"

"Seems like he's confessing to you."

"Confessing?"

She doesn't even know that?

Ignoring Aurum's confusion, the man continued to act pushy, saying, "Please be mine!"

"Ooh. So that's it." Aurum recovered from her bewilderment. Apparently, she understood now. "I'm sorry. I can't live without Ryota now, so I can't be yours."

"You're saying that now?!" I shouted. "Also, I don't like how you're wording it!"

"Damn yooou! Remember thiiiis!" The spurned man ran away tearfully.

"He was crying..."

"Well, yeah, that combination of words would make anyone cry."

"Really? Hmm... Humans are so difficult. But that's fun in itself!" Aurum was experiencing a lot of firsts today, but she appreciated the newness of it all.

Now, what should I show her next? Everything that isn't dungeon-related should be new to her, so we might as well go with something normal—

"Eeeek!" Aurum's scream interrupted my thoughts.

I whipped around; someone had snatched her up.

A man wearing a hat and a mask was running away with her slung over his shoulder. He looked almost like a bank robber.

"Hold it!" I shouted.

The man glanced back for just a moment. His eyes were full of greed—of a lust for cash.

I felt the presence of the gold chunk in my pocket. He must've kidnapped Aurum because of her connection to gold.

"Ryota..." she called out.

Whoa, now isn't the time to analyze things. I have to save her!

I firmly planted a foot down, kicked off the ground, and sprinted as fast as I could. With my SS speed, I caught up in no time and circled around the man.

"Wha?!"

"Give Aurum back." I swung my right fist into his stomach to strike the perfect body blow, before transitioning into taking Aurum from him and holding her close.

The man was launched off of his feet with his body bent in the middle. He fell to the ground, spewing vomit.

After I rescued Aurum from the kidnapper, everyone openly praised me.

"Good stuff, man!"

"Now that's a learning experience."

"I want someone to save me like that, too!"

There wasn't any confusion as to who was in the wrong, since he'd done it in broad daylight.

More importantly, Aurum.

I put her down and looked right into her eyes. "Are you okay, Aurum?"

"…"

"Aurum?"

"Oh, no... I think I can't live without you anymore."

"Okay, that's enough of that. Seriously, are you okay?"

"Don't 'that's enough' me! Nnh... B-But yes, I am."

"Okay. Good."

"Nnngh..." Aurum grumbled in apparent frustration, for some reason. I didn't know why, but I satisfied myself with the fact that she wasn't hurt.

What now, though? She's still drawing a lot of attention. Greedy eyes are gathering all over. Maybe we should just get out of here for now.

"Let's go home, Aurum. We can come again another time."

"We're leaving already?"

"Yeah," I confirmed. I felt bad leaving so soon, but I could bring her back once we had a way to deal with prying eyes.

"...Okay, then let's do this."

"What do you... Ah!"

Aurum jumped at me. Her small body clung to my back, as if trying to get me to give her a piggyback ride. She was soft. Despite being gold, she was light.

"We wouldn't want me getting kidnapped again!"

"You're right." I couldn't argue with that. As such, I gave her a piggyback ride home.

All the way to the mansion, she clung tight to me, making my body feel hot.

128. The Girl Who Spewed Gold Dust

The whole way back to the mansion, Aurum held on to me like a vice. She was so soft all over that just giving her a piggyback ride made me nervous.

I was fortunate that she at least stayed quiet on the way home. If she talked to me, my nervousness might have been exposed.

But I managed to make it back with my cover intact. We went into the entrance hall of the mansion together.

"We're here."

"Yeah..." Aurum reluctantly got off my back.

Maybe I should've carried her all the way to the warp room?

While I thought to myself, Erza greeted me from inside the mansion. "Welcome back, Ryota."

"Hey, Erza. I didn't know you were here."

"Yep! I brought the Master Rock, too. From today on, this will be my new point of duty."

"Keep up the good work."

"Of course! Also, erm..." Erza hesitated.

"Yeah?"

"I'll be moving soon."

"Moving? Are you leaving for another city?"

"Aaaah! A-Absolutely not!" She frantically waved in refusal. "That's not it. My current home is a little far from this mansion. Since it seems like I'll be with you for a long time to come, I was thinking of going all-out and moving nearby." Erza rattled that all off rapidly.

Ah, okay. I get it.

Erza had been loaned out to us. She was formerly a normal employee of the Swallow's Returned Favor, but since my friends and I were making so much money now, they decided to dispatch her to us. In short, she wanted to move due to her office's relocation.

"Besides... Being near you would be..."

"Hm?"

"N-Nothing!" She waved frantically again.

I couldn't hear her, but I thought to myself, If that's the reason she's moving, then what if...

"Erza, would you like to live in this mansion?"

"Huh?"

"You can tell that we have rooms to spare. We probably won't fill them for a long time. So, if you'd like—"

"Do you really mean it?!" A big smile burst onto her face.

"Of course. Unlike others who might come, you're special."

"Umm... Special?"

"It's not like you're a stranger. And you get along with the other members of the Family, too." "Special... He called me special..." Erza clasped her hands together and looked up at me with teary eyes.

"You in?"

"I would love to! Thank you!"

"Okay, so... How do we go about securing a room for you? I guess asking Emily comes first. She probably has control over the whole mansion by now."

"I'll go ask Emily. And I'll bring my things!"

"Hey, you don't have to hurry so much—aaand, she's gone."

Erza whipped around and ran off at a speed that would put many adventurers to shame.

I was just happy that she was happy.

"Lucky her... I'm jealous," Aurum muttered.

"Hm? What's the matter, Aurum—" When I turned around, I was shocked. "Whoa?!"

Aurum was staring straight at me, and for some reason, she was spewing gold dust out of her mouth.

The gleaming gold poured onto the floor.

"What's, uh, going on there?" I asked.

"Hm? What would you be referring to?"

"Be serious. I'm talking about the gold coming out of your mouth!"

Part of me was flabbergasted by the words I was saying, but how else should I react to what I was seeing?

"Huh-Oh, you're not kidding."

"Yeah? Did you not notice?"

Aurum wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. The gold dust had stopped for now, but seriously, what was that?

"Are you okay? Not feeling well, maybe?"

She was a dungeon spirit, so maybe being out of her dungeon for too long was bad for her.

Just as I decided I'd best take her home, though, she asked me, "Hey, Ryota? Who was that woman?"

"That woman? You mean Erza?"

"That's what you called her."

"Hmm. Well, how do I answer that? A work client, I guess, and—" Suddenly, I recalled when Erza kissed me. It was an ambush. A one-time kiss. But when I remembered it, I felt my face heat up all the way to my ears.

"...And?"

"S-Someone who's done a lot of good for me."

"Hmm. Is that so ...?" Aurum put a hand to her cheek in thought.

Is she doing okay? Shouldn't she be going back to her dungeon? I thought to myself.

"Ryota."

"Celeste?" This time, Celeste had appeared. She came in from outside the mansion with books and papers in hand. "Welcome back. Whatcha got there?"

"I went to the library. I've gathered information on all of Cyclo's dungeons' traits and peculiarities."

"All of them?"

"Yep. Thanks to Eve, we can go to any floor we want. I'm devising strategies."

"And you brought your research home, huh? Thanks for all you do."

"No, not quite. I memorized all of the research; these are just reference notes for summarizing it all."

"Summarizing it all?"

"Yep! The Ryota Family often works separately, right? I was thinking of making...pamphlets, I guess you could call them? Or something smaller, maybe. The point is to give everyone a reference they can keep handy."

I was surprised at how much thought she'd put into this.

"Thanks, Celeste. I don't know how to repay you."

"...You don't have to. I just did it because I wanted to, after all."

"Wait, but-Mmph." A finger touched my lips.

Celeste had put her pointer finger on them and flashed a mischievous grin.

"I do it because I want to, so it's fine." She smiled. Celeste was a real beauty, so her smile was even prettier, making my heart skip a beat.

"Is she another..." Aurum started to mutter.

"By the way, Ryota, is this girl... Whoa! Something's coming out of her mouth!" Celeste screamed and stared at Aurum in wide-eyed shock.

I looked at Aurum, and once again, she was spewing gold.

"Aurum! You're spitting gold again."

"Huh? Oh—" She vigorously rubbed her mouth.

Eventually, the gold dust stopped. I explained things to Celeste in the

meantime.

"Her name is Aurum. She's the spirit of the dungeon Aurum."

"Just like the spirit of Arsenic, then?"

"Yeah. Last time I met her, she wanted to go outside, too. Now that we can warp, I took her from Aurum and showed her around the city."

"And...therefore, she spews gold?"

"I'm just as surprised. This hasn't happened before."

What had gotten into Aurum?

"Excuse me? May I enter?" There was another voice, apparently a visitor this time.

I opened the front door, and there stood Margaret and her knightly retainers. When I opened the door and Margaret entered, her knights respectfully remained outside as it closed.

Margaret stood in front of me and smiled. "Congratulations on your move."

"You already heard? I was planning on telling you once things settled down."

"All of Cyclo is watching the Ryota Family's moves. It's already the talk of the town."

"That so?" I couldn't contain my wry grin. The thought that our Family moving homes could cause rumors was a little uncomfortable.

"What a lovely mansion. It's so comforting and warm. A clear reflection of its owner."

"I appreciate the compliment, but if there's anyone to thank for that, it would be Emily." "You're always too humble, Ryota," Margaret said and leaned just slightly against me. It wasn't quite a hug, but she was too close.

She was petite, and she smelled lovely. So lovely that it made me go dizzy.

"That's another thing I love about you," she added.

"O-Oh, really?"

"By the way, I don't believe I've met the one vomiting sand?"

"Yeah, this'd be your first time seeing Aurum—wait, sand?!" I looked at Aurum for the third time. For some reason, she was spewing gold dust with a jealous look on her face.

Wait, why? What is the cause?

"Seriously, Aurum, are you okay?"

"Nnngh..." she groaned.

"You don't look too good. Let's get you home. Celeste, I'll take her back. Take Margaret to the drawing room and have Emily get her a drink, please."

"Okay, got it," Celeste assented with a gentle smile and guided Margaret away.

I took the catatonic Aurum back into the basement, turned her into a gold chunk again, and hauled her back home.

But even after I brought her back, the girl stared at me. I was so frightened by the look in her eyes that I couldn't even move.

"A-Aurum? Something wrong?"

"Say, those girls from before..."

"Huh?"

"Have you been...doing things with them?"

"Doing...what, exactly?" I asked.

"I know about that stuff. Couples who come to my dungeon sometimes give off that vibe. They'd even kiss or get naked and hug."

My heart skipped a beat. Aurum might have lacked a lot of common sense due to being stuck in a dungeon for so long, but she wasn't stupid; she just didn't know things. The things that she did know, though, she knew well.

Celeste aside, I had kissed Erza and Margaret.

"So you have," she said.

"Well... Er, I guess..."

Mwah.

Before I could say anything, Aurum stood on her tiptoes and kissed me.

"...Huh? Wh-Why?"

She did not answer. Instead, she glared at me. Her red eyes displayed embarrassment, yet a hint of rage.

After making a face that looked like she was trying to hide her embarrassment, Aurum said, "Okay, bye!" Then, she turned to a gold chunk herself.

Left behind, I stood there vacantly in the underground room for some time.

☆

After taking Aurum back to her dungeon, I used the warp room to go to B3 of

Tellurium.

Emily wanted to treat Margaret to cake, so she asked me to get a pumpkin. My mind was still shaken from Aurum, so I accepted and escaped to Tellurium.

Even here, though, my mind was a mess. I couldn't think of anything but Aurum's kiss.

Frankly, it wasn't bad. Aurum was cute, and she'd started smiling ever since she went outside for the first time, making her even cuter. How could I not enjoy a kiss from her?

Next time, I'd have to have a real heart-to-heart with her.

After leaving it at that, I focused my mind on hunting monsters. The monster that dropped pumpkins was, of course, the cockro slime. While having a slime-like body, they scuttled along the ground in a way reminiscent of cockroaches.

I didn't have too much of a problem with them, but they were still gross, so I used Repetition to avoid having to touch them.

The defeated cockro slime dropped items. First was the pumpkin that Emily had ordered. And the second...was gold dust.

"...Huh?"

Why did it drop gold dust? Wasn't this a drop from Aurum? Or maybe the gold dust Aurum was spewing got stuck on my clothes and fell off just now?

Curious, I used Repetition on another cockro slime. Once again, it dropped both a pumpkin and gold dust.

"What in the world is... Oh." I recalled Aurum's kiss.

The phrase *spirit's blessing* welled up in my mind.

129. Double Record

I went to B1 of Tellurium instead of Nihonium this morning.

I encountered a slime, which I defeated with a normal bullet. The slime burst to bits, and immediately after, it dropped both bean sprouts and gold dust.

I picked up both and looked at them.

Bean sprouts in my left hand, gold dust in my right—both had dropped from the same slime at the same time.

I circled B1, defeating a bunch more slimes. They all dropped bonus gold dust along with the bean sprouts.

I used my magic cart to send the drops to Erza before heading down to B2.

This floor was inhabited by sleep slimes, which looked almost exactly like regular slimes.

B2 of Tellurium dropped carrots. And when I watched other adventurers, they were *only* getting carrots from monsters.

When I fired a bullet at a nearby sleep slime, it dropped both carrots and gold dust.

Yep, that's gold dust. I'm getting gold dust alongside my usual drops.

"Is it the spirit's blessing, after all...?" I muttered aloud.

Gold brought Aurum to mind, and Aurum brought yesterday's kiss to mind.

And that kiss...

I might not be able to draw a straight connection through it all, but what was

happening now was definitely something that could be called a blessing.

After Aurum's kiss, I would get extra gold dust after every monster kill.

☆

Around noon, I found Celeste in a dungeon, and we left together.

After informing her that I had something to tell her, we went to a place with fewer people, and I told her about Aurum.

She was surprised at first, but she quietly listened to the end.

"Everything comes with extra gold dust?"

"Not everything, just dungeon monsters. Tellurium, Arsenic, even Nihonium monsters come with it. Nihonium's came as a real surprise."

"Just dungeon monsters? So you mean...?"

I nodded. "Outsiders didn't drop any."

Celeste looked unsurprised by my reply. She was smart, so she'd already hypothesized as much based on what I told her.

"And that power comes from the spirit of Aurum, huh?"

"That's what I think. I wanted to ask you, Celeste: has anything like this ever happened before? The existence of spirits seems to be widely known, if only as an urban legend..." I'd learned that much from Aurum when I met her, at least.

Though the probability was low, there was still a possibility that normal adventurers could reach the places where spirits were.

I'd heard about it from adventurers and the Dungeon Association, too.

Dungeon spirits were, at the very least, an urban legend.

If there were people in the past who'd met spirits, then had they received blessings?

When I posed that question, Celeste crossed her arms and cocked her head in thought. "I dunno. I do know some legends that say spirits are very impulsive beings, but none say that just meeting a spirit means you'll get their blessing."

"Yeah, I can see why people call them impulsive."

Aurum was like that.

"I'm sorry I couldn't help you, Ryota..."

"Hey, there's no need to apologize. You can't help the fact that there's no available information."

"Thanks... But this is incredible, right? If you get gold dust for free no matter what you fight, then you'll make more money than ever."

"I do, but it's not like it's much. It's way less gold dust than going to Aurum and killing monsters there. Just a little bonus."

"I see..."

"In a full day of farming, it basically doubles my earnings."

"But that's huge!" Celeste shouted. "Your one-day record was 3,000,000 piros, right?"

"Yeah."

"Then double that?"

"Yeah. When I tried it out this morning under the same conditions, I got 6,000,000 piros from the combo of vegetables and gold dust."

"That's huge..." Celeste looked both amazed and exasperated. "I bet you could make more than 10,000,000 in one day before long."

"That sounds nice."

Ten million was kind of a huge number. I'd been happy to see my bank balance go over 10,000,000 piros, so if I could get that much in one day of farming, I'd love to try it.

It was probably too late now, but sooner or later.

"Maybe it would be faster to ask her yourself?"

"...Yeah."

Celeste was right. Instead of theorizing over Aurum's blessing, it'd be fastest to just ask Aurum herself.

In truth, Aurum and Arsenic already had what seemed to be dungeon-wide blessings. Aurum's drops had increased, and Arsenic was in a constant lunar eclipse that increased the number of monsters.

I'd heard those from the spirits in question, and Celeste knew that, as well. So it was natural for her to think that maybe they could bless individuals, too.

Natural. Yeah. Except...

This was hard for me. If it was a blessing from Aurum, then the cause was probably her kiss. I'd be too embarrassed to ask about that directly. And it felt... a little wrong, too.

I returned home with Celeste, all the while wondering if there was another way.

When we went into the mansion, we found a commotion.

"What's going on?" I asked.

"That's Emily's voice," Celeste said. "It sounds like it's coming from Erza's office."

"Wanna go see?"

My hidden scheme was to use this to shelve the Aurum issue for now. Celeste agreed readily without suspicion.

We went to the room that we'd parceled out for Erza, which served as a Swallow's Returned Favor branch office now. As we'd judged from the voices, we found Emily and Erza there.

They noticed us and greeted us at the same time.

"Ah, welcome back, Ryota."

"Welcome back!" Emily said, sounding unusually excited.

"What's up, Emily? Did something good happen?"

"Yes! I got a new record today!"

"New record?"

Erza calmly, yet gleefully added, "She broke her personal best daily earnings record."

"Five hundred thousand piros," Emily said.

"That's great, Emily!"

"Congrats, Emily!"

Celeste and I congratulated Emily. She giggled bashfully.

"That's a big jump. What made the difference?" I asked.

"It's thanks to the old man."

"Old man?"

"Yes. After Yoda told me everything, I sent him a meal through the warp room, and he gave me an incredible new power as thanks."

"Okay, but... Old man?"

"Seems like she's referring to the spirit of Arsenic."

"Oooh."

We'd left the door to the warp room open as of late.

I'd successfully tested my theory from before: if I warped away but didn't warp back, instead coming back the usual way, the room would count as still in use. That would allow the door to stay open.

Through this, my friends could use it whenever they wanted. Emily had used that to warp to the spirit of Arsenic.

And then...

"Emily... Were you blessed by the spirit of Arsenic?"

Her smile spread even wider, proving without a word that my theory was correct.

130. The REAL Mine Craft

The full Ryota Family came to B1 of Arsenic. We were here to confirm the truth: had Emily received a spirit's blessing?

After we warped there, she headed over to a dante rock monster with hammer in hand. For some reason, Alice was pushing a magic cart next to her.

"Okay, I'll go now."

Alice formed a ring with her thumb and pointer finger, the universal "OK" sign, and replied with her usual sunny disposition, "Ready any time!"

Emily sucked in a deep breath, swung her hammer down, and shattered the dante rock. The monster disappeared and dropped the usual item, dandelions.

Almost immediately after Emily lifted her hammer, Alice, who'd squatted down next to her, picked up her drop.

So far, it was a normal sight; the dungeons of this world were full of people defeating monsters and producing goods. However, immediately after Alice snatched it away, something unusual happened. Incredibly, another dante rock appeared in the exact same spot where the first had just disappeared.

"So she timed killing it with its revival time?" I asked.

"That's not it," Celeste answered.

"What do you mean?"

"Watch, and you'll see."

I turned my eyes back to Emily. She swung her hammer down again,

shattering the second rock. Alice picked up the drop—and another dante rock immediately appeared. As soon as the dandelions were off the floor, the rocks respawned.

"That's fast!" I exclaimed. Meanwhile, Emily and Alice continued their work.

A rock appeared, Emily smashed it, Alice picked up the drop, a rock reappeared, Emily smashed it...

Whenever Emily broke the rock and created a drop, Alice would pick up the drop, and the next rock would appear. They respawned in no time, and Emily continued to break them over and over.

This caused a rhythmical smashing sound, each one followed by Alice snatching up the dropped dandelions and putting them in the cart.

Their pace sped up over time. Whenever Emily lifted her hammer, Alice's hand was already on its way out to grab the next drop.

By the time she'd grabbed it, Emily's hammer was on its way back down. When the dante rock came back after Alice snatched the drop away, the already-falling hammer would break the rock. They were going at a pace I couldn't even imagine before.

While I watched, I tried punching a different rock I found nearby. It dropped dandelions, but it didn't respawn like Emily's.

I see. So this is a blessing from Arsenic to Emily.

When it came to farming dungeons, once you were strong enough, the key to making more money was efficiently finding your next monster.

I memorized the layouts of dungeons and respawn timings of monsters, and Alice had a special ability that let her sense where monsters were. Celeste had gathered boundless information, and Eve... Come to think of it, what *did* Eve



That aside, we each had our own ways of raising our efficiency.

But each of us still had to *search* in the end. Searching meant a loss of efficiency due to the travel time involved.

This blessing was incredible. When Emily defeated monsters, they reappeared in the same place with just as many drops. It was the ultimate blessing for farming.

Emily was in her element now, smashing rocks in perfect rhythm.

She was holding a hammer, but it reminded me of the sight of her in the kitchen every day, chopping with her knife.

The sight relaxed my heart. After I watched for a while, I remembered something. Emily smashing, Alice reaching out and picking up from the side...

Smash, pick up. Smash, pick up. I knew something a lot like this.

"It's like mochi-pounding," I mused.

"Mochi-pounding?"

"Back in Japan—my homeland—we had something a lot like this. One person would pound rice with a mallet, while the other would knead it as soon as the mallet came up. This is a lot like that."

"I had no idea," Celeste said in understanding.

"This sound is addictive..." Eve, wearing her bunny outfit, gnawed on a carrot. It was normal for her to be savoring a carrot, but it was unusual for her to express interest in something else—said thing being Emily's rock-smashing.

"I get it," I agreed. "The rhythm is like a metronome, right?"

"I could listen forever, zzz..." Eve's head suddenly slumped over, though she

still held the carrot in both hands.

"She fell asleep?!"

Her eyes were half-closed now, and she was drooling on the half-eaten carrot. Since she was wearing the bunny onesie she'd been obsessed with lately, it was kind of adorable.

"Ah!" Eve's face shot up as she realized she was asleep. "Bunnies don't sleep." She rushed to make an excuse and began chewing on her carrot again.

She was clearly trying to cover up the fact that she was just sleeping.

"I mean, you were obviously sleeping," I rebutted.

"Nuh-uh. Sleep magic doesn't work on bunnies."

"It's not magic. It's just sound."

"Either way, it doesn't work. As long as I have my carrots, zzzzz..." Eve said, chewing again, but she quickly fell back asleep.

Emily's rock-smashing was super-effective for inducing sleep.

If I took a video of this and uploaded it with the title "Chill Beats to Sleep to," I was certain it would get a million views.



That night, while I relaxed in my room, someone knocked on my door. When I answered, Emily came in.

She'd changed into her bed clothes after coming home. Emily blushed just a little as she entered my room.

```
"What's up, Emily?"
```

"I came to thank you, Yoda."

"Thank me?"

For what? I wondered.

Emily stopped in front of me, blushed even more, and gazed into my eyes. "Thanks to you, I make so much money now."

"That's because of your efforts, Emily."

Being able to smash rocks one after another was a result of the blessing she'd gotten from bringing old man Arsenic meals, after all.

That was all Emily's doing. Or so I thought, at least.

"That's not true. If not for you, I would still be fighting slimes on B1 of Tellurium. My maxed level, my incredible new hammer, meeting the spirit... You caused all of that, Yoda. And..."

"And?" I urged. Emily held something out to me. When I looked, I found that it was her passbook. "What's this?"

"Look inside."

It was bad manners to look at other people's bank accounts, but Emily wanted me to see it, so I accepted it.

I opened it and looked inside. It was almost all deposits and no withdrawals. That wasn't surprising for someone so focused on the household. Her balance increases were more modest than mine, but the number was growing over time.

And then, today, her balance had reached 10,000,000 piros.

"Congratulations, Emily!"

"It's because of you, Yoda. Thank you," she thanked me again.

Aha. And that's why she came to see me. Our Emily is a ten-millionaire...

The same girl who used to camp in dungeons, forced by her circumstances to live a shoddy life, had 10,000,000 piros now. It brought a tear to my eye.

I returned her passbook and gazed at her. There were 118 dungeons in total, which meant we had 116 spirits left to meet. We had plenty of room to grow stronger.

"Emily."

"Yes?"

"How about you aim for a hundred mil next?"

"...Okay!" she replied with passbook in hand and a beaming smile.

Emily's smile looked like the happiest one I'd ever seen on her face.

131. The Evil(?) Trash-Disturber

I turned to stone and farmed B6 of Nihonium as usual. Amidst the poison mist, I readied my guns and aimed carefully for headshots.

I didn't need to speedrun Nihonium, so I took my time here. Thus, I maintained a 100% headshot rate, insta-killing every enemy throughout my farm.

And I never neglected to evade attacks, either. I might've been invincible thanks to the Absolute Rock stone, but it was only here to protect me from the mist. Rather than being lazy, I resolved myself to dodge every monster attack.

Often in video games, when I was farming weaker monsters, I'd have this bad habit of playing sloppily due to the raw stat difference. But here, I was careful to avoid that as I hunted these poison zombies.

I evaded every attack and maintained my perfect headshot rate.

As I got closer to the end, I got more and more tired from the necessary concentration, but I kept on doing it in case it would come in handy someday.

After doing this all morning, I'd raised my intelligence from D to C. And of course, both my hit and evasion rates were still 100%.



Before I went out for afternoon farming, I stopped by the city. I'd offered the

mirror to Nihonium, so these days, I'd wander around looking for the sword and magatama.

The time I'd gained from being able to warp to dungeons just added to my free time looking around the city.

"Hey, buddy, want some tobacco? We've got every kind from B30 to B60 of Mercury!"

"We've got newt, soft-shelled turtle, and pit viper from Zinc! Ask about our rare drops, too!"

"We have the only box of leeks from Krypton today! Eat 'em, wave 'em, whatever! They're fresher and tastier than any of Cyclo's!"

The city of Cyclo was as bustling as ever. Goods from dungeons all over gathered here, bringing life to the market.

I wonder if my goods are circulating all over the world in the same way? I mused mentally. The thought of it made me a little emotional.

I wandered through the market, though some of the dungeon names I heard made me do a double take. The god of this world must've hated tobacco, making it a good from Mercury. And the aphrodisiacs from Zinc... Don't even get me started.

Compared to those, Aurum's gold was straightforward and likable.

While I wandered, I looked around in search of the sword and magatama. Suddenly, I noticed that a crowd had formed in one corner of the market.

Curious, I headed over.

"A monster! An outsider's appeared!"

"Someone call for help! It's attacking Pierre!"

I approached until I could discern what they were saying. Then, I sped up into a sprint. The source of the commotion was beyond the wall of spectators: a middle-aged man being attacked by a monster.

It was a Frankenstein, the outsider created from trash.

"Repetition!"

He seemed to be in danger, so I prioritized speed and killed the monster with Repetition.

The Frankenstein was wiped away without a sound, saving the man. Instantly after, people cheered.

Words of thanks and praise for my actions came my way.



"Thank you! You saved me."

"Are you hurt?" I asked.

"Aww, it's just a scrape or two." The man, Pierre, showed me his elbow and laughed.

It was scraped, for sure. It looked like he'd scraped it against a wall while he was running, or something. I was just glad it wasn't major.

"There are more of them lately, huh?" he said.

"More of them? You mean the Frankensteins?" I asked.

"Oh, you don't know? They've been showing up in town a lot these days."

Has that been happening? I had no idea.

"Why? Cyclo has people disposing of trash, doesn't it?" I recalled Celeste's former occupation.

In this world, all trash produced by human consumption could turn into outsiders. The waste didn't turn into its former material's monster, though; it all turned into Frankensteins.

If left alone, trash would turn into monsters and cause trouble, so this world prioritized trash disposal even more than modern Japan. That led to a higher-quality living environment, in a roundabout way.

Cyclo, a place with multiple dungeons and lots of adventurers, took in a lot of taxes. That should mean they had the funds to handle trash disposal well.

"Well..." Pierre began, brow furrowed. "Lately, someone's been making a mess of the trash. I don't know why, but they are."

"They...make a mess of it?"

"Yeah. Sometimes, the mess turns into those outsiders."

Huh... Making a mess of the trash? Who would do that, and why? I left Pierre and kept that in mind as I walked through town.

Indeed, I noticed trash on the ground here and there. Trash turned into monsters, so to this point, they hadn't let that happen. It was out of necessity, sure, but this world was like a paradise with no littering.

But now, there was trash all over the place. Trash on the main street wasn't an urgent issue; there were people out here during the day, so it wouldn't turn into outsiders.

Woooosh.

Wind blew, whipping up trash and carrying it into a back alley. Since I

happened to see it, I promptly burned it with a flame round. Trash left in places without people would turn into outsiders that caused all sorts of problems.

Still...why would people disturb the trash?

☆

I went back to the mansion and found Alice.

There, I explained the situation in the city and asked, "Alice, can you sense monster locations in town?"

"I can! I always win hide-and-seek with my buddies," she said proudly. The monsters on her shoulders protested by jumping around and hitting her lightly.

They're such good friends.

"That's great. Mind helping me patrol the city for a while? With your power, we can find newborn Frankensteins and take them down before they can cause trouble for people."

"Sure, okay."

"Sorry to ask you for this on such short notice."

"It's okay! Protecting the people of the city is cool!" Alice smiled innocently.

"Oh, I already found one!"

"Huh?"

"That way. There's a monster not too far away." She pointed at the mansion wall. It was a wall, but this area's trash collection center was that way. "I'll go check."

"Nah, don't worry. I can find it myself if it's that close. Thanks, Alice." I thanked her and ran out of the mansion.

Then, I headed in the direction she'd pointed toward. When I came to the trash collection site, I found something moving around in it.

It was too big to be a human; it was an outsider.

There was a home nearby. If left alone, it would attack the people inside, so I fired off Repetition in order to deal with it right away.

Repetition, my ultimate farming magic that immediately killed any monster I'd defeated before. Thinking I was up against an outsider Frankenstein, I used that—but it didn't work.

The monster slunk around the trash for a moment before running off.

"Hey, wait!" I'd stopped for a moment out of confusion over why Repetition failed, allowing the enemy to escape. I ran after it and fired Repetition off again, but it still didn't work.

Why? I wondered, looking at my foe.

It had cloth over it, so I couldn't identify it. But on closer inspection, it didn't quite look to be a Frankenstein.

I remembered the conversation from before. Something was digging around in the trash, and it wasn't a Frankenstein.

"Aha. You're the trash-disturber!"

In that case, maybe they were the perpetrator. With that thought in mind, I decided to capture it alive instead of killing it.

I sprinted at max, SS-rank speed. I easily circled around it and pointed the barrel of my gun at...what seemed to be its head.

"Don't move."

It stopped and shook like a leaf. Still pointing my gun at it, I threw off the fabric covering it.

"D-Don't hurt me! I'm not a bad monster!"

I was surprised. Shocked half to death. Beneath the cloth was a wretched-looking, dog-like monster with matted, dirty fur.

132. Harmful and Harmless

I looked closer at it, never taking my gun away. It was shaped like a dog, but it was big—even bigger than something like a St. Bernard. Maybe as big as a pony.

The patterns on its forehead and back, which almost looked like cross-shaped wounds, had a boyish sense of coolness to them. Its fur was dirty, so I couldn't quite tell, but it was probably grey when clean.

It looked like it would have a strong, fierce look if it tried, but its raised eyebrows and teary eyes just made it look like a person at their wit's end.

Is this thing really a monster?

"Don't kill me. I know! I'll give you something." The dog started digging through the fabric and retrieved a dirty sheet of paper. "Let me go, and you can have this. You humans value this stuff, right?"

"Is that...a thousand-piro bill?"

It had taken out a tattered, dirty 1,000-piro note.

"Yeah! I picked it up a long time ago. Humans can eat with it, yeah?"

"Well, yeah, but..."

"Then take it! As long as you let me go."

I was confused. At a loss, even. The fact that this monster could talk was a surprise already, but more than that, it wasn't hostile like other monsters. It even begged for its life.

The way it begged bothered me, too. How it offered me 1,000 piros that it

picked up "a long time ago" and kept so close until now.

What is this thing...?

Suddenly, I heard a loud noise.

Grrrrumble.

It was the dog's belly rumbling.

"Urk..." it groaned.

"Uh... You hungry?"

"Yeah... But it's okay! I won't do anything bad anymore. Let me go, and I'll leave this city right away! I mean it! Believe me!" it pleaded even more desperately.

I put down my gun. How could I shoot this thing?

 $\stackrel{\star}{\Rightarrow}$

The dog and I went to a back alley.

He looked up at me and asked, "D-Do you really mean it?"

I'd put meat on the ground—raw meat that I'd bought at a nearby shop while the dog waited here.

Given his size, I'd bought a seven-pound chunk of meat for him. It cost 10,000 piros, or about 1,400 piros per pound, but I got a little bit for free.

"Do you not like meat? Or can you not eat it raw?" I asked.

"Th-That's not it at all! I'll eat anything edible."

I recalled the leeks from Krypton I'd seen in town just a short while ago, but the thing was so pitiful that I couldn't bring myself to mess with him.

```
"Then eat. Don't worry about it."

"...You mean it?"

"I do."

"O-Okay..."
```

The dog timidly bit into the meat, glancing at me over and over.

I'd bought it to feed the thing, so I just watched over him. The dog continued to be wary of me as he devoured all of the meat.

```
"Thanks. It was delicious."

"Was that enough? I can go get more, if you want."

"I-I'm fine! That was a whole month's worth of food for me."

"A month?"
```

"Yep. I normally just dig through human trash, but it never has this much meat."

"So you were the one digging through the trash after all."

"Oh, I'm sorry, I'm sorry!"

"I guess...I do understand why you were doing it."

Anyone could tell just from looking. It was a big, talking dog-probably a monster-but the truth lay somewhere else. Tattered clothes, fishing through the trash when people looked away, clinging to a single 1,000-piro note for dear life...

The word *homeless* described it well.

```
"What are you, anyway?" I asked. "A monster?"

"Probably."
```

"I dunno. It was a long time ago, but I woke up one day in a totally different city."

"Then maybe you're not a monster."

"I think I am, though. Sometimes, when people see me, they yell, 'It's a Cerberus outsider!' Outsiders are monsters that show up in town, right?"

"That's not precise, but yeah."

"Probably?"

It seemed this dog was an outsider from a monster called Cerberus. If multiple people had said as much, that was probably true.

He explained, "I've always been hiding, because people kill outsiders when they find them. But staying in the same city means people will find me, so I've been going from place to place. This city has a lot of people, which makes it easy to find food. I got so excited that I've just been running around and digging through trash..."

"And that's why Frankensteins have been showing up so much?"

"I thought of following people into dungeons to do work, but I'm too scared to go. I heard outsiders die when they go into dungeons."

"Oh..."

That's right.

If this Cerberus really was an outsider, he wouldn't be able to go into dungeons and make money. He couldn't do the most popular job in this world.

"I'm sorry. I'll leave this city right away. Just don't kill me," he begged for his life again.

Whether he begged or not, I definitely wasn't about to kill him. How could I be so cold toward a Cerberus forced to live a vagabond's life, uncertain of his own identity?

"Thanks, Mr. Human. I appreciate the meal. You can have this." The Cerberus put the 1,000-piro bill from before in front of me, turned, and walked away.

He held that shoddy cloth with his mouth to conceal his identity as he proceeded down the back alley.

Should I just let him go like this? But what's the point in stopping him? Can I do anything for him?

While I worried, an adventurer appeared at the other end of the alley.

He was pushing a magic cart, with an Emily Hammer slung over his shoulder. He seemed like he was on his way to sell drops after a day of dungeoneering.

"Whoa!"

"Ack, an outsider?!"

Man and monster froze in place, facing each other. The adventurer moved first, swinging his hammer horizontally.

It struck Cerberus, launching his pony-sized form sideways. The canine flew into a wall and collapsed in a heap.

"Oh, it's a weak one. Don't scare me like that. Geez," the man complained and pushed his magic cart on as he left.

There were plenty of adventurers out there who didn't kill outsiders; after all, they didn't drop anything.

They might do it if the Dungeon Association offered a bounty or if someone made a request, but in most other cases, they avoided them. That was true of the majority of adventurers in this world. Likewise, this man had only struck Cerberus once before leaving.

Meanwhile, after being launched into the wall, Cerberus was totally immobile. He wasn't dead; when monsters died, they disappeared, so I judged that he wasn't dead yet.

My theory was correct. After a while, Cerberus stood up on unsteady feet.

"Hey, you okay?" I tried to run over, but after one step, I stopped in place.

I wasn't thinking of anything. I hadn't sensed anything. But I stopped and crossed both arms in front of my face. It was pure instinct, split-second decision-making cultivated from years of life experience.

And it told me now to defend myself.

Instantly after, Cerberus charged at me with ferocious speed. Despite my cross-armed guard, I was launched away. I flew far back, out of the back alley, and struck a building.

"Eeek!"

"What's happening?!"

Pedestrians screamed. Tension ran through passersby.

Cerberus lunged out of the back alley. This time, he opened his mouth to bite me. I thrust both hands out and stopped his jaws before they could bite down. His sharp fangs dug into my palms painfully.

"Grrrrr..." Cerberus growled and tensed up his jaw even more.

I heard a bunch of voices around me.

"It's a Cerberus! An outsider of that demonic dog has appeared!"

"Hey, someone call an adventurer! Or even the Dungeon Association!"

"Wait, that's Ryota Sato!"

"The boss of the Ryota Family?"

"The one who kills outsiders that other people won't bother dealing with?"

While some of them cheered me on and lifted me up, I noticed someone in my periphery leaving to call for backup.

This is bad. I gotta settle this fast.

Normal adventurers might let outsiders go, but any adventurers they called now would make sure the job was done. Now that I felt sympathy for the homeless vagabond Cerberus, I didn't want to see him killed.

I had to do something before others came.

"Grrrr..." Cerberus's eyes were bloodshot. He was out of his right mind, probably because of that blow to the head.

In that case...!

I took my hands out of his mouth and jumped back. Then, I whipped out my guns, loaded bullets, and stood ready.

Cerberus lunged again. He's fast! Easily as fast as someone with A-rank speed.

Despite his ferocious charge, I calmly fired my guns.

Two fully-buffed recovery rounds collided in midair, making a sleep round. It struck the lunging Cerberus, and his bloodshot eyes rolled back.

The dog retained the momentum of his leap, so I caught him. The sleep round was super effective. Where the Cerberus had previously growled with

bloodshot eyes, he now snored and blew a snot bubble in my arms.

"Well, well. Fancy meeting you here."

I heard a familiar voice: Neptune. Leader of the Neptune Family, and an adventurer of great skill and fame.

Behind him were the women Ran and Lil. Last time I saw them, they'd used their magic to power him up. In other words, they were serious about this. If I'd taken much longer, they might have killed the dog.

"If I knew you were here, I wouldn't have rushed," Neptune complained. "By the way, how long are you planning to hug that thing?"

"Huh? Oh... Right. What do I do with it?" I asked.

"Save intimacy for the girls, I say."

"This isn't the time for stupid jokes!" I rebutted with gusto, prompting a carefree laugh from Neptune.

"Trust me, I'll do it in any situation. Right, Lil and Ran?" He looked to his girls for agreement. "But really, what's the problem? It's an outsider, so just kill it. The audience won't be satisfied until you do."

"...I don't want to kill this one."

"Why not?"

I said nothing.

"Silent treatment, eh? So you want to keep it as a pet." Neptune's unsurprised tone surprised me.

"Can I do that? It's an outsider."

"As long as you can tame it. There's no reason every outsider needs to be

killed. You ought to know that, since you've been using them to soup up magic carts."

He was right. The calculation and warp features in the magic carts had been installed using rock monsters from Arsenic. They never attacked anything, so even as monsters, they were harmless.

We only killed outsiders because they were dangerous when violent.

"If you can convince people it's safe, or rather, that you can hold it back if it does get violent..." One end of Neptune's lips curled up into a smirk. "There's no weirdo out there who hunts outsiders for sport."

It was so simple, but I felt as though the scales had fallen from my eyes.

133. Doggie Says Dig

After leaving Neptune, I took Cerberus back home to the mansion.

"S-So this is your home, Mr. Human?" he asked.

"Yep."

"Wow... Are you actually a really big deal?"

"I dunno about that..." I didn't think so. I was just a little famous these days, thanks to my unique skill that nobody from this world had. "Anyway, let's go in. I hope someone's home."

Everyone might be out dungeoneering at this time of day, I thought as I showed Cerberus inside.

When we entered the front door, we encountered Emily.

"Huh? Yoda, why did you come back this way?" She was holding a broom instead of her hammer.

"I was hanging around Cyclo instead of in a dungeon. What are you up to, Emily?"

"Thanks to the warp room, I can come straight home. I'm using the extra free time to clean."

"That so? Thanks, Emily. I'm always happy to come back to such a warm home, and it's all thanks to you."

"I just do it because I want to."

"Either way, thank you."

Emily looked down. She seemed embarrassed to be thanked over something she said she wanted to do. I wanted to butter her up more, since she acted so cute, but I noticed Cerberus hiding behind me, so I decided to deal with that first.

"I'm glad you're here, Emily. There's somewhere I need to go; would you mind taking care of this little guy for a while?"

"You want me to take care of something? Anything for you, Yoda!"

"Thanks. C'mere, puppy."

"Aww, a puppy-that's a big puppy!" Emily gasped.

When I'd called the Cerberus over, he came to the front door and shrunk down, unsure what to do. When Emily spoke to him, he shrunk even more.

"Yeah, that size needs no introduction."

"A really big puppy..."

"N-Nice to meet you..."

"And he can talk?"

"Yeah. He's an outsider. I need you to protect him so nobody hurts him."

"I see. Please leave it to me." Emily pumped her fist slightly, broom still in hand. She was cute in a domestic sense before, but the way she pumped her fist with the broom made me imagine it as her hammer, making her look even more reliable.

"Y-You're not afraid of me? I'm an outsider..."

"We have other monsters here," Emily replied.

Right, Alice's buddies. Though they're a little different.

"Then good luck," I said to them. "I'll be back as soon as possible."

"Okay."

After leaving Cerberus with Emily, I left the mansion and went to the Dungeon Association.

☆

The various formalities took about an hour. I explained the situation to Clint and brought up what Neptune had suggested. We filled out the paperwork necessary for me to raise an outsider, I got the collar that would serve as proof, and I returned to the mansion.

I then went in and searched the place. Eventually, I found Emily and Cerberus in the kitchen.

Cerberus sat next to Emily, his tail wagging like mad. Given his massive size, that tail-flapping was intense. It might even be enough to break an adult's bones.

"I'm back," I called out.

Emily and Cerberus came over to greet me.

"Welcome back, Yoda."

"Welcome back, Mr. Human."

Emily bore her usual smile, but for some reason, Cerberus's tail had stopped wagging. He wasn't curled up and scared, at least, but he didn't wag his tail for me at all.

I wonder why?

"Listen, Mr. Human! Ms. Human's food is delicious!"

"Food?" I cocked my head at Emily.

"Yes. After you left, this puppy's tummy was grumbling, so I made food for it."

"It tasted like dreams..."

"Oh, I see."

That answered all of my questions. Because when Emily said that, Cerberus's tail started wagging again—even harder this time. The pup had a blissful look on his face, too.

He wagged his tail for her because she'd tamed him with food.

I couldn't blame him; her food was like drugs. Simply delicious. Warm, and delicious. And you couldn't stop eating it. You'd want to eat it forever and ever. It was like she'd mastered the basics to an arcane degree.

That was Emily's cuisine. I could see why Cerberus wagged his tail so fast that it looked ready to snap off.

"So where did you go, Yoda?"

"To the Dungeon Association. I had to get permission to keep the puppy. He's an outsider, so he falls under their purview."

"I had no idea."

"So, I'm supposed to put this collar on him... Also, he needs a name. They say that when you pick a name, there's magic that displays it right here." I took out the collar and pointed at the white part in the middle. "You don't have a name, do you?"

```
"Nope. Would you like to give me one, Mr. Human?"
```

"Sure. But first, I want to check something."

"Check what?"

"I thought of two names, and I want to figure out which one we'll give you."

"How do you do that?"

"Come with me." I turned and walked away, and Emily and Cerberus followed. We exited to the courtyard.

There, they stared blankly at me as I revealed a ball that I'd bought in the city. It was about the size of a baseball.

"What are you going to do with that, Yoda?"

"Just throwing it. Here goes."

I casually tossed the ball. There wasn't any particular technique or speed behind it—just a regular ol' throw. When I did, Cerberus's eyes lit up for just a second. Then, he chased the ball.

Emily piped up, "He really is a puppy!"

"Yep, that's a dog."

"What do you mean?"

"I wanted to figure out whether he was a dog or a wolf at heart. The name depended on the answer."

"I see. He instinctively chased the ball, so he's a dog, right?"

"That's right."

Just as Emily understood my meaning, Cerberus brought the ball back in his mouth. He stopped in front of me and looked up, never letting go.

Incidentally, his tail was wagging. Not as much as it did for Emily, though. I mentally complimented her food; clearly, it was good enough to supersede canine instinct.

"Good fetch. Who's a good dog?" I took the ball and petted Cerberus. He looked happy and wagged his tail even faster. "That means you'll be named Kerberos," I said as I raised the collar.

It glowed for a moment, and the name Kerberos appeared on it.

"Kerberos?" he asked.

"It basically means hellhound. It also sounds similar to Cerberus, which is a plus."

"Thank you!"

I put the collar on one happy-looking Kerberos.

"By the way, Yoda, what would you have named him if he was a wolf?" Emily asked.

"Loki or Holo. Both of them are legendary wolf names."

"Oh, I see. So all wolves have 'lo' in their name?"

Not really, but if Emily is cool with it, then that's enough for me.

I looked at the Cerberus named Kerberos and said, "You'll be wearing this collar all the time from now on. As long as you do, other people won't try to hurt you."

"Okay."

"Is the collar really that incredible?" Emily asked.

"It's proof that I'm caring for him. If Kerberos goes crazy, it's my

responsibility; and if other adventurers kill him, then that means they're being hostile toward me."

"That's a relief. No adventurer in Cyclo would declare war on you, Yoda."

I hope you're right about that.

"Whoa... You really are a big deal, Mr. Human," Kerberos said.

"He is! Yoda is the strongest person in Cyclo, he makes the most money, and he's solved the most problems. He's our triple threat."

"Oooh..." The dog looked up at me with pure respect in its eyes. "And I ended up with him, of all people..."

"Why don't you try changing what you call him?" Emily suggested. "He's going to raise you as his puppy, so it would be weird to call him Mr. Human all the time."

"R-Right. Umm... What should I call him, then?"

"Anything is fine. My name is Ryota Sato, so Ryota, or Sato, or whatever is fine."

"You should call him Master!" Emily said eagerly.

"Master?"

"You're an important person's puppy, so you should address him as such."

"Hey now, that's not necessary," I cut in.

"Master..." Kerberos repeated it, as if feeling how it rolled off the tongue.

I wanted to tell the dog not to worry about it, but then I realized something.

That tail was wagging like never before—just swinging madly left and right, as

loud as a world-class batter's swing.

"Master!" he called me with an innocent look on his face, wagging his tail against the ground with excessive force.

Boom! The ground caved in a little.

Does he like the title that much? Maybe dogs like being raised by big shots, because of the alpha mentality, or whatever?

Not that I minded. In fact, maybe being called Master was ideal. Since this monster could talk, him calling me Master in public would show people that I was caring for him and make them less likely to hunt him down.

It'd be a real problem if, say, the dog was human-like and also a little girl and called me master, but he was just a dog.

"Master!"

"Here. Go fetch again!" I threw the ball again. Kerberos ran like the wind.

"He looks even happier than when I fed him," Emily mused. "That's our Yoda for you."

"We'll have to introduce Kerberos to everyone else later."

"I think they'll be happy to welcome a new member of the Family."

"Yeah." I watched Kerberos chase the ball, imagining how everyone else would react.

He ran to the edge of the yard and took the ball in his mouth, but something seemed to distract him. He dropped the ball and began sniffing the ground.

"Did he find something?"

"Let's go find out."

Emily and I followed Kerberos.

"But man, this courtyard is big. I'm amazed that everything inside the building didn't turn into outsiders with people not being able to get in."

"Realtors usually send people to make sure that doesn't happen," Emily explained. "If you put a few dozen people around the mansion, that would be enough to prevent it."

"I can only imagine the personnel costs. There's no way they make a profit, right?"

While we talked about it, we caught up with Kerberos. The dog had stopped at the edge of the yard, still sniffing the ground.

"What's up, Kerberos?" I asked. "Find something?"

"Master, dig here."

"Here?"

"Yeah." Kerberos nodded firmly.

I think I've heard stories about this, I thought to myself as I dug.

Part of me wanted to ask why, but Kerberos looked serious, so I decided to just get right to it.

Since I didn't have any tools, I dug with my bare hands. Oddly, I felt certain that something was there. Guided by that sensation, I dug twenty inches down and found it.

It was a magatama—the unique shape you'd see in video games and the like.

"Wait, a magatama?!"

The thing I'd just dug up might have been one of the Nihonium-related items

I'd been searching for all this time.

134. Chewing Bones, Chewing Arms

Back in the mansion, I brought Emily and Kerberos to a vacant room.

"What room is this, Master?"

"Storage. We throw things we don't really use in here. They're here, right, Emily?"

"Yes, it's all here."

"Good. First, let's check you out."

I held an item out toward the confused-looking Kerberos. It was a consumable item that could fit in the palm of my hand: a portable status board.

You could check your stats all you wanted for free if you went to one of the town's dungeons, but anywhere else, you'd need one of these. But they weren't very expensive, so we always kept a few here just in case.

I held one out to Kerberos.

"Try using this."

"Okay. Like this?" Kerberos used the portable status board to check his stats.

Level 1/50
HP D
MP F
Strength E
Vitality F
Intelligence F
Willpower F
Speed E
Dexterity F
Luck F

—— 2/2 ——
Plants F
Animals F
Minerals F
Magic F
Special F

His stats were low. His level had some room to grow, being level 1 now, but his stats weren't too promising. Kerberos was so weak that I could kill him with just one bullet.

I found that odd, given how strong he'd been when he went wild.

"You haven't raised your level at all, huh? Have you ever killed anything?" I asked.

"Like humans? If I did that, others would definitely come and get revenge."

"I see. You did say you've been hiding all your life."

While we talked, Emily opened the door and came in. The storage room had a lot of stuff inside, but it was well-maintained, so it didn't have even a speck of dust.

Even the meanest mother-in-law or sister-in-law wouldn't be able to find any faults with this level of cleanliness.

"Incredible," I mused.

"Hmm?"

"Sorry. Just thinking of how Emily it all is."

"Do you think so?" Emily looked befuddled.

I traced the wall with my finger. Not a speck of dust gathered on my finger; in fact, I was only making the wall dirty.

That's our Emily.

Emily brought a box full of crystals from the back of the room.

"We sure collected a lot."

"Only because you send so many every day, Yoda."

"What are these, Master?"

"It'll be faster to show rather than tell. Take one." Kerberos did as commanded and picked up a crystal with his mouth. When he did, the crystal melted away and disappeared. "Whoa, M-Master? When I touched it, it went away."

"Don't get all flustered; that's how they work. Keep on going. Emily, bring all we've got."

"Okay!"

Kerberos looked at me blankly while Emily brought crystals from the back of the room.

He looked utterly confused, but he obeyed his master's orders and touched the crystals one after another, absorbing them into him. We continued this for a total of twenty boxes.

"Master, they're not disappearing anymore."

"Capped, huh? Okay, use this one more time."

I gave him another consumable portable status board. Though confused, he used it. And then...

—— 1/2 ——
Level 50/50
HP B
MP F
Strength D
Vitality C
Intelligence F
Willpower F
Speed B
Dexterity F
Luck F



"Wow! Master, my level went up so much!"

"So you are capped now."

Indeed, I'd given him the crystallized EXP. The ring dropped by Nihonium's dungeon master allowed the user to crystallize and save up EXP when they had reached the level cap.

Our new pet and friend had gone from level 1 to his maximum in no time. We could cap our new companions' levels instantly. I wanted to make that the new standard of the Ryota Family.

"Wow... My Master is incredible..."

"He's Yoda, after all. Of course he is!"

"I'm glad you found me, Master..." Kerberos was moved. Despite his size, he was saying some adorable things.

"You can't go to dungeons, so instead, I want you to protect the mansion," I told him. "Be the strongest guard dog to suit your name. If people attack our home, I want you to fight. That's an order from your master."

"Yeah! I'll bite all your enemies to death!" Kerberos said excitedly. And in truth, his stats weren't bad. He looked strong enough to be able to take down the average adventurer.

"Okay, next up..." I rolled up my sleeve and offered him my arm. "Bite me as hard as you can."

```
"Huh? Y-You, Master?"

"Yeah. Don't hold back."

"But..."
```

"It's fine," I urged him. He looked back and forth between me and Emily, clearly unsure, but he timidly took my arm in his mouth. He bit down—but it was just a nibble. Not forceful at all. "Harder."

"I can't bite you, Master..."

"We need you to. I could ask Emily, but she's a little too strong."

"Kerby, you should do what Yoda says. There's always a good reason for it."

"But..."

"Emily says she'll give you food that's so good it could kill you, if you bite me as hard as you can."

The moment I dangled a carrot in front of him, Kerberos bit me.

Chomp! A bit of pain ran through my arm.

"Aah! S-Sorry!" Kerberos let go and pulled his head away.

"You little glutton." I petted him.

I looked at my arm. The skin where he'd bit me was indented and pale. He hadn't broken skin, but it was indented.

"About that much, huh? Okay, I'll be right back. Emily, make something tasty for Kerberos."

"Okay. Kerby, what would you like?"

"Huh? Umm, okay, well..."

I left the flustered Kerberos and smiling Emily behind as I headed for the warp room.

☆

After a quick lap around Nihonium, I returned to the mansion. I looked around for a minute and found Emily and Kerberos in the yard. The pup wagged his tail next to Emily as he gnawed happily on a bone.

The bone had burn marks on it and smelled really appetizing, like roasted meat—maybe Emily had roasted it?

"Welcome back, Yoda."

"Welcome back, Master!"

"Hey, you two. Looks like Emily got you good and fed?"

"Kerby really loves meat and bone."

"He is a puppy, after all. Did you roast that bone?"

"It's the best cooking method for making use of the ingredients. Seasoning isn't good for puppies, after all."

So that's why she roasted it. I would've just given him the bone straight, but that's Emily for you. She always had the craziest ideas.

"So you were gnawing on a bone, eh? How convenient." I stood in front of Kerberos and held out my arm again. "Try biting me again."

"Yes, Master." He was still hesitant, but he seemed more used to the idea this

time. He chomped down on my arm. "Huh?"

"What's up?"

"I can't bite down. Your arm is a lot harder than before."

"Figured," I replied.

"Did you raise your defenses?" Emily asked.

"Yeah. I figured it'd be a waste to raise the cap and not reach it."

"I see," she mused in understanding.

Kerberos watched us blankly.

Emily could tell that I'd taken the magatama to Nihonium and raised my stat caps. Back when I'd taken the mirror, my HP, strength, and speed caps had risen from S to SS.

As I'd expected, the magatama did the same for my vitality, MP, and intelligence. After raising my caps, I farmed B4 mummies to raise my vitality from S to SS.

At S-rank vitality, Kerberos's full-power bite had sunk into my flesh. At SS, it couldn't even do that.

"You've gotten stronger yet again, Yoda." Emily rejoiced as if my success was her own.

135. All-MP-Consuming Magic

On B5 of Nihonium, where dungeon snow fell endlessly, I farmed red skeletons who'd evolved through the power of the magic snow.

When a red skeleton rose from the ground in front of me, I pointed the barrel of my gun right at it. It didn't attack immediately; it leaped to the side and tried to circle around me.

People who fancied themselves speedy often tried to use their speed to disrupt their foe, but this was a rare tactic for monsters.

They were fast, too, but I was even faster. I turned my shoulder and gun 90 degrees, like a compass, and pulled the trigger. It was just a normal bullet. I'd led my shot, so the red skeleton charged straight into it.

The monster, fast but feeble, went down from one normal bullet and dropped an MP seed.

I continued to farm B5. I had Repetition, sure, but I tried to avoid using it when possible—especially in dungeons where mobility was important. This was my way of trying to maintain my sharpness instead of relying only on my stats.

After a lap, I had enough MP seeds, so I went outside. Out there was the only status board set up for this abandoned dungeon.

I used it to check my stats.



My MP was SS. Now, my well-cared-for stats list was more than halfway taken up by SS.



Back in Cyclo, I went to the usual magical item shop.

When I went inside, shopkeeper Isaac approached with a customer-service smile while rubbing his hands together.

"Welcome, Mr. Sato. What brings you here today?"

"I want magic fruit."

"Again? Just so you know, there are side effects if you eat too many..."

"I know. Not worried about it."

He seemed genuinely concerned, but I wasn't worried.

Magic fruit was an item that let you learn a spell at random when eaten. If you ate one, you'd no longer be able to raise your level. Each one after that would lower your level by 1 at a time. As such, it was common for people to eat magic fruit just once in their life after capping their level.

It was random what magic you learned, so the risk was too much to venture reducing your level without ever being able to raise it again.

So the familiar shopkeeper Isaac tried to warn me away from it, but I mean...I was level 1 anyway. I couldn't raise or reduce my level at all. I was the only person in the world who could eat all the magic fruit I wanted without worry.

"If you say so..." he said hesitantly. "But production lately has been slowed, so the price is 5,000,000 piros each..."

"I won't blame you for that. You can't change the supply."

That's market economics for you. Everyday goods aside, these low-demand, high-price goods occasionally had their prices influenced by supply changes. Sometimes, the price goes up, and you can't do anything about that.

I could tolerate five million a pop. Sure, that was enough to buy a luxury car, but it was also my daily allowance. Or rather...even if it cost *fifty* million a pop, I'd still raise the money for it.

For I'd caught a glance of something: on top of the store counter was that girl in the kimono I'd seen before. The translucent woman, as big as a doll, held the mirror and magatama I'd taken to Nihonium and bowed to me over and over.

The fact that she was here meant...

"Mind showing me the magic fruits you have in stock?" I asked.

"Of course. Please wait a moment." Isaac ducked into the back, brought up three magic fruits, and sat them atop the counter. "These are all of the ones we have in stock. Which one would you like?"

When he asked me that, the woman moved. The kimono woman, visible only to me, stopped in front of the middle magic fruit, a mirror and magatama in hand.

With a big smile, she gestured as if to say, This one!

"I'll take this one," I replied. Like when I'd learned Repetition, I paid in full for the one she chose.

"Thank you very much."



I returned to the mansion and went to the basement with Emily and Kerberos.

"What are we doing now, Master?"

"Setting the stage for this magic fruit."

"Is there something I can do to help?"

"All you have to do is watch," I said, placing the magic fruit in the middle of the basement, and returning to Emily and Kerberos.

We waited for the outsider to spawn.

"Isn't it nice to have this basement?" Emily mused. "Now we don't have to worry about anyone seeing us."

"We had to be careful when we did it outdoors; if you don't kill it right off the bat, there's no telling where it might go."

"And we don't have to worry about that here!" Emily said with a smile.

We'd been together for a long time now, so she knew what we had to watch out for when it came to outsiders. The fact that I could get drops from outsiders was a secret from everyone but my friends, so we had to do it away from prying eyes.

We also had to stay far away when making outsiders outside, which meant that if we didn't attack them right when they spawned, they might find another target and start wandering off.

All of these problems had been solved by this basement.

The magic fruit spawned an outsider in our private basement. It was a monster that looked just like me, except it had a metallic sheen.

Metal Ryota ran straight at me. The monster and I were on two ends of the basement, so coming at me in a straight line was his best option.

"Wow, it looks just like you, Master! Wh-What are you going to do?"

"No worries. Repetition!" I cast my spell on the monster, killing it instantly.

Unlike in dungeons or outside, a fierce battle down here risked damaging the mansion. Whenever I made outsiders here, I made a point of insta-killing them with Repetition.

The outsider fell and dropped a magic fruit. Where the original one had a hexagram pattern, this new one had two. I took it and ate it as usual.

"Hmm."

"Did you learn new magic?" Emily asked.

"Yeah, one is Heal. Recovery magic, of course."

"You already have your recovery rounds."

"Yeah. They're limitless, and they recover MP, too." I took out a gun and fired

a few limitless recovery rounds into myself, as if giving myself injections. That was for the sake of recovering the MP I'd consumed through Repetition.

Because the magic I was about to use—the real winner here—used tons of MP.

"Emily, would you mind bringing three portable status boards over?"

"Okay-"

"I'll get them!" Kerberos's tail wagged as he ran out of the basement. He quickly returned with the portable status boards in his mouth. "Here you go, Master."

"Good boy." I petted him and even scratched his chin.

"Hehehe..." Kerberos blissfully closed his eyes.

"Now, try using one right away."

"Okay." Kerberos used the board.

Level 50/50
HP B
MP F
Strength D
Vitality C
Intelligence F
Willpower F
Speed B
Dexterity F
Luck F

[&]quot;I used it."

"Now, I'm going to use magic... Quicksilver!" The instant I used the spell on Kerberos, I felt a little dizzy and weak.

"Yoda? Are you okay?" Emily worried.

"I'm fine. Just used all of my mana, is all."

"Is the spell that incredible?"

"I think it might just be. Kerberos, use another status board."

"Okay!" Kerberos obediently displayed his stats again. When he did, he gasped.

Level 50/50
HP B
MP F
Strength D
Vitality C
Intelligence F
Willpower F
Speed B
Dexterity F
Luck E (+1)

"Huh? One of them went up."

"Your luck has gone from F to E..." Emily noted.

"That's what this magic does. In exchange for all of my mana, it raises one person's stats by one rank at random for a full day."

"A full day? That's incredible," Kerberos said.

"But randomness is inconvenient," Emily added. "I think spending all of your MP isn't a very fair trade-off."

"I'll have to disagree there." I fired my gun into myself repeatedly. Like before, I was firing recovery rounds. Recovery rounds recovered MP, too, so I brought it back up to max and used Quicksilver again. "We can just use it this way."

"I see."

"And...let's do a little experiment."

From this point, I had a bit of work to do.

Recover my MP with my limitless recovery rounds, use Quicksilver once it's full, and repeat—I performed this process about twenty times.

"It can pick stats that have already been boosted, so I need to do it more than just a few times... But I think that about does it."

All of Kerberos's stats had gone up by one rank.

"Wow! That's incredible, Master!"

"Only you could use it this way, Yoda."

Kerberos and Emily were impressed and moved.

With my MP-emptying Quicksilver and limitless recovery rounds, I could raise an ally's stats by 1 at effectively no cost.

136. The Cowardly Guard Dog

I directed Kerberos to go play in the mansion and tried raising all of Emily's stats with Quicksilver. Like with Kerberos, I did it twenty times before checking her stats with the portable status board.

Level 40/40
HP A
MP E (+1)
Strength A
Vitality A
Intelligence E (+1)
Willpower E (+1)
Speed D (+1)
Dexterity D (+1)
Luck A (+1)

"Aha, so there you have it."

"There we have it..."

When we saw Emily's stats, we reacted the same way. Her HP, strength, and vitality stats had already capped at A, and they were excluded from the boost. All of her other stats had been boosted by 1 rank.

"That can't be coincidence, surely," I said.

"Right. It looks like you're the only one who can reach S."

"After all, Quicksilver probably existed in this world to begin with."

I had some powerful spells in my disposal: the spell Reservation, which shared the user's drop rates with anyone who killed a monster; and Repetition, which killed a monster the user had already killed without any conditions (except for an MP cost that rose based on enemy strength).

They were powerful, but they'd always existed in this world, with or without me. Quicksilver was likely the same, so it didn't deviate from the natural law that stats capped at A.

"But that's good enough."

"Yeah. I can't complain about raising stats that aren't already A for free."

We were extremely satisfied with the results of testing my new magic.

Just then, I heard a pattering at the window. It was dark outside, and rain started falling like mad. A passing rain, maybe?

"It's raining... You really are something else, Yoda."

"Hmm? I don't follow."

"We can come home from dungeons without ever getting wet when it rains. That's thanks to you."

"Oh." I guess that makes sense.

Not long ago, we'd have to either get drenched on our way home or waste time waiting for the rain to stop. That wasn't necessary anymore.

Right on cue, we heard Alice's voice from outside the room. "I'm home! Oh, huh? It's raining."

"You can't tell from inside a dungeon, so you only realized it was raining when you got home, huh?" I said to her.

```
"Yeah!"

"This really is convenient. Plus..."

"Plus?"
```

"If we go out as far as, say, Aurum, it might not be raining. Oh, and if we keep on spreading out our range, we could even go to any place we want for any weather we want."

"That sounds wonderful!" Emily put her hands together, eyes sparkling.

This sudden rain had given us inspiration for a new use of the warp room.

Suddenly, fear shot through us.

"Huh?!"

"Mm?!"

A cold chill ran up my back. Murderous tension filled the air.

My smile turned grave as I ran out of the room, toward the source of the aura. I arrived in front of the warp room, where Eve and Kerberos faced each other.

Eve was expressionless as usual, while Kerberos had crouched low to the ground (though he was still big) in a threatening pose. He emitted pure, chilling bloodlust.

"Dog. Who are you?" Eve demanded.

"I'm Master's guard dog. I must defeat all of his enemies."

"I'm the mansion's bunny. I must eat all of its carrots."

Eve's reply sounded like a dumb joke, but the tension continued to rise between them.

This was a delicate situation. At this rate, there would be bloodshed.

Though all I have to do is stop them, really. Kerberos is just trying to get rid of a stranger because he's our guard dog.

While proud of Kerberos for his reliability at his job, I tried to stop him.

Crash! Rrrrumble...

Before I could, there was a flash of light outside, followed shortly after by thunder. Lightning had struck. It was close, too, because the thunder came less than a second later.

That didn't matter right now, though. The instant the lightning fell, Kerberos abandoned his foe (Eve) and fled. He scampered toward Emily, as if trying to duck under a desk.

The tiny Emily, and the giant Kerberos. Our guard dog curled up his tail and charged under Emily. From a spectator's point of view, it almost looked like she was riding him now.

"Kerberos..." I sighed.

"Ack! I-I'm not scared. I'm your guard dog, so I'd never be afraid of lightning!"

"I didn't even say anything!"

"Aah!" Kerberos had dug his own grave. When that was pointed out to him, he started blushing like mad. "Anyway, rude intruder, prepare yourself—" He glared at Eve murderously again, sending another chill down my spine. At least he seemed reliable in this regard, but...

Crash! Rrrrumble...

"Eeeek!" Whenever lightning struck, he screamed and started trembling.

Reliable, but also not.

Stuck on the dog's back now, Emily gently petted him. "There, there. It isn't scary."

Thanks to her motherly kindness, his trembling subsided.

"What is that?" Eve asked me.

"This is Kerberos. He's our guard dog now."

"...Dog?"

"Yes, he is a dog."

"Then that's okay. Dogs eat bones, so he won't be my enemy."

Dogs are omnivores, so I'm sure he could eat carrots if he wanted. So I thought to myself, but I didn't say anything. Lightning would probably strike again if I did.

Kerberos trembled pitifully, and Emily gently petted him.

"What would happen if I threw a cockro slime over there?" Eve asked, deadpan.

"Seriously, don't. You want this place to turn into a hellscape?" I warned her as I watched Emily and her big buddy.

Celeste returned later, and Erza came when she heard all the commotion. All of my friends met Kerberos, and he declared that he knew everyone's scents now.

Thus, our home had a new (cowardly) guard dog.

137. As Loyal as Hachiko

The night after the rain stopped, we went to Villa di H in Cyclo, the place with great beer.

The Ryota Family had all come together. In the big pub, I asked that we be seated in the back. There, the five of us—Emily, Celeste, Eve, Alice, and I—sat together. Next to us, Kerberos obediently sat and glowered fiercely at the rest of the pub.

While we drank, he was doing his job as a guard dog.

The whole bar watched us and talked about us.

"Hey, that's a Cerberus over there, right?"

"Hell's guard dog, huh? Whoa, and that little girl is petting it?!"

"Don't call her a little girl, you idiot. What kind of fraud doesn't know Emily?"

The instant an employee came wearing an apron and hood, bearing the food and beer we'd ordered, Kerberos stood up. The human-sized dog bared his fangs and glared at her.

She shook like a leaf, the poor girl.

"Kerberos, she's an employee. She's fine," I said, prompting him to sit again. Relieved, the girl put our meals on the table. "Sorry for him threatening you. It's fine now."

"A-Are you sure?"

"Yeah. See?" I pointed next to the still-scared employee.

Alice put some of the food that had just arrived in front of Kerberos. He wagged his tail madly. Despite his size, he was a dog, through and through.

I explained, "Our pup's a good listener. He can be merciless to his enemies, but as long as you make it clear you're not hostile, he'll understand."

"I-I see. He's big, but he's a good boy."

"Would you like to pet him?" Emily offered.

"Huh?" The girl was startled.

"If you give me free carrot-based foods, I will allow you to pet him," Eve interjected, but nobody cared.

"Are you sure it's okay?" she asked.

"Kerby, come here," Celeste said.

Kerberos followed her orders and came next to her. She petted him on the head and used that position to urge him to lie down.

"Go right ahead."

"O-Okay..."

The employee timidly reached over and petted him.

Kerberos allowed it. Because that was his master's—the Ryota Family's—orders, he allowed her to pet him.

People all around clamored again.

"It's so obedient..."

"They tamed a hellhound that well? The Ryota Family is fearsome..."

"H-Hmph, it's not that big a deal. That's like the first form of Cerberus."

"I hear that tremble in your voice."

"Besides, an obedient guard dog is the scariest thing there is. They don't listen to anyone but their master, so they have no mercy."

Satisfied by the whisperings I heard, I made eye contact with my friends and nodded to them.

The reason we'd all come today was to show off Kerberos. He was an outsider of a monster called a Cerberus. Though we'd given him a collar, that didn't mean that it was impossible for someone to kill him by mistake.

Our goal tonight was to bring him to the pub and show that he was the perfect pet dog. And fortunately for us, something convenient happened: people started arguing a ways away from us.

"My voice wasn't trembling!"

"Pretty sure it was..."

"I said it wasn't!"

"Wanna say that to my face?"

One of the men flipped a table, and the other kicked it away. Said table came flying at us.

But before it could come near, Kerberos chomped down and shattered it. He'd jumped in front of me, opened his mouth wide, and bit straight down onto the table. A table for eight had been blown to smithereens in an instant.

"Grrrr..." Kerberos let out a low growl with a fierce look on his face, as if demanding to know where his master's enemy was.

I hadn't expected this chain of events, but I did appreciate it.

Our surroundings fell silent. Everyone was overwhelmed by hell's guard dog—our Family's guard dog.

"It's okay, Kerberos. That was an accident; nobody's trying to hurt us."

Kerberos stopped growling and lay down again to allow the employee to continue petting him.

"Wow... He's tamed it so well, it's listening to all of his commands!"

"And look at that. That dog hasn't even touched its food!"

"You're not kidding. What's the deal with that?"

"Dogs are all about familial hierarchy. They don't eat until the alpha does."

"The alpha... Oh!"

As they whispered, their eyes gathered on me.

This was convenient. I finally took a bite of my food. After I did, Kerberos began eating, as if he had permission now.

Everyone piped up again.

"The Ryota Family is awesome..."

"Seems like that Ryota Sato guy surprises us all the time."

"What a scary guy... No matter what, I'm never gonna oppose that Family."

"Yeah. I'll let my buddies know not to, either."

Hearing the whispers around us, I knew that people had accepted me as Kerberos's owner. Rumors would spread after this and do the rest of the work for me. I was satisfied, for our job here was done.

We went back home, and I relaxed in my room.

Man, a lot has happened today. But now it's time for bed...

Before I could fall asleep, though, there was a knock at the door. It was an oddly awkward knock.

"Who's there?"

"It's me, Master."

"Oh, Kerberos?" I stood up and opened the door. He sat in the hallway like the loyal Hachiko, but since he was just so big, he was still intimidating.

"What's up? Don't like your room?"

"No, that's not it at all! Thank you, Master. I never thought I'd be able to have a whole room to myself."

"That so? Hmm... I guess it is difficult for you to get in and out of human rooms, huh?" I'd given Kerberos an empty room in the mansion, but as with that knock a moment ago, it probably wasn't super accessible for him. "I'll call a contractor tomorrow to get it fixed up for you to live in."

"Oh, no! I'm fine. Just having a roof over my head is enough for me to die happy."

"You'll say that again in a week, I'm sure. Emily's here; there's a lot more bliss to come."

"...Thank you so much, Master." Kerberos lowered himself and looked up at me. "I'm blessed to have been found by you, Master. Never would I have dreamed of hot meals and a warm bedroom."

"Yeah?"

"So thank you again, Master!" Kerberos looked truly happy.

I found myself satisfied just to hear that coming from an outsider who'd spent
his whole life digging through garbage.

138. Taking Aim

After breakfast, we gathered in front of the warp room. There, I used my new magic Quicksilver on all my friends.

By consuming all of my MP with each cast, I raised one of their stats at a time by one stage for 24 hours. Each time I used it, I recovered my MP with limitless recovery rounds and used it again.

After raising everyone's stats, I sent them off to dungeoneer.

Emily and Celeste needed fewer casts. They already had a few A-rank stats, which Quicksilver wouldn't raise. Not that the cost changed in either case; it consumed all of my MP, but since I had limitless recovery rounds, it was just a question of how much time it took.

After sending off Emily, Celeste, and Alice, it was finally Eve's turn.

"Bunny onesie again today, huh?"

"This bunny has truly become a bunny."

"I feel like you've been a bunny ever since I met you. I mean, you wore a bunny suit before."

"People call me the Four-Eared Bunny these days."

"Four? Oh, so two natural ones and two from the onesie, right?"

"Yes. I'm very happy."

So she's happy.

Eve flushed just a little. It seemed like she was genuinely happy, no kidding.

Our most *unique* Family member, Eve Callusleader. There were some things I still didn't get about her personality. Not that doing so was urgent, or anything.

"Okay, I'm gonna use my magic on you now."

"No, thanks."

"No?"

"If you're going to buff me, just give me carrots, instead."

"I feel like this isn't an apt comparison."

"If you're going to buff me, just give me carrots, instead." She repeated the meaningless line like a child actor.

"So you don't want the buff, then?"

Eve nodded and replied, "I want carrots."

"I'll go get you carrots later."

"I want carrot sashimi tonight..." Eve blushed again. Then, she used the warp room and left for a dungeon.

What the heck is carrot sashimi? If I told Emily that, she'd probably find a way. Anyway, I've seen everyone off. Time to get going, myself.

But before I could, Erza appeared. "Oh, good morning, Ryota!"

She wasn't exactly one of us, but she lived in our mansion on loan from the drop-buying shop Swallow's Returned Favor.

"Morning. Everyone left, so we'll be counting on you today."

"Of course."

"By the way, can I ask you a favor? I'd like to put a status board here."

"Oh, now that you mention it, this place is sort of like a dungeon entrance.

Okay, I'll have one procured for you."

It was true that this was like a dungeon entrance, but more than that, it would help to have one here now that I could use Quicksilver. Using portable status boards to check Quicksilver like we had this morning was inefficient.

"It should be usable by tomorrow," she added.

"You can get it that fast?"

"You're a super-special customer, after all, Ryota."

"That so?"

Erza and I faced each other, smiling.

"Master!" Kerberos came and joined us. Our guard dog's giant form swayed back and forth as he trotted heavily through the hallway. "Are you leaving, Master?"

"Yeah, I'm going out to work in dungeons. This room takes us straight to them, so don't go in by mistake, okay?"

"Okay."

"Also, make sure you protect Erza here. She's important."

"Huh?" Erza was surprised. She turned red in an instant.

I felt like they'd misunderstand, so I tried to correct myself, "Ah, er, that is, sh-she's an important guest."

It wasn't wrong to say that she was important, but still.

"Understood. I'll protect her with my life. I will do my best as your guard dog, Master!"

"Good boy. Erza, rely on Kerberos if you need anything. If it gets stormy out,

you use him as a shield and run for your life."

"Huh?! M-Master, that's mean!"

"Okay, but it is true that you're a coward..."

"I'm plenty reliable!" Kerberos shot back in a low voice.

As a Cerberus monster, the hellhound was big and bloodthirsty. But he had one big weakness...

I opened a window and fired a limitless lightning round outside. It struck the ground, causing a flash of lightning and crack of thunder.

"Eeeek!" Kerberos tucked his tail between his legs and cowered in fear.

Our ferocious guard dog was terrified of lightning.

Grinning at the terrified pup, I spoke to Erza, "So yeah, he gets like this when the weather gets bad outside. Again, use him as a shield and run for your life."

Of course, I said it jokingly, so Erza giggled in response.

"Master, you're too mean..."

I waved to Kerberos, who just glared at me, and used the warp room to head off to a dungeon.

 \Rightarrow

I went to B6 of Nihonium. There, I made myself invincible with the Absolute Rock stone and killed poison-spewing zombies with normal bullet headshots.

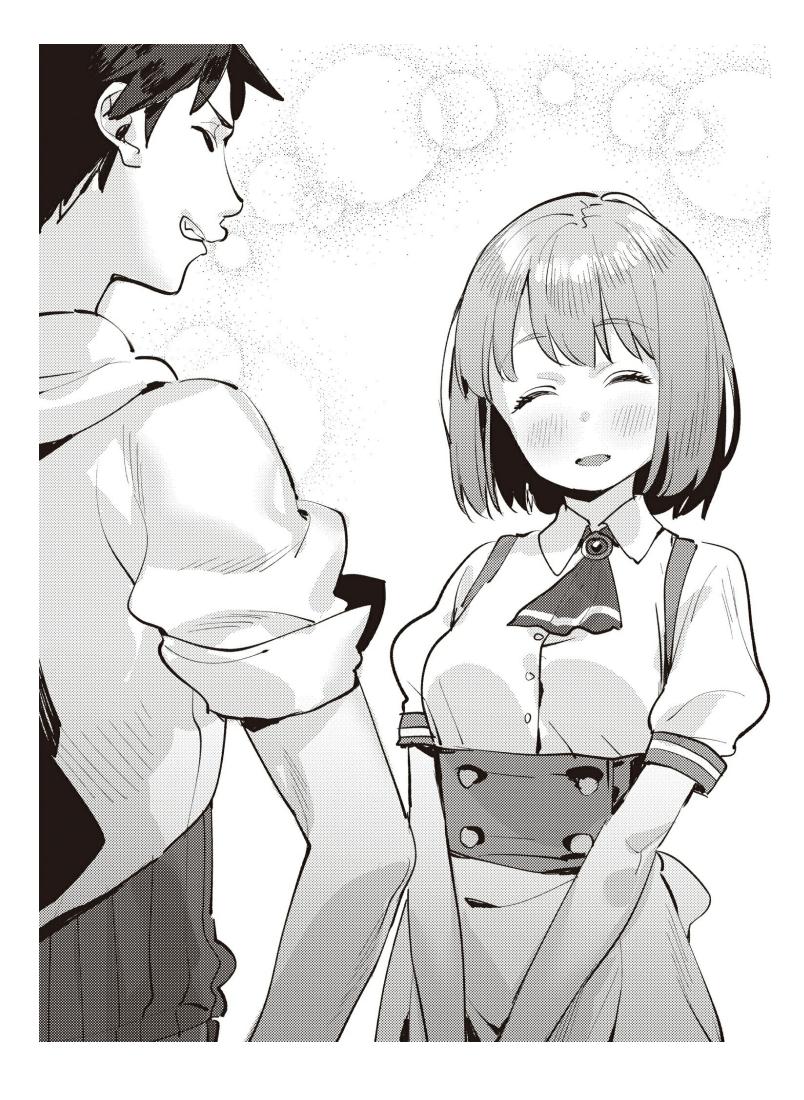
The zombies dropped intelligence seeds, which I picked up to raise my intelligence.

People from this world raised their stats through leveling, but my level was fixed at 1. The only way for me to increase my stats was to get seed drops in this dungeon and raise them one point at a time.

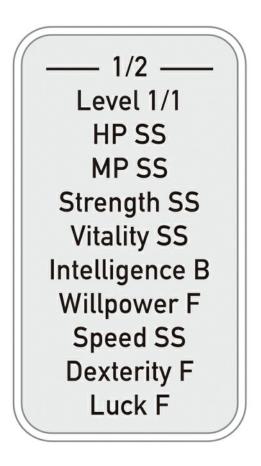
I used rocks as cover today in order to keep my movements and intuition sharp. When I ran into monsters and they noticed me, I killed them instantly. If they didn't notice me, I'd use the geography and sneak over like a ninja to ambush them from close up.

It didn't go well at first, but eventually, I learned how to stifle my footsteps, hide myself, and circle around them.

Unlike other dungeons, I didn't need to raise my efficiency here. It was a place to raise stats, so I saw it as kind of a training ground. I practiced my maneuvers and techniques that wouldn't reflect in my stats.



Today, I killed a fixed number of poison zombies...



...and in the process, I'd raised my intelligence from C to B.

139. Trust-Busting

After finishing a day's work, I warped back to the mansion, where I found Erza waiting for me.

```
"Welcome back, Ryota."

"Hey, Erza. What's up?"

"You have a guest."

"A guest?"

"The Dungeon Association head is here."
```

My brow furrowed so tightly that even I could tell. Clint never came unless he needed something. Every time something happened, though, he loved to lay it in my lap.

No doubt he'd do the same today.

"Is he in the mansion right now?" I asked.

"Yes, in the reception room. Also..."

"Yeah?"

"There are a lot of sugar cubes in the courtyard."

"Huh?" I looked out the window. In the courtyard, barely lit by sundown, there was a veritable mountain of sugar cubes.

It looked like two or three trucks' worth. Was that the year's worth of sugar cubes Clint often mentioned?

That's too much. If you want to give me a year's worth of something, then let it be a New Year's gift so it's only one.

"Advance payment, huh? It must be a serious problem."

"Yes, it is serious."

"Do you know about it, Erza?"

"I've heard about it from the Swallow's Returned Favor, but I'm only operating a branch office, so I didn't get many details."

"Hmm..."

So she said, but the fact that this news got to a branch office at all was a sign of how big it was.

I'd better brace myself, I thought to myself as I went to the reception room.

☆

When I entered the reception room, I saw Clint chewing on sugar cube after sugar cube like some sort of insatiable rodent. He threw the one he was nibbling on, along with several more he hadn't even touched yet, into his mouth and swallowed them all.

Is his throat okay?

He stood up and came over to me, arms held out wide. "Ooh, you're finally home, Mr. Sato! I've been waiting for you, benefactor of Cyclo!"

"Sorry, I'm resigning."

"How could you?!" Clint screamed in open-mouthed shock.

I mean, what do you expect? I can tell from the way you're complimenting me right off the bat that this is a seriously big deal, so why would I not want to run away?

"I thought you of all people couldn't be so cruel, Mr. Sato!"

I sat down on the couch and asked the recovered Clint, "More importantly, what do you need? It must be important if you brought all that sugar."

"Do you know of the Clifford Family, Mr. Sato?"

"Clifford? No, I've never heard of them."

"They're the Family that has monopolized B6 to B10 of Bismuth."

"Bismuth..."

Cyclo had seven dungeons.

Tellurium, Silicon, Arsenic, Bismuth, Boron. Plus Nihonium with its exceptional drop situation, and Selenium with its exceptional location. That made seven.

One among them was Bismuth. I hadn't gone anywhere near there yet, since I hadn't needed to.

"And what about the Cliffords and Bismuth?" I urged.

"Do you know that B6 to B10 of Bismuth drop wheat?"

"Okay, and?"

"They are the only floors in Cyclo that drop wheat."

"...Are they blockading the dungeon again?"

"Not quite."

"Hm? How do you mean?"

"The monsters on B6 to B10 of Bismuth require unique methods to defeat

them, and they can't be done by just anyone. Other adventurers produce wheat sporadically, but the Clifford Family account for 97% of Cyclo's production. They've demanded that we raise the purchase price of wheat."

"I see."

Ninety-seven percent was, indeed, effectively a monopoly.

"Frankly, we're at a loss. The Cliffords haven't done anything drastic; they're just saying that they won't work for less money."

"So it's not like the strike from before."

Clint nodded.

A while back, there were guys that locked up the rice floor and wouldn't let anyone in. This was different, though. They were using the fact that only they could produce it to demand price hikes.

"In a way, that's the free market for you," I said.

"But that is the problem. Losing wheat production will do more than just trouble people."

That was true.

Rice, wheat, potatoes—I figured these were among the top three crops that would cause problems if they went away. It goes without saying that rice and wheat are staple foods. As for potatoes, this is just speaking from Earth knowledge, but they were worth more calories per farm space than rice.

That aside, stopping the production of wheat would do more than just bother people.

"What if you just raised the price?" I suggested.

"All else aside, we want to stabilize the market for this essential item as much

as possible."

"Makes sense."

"Besides, if this works once, the same thing will happen again. Every time, it's going to be chaos."

"You have a point."

They could do what they wanted with luxuries, but when it came to something like wheat, that had to be stable. I could understand that.

"So..." Clint looked at me. Here, he hit me with another unreasonable request. "Can you do something about this?"

At night, I gathered everyone in the living room and told them about Clint's plea.

"As such, I accepted his request."

Emily, Celeste, Alice, Eve. Even our client Erza and our new pet Kerberos–everyone was here for this meeting.

"B6 to B10 of Bismuth, huh?"

"Do you know something, Celeste?"

"Yep. I mean, it's a famous place. Information about it is all over the place, but there's nothing anyone can do about it."

"There's nothing anyone can do?"

"Well...that's not quite it. I'm sure someone could handle it if they tried, but it's not exactly worth the effort involved."

"I see."

That made sense. This world's adventurers prioritized efficiency first and

foremost. Since everything was produced in dungeons here, that meant farming the same things every day in the same way.

Farming also meant removing danger from the equation. If something wasn't worth the effort, then adventurers would do everything in their power to avoid it.

In RPG terms, it was like the adventurers of this world preferred to go to places recommended for players 10 levels below their own.

"Is there something we can do about it?" I asked.

"There is," Celeste declared. The most well-informed person in our Family said it firmly, without hesitation.

"What do we do?"

"The strategy is simple: we all do what we can to help Ryota defeat an enemy once." Celeste paused for a moment. I knew what she was implying here.

"So after that, Repetition does all the work."

"Right. It's something that only you can do, because you have your ultimate farming magic and your limitless recovery rounds."

I get it.

"Yoda is amazing. It's as if he's guaranteed to succeed at any problem he's tasked with," Emily praised me. Indeed, combining Repetition and limitless recovery rounds would make me a one-man mass-production machine.

"Doing that all day will be exhausting," Eve pointed out.

It was great that I could fire off Repetitions like a perpetual motion machine, but I had to make up for a 97% loss of production. Ninety-seven percent of the consumption of prosperous city Cyclo.

It was just work, but man, it was a lot of work.

However, Erza spoke up. "I think you'll be fine. In situations where people try to raise prices because they have the means of production, they typically fold the moment someone else begins producing. The whole premise of their demand is gone, after all."

"Sounds about right."

"The real problem is that they may attempt to strike back while you do so," Erza warned me.

"What do you mean?"

"For example, they might try to take a Family member hostage."

Oh, so that's what she means.

"Then leave it to me!" Kerberos piped up. "I'll protect the mansion in your stead, Master!"

"Awesome. I'm counting on you, Kerberos."

"Yeah!" our guard dog said, showing off his growl. As long as it didn't storm, he'd be a big help.

"In that case, we'd better get moving right away," I said. Everyone nodded in agreement.

☆

Alice and I traveled to B6 of Bismuth through the warp room. The moment we entered, we were surprised.

"This is...incredible."

"Yeah, it's so pretty!"

The dungeon was indeed beautiful.

You might know about bismuth crystals. Like those, the dungeon Bismuth had a jagged structure and shone all colors of the rainbow. It was so beautiful that bits broken off the walls could probably be sold as products too.

I had arrived with Alice. We alone could handle the first kill. Rather, Celeste had said that Alice would be vital in dealing with it.

"Wow, there's really nobody here," I said.

"Yeah, 'cause this place is hard."

"Adventurers aside, I don't even see any monsters around."

I looked around the dungeon. Indeed, there were no monsters. Alice and I stood alone in the vast, rainbow-filled dungeon.

"That's not true. Umm..." Alice said and began looking all around until her gaze stopped at her side. "Ah, here. In five, four, three, two, one..." When she reached zero, a single monster appeared, as if revealing itself from thin air.

It was a chameleon about the size of a small dog.

"So this is the monster of this floor?" I asked.

"Yep. Apparently, they only show up for five seconds every ten minutes."

"Yeah, for real. It's already gone... I agree, this is inefficient."

I felt like I was starting to get it. It *would* be hard to mass-produce these without devising a special scheme.

I looked to Alice. "You were counting down just now. Does that mean you can

tell when they'll appear?"

"Yep, I can. Another one's about to appear up ahead in fifteen seconds."

I looked in the direction she pointed toward. As she'd claimed, another one appeared. Exactly five seconds later, it was gone.

"They can't attack when they're not visible," she said. "And they're a lot tougher than they look, so if you can't overwhelm them instantly, they'll just run away."

"Huh. This isn't worth the effort."

I understood now. At the same time, I was relieved.

Repetition's cast took less than a second. If Alice could find out where they spawned, then I could take down all but the first with ease. As long as I could get that first one, there wouldn't be any problem.

The formula for victory was coming into view.

I thought of the best strategy to maximize firepower and take down the first one.

"Where's the next one going to appear?" I asked Alice as I prepared myself.

140. All-Out Warfare

Still on B6 of Bismuth, I mowed down chameleons with Repetition thanks to Alice's guidance.

"Repetition!"

As a test, I tried firing off Repetition after a chameleon had turned invisible. They moved slowly, so it should still be in the same spot if it had just disappeared.

"It didn't work, huh?" Alice said, disappointed.

"Seems like it. In that case, I'll just have to assume they're not just invisible; they're invincible, too."

Repetition always defeated monsters I'd beaten before, but it couldn't defeat that chameleon. I had to assume that they couldn't be defeated while invisible.

If the strongest magic out there couldn't defeat the chameleon, then they had to be considered invincible when not showing themselves.

"I can see why there aren't many adventurers who can do this," I said.

"Yeah..."

"But you know when they'll come out, don'tcha?"

"Of course!" Alice shot me a confident thumbs-up.

"Then let's keep at it. We'll take them down one after another and send them back through the magic cart."

"Yeah!"

Alice and I did laps around B6 of Bismuth. While we walked on the multilayered rainbow-like bismuth crystal floor, we defeated chameleons with Repetition, turned them into wheat, and sent it through the magic cart.

After a while of doing that, the warp phenomenon occurred in front of us.

Is someone here from the mansion? I thought to myself. Just then, everyone appeared.

Emily, Celeste, and even Eve. Everyone, save for Kerberos (who couldn't come because he was an outsider) and Erza (who was busy buying up our wheat).

"Good work out here."

"Looks like things are going great."

I stopped and asked Emily and Celeste, "Why are you all here?" They both looked to Eve.

Our resident bunny-girl, still wearing her bunny onesie, said expressionlessly, "Don't worry about it. If nothing happens, then good."

"What does she mean?"

"We don't know, either," Emily said.

Celeste added, "She just said, 'We should go. You'll understand when we get there.'"

It seemed she hadn't told them why, either.

I looked at Eve Callusleader. A veteran adventurer, also known as the Killer Rabbit. She must've had a reason.

"All right," I finally replied. "Do whatever you want."

"That's all?" Celeste furrowed her brow.

"I'm keeping hostages from her, you see."

"Hostages?"

"I'm the only one who can get S-rank carrots, after all."

"How frustrating... But munch, munch," Eve said jokingly before taking a carrot from her costume and eating it raw. She really did love carrots.

Meanwhile, Emily and Celeste began to understand. Apparently, my S-rank carrots tasted leagues better than any others. It often seemed like Eve was only with us for my carrots.

It logically followed that she wouldn't do anything to hurt me—to make the flow of carrots stop.

But Alice had a grin on her face as she elbowed my side and whispered, "C'mon, you don't have to be all shy, Ryota! You can just say you trust Eve."

"If I trust her, then that's all the more reason not to say it. That's how trust works."

"Oooh? Hmm, that kinda makes sense."

"Besides, Eve likes it more that way. She looks happier than ever when I tell her she's incapable of loving anything but carrots."

"Reeeally?" Alice made a funny face. Then, she spoke to Eve, who was still gnawing on that same carrot. "Eve, you're incapable of loving anything but carrots, right?" she said, repeating my exact words.

For an instant, the rainbow cave seemed to shine brighter.

"Finally, someone who gets me!" Eve flashed a huge smile, bigger than I'd ever seen her smile. It was enough to make me feel like she was breaking character.

"Ooh, wow." Alice was amazed. She didn't have to try that right now, but Eve was happy, so whatever. Alice came back to me and said, "That was awesome. You were right, Ryota."

"Was I?"

"Yeah! It's awesome how much you understand your friends."

I don't think I did anything that praiseworthy.

Embarrassed now by Alice's praise, I went back to hunting chameleons.

She led the way, I killed them instantly with Repetition, and our remaining friends picked up the wheat and threw them into the magic cart. It was like they were out picking strawberries.

This relaxing time continued for a while, but it was ruined in a mere instant. Just as we passed in front of the stairs again, a bunch of strange men came running down from B5 above.

Some of them had wicked grins on their faces, while others glared at us. There were ten in total. The thing that they all had in common was that they were all showing clear malice toward us.

"Oooh. Real successful, aren't ya, buddy?"

"Sorry, but you're gonna have to call it quits now."

"If you wanna blame anyone, blame yourself. Keep this stuff up, and you'll ruin a whole lot of people's livelihoods."

They spoke one after another, displaying their hostility. We-especially Emily and Celeste-looked to Eve.

"Is this it?" Emily asked.

"I see. You predicted that people would show up if Ryota kept going," Celeste

added.

"Happens a lot," Eve confirmed.

Aha. So that's why she brought everyone here.

The men came at us at once. Emily, Celeste, and Eve met their attack. Emily jumped and swung her hammer, while Eve jogged over and unleashed her killer chops.

Celeste had gotten used to fighting despite her lack of experience before, given the job change. She put up a hail of bullets with her Bicorn horns in her left hand and used Inferno with her right.

Up against ten people, these three didn't yield an inch; in fact, they overwhelmed them.

"Pfft!" a man laughed cynically.

"What's so funny?" Emily asked.

"We got you. We didn't come to kill you lot; we came to stop the most capable one of you."

What is he talking about? I wondered, but I quickly realized.

Bloodlust oozed from above. It was sharp, even mechanical—unlike that of the other men. It was nothing more or less than the straightforward urge to kill.

"We draw your attention, and then *bam*, there goes your star farmer. Heh, how clumsy of you!"

"We knew that already," Eve said quietly.

"What?!" the man shouted, surprised.

It wasn't just Eve; Emily and Celeste were unmoved and unshaken. They even

grinned slightly.

In the meantime, the bloodlust closed in. I jumped back from where I was standing. Then, I charged. After backing off and charging forth again with SS-rank speed, I was able to make the guy whiff his ambush and then slip right back in for a counterattack.

I unleashed a full-power body blow using my SS-rank strength. The assailant's body bent so sharply at the center that it almost looked like his head would touch his feet.

The blow sent him flying into one of Bismuth's rainbow walls.

"The low level knew you'd come after him."

"Yep. We weren't trying to hold you all off; we left the strongest one for Yoda!"

"Ryota's a lot stronger than we are, after all."

My friends spoke calmly and confidently before mopping up the distractions.



141. Sato's Sweet As Sugar

I spent all of the next day in Bismuth, too.

Alice found the monster spawns, and I insta-killed them with Repetition. In between, we sent the drops home through the magic cart.

Immediately after firing Repetition, I'd fire a limitless recovery round into myself. I wanted to keep my MP at the max. Though I was keeping my MP and HP maxed in case of any funny business like yesterday's.

My friends relaxed together not far away. They'd put down a sheet on the bismuth crystal floor and had a picnic.

"This cake is delicious."

"It's pumpkin cake. Yoda's pumpkin, of course."

"The low level's carrots are better."

It might've looked like they were just having a relaxing picnic, but...

"All right, time to give it all I've got—" The instant another adventurer appeared, they all whipped around and startled him. "Whoa?!"

Emily readied her hammer, Celeste held her Bicorn horns, and Eve put her fingers together in chopping formation. But he was just a random adventurer going to the lower floors, so they relaxed.

"It sure is nice having everyone as our bodyguards, huh?" Alice piped up.

"Yeah. That means we can focus on farming."

Genuinely grateful for their help, I farmed more chameleons. While I did,

another adventurer came by. The three raised their guard like last time, but the male adventurer just stared, unflinching.

He looked at them, then at me. Then, without a word, he left.

He'd left without doing anything, but that only made us warier.

"He was staring at us."

"Yeah. He's gotta be with the Cliffords."

"A pretty high level."

"But he didn't attack us."

"Staring and leaving is even creepier, honestly."

"Let them come. This bunny has a delicious carrot dangling in front of her."

"Yeah! We won't let them disturb Yoda's farming."

"Right. No matter what may come, we'll send them packing."

My friends are all so reliable. Also, Eve, do you have to sound so proud of it?

Relieved that they were here to protect me, I continued farming chameleons at max speed. Farming them, getting wheat drops.

I managed to whip up a whole day's worth of the city's wheat consumption, though it took late into the night.

I'd fulfilled Clint's request again today. And as a side effect, I had earned 15,000,000 piros in one day.

The next day, I got out of bed and left my room, ready for another day at Bismuth.

"Yoda, you're just in time."

"What's up, Emily?"

"The Dungeon Association head is here."

"Clint is?"

"Also... Welcome home," Emily said to someone behind me. I turned around and saw Eve there. As she came down the hallway, her expression was as flat as ever. Emily asked her, "How was it?"

"They were there. Probably back to normal."

"Oh, that's good!"

"What's going on?" I asked. "Don't just speak in code to each other, loop me in."

"It's okay. You'll understand when you see Clint."

"...Hmm."

Emily's reply hinted at what was going on.

I changed clothes, washed my face, and got ready for the day before heading to the reception room.

☆

"Ace of Cyclo!" Clint jumped off the couch and tried to hug me, but I smoothly evaded him.

He had a lot of momentum, so he hit the wall face-first.

"Oof, ouch. Come now, Mr. Sato, don't avoid my hugs! That's just mean!"

"Of course I'm gonna avoid hugs from a guy whose mouth is all sticky from sugar." Sugar stuck to the wall he'd struck. If I hadn't avoided him, that would be on my clothes right now. I sat on the couch and urged him to sit, too. "So, what brings you here today?"

"The Clifford Family has returned to the dungeon."

"That so?"

Figures.

"You're not surprised. Have you already heard?"

"Yeah, Eve said they're back to normal. Our goal here was to return everything to normal, right?"

Clint nodded firmly. This whole mess was essentially price hike negotiations.

When they used their status as a near-exclusive supplier to try to raise prices, I'd gone in as a way of telling them that I could end that exclusivity any time I wanted.

In fact, the Ryota Family had managed to provide for all of Cyclo's consumption. And we didn't even have to push ourselves much. Sure, we had to put all of our other work on hold, but the wheat production itself wasn't that bad.

That meant the Cliffords were the only ones losing out in the situation. By refusing to farm, they'd halted their entire revenue stream.

If the price went up, then their negotiating would be worthwhile. If not, they'd only lose money. And so, they went back to normal operation.

"Her saying that was all it took for you to understand the situation?" Clint asked me.

"Someone was watching us yesterday. He was probably from the Clifford Family. He reported what he saw me doing, and that resulted in the state of things today."

"Aha. There were signs, then."

"Yep. That was how I knew."

Clint nodded in understanding. After that, he gazed directly at me. "Thanks to you, we're saved again. As a reward—"

"I'll pass on the year of sugar." I waved a hand in refusal. Clint averted his eyes. "You were seriously going to say—no, even do that?"

"There's nothing wrong with sugar! Why, it's almost as sweet as you!"

"Yeah, yeah."

He tried to *sweeten* me up, but just hearing it made me feel diabetic, so I shook him off.

Anyway, with this, things would return to normal. The Cliffords might come after me for revenge, but—

"Suspicious person! You're my master's enemy!"

"Rggraaaah!"

We had a reliable guard dog, and we were strong. We'd be fine.

"Thank you, Mr. Sato. Thank you for everything." Clint recovered from his sugar freak state, looked at me head-on, and thanked me. "As a reward, and as a way of warning them against doing this again, allow us to match the money you made from selling your wheat."

"Got it."

The money I'd made in the last two days would be doubled. I put in no more effort than usual, but I'd made 50,000,000 piros in two days.

That was an exciting sum.

142. Ryota's Butterfly Effect

With the wheat problem solved, I had a free day, so I spent the morning on B6 of Nihonium and mowed down poison zombies.

I never slacked on practicing my different killing methods, just in case.

Today, I made sniping the focus of my training. I loaded normal bullets into my revolvers and searched for just the longest distance I could one-shot them from.

In doing so, I found that I could reliably shoot their heads off from about a hundred feet away. Any further, and my bullets tended to not pierce through all the way, failing to kill the target.

Now that I had an idea of my range, I backed off that far every time I ran into poison zombies. I'd retreat to the distance I'd measured before, hold out a gun, close one eye, and fire.

A poison zombie approached, emitting poison and groaning. I aimed carefully...and fired!

The first bullet grazed its cheek. It was only enough to dig into an ear, effectively missing the zombie. I took a deep breath, took my stance again, and prepared myself.

Then, I aimed and fired again. This time, it blew the zombie's head off.

I sniped, not with a sniper rifle, but with a handgun.

I could one-shot them with homing rounds from this distance, but that wouldn't be any better than using Repetition. Instead, I always used normal

bullets, always from a distance.

It wasn't clear when I would need it, but I wanted to make sure I could snipe.

At first, my accuracy rate was only 30%. It slowly rose over time, and by the time I finished for the day—when my intelligence reached A–I'd raised it up to 50%.

It seemed I still had plenty of room to practice and improve my sniping.

☆

I went back to the mansion to prepare for an afternoon trip to Tellurium.

Erza, effectively the one keeping watch over the mansion, awaited me in front of the warp room and greeted me.

"Ryota, you have a visitor."

"A visitor?"

"Yes, it's his first time here. His name is Leon Baker."

"Leon Baker..." I repeated the name. That was a new one to me. Seemed to be a man, though.

"What will you do?"

"Where is he now?"

"In the reception room, at the moment."

"I'll go see him."

Something could've gone wrong again. Someone might still be struggling. I decided to meet with him.

I left Erza to her drop appraisal work and went to the reception room myself.

There, I knocked and entered. A man sitting on the couch stood up when he saw me.

He was in his late twenties, with a well-maintained beard. He looked to be a nice enough guy.

"Pleasure to meet you. My name is Leon Baker."

"Ryota Sato."

We introduced ourselves, and I sat across from him.

Now, what do you want? Before I could ask the question, I noticed that he hadn't sat; he was staring right at me.

Then, still standing, he bowed deeply in front of me and said, "Thank you, sir."

"For what? This is the first time we've met, right? I don't remember doing anything worth your thanks."

"Yes, it is the first time. But thank you."

He thanked me again. I was puzzled by the incoherence of it all.



Leon took me to a bakery in southern Cyclo.

"This is my bakery."

"It smells good."

The place he'd brought me to didn't have many customers at all, but it was well-cleaned, and the good smells inside wafted out to us. It was the kind of

place I'd go into if I happened to pass by.

"As you can see, we bake bread. Your wheat farming the past few days has been an incredible help to us."

"Uh-huh..." I was starting to see the connection.

Sure, but...what was the point of him thanking me for that?

"You seem to be wondering why I'm thanking you for it."

"To be honest, yeah. I know you can't make bread without ingredients, and you'd be in trouble if the price went up. But it doesn't seem like enough to go out of your way to thank me."

"Come in, and I think you'll understand."

"All right, then."

If he said so, then there must be something inside, so I obeyed.

The bakery was well-lit, and it was as clean as the outside made it look, but the bread lineup was kind of plain. Loaves of bread, French bread, table rolls... I didn't see any sorts of stuffed buns, or even anything as simple as red bean paste rolls.

It was simple, with nothing beyond the most basic ones. Why was that? I looked at Leon, and he made way to the back.

"Right this way."

The moment we entered the kitchen—the baker's workshop—I was surprised by what I saw.

Three little pigs. That was the first phrase that came to mind. There were three pigs, about the size of kids just starting elementary school, kneading dough.

It was cute, but they were clearly monsters rather than people.

"What are these?" I asked him.

"Mini orcs. They once lived in a dungeon, and now, they're outsiders. I'm sure you understand, Mr. Sato."

"Yeah. We have Kerberos, after all."

So this is the same.

"I met them outside a few years ago," he explained. "At first, I thought they would attack me, but they instead took a liking to me. Eventually, we started living together."

"And the collars...are on their wrists, huh?"

"I couldn't bear to put them on their necks, so I asked permission to put them on their wrists."

Even while Leon and I talked, the three little pigs-mini orcs, rather-kept on kneading.

Single-mindedly, perfectly focused. One of them came over to show Leon its finished dough.

"Oink!"

"Let's see... Yep, very nice. You worked hard on that one." After checking the quality of it, Leon petted the mini orc.

"Oink!" The mini orc gleefully began kneading its next one.

"There was a lot of trial and error when we started living together... And I mean a lot."

"That so?"

It wasn't hard to imagine that when he said a lot, he meant a lot.

"Our efforts bring us to this bakery. I won't say that this is the only thing they can do, but it suits them best. You might have figured it out already, but they enjoy being able to knead well and receive my praise." That was a good relationship. I was even envious. "They get sad on days when we can't bake. For example, if I get sick and can't check the dough."

"I get that."

Finally, I understood. Leon knew that I'd understood, too.

When the Cliffords stopped wheat production, that caused trouble for him and his three mini orcs. He'd come to thank me for taking over and holding out until things were back to normal.

"Mr. Sato." Leon turned to me and bowed once more. "Thank you. Truly, thank you for what you've done."

My efforts had yielded unexpected results in an unexpected place.

143. Light and Darkness, Carrots and Wheat

In the morning, I farmed intelligence seeds in Nihonium. In the afternoon, I farmed various vegetables.

After spending another day as usual, I returned to the mansion in the evening. When I did, I made my first stop at the Swallow's Returned Favor branch office in our mansion in order to have my passbook updated. This, too, was part of my daily to-do list.

"Welcome home, Ryota." Erza stood up and jogged over to me.

"Thanks. Here you go, as usual."

"Of course, I'd be glad to update your passbook. By the way, we're raising the purchase price of your carrots."

"Carrots? Why's that?"

"All of your vegetable drops have a reputation for being high quality. Lately, we've been getting more special orders for your drops even if it means paying a higher price. Among them, the carrots—lauded by even Eve, the Killer Rabbit—are the most popular, so we've decided to raise their price."

That makes sense.

Drop stats reflected both quality and quantity. As the only person in the world with S-rank drops, my drops were higher quality than anybody else's. Though I found it funny that it was specifically carrots, the one Eve pushed, that got the price hike.

"You know how Eve is," I chuckled. "S-rank carrot lover."

"Maybe so... There, your ledger is done. Today, you made 1,543,298 piros."

"Thanks."

1,500,000 piros, huh? I made some good money today. Oh... Right.

"Erza, do you have any plans today?"

"Not especially. Why do you ask?"

"Wanna come drink with me to celebrate that price hike?" I casually invited her.

"Sure!" she exclaimed, jumping at the opportunity.



We went to Villa di H. This was our usual pub, the one that sold different beer every day.

I was getting a little popular lately, so when I came here, they took me to the quiet seats in the back.

In the familiar seats in this familiar pub, Erza and I raised a toast with our beer jugs.

I ordered coffee beer today. It only dropped on the very last floor of some dungeon, so it was a rare opportunity. The combined bitterness of coffee and hops was just right, making it one of my favorite beers.

"Good work today, Ryota. Thank you for everything."

"Hm? What's this all about?"

"Thanks to you, our business is doing better than ever."

"That so? I mean, I can't possibly be making that much myself, right?"

"Your drop quality is extremely stable. People appreciate stable quality and quantity. Once upon a time, the owner told me that when you set up an independent business, getting as many A-ranks as possible is key."

"Huh."

They needed to be able to secure multiple regular patrons with A-rank drops to secure high quality and quantity.

Strictly speaking, quantity depended on the individual. If they were sickly or a slacker, then that would mean a lower frequency of dungeon runs, which meant fewer drops.

But if an A-rank put in the work, they could get some high-quality drops. That alone made them valuable.

"And you wouldn't believe the bonus you earned me," Erza added. "It was double my last one."

"Ooh, that's great," I replied, raising a toast again. Back when I'd worked for my old company in my old world, I'd almost never received bonuses, so I kind of envied that. "Congratulations, Erza."

"Thank you, Ryota."

The pleasant conversation made the beer taste even better.

I drank, enjoyed some appetizers, and chatted with Erza. It was a good way to wrap up a day's work.

While I drank, two men sat in the seats next to us.

They were both dressed like adventurers. As if they'd just come home from a day of work.

"Phew, man, what a headache."

"You're not kidding. Having wheat prices go down sucks."

Hm?

When the word "wheat" reached my ears, Erza tried to say something. "Ryo-"

"Shh." But I put a finger to my lips, gesturing for her to be quiet, and listened carefully.

"Our revenue dropped ten whole percent. Damn Clifford doesn't know when to quit."

"What, did you hear why? They wouldn't tell me."

"Yeah, I forced it out of 'em. You know how they used wheat production as an excuse to start a strike?"

"Yeah. That's when Clint got those Ryota Family people's help breaking it, right?"

"Thing is, when the Cliffords came back, their wheat was obviously worse quality than the Ryota Family's. Or I guess you'd say the Ryotas' was better."

"Theirs went down in price because better-quality wheat came out, is that it?"

"That's it." The man gulped down his beer all at once and slammed the jug down on the table. "It's happened before, and it'll happen again. When something happens, the Ryota Family—nah, specifically that Ryota Sato guy—gets involved. Always does."

"That's what Clifford gets for being an idiot. If he didn't do that, he'd still be selling for full price."

"For real. Dumbass Clifford."

"That's what he gets for screwing around."

"Word's spreading like wildfire, too. Everyone's saying, 'Don't screw around, or they'll send the Ryota Family.'"

The men complained as they downed their beer.

Hmm... So that's what's happening?

Carrots had gone up, wheat had gone down. Two products I was involved with had opposite results.

Erza, who'd eavesdropped with me, said, "That's our Ryota."

144. Aim and Fire

On B6 of Nihonium, I farmed poison zombies amidst the poison air as usual.

I continued practicing my sniping from last time. This time, though, I didn't kill them in one blow; I aimed carefully and fired from afar like a sniper.

First the arm, then the knee, then the ear... I sniped in order to weaken them, rather than killing them.

Shooting to spare them was leagues harder than shooting to kill.

Yet I did it. After all, if I wanted to snipe them to death, I could just use homing rounds. They always beelined for monsters' weak points, never missing their mark.

I'd realized this morning that learning to snipe vitals was inefficient, so today, I went for everything but their vitals.

Was there much meaning to this? Maybe not. After all, I could just use Repetition to kill any monster I'd already killed before.

The reason I still did it was to learn the techniques necessary to keep myself safe no matter what came in the future.

So I kept doing it. I kept sniping the skeletons without killing them. After shooting through their arms and legs, I'd finally headshot.

I repeated this process over and over...

And though I went a little over my usual allotted time, I gradually raised my intelligence.

Through the warp room, I returned to the mansion for a moment. I didn't need to bring a magic cart to Nihonium, so I'd come here to get a cart to take to my afternoon Tellurium run.

My life had settled into a pattern, but something outside of the usual pattern occurred today.

"Oh, good! Ryota's here!" Alice ran over from the other end of the hallway.

"Alice? What's the matter?"

Alice Wonderland. Since she was born in a dungeon, she could feel the layout of a dungeon and the locations of monsters within. She also had the power to recruit monsters to her side.

The three monsters on her shoulders were Bubbly, Boney, and Boomy.

They were all monsters she'd defeated and recruited in dungeons. Now, they were chibified like plushies. And they'd stay that way, until she ordered them to return to normal size and fight for her.

If I were to liken her specialty to an RPG class, she'd be like a Summoner.

It was rare for her to look at me so desperately.

"Are you free right now, Ryota?"

"I was just going to go to Tellurium as usual, but if you need something, I'm glad to help."

"You mean it?! Then come with me!" Alice said and started walking. She went

in the direction I'd come from—in the direction of the warp room.

Does she need something in a dungeon...? Well, most everything in this world comes from dungeons, after all.

We arrived in front of the warp room.

"Should I go to a dungeon?" I asked.

"Yeah. I'll go first, so you come right after me."

"Hey, wait, wait." I seized Alice and dragged her back before she could jump into the warp room.

"What's up, Ryota? Do you need to get ready?"

"That's not it. You need to tell me where we're going."

"Oh, yeah. It's B7 of Bismuth!"

"For wheat?" I asked Alice if the incident from the other day was still ongoing.

"No, that's not it," she denied. So that wasn't the problem. "I think it'd be faster to show you in person and explain there."

"That so? Okay, that's fine," I assented.

Alice used the warp room first and disappeared. I followed into the warp room.

Uh, let's see...B7 of Bismuth, was it?

This warp room could unconditionally warp us to any dungeon floor we'd been to before. When I learned that, I'd had our resident veteran Eve help us bookmark every floor of all of Cyclo's original five dungeons. As such, though I hadn't cleared it myself, I could go to B7 of Bismuth as well.

I used the warp room to go.

B7 of Bismuth was a dungeon snow floor. Magical snow fell upon the bismuth crystal caverns. It was a wondrous sight.

"Ryota, this way!" Alice took my hand and started running.

"Wait a sec. I'm not scared."

"But he's gonna get away!"

"Who?" What was she talking about?

Suddenly, I happened to notice the monsters on Alice's shoulders. Bubbly, Boney, Boomy—her adorable little buddies.

Could it be?

"There!" Alice suddenly hit the brakes and stopped. I rushed to stop, too, just before I could collide with her. "Look at that, Ryota."

"At what?" I followed Alice's finger. Pretty far away, there was a monster. It was so far that it was blurry. "You mean that monster-looking thing over there?"

"Yep, Spiky. He's calling me."

"Ooh, so its name is Spiky."

I'd figured that was what this was. The fact that it had a name meant that she was going to recruit this monster. That was how it had been for the other three; they had names before she'd recruited them.

This one must be the same.

"Why is it Spiky?" I asked.

"Umm, well, the monsters here are called needle lizards."

"Needle lizards... They're spiky reptiles. Got it." I imagined it and quickly

understood.

The floor above this one had chameleons, after all. Based on dungeon tendencies so far, maybe Bismuth was all lizards.

After making that hypothesis, I asked Alice, "So, how should I help you?"

"I have to defeat Spiky to recruit him, but you can't defeat needle lizards without breaking all the spikes on their back first."

"This is B7, after all."

Cyclo's dungeons got harder from B6 onward, requiring special methods to defeat the monsters within. That was why you needed a license to go this far.

It seemed B7 here was no exception.

"But when you get close, the spikes recede into its body," she added.

"In other words, you have to break them from a distance. Is that right?"

"Yep. But how..."

"Leave it to me." It seemed my practice would come in handy right away. I took out my two revolvers and loaded normal bullets. "Are those spikes hard?"

"Yep, pretty hard. Not as hard as Arsenic's rocks, though."

"A little hard for normal bullets, then... All right."

I readied my guns and approached the monster. As I did, its form came into sight.

Needle lizard—a short and stout reptile with thorns on its back. Honestly, I'd almost sooner call it a dragon than a lizard.

"Stop!" Alice called out. "If you go any further, they'll retract."

"Got it." I obeyed and stopped. Then, I got down on one knee and held out

my guns.

I closed one eye and aimed carefully. This was the sniping I'd practiced these past few days.

The needle lizard stood still. I could make these shots.

My palms began to get sweaty. Failure was not an option.

I mean, maybe it was, but this was a monster that wanted to be Alice's buddy. I didn't know what negative effects there might be if I messed up.

So no, failure was not an option.

I sucked in a deep breath and focused as best I could. The scenery around me disappeared. Even the falling dungeon snow left my perception.

All I saw was the needle lizard—its spikes. I pulled the triggers over and over again.

Bang, bang, bang!

The normal bullets coming from my two guns collided in midair, becoming piercing rounds. They spun as they flew—and all of them struck the needle lizard's spikes.

None touched its body. They only broke its spikes.

"I did it."

"I'm coming!" Alice began sprinting.

Along the way, Bubbly, Boney, and Boomy returned to their original size. They started beating down the needle lizard alongside Alice.

After the fierce battle, the needle lizard fell. It disappeared with a poof before reappearing in a new form.

It was a short, stout, plushie-like lizard. The spikes on its back (which looked soft and elastic) extended and retracted.

Alice picked up Spiky and stroked its head. Spiky rubbed its face against her, too. It seemed she'd successfully made a new friend.

Alice returned, waving, alongside her friends.

"Ryota, thank you! Spiky says thanks, too!" She was beaming. Spiky, with its now-adorable face, extended and retracted its spikes over and over.

Thus, she had gained another buddy.



145. Tool-Assisted Gameplay

With Spiky on our side now, we returned to the mansion.

The atmosphere of our home was refreshing. It was warm and bright, thanks to Emily's care.

Brought here for the first time, Spiky—the plush-sized needle lizard—looked all around uncomfortably.

"It's okay, Spiky. This is my home! From now on, it's your home, too," Alice soothed Spiky. At the same time, the other three—Bubbly, Boney, and Boomy—approached Spiky and conveyed something in silly body language.

The four plushie-like monsters kind of looked like anime characters, maybe from one of those spin-off series.

Encouraged by his new senior buddies, Spiky relaxed.

During this exchange in front of the warp room, our guard dog Kerberos heard the commotion and came over.

"Welcome home, Master."

"Hey there. Any problems in the mansion today?"

"Hmm. A weird pushy salesman came, but when I barked at him, he ran away."

"A salesman, huh? How'd you bark at him?"

"Like this." Kerberos looked up to the ceiling and roared.

For an instant, everything trembled. Alice's buddies were all blown away. That

was a heck of a roar. In a video game, that probably would've dealt actual damage.

Most people would run away when faced with that.

"I did it like that," he said.

"Yeah? Good job, Kerberos."

"Hehehe..."

Despite being a ferocious guard dog bigger than a human being, he was happy when I petted him. His tail wagged fast enough to look like it would snap off as he basically begged for more.

If it made him that happy, I'd love to keep going, but...

"I need to get back to work. I'll pet you more when I get home tonight, so guard the home well, okay?"

"Yeah! Leave it to me!" Kerberos wagged his tail more as he left.

As a dog, he enjoyed being given work from his master. Even now, his tail wagged like mad as he was entrusted with protecting our home. It did dent the walls slightly when his tail struck them...but hey, we can call that part of his charm.

As I watched him leave to do his duty, I decided it was about time to get back to dungeoneering.

But Alice watched Kerberos intently as he left.

"What's up?" I asked her.

"Kerby...is a monster, right?"

"Yeah."

"...He wouldn't drop anything if he was killed, right?"

"He is an outsider, after all."

I looked to Alice, asking with my eyes, What's the deal?

She gazed at Kerberos, then at her four buddies, who'd just come back from being blown away.

"I wonder..." Alice looked like she'd hit upon something.

☆

Alice and I came to B1 of Tellurium, a place teeming with bean sproutdropping slimes.

"Watch this, Ryota."

"Okay."

She brought me here saying she wanted me to see something, so I put my guns away and crossed my arms. I was in full-on spectator mode.

Alice took a step forward and summoned her four monsters.

"Bubbly, Boney, Boomy, and Spiky. Go!"

The plush-sized monsters returned to their normal size—their monster size. They didn't return to their former appearance, however. While they were big again, they still looked chibified.

All four of them had been summoned in these cute forms that served as proof that they were Alice's buddies.

They went over to the nearest slime and attacked it. It was a four-on-one

beatdown, so I assumed it would be over in no time.

"Stop!" On Alice's orders, the four stopped attacking all at once.

The slime continued counterattacking, but they stopped hitting it and focused on defending and evading.

"What's going on, Alice?"

"Just watch..." She gazed at the slime for a while, seemingly trying to discern something, and then gave the order to attack again. "Go!"

Her buddy monsters obeyed and defeated the slime in no time. It dropped bean sprouts.

"Ooh, I knew it!" Alice murmured in apparent understanding before leading her small army to the next slime.

She farmed on. Sometimes, she'd have them stop and wait for a moment before finishing off the slime. Sometimes, she'd have them kill it outright.

After watching for a while, it started to seem like she was waiting for some kind of timing. The moment I noticed it, I realized something else: she was getting drops every single time.

Alice's plant drops were C-rank—or more precisely, she herself had F-rank drops, but when her buddy monsters killed enemies, they were equivalent to C-rank drops. C wasn't very high. On a good day, you might have 50% drop rates.

But now...she was getting 100% drops. I was sure that her waiting for some timing had to be related to it.

"Alice."

"What?"

"Can you make it so they don't drop, too?"

"Oh, did you already figure it out?" Alice smiled as she led her buddies to the next slime.

She gave the order for them to kill it. This time, nothing dropped at all.

Neither did the next slime. Nor the next, the one after, or the one after that. None of them dropped anything.

There was no mistaking it now.

"Do you know which enemies will drop items?" I asked.

"Not exactly. I learned how to tell the timing they'll drop at."

"Timing?"

"Yep. If I finish them off at the right time, I can make them drop items. I felt that Kerby would never drop anything, so I had a feeling."

"Outsiders don't drop, after all... It's like you're doing RNG manipulation."

"Huh? Orangy what...?"

"You wouldn't get it." Gaming lingo didn't work on the people of this world, after all. "Anyway, that's awesome, Alice."

"Yeah! It's because of you, Ryota."

"Me?"

"Yeah!" Alice replied firmly, returned her four buddies to plushie size, and held them up in her arms. "I think I learned how when Spiky became my buddy, so it's thanks to you for helping me."

"That so?"

"Thanks again, Ryota," Alice said with a smile. In her arms, her buddies used exaggerated body language to communicate the same thing.

It seemed our summoner had grown a little more.	

146. One in a Million

I joined Alice and watched her farm.

"Spiky, go around behind it. Boomy, stop after you hit it three times. Boney, wait... There!"

Under her leadership, her buddies fought a slime. It wasn't an all-out attack like before; they whittled it down slowly, found the right timing, and finished it off as a team.

And that wasn't all.

"Bubbly, melt for now!" she gave what sounded to me like a meaningless order.

Really, all of it was incomprehensible to me, but that made her drop rate 100%. Whenever she killed a monster, she got drops. It was as if she had an Arank drop rate.

She did this all day, resulting in over 300,000 piros of earnings.



On the outskirts of Cyclo, I tied up an outsider Frankenstein with a restraining round. After gazing at it from point-blank range for over a minute, Alice declared, "Hmm, seems like a no. No matter when, I'd never get a drop from it."

"Figures."

"You're really the only person who could get a drop from it."

"Seems like it."

We learned one more thing from this test regarding Alice's ability and the way this world worked.

Alice had the ability to know the time when a monster would drop a drop, if it could drop. In dungeons, that was the same as having a 100% drop rate if she stuck to the timing. Outsiders outside of dungeons were a no, though.

She could keep winning with a 1% chance, but there was nothing she could do about 0%.

That meant that drops in this world were like spinning a roulette wheel. The higher one's drop stats were, the larger the area of their winning color on the wheel.

Every monster had a roulette wheel, and outsiders had a winning area of zero on it. Meanwhile, my out-of-this-world S-rank drops turned the whole roulette into a win.

"Thanks," I said before killing the Frankenstein with a piercing round headshot. I also picked up the homing round it dropped.

"No, Ryota, I should be the one to thank you! I got so many drops today because of you. I reached 300,000 piros!"

300,000 piros. That was what she'd earned.

She had 100% drop rates when she did this, but because she had to get the right timing, it took extra time. That was why she'd *only* gotten 300,000 piros.

"Good for you. That makes you a fellow ten-millionaire now!"

"Yeah!"

Making 300,000 piros a day worked out to over 10,000,000 piros per year. That was a simple, symbolic indicator of progress. Of course, Alice was happy to have reached it.

"It's really all because of you, Ryota. Thank you for letting me join you."

"It's no problem at all."

She thanked me, but really, I was more than happy to help. With a low level cap of only 2, Alice wasn't accepted into any of the families she'd tried joining. Seeing this poor, shunned girl come so far made me happy.

"Oh?" she gasped.

"What's up, Alice? You just stopped."

"There..."

"There? The magical item shop, you mean?" I noticed that she was gazing at the magical item shop I always went to. "You wanna go in?" I proposed.

Alice wouldn't focus so intently on something for no reason.

"Yeah." She quickly headed inside.

I followed her. Inside were the familiar Isaac and a customer I didn't know.

"Ah!" Alice piped up when she saw the magic fruit held by the customer.

"What's wrong?"

"That magic fruit..."

"Do you want it?"

"Yeah," she said quietly, never tearing her eyes away from the magic fruit.

"The others won't work?" I confirmed.

"They all have different stuff inside. That's the only one that has it..."

As I knew Alice's ability, I tried to decipher what she was feeling. They were all different. That one "had" something. Maybe each magic fruit had a lottery box—or maybe they were roulettes, too.

And only that magic fruit contained the spell that Alice wanted.

"Sir, I want that," she said to Isaac.

"I'm sorry. The other customer there has just purchased it." He looked genuinely apologetic. "There are other magic fruits over here..."

"I want this one." Alice looked to the customer and said, "Hey, sell me that."

The customer gazed at her for a moment before saying, "Then it'll be 10,000,000 piros."

That was an insane sum.

Magic fruit had gone up in price recently, sure, but only to 5,000,000 piros. He demanded double—proof that he could tell she was desperate to have it. Though, the only real proof we needed was the way Isaac's brow twitched the moment he heard it.

"T-Ten million... Urk..." Alice groaned, at a total loss. The look on her face said that she couldn't afford to pay that much, no matter how much she wanted it.

"We'll pay the ten mil," I said.

"Ryota! B-But..."

"You really want it, right?"

"Yeah! I do, but... But..."

"Then that's all that matters to me." I looked to the man and confirmed, "There you have it. I'll pay 10,000,000 piros for that fruit. Ready to sell?"

"...Thirty." After a beat, he tripled the already-outrageous price to 30,000,000 piros.

He's got us eating out of his hands. He raised the price because we were so eager to buy.

What now? I can pay thirty million, but if I say that, he'll just raise the price again. In the worst case, he might even stop giving prices and squeeze us for all we've got. What do you do in a situation like this?

"Sir," Isaac cut in. He said this not to me, but to the man who'd bought the fruit. "I should warn you about one thing."

"What? It's not like I'm forcing him to buy it."

"That's not it. You should know that this man is Ryota Sato."

"...Huh?"

"The leader of the Ryota Family, Ryota Sato. Consider that well before you take this further."

"The guy who brought the Clifford Family to the brink of bankruptcy? That Ryota Sato?!"

"Exactly. If you're well-informed, I'm sure you're aware that the problem was of their own making."

"Urk!" The man groaned, and Isaac fell silent. His boldness from before had flipped to fear, just like that.

I hadn't thought of using my name like that.

Taking this opportunity, I cut in, "Ten million."

"Huh?"

"You agreed to that price before, so that's good, right?"

"Y-Yeah. I'm good with that." The man vigorously nodded, happy to be spared.

☆

At night, in the mansion living room, Alice stared at the magic fruit we'd bought.

"Alice, what's the matter?"

Our friends were worried.

I explained her new ability and said, "It looks like she can do the same thing with magic fruit."

"So you mean she's calculating the perfect time to eat the fruit and get the spell she wants?" Celeste quickly understood. That's the brains of the Ryota Family for you.

"What kind of spell is it?" Eve asked, but I shook my head.

"I dunno. She hasn't told me."

"But look how serious she is. It must be incredible!" Emily said.

"Or maybe it's just something that she wants," I added.

"Like infinite carrot multiplication?" Eve chimed in.

"Yeah, something like that."

This time, and this time alone, Eve's dumb remark made sense. Because that was possible. Given Alice's special abilities, it was genuinely possible.

While we talked, Alice continued to gaze at the magic fruit. It was like she was staring at a spinning roulette wheel.

Alice, the one who'd solved monster roulettes in seconds and the outsider's roulette in a minute, kept on staring for what seemed like forever.

An hour passed. Two hours passed. But she kept going.

Eventually, when dawn came, Alice took a big bite of the magic fruit.

I had to wonder if the probability of her desired magic was one in the hundreds of thousands.

147. Ryochin

In the morning, we gathered in the mansion courtyard around Alice.

Celeste broke the ice. "What kind of magic did you learn?" The fact that she looked so excited now despite her usual cool and collected demeanor was probably because she was a mage.

"It's called Omnipotence."

"Omnipotence... I've never heard of that."

Our resident brainiac cocked her head in confusion.

"Omnipotence, huh?" I muttered.

"Do you know it, Yoda?"

"Only the meaning of the word. It means all-powerful, perfect, invincible, that kind of stuff. You see it sometimes when people talk about God."

These days, there's a superhero who uses part of it as part of his name, too.

"So you mean carrots," Eve said.

"We thought you'd say that..." we all rebutted Eve's joke. Note: she was not joking.

"If that's true, then it must be incredible. I wonder what it's like!" Erza's eyes shone with excitement.

Alice's next words only bolstered our excitement. "I can only use it once a day."

"If it has that limitation...then it must really be something."

"When it comes to limitations, Ryota's Repetition had one, too."

"Yeah. It only works on enemies I've killed before."

It dealt no damage to enemies I hadn't killed before, but it insta-killed any that I had killed before.

I had to agree with the sense that harder limitations meant better magic. Omnipotence—a spell that could only be used once a day. On top of that, she'd won it after hours of spinning that roulette.

All of these conditions together excited even me.

"Are you going to show it to us... Or can you even use it?"

"That's a good question! Is it safe to use such incredible magic in our mansion's courtyard?"

"It's okay! That's why I had you all come here," Alice declared firmly.

Finally, our anticipation peaked. Alice put some distance between us and her. She stooped down, gathered her strength...and then pumped both fists upward.

"Ryochin!"

Excuse me? What is that? Ryochin? Wasn't it called Omnipotence? I was confused. My friends furrowed their brows and cocked their heads, too.

Then, a rift was torn open. An empty space cracked and broke, and something emerged from it. It was as if it had come from another dimension.

The first thing I saw in the dimensional rift looked like a hand.

Ooh, is it summoning magic? I began to think.

My friends spoke in unison.

"...Yoda?"

```
"It's Ryota."
```

"That is definitely Ryota."

"You're uppity for a low level."

The being that appeared from the dimensional rift—the one Alice had summoned—looked like me.

I say *looked like*, because it was not me. In a word, he looked like a stuffed version from an amusement park. It was clearly made to look like me, but it was chibified like Alice's buddy monsters.

My name is Ryota, so I guess it's like a cute nickname.

"Alice, what is ...?"

"Let your guard down, and you'll get hurt!" Alice called out.

"Huh? Ah!"

Suddenly, Ryochin disappeared from view. No, he hadn't disappeared; I saw him tense up his right leg right before, so he must have moved at super high-speed.

Right leg... Behind me? No, up above?! I looked up to find Ryochin coming at me with a flying kick.

I raised my arms to guard, but he changed the trajectory of his kick. Instead of attacking, his leg wrapped around my arm to restrain me.

Then, he pulled out two revolvers. They were chibified, too, making them kind of cute.

I dodged when he thrust the barrels toward me. Then, when I saw the bullets come out, I dodged even wider.

I kicked Ryochin, tore his leg away from my arm, and jumped aside. Just then, an annihilation round struck the place where I'd just stood.

Annihilation rounds—the combination of flame and freeze rounds, which swallowed up a whole area.

"He can use those, too?!" I cried.

It was then that I flipped the switch from everyday life mode to battle mode. I took out my guns and put a curtain of normal bullets between us.

Then, I dug my feet into the ground and closed in with my SS-rank speed. I charged about as fast as the bullets and fired another volley of normal bullets I'd reloaded. They became a hail of piercing rounds, which I followed as I closed in on Ryochin.

Ryochin fired a bunch of freeze rounds. After freezing some of my piercing rounds, he grabbed them and deflected the other piercing rounds with punches.

So that's his move?

Piercing rounds were strong when it came to forward momentum and piercing power, but they were weak to forces that came from the side. If you timed it right, you could easily deflect them by punching their side.

Ryochin had done just that.

After this first exchange, the battle began to heat up.

During our fight, I realized that, though he was a chibified version of me, our stats were almost the same. He could also use the same bullets as me. Power, speed, toughness... No matter what metric—

"He's the same as Ryota in every way."

"Yeah! Omnipotence was the strongest summoning magic I could find. He's just as strong."

I wasn't surprised by Alice's claim.

Indeed, he was just like me in every way. We looked different, but abilitywise, we were alike. Our battle went on without a conclusion. As soon as I thought it would go on forever...

Fwoosh. I heard a sound like wind blowing, and Ryochin disappeared.

"Mmh?"

"Yep, that's it. I can only call him once a day for about this long," Alice explained.

"So that's another limitation," Celeste said.

"It sure is. But I get it; that's all part of the cost of summoning Yoda."

"High-level, for a low level. Too uppity."

The battle had come to an unsatisfying end, but we knew the effects of Omnipotence now. It was summoning magic that could only be used once a day and lasted for what felt like sixty seconds.

"That's incredible. If you can summon Ryota, that makes you just about the strongest, Alice," Erza said. Our friends surrounded Alice and praised her.

She was happy, too, but it seemed less like she was happy to have something strong, and more excited to be able to summon Ryochin, a chibified version of me.

While I watched them, I thought to myself.

"What's the matter, Yoda?"

"Oh, I was just curious about something."

"About what?"

"As I get stronger—through seeds, magic fruit, and the like—what will happen to Ryochin?"

"That's a good question!"

Was Ryochin stuck at this level of strength, or would he copy me in real time? I had to wonder.

"He'll get stronger alongside you, Ryota," Alice said confidently.

"Is that so?"

"Yep!"

So that was it. In that case, it was time to test it. Knowing your abilities through testing was important, after all.

And the best way to measure change in this case was...

"You're going for more magic fruit, aren't you?" Our mage, Celeste, read my mind.

I nodded in affirmation.

148. The Strongest Servant

On B7 of Selenium, where dungeon snow fell upon the empty floor, a single horse strutted about as if it owned the place.

It wasn't just a horse, though; it was the master and most evil monster in this dungeon, with two horns on its head.

Dungeon master, He Who Defiles Purity. The Bicorn.

The Bicorn walked around at a leisurely pace, emitting an aura that lowered the stats of anyone around it. Alice and I had found it after searching every floor from B1 onward.

"There he is! It took forever to find him."

"Yeah, those dungeon masters love to move floors, so we can't just find them right away by warping."

"Even when I followed it, it just moved floors."

We'd discovered an unexpected limit of the warp room. Our mansion came with a warp room that could warp us to any dungeon floor we'd been to before, but you couldn't use it to find dungeon masters since they didn't appear on a fixed floor.

We'd warped to B1 and descended from there before finally finding it on the seventh.

The Bicorn noticed us, too. It glared at us.

"It's mad," Alice noted.

"Other adventurers tried to fight it and got trounced in the process, right?" I recalled the urgent request that had come to us from the Dungeon Association.

The dungeon master of Selenium had appeared. They'd sent a primary cleanup crew to deal with it, but they were defeated. It would affect production and the flow of products if this went on too long, so they wanted it dealt with swiftly.

"Let's get this done."

"I'll go," she offered.

"If you think you're in danger, I'll interfere right away."

"No worries! Leave it to us!" Alice smirked and did a sideways peace sign in front of her eyes as she left to fight the Bicorn.

"First off, preliminary testing. Boney, Bubbly, Boomy, Spiky!" Alice called the names of her buddy monsters and summoned them.

The four monsters on her shoulders returned to regular size and attacked the Bicorn.

Skeleton Boney and slime Bubbly fought on the front line, little demon Boomy used magic from afar, and needle lizard Spiky launched spikes from his back to support them. Two front liners, two back liners. A very balanced, orthodox party.

They cooperated well, too; most monsters wouldn't be able to stand up against them.

But they were up against the Bicorn. A dungeon master. Defiler of purity that he was, he lowered all of their stats and scattered them with ease using his horns and legs.

They got up and continued the fight, but the difference in strength between them was evident.

"Not gonna work, huh? Fine. I'll use my trump card!" Alice stored up strength before pumping both hands in the air. "Ryochiiin!"

Alice's summoning magic created a rift in space, from which emerged... something akin to a stuffed animal, like you might see in a mall-top performance. In a word, it was me. Me, but chibified and turned cute.



"Get him, Ryochin!"

Ryochin silently jumped at the Bicorn. Instead of using his guns, he first thrust out his hand.

He used magic—causing lightning to fall on the Bicorn the moment he held out his hand. This was lightning magic, aptly named Lightning.

With a boom, his preemptive attack scattered electric discharge. However, it didn't affect the Bicorn. Its two horns lit up, causing a spherical barrier to surround it and deflect the lightning.

"That's it, huh?" I murmured to myself. It was no surprise that it had deflected elementary magic.

What really mattered was that he'd used Lightning. I had learned it using a magic fruit I'd bought before the dungeon master had spawned, and now, Ryochin had used it.

Ryochin's strength hadn't been fixed the moment Alice had learned the spell; it evolved in real time with mine.

"Lightning!" I held out my hand and used it myself. Magic of the same scale struck the Bicorn, and like before, it was deflected by the barrier.

"Ryota, it's my turn right now!"

Alice was mad, so I apologized, "Sorry, sorry."

The test was complete. My magic was the same strength as Ryochin's, and it was the same as when he wasn't around.

I checked my stats with the portable status board; nothing had been decreased. It seemed Alice summoning Ryochin had no negative effect on me.

That summoning spell was almost nothing but positives. If there was any

negative...

"Ryochin, use Repetition!"

Ryochin held out his hand and cast the spell Repetition, which would defeat any previously defeated monster without question.

I'd defeated the Bicorn before, so it would work just fine if I'd used it. But even when Ryochin used it, the Bicorn was just fine.

"Aww. So it really is a no, huh?" Alice had expected as much, too.

Ryota had defeated the Bicorn before, but Ryochin had not. So Ryochin could not use Repetition on it.

The battle raged on. Even with his stocky form, Ryochin moved like the wind and outmaneuvered the Bicorn.

Like me, he had SS-rank speed—overwhelmingly faster than the Bicorn.

He put up a hail of normal bullets, charged forward, and seized the enemy's neck. Then, he fired from point-blank range and broke off its two horns.

With the horns broken, its barrier was gone.

"Now! Boney, Bubbly, Boomy, Spiky!"

On Alice's orders, they rejoined the battle. They joined forces with Ryochin and beat down the Bicorn.

It was funny to see, like watching a video game. They all looked like chibi characters, so it was like a battle screen in an RPG with such characters.

But their strength was authentic. With Ryochin at the lead, the five of them trounced the Bicorn.

The dungeon master fell. It struggled, but it could not stand back up. Alice's

monsters mobbed it and continued the beatdown.

I almost had to feel bad for the thing.

"Ack! Oh, no!" Alice suddenly piped up. While I wondered what was wrong, she continued, "There's no time! Ryochin, finish it off quick!"

On her orders, Ryochin thrust out both guns at once. The left had flame rounds, and the right had freeze rounds. He fired repeatedly, chaining annihilation rounds.

Then, with a bang, he burst and disappeared, as if he'd never been there in the first place. And though the Bicorn tried desperately to evade the final annihilation round...

"Nice job, everyone!"

The remaining four monsters held the thing down to keep it from escaping. It was filled with holes by the annihilation rounds, causing it to be, well, annihilated.

"Aw, I didn't get to wait for the drop timing," Alice said regretfully.

That made me realize one more difference between me and Ryochin: he copied the stats that I'd raised in this world, but it seemed it couldn't copy the ones I'd brought from outside of it—my drop stats. Even after making him fight for the entirety of his summoning time, he couldn't get a drop.

"Well, you won. That's good, right?"

"Yeah! Because of you, Ryota. Thank you."

With that, Alice had cleared the request, defeating the dungeon monster that had stemmed the flow of dungeon drops in Selenium.

Rumors of the Ryota Family, which now had two people who'd solo-killed

dungeon	masters,	spread	like	wildfire.	We	became	even	more	famous	as	а
result.											

149. Breaking 100,000,000 Piros

At night, we gathered in the living room and relaxed together. On top of the table were pancakes with pink cream. The girls ate them together.

"These are delicious, Emily," Celeste complimented her. "And they smell sweet, too... Mm, that's strawberry, isn't it?"

"Yep. I saw strawberries from Sternum, so I decided to buy them," Emily replied.

"Sternum? I've never heard of that dungeon."

"It's a new dungeon. Its city is close to Cyclo, so we get them fresh."

"Wow, no wonder it's so good."

Emily and Celeste conversed about the pancakes. Meanwhile, a tail stuck out from under the table in front of Alice.

It was wagging madly, with a lot of weight behind it. Kerberos was under the table with only his tail sticking out, as if he'd buried himself in a pit.

"Kerby's under the table again," Alice giggled. "I'm always surprised that he fits there."

"He likes cramped places. Like a cat," Eve said.

"No, it's not that he likes it. It's just habit to him."

"Habit?"

"Yeah! Every time lightning strikes, he rushes under a table or bed, so it's like a habit to him. Watch next time; it's crazy how smoothly he slides under the

table!"

I knew that already. Last time I saw him, he'd fled under a table so smoothly and stylishly that it was like watching 60fps video. I found it almost artistic.

While I stayed out of the conversation, Erza came over next to me. "Ryota, what are you looking at?" She peeked at what I was holding. "That's...your passbook? Is something wrong?"

"Just doing some calculations. I had a feeling about something, but I don't have a phone or calculator—er, I mean, machine that can do math for me, so it's not going too well."

"What are you calculating? I'll help," Erza offered with a smile.

"You good at math?"

"When it comes to money, sure."

"Then maybe you could help me... See, I wanted to know my total revenue so far. How much I've made in total since I came to this world—to Cyclo, that is."

She answered immediately, with the most nonchalant look on her face, "98,763,750 piros."

"Huh?"

"98,763,750 piros."

"You already knew what I was doing?"

"No, but... Oh, Ryota, you haven't gotten any income other than through this account, have you?"

"No... I do all of my business through Swallow's Returned Favor, and my dividends from Aurum's taxes come into this account."

```
"Then that should be correct," Erza said calmly.
  "Okay, what about Emily?"
  "7,866,754 piros."
  "Celeste?"
  "4,117,896 piros."
  "Alice?"
  "1,993,812 piros."
  "And Eve?"
  "With us, 38,983,400 piros. But Eve is a veteran, so if you added her sales to
other shops, I'm sure that would double."
  Erza rattled off answers the instant I asked her questions.
  "That's awesome."
  "I like calculating these things, so..."
  "Huh. I had a feeling, but wow."
  Upon hearing that, Erza asked, "A feeling?"
```

"A feeling that my total earnings would reach a hundred million before long."

"So did I. I'm impressed that you knew, though. When you get to sums this big, it gets difficult to keep up with all of the small numbers adding into it."

"Well..." I stared off into the distance. "It's a sense I've cultivated from gacha spending. Spend on gacha, and when your bill comes at the end of the month, you're shocked by how much it is. Eventually, I got a grasp of about how much it was adding to my bills."

"O-Oh, I see... Not that I know what 'gacha' is."

Despite her confusion, Erza didn't question me. What a nice person.

But wow. A hundred million, huh?

Fifty million was a lot to me not long ago, but here we were. I didn't have much on hand, since I tended to use money as I earned it, but this made me happy.

"Let's have a feast tomorrow," Emily cut in.

"Emily?"

"We should celebrate your earnings reaching a hundred million piros!"

She was unusually excited.

"A feast, huh?"

"Yes. Mom always told me that when you're happy, you should have a feast."

"Yeah. You're right," I agreed before looking around at all of my friends. "Wanna go wild tomorrow, everyone?"

"Yeah!" everyone readily agreed.

☆

The next day, I skipped Nihonium and went to Tellurium in the morning.

Everyone was waiting for me, so I fired off Repetitions like mad.

I sent bean sprouts from B1's slimes and got 40,000 piros.

Carrots from B2's sleep slimes, 40,000 piros.

Pumpkins from the B3's cockro slimes, 40,000 piros.

Bamboo shoots from the B4's bat slimes-

I farmed at max speed using Repetition, sent everything back to the mansion through my magic cart, and counted as I went using the cart's built-in feature.

In total, I needed about 1,240,000 piros.

I was emotional. As I farmed, I remembered everything that had happened to this point.

When I'd first arrived in this world, I couldn't even make 10,000 piros a day. It took three days to make rent for our cheap, 20,000-piro apartment.

But now, I farmed at blinding speed.

I piled up the magic cart's limit of 40,000 piros. That quickly turned into 80,000, then 120,000.

I used my abilities, cultivated bit by bit, to farm now. After thirty carts, when I was up to 1,200,000 piros, I returned to B1 of Tellurium.

It was here. This place, and its bean sprouts... It had all started here.

When a slime bounced my way, Repetition.

When a slime tried to flee, Repetition.

When slimes appeared from the floor, walls, or ceiling, immediate Repetition.

Every time bean sprouts went into my cart, the counter climbed. Finally, it reached 40,000 piros again.

"Phew..." I gasped for breath.

I pressed the warp button one last time for good measure.

40,000 piros worth of bean sprouts warped away. With that, today's earnings had reached 1,240,000 piros.

Using the warp gate, I returned to the mansion.

When I got back, everyone was waiting for me.

"Everyone..."

Emily, Celeste, Alice, Eve, and Kerberos all greeted me.

"Congratulations!"

"Congrats."

"Grats!"

"Good job, low level."

"Congratulations, Master!"

Then, Erza ran over from the other end of the hallway. "Congratulations, Ryota. You crossed the hundred-million threshold!" She came with a bundle of papers chock full of numbers. It seemed she'd recalculated it for me.

Everyone's congratulations made my eyes heat up. My chest warmed up, too.

"Thank you all!"

Everyone celebrated around me, the guy who'd reached 100,000,000 piros in earnings. We partied and feasted until late at night.

Then, the next day, we were shocked to learn that a new dungeon had been born.

Extra Side-Story: The Family's Day Off

One morning, on my way to the dining room for breakfast, I noticed Emily receiving something at the front door.

"Morning, Emily. Whatcha got?"

"Oh, good morning, Yoda. This is Eve's carrot cake."

"A delivery this early?" I gazed at the front door for a moment after the delivery person left.

"Something wrong, Yoda?"

"Oh, no. That delivery just reminded me that I've always wanted to try delivery pizza."

"Delivery pizza?"

"Yeah. The place I used to live in, pizza delivery was expensive. About this size..." I used both arms to form a circle the size of a large pizza. "That would've cost 4,000 yen–sorry, piros."

"That's really expensive!" Emily was stunned.

Emily had spent most of her life living in a dungeon. After that, she'd moved into a cheapo apartment with me. Her sense of money was basically between those of a survivalist and a common person. It was natural that she'd be amazed by spending 4,000 piros on one meal.

"Yeah, it's expensive. That's why I always wanted it. I've never had delivery pizza ever since I got a job and moved to my own place..."

"Would you like to make pizza?" she offered.

"Make?"

"Flour, vegetables, meat, and cheese. With those things, we should be able to do it."

"Yeah, I guess you would be able to make it with the right ingredients...
Should we try it?"

While I thought about Emily's proposal, Alice and Celeste suddenly appeared.

"We heard Emily was making a special dish!"

"Leave gathering ingredients to us."

"Hey, Emily, what veggies and meat do you need?" Alice asked.

"Well, for vegetables, I'd need potatoes and tomatoes. Asparagus would go well, too. For meat, bacon would be best. And the cheese..." Emily counted ingredients on her fingers, and Celeste and Alice nodded along and memorized them.

"Okay, leave it to us!"

"We'll gather the ingredients right away."

Then, they headed to the back of the mansion—toward the warp room. They were probably going to warp to each ingredient's dungeon to collect them. Along the way, they ran into Eve as she exited her room. Alice decided to drag her along.

"I'll make sauce," Emily said. "Yoda, can you get flour?"

"Oh, sure. Flour..." I searched my memories. As I recalled, it was on a floor in Silicon.

☆

I returned to the mansion with a magic cart full of flour—probably a hundred pounds worth—but there didn't seem to be anyone inside.

Is everyone else still gone? I wondered. But when I looked out the window, I spotted people outside.

When I approached for a better look, I noticed that a few of my friends were standing around something. I strained my eyes to look closer...

"A brick oven?"

There, I saw a brick oven with a rounded top. Erza, Alice, and Alice's buddy monsters surrounded it.

I left the mansion and headed over to meet them.

"Hey, Alice and Erza," I greeted them.

"Oh, hi, Ryota!"

"Welcome back, Ryota."

"Thanks. So, what's going on here?"

"Well, I heard we were making pizza, so I prepared a stone oven," Erza said.

"Is this one of the Swallow's Returned Favor's products?"

"Yes. You can have a discount."

"I see." I gazed at the brick oven.

It was built solid, to the point that you wouldn't think it was put together so quickly. I was certain that it was built well enough for us to leave out and use for many years to come.

☆

As steam rose from the top of the brick oven, Emily used a big boss-sized spatula to take the pizza out. Then, she put it on a table we'd brought from inside the mansion. The scent spread all around.

Alice and Erza piped up first.

"Whoooa..."

"Smells good..."

Celeste audibly gulped down saliva.

"Incredible. That's Emily for you," I complimented.

"Thank you. Will this do? I tried sticking to your order, but..."

"Yeah, I think that's good."

I'd ordered German pizza with a cheese and potato base. It used potatoes from Tellurium's specialty potatoes, sourced from the slime families on B6.

Emily skillfully cut and dished out pizza.

"Here you go, Yoda."

"Thanks," I replied. Then, I picked up the triangular slice and brought it to my mouth. The moment I took a bite, I felt an impact as if I'd been struck upside the head by a hammer.

"What's wrong? Ryota, what's up?" Alice asked me.

"Take a bite."

"Okay, here goes—Oh!" Like me, the instant she took a bite, Alice's eyes went wide. She was at a loss for words. We looked to each other and nodded.

"Deliiicious!" we shouted in unison.

"It's good. It's way too good, seriously," I repeated.

"So this is pizza?" Alice asked.

"Listen, it's not this delicious just because it's pizza. Emily's power is just too great."

"That makes sense!"

Alice and I gazed at Emily. There was a shared flash of inspiration between us before we ran over to Emily and lifted her high up together.

Then, we tossed her up into the air in celebration.

"Long live Emily! Long live Emily!"

"Whoa! P-Put me down!"

"Long live Emily!"

Heedless of her flusteredness, we continued to toss her up, spurred on by the lingering taste of delicious pizza in our mouths.



"Whoooa... It really is good."

"I've never eaten something so delicious..."

Celeste and Erza were moved by the pizza, too.

Alice and I finally relented, let Emily down, and returned to wolfing down our pizza.

"I have plenty more ingredients. Should I make more?" she offered.

"Yes, please!"

"Say, do we have sausage?" I asked. "You could bake buns and make hot dogs out of them."

My friends jumped into action again.

"Ooh, sausage! I'll head off to the dungeon right away!"

"I'll grab onions and cabbage, too."

Celeste and Alice sprinted off into the mansion, beelining for the dungeons.

"Emily, could you bake the buns? I'll prepare ketchup and mustard," Erza said, offering to go to the Swallow's Returned Favor building for condiments.

"Okay!"

Fresh ingredients were gathered in the blink of an eye, and Emily worked her magic on them. In no time, we had piping-hot wieners.

"These are plain hot dogs, these have onions, and these are cheese dogs," she said before allowing us to dig in.

"Deliciousss!"

"Paradise was here all along..."

"I don't care when I die now..."

My friends were just as moved, or perhaps even more moved, than when they'd eaten the pizza. I was impressed by Emily's hot dogs, too.

"You're just amazing, Emily."

Embarrassed, she tried to be humble. "That's not true. I-It's all the brick oven, not me!"

That wasn't true, of course, but maybe the brick oven was good too. Let's break it down: 99% Emily, 1% brick oven.

"I'd love to try out more brick oven meals," I said. "Slow-baking apples could be good."

"I'll go get apples!"

"Churrasco would be great, too. With meat and rock salt, Emily would make it the best it could be."

"Meat and rock salt! Got it! Let's go, everyone!"

I remembered more brick oven foods, and my friends rushed to the warp room to bring more fresh ingredients. Emily cooked them all, blowing our minds.

Procurement, cooking, astonishment—we had perfected the ultimate pattern.

"This is bliss..." I sighed. "Thank you, Emily."

"It's thanks to all of you. The ingredients are fresh, so it makes showing my skills very rewarding."

We all ate to excess around the brick oven. But we weren't done yet.

"By the way, I heard you can bake pudding, too," I hinted.

```
"Pudding!"

"I'll get the eggs!"

"We need milk too, right?!"

"Leave the sugar to me."
```

Everyone latched on to my proposal and ran to procure the ingredients. In an instant, they were all gone. Emily and I were alone in the courtyard now.

We looked at each other and smiled.

It was such a fun, blissful day off.

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 5 of *My Unique Skill Makes Me OP*Even at Level 1.

Thanks to you all, we made it to the release of the fifth volume. Now that we've reached volume 5, this has become the second-longest series in my writing career. I don't have enough words to thank you, but thank you so much!

Now, let's talk about the novel. This one is fundamentally similar to previous volumes. Conquer dungeons. Make money with drops. Use unique skill and special items to get stronger. As a result of his efforts in the four volumes leading up to this one, Ryota has become a very famous adventurer in this new world.

You know what they say; the flap of a Sato's wings in a dungeon can cause a tornado in a bakery. Ryota's casual daily activities have a great effect on people he doesn't even know.

I hope you enjoy reading this fifth volume and finding out how every move of his affects the new world around him.

Now, I'm going to advertise a little. About one week after the release of this volume, the first volume of Level 1's manga will come out. The Level 1 manga, which has been serialized on NicoNico Seiga, is at a glance faithful to the light

novel, while also being extremely entertaining thanks to Mawata's outstanding skill.

The way Mawata draws Emily... She's so precious, I find myself being healed by Mommy Emily every day. It's really good! I'd be very happy if you gave the manga a try, as well.

Finally, I have many thanks to give.

To Subachi-sama, who continues to make wonderful illustrations.

To K-sama, who continues to edit my awkward writings.

To K Light Novel Books's editorial department, who made this publication a reality.

To the bookstores who stocked this book, and to those of you who bought it.

I offer my deepest thanks to every single person involved in this work.

Here I'll put down my pen, praying that the next volume will someday reach your waiting hands.

Respectfully yours,

Nazuna Miki

December 2018

Author: Nazuna Miki

Formerly a wannabe voice actor, now a light novelist.

Kerberos is cute.

Illustrator: Subachi

This year, I've started working with my PC on my kotatsu.

It makes art a breeze.

My Unique Skill Makes Me OP Even at Level 1 vol 5

KODANSHA COMICS Digital Edition

My Unique Skill Makes Me OP Even at Level 1 volume 5 copyright © 2019

Nazuna Miki, Subachi

English translation copyright © 2024 Nazuna Miki, Subachi

All rights reserved.

First published in Japan in 2019 by Kodansha Ltd., Tokyo.

Electronic Publishing rights for this English edition arranged through

Kodansha Ltd., Tokyo.

No portion of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by

any means without written permission from the copyright holders.

English digital edition published by Kodansha USA Publishing, LLC, New

York.

www.kodanshacomics.com

ISBN: 9798889336334

Digital Edition: 1.0.0